

A Surprisingly Swift Apostasy

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The following sermon was preached at Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, CA. For more information, please visit our website at hopeprc.org.

Tonight we turn to the book of Galatians, the epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians 1.

1 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) 2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: 5 To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. 11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: 14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, 16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: 17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to

see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. 19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. 20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. 21 Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; 22 And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: 23 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. 24 And they glorified God in me.

Thus far we read the divinely inspired sacred Scripture tonight.

The text for the sermon is verses 6 through 9.

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, last week we preached Lord's Day 52 and finished the Heidelberg Catechism. Next week, God willing, we shall preach Lord's Day 1 and begin the Heidelberg Catechism anew. The sermon this evening is intended as a kind of introduction to another round through the Heidelberg Catechism giving us a perspective of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Heidelberg Catechism is our safeguard. The Heidelberg Catechism is not only our beloved soul-comforting confession and it is not only part of our heritage as we form churches and it is not only a faithful manual of systematic biblical instruction, but the Heidelberg Catechism, along with the other two of the three forms of unity, namely the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, is our safeguard. The Heidelberg Catechism is a mature expression of the Gospel of salvation as recovered and clarified by the 16th century Reformation and the Gospel of salvation is that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, and not of our works lest any one of us should boast. The Gospel of salvation is that we are not our own but we belong in our life and in our death, in our body and in our soul, to Jesus Christ so that the totality of our salvation is found exclusively in Jesus Christ. That's the Gospel of salvation. It is the Gospel of justification by faith alone and the Heidelberg Catechism is a clear expression of that Gospel of salvation.

So the Heidelberg Catechism is our safeguard. If we stick to the Catechism, if we preach the Catechism, if we teach the Catechism, if we stay within the boundaries of the Heidelberg Catechism, then we will not go astray on the important matter of salvation and how our works might be related to salvation, and that's because the Heidelberg Catechism is the time-tested expression of biblical truth. The Catechism is our safeguard.

The grave threat on account of which a safeguard is necessary, is apostasy. The grave threat for every true church of Jesus Christ and the grave threat for the Protestant Reformed churches in America, the grave threat for Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, CA is apostasy. Always is apostasy, a turning away from the truth of God. And apostasy can not only come, apostasy can come so very swiftly, so swiftly that apostasy come to the Galatian churches that the Apostle Paul declares, "I marvel. I am astonished that you are so soon removed from the gospel of Jesus Christ upon which you were founded not that long ago." We don't want to go as the Galatian churches were going.

The Heidelberg Catechism is our safeguard. If we should find ourselves, ever find ourselves embroiled in a controversy over the place of good works in salvation and whether or not we can contribute in any way to our salvation, which is the deliverance of us from evil and into the communion of God, we are only getting involved in a controversy which has surfaced all throughout the history of the church, and most notably at the time of the great 16th century Reformation. God led the church through the fires of controversy and the result is the settled and binding expression of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of Scripture now set forth in our Reformed Confessions. If we commit ourselves to the Confessions, not because they're above the Scripture, not because they are equal to the Scripture, but because they are a faithful expression of the Scripture, of the Gospel of salvation as the church was led through the fires of controversy, if we stick to the Confessions, the language of the Confessions, then we will be safe, we will not go astray into heresy.

The text tonight is a warning, a solemn warning that apostasy from the Gospel is not only a real and present threat and danger for the church, but that apostasy can come so swiftly. The text is a warning to us and may God use the warning to bring to us repentance tonight if we do not take seriously the truth of the Gospel of salvation as we have it. May it bring to us hope that all of our salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ, and may it bring to us a firm resolve by the power of the Spirit to be committed to the faith that was once delivered to the saints, the truth of the blessed Gospel of salvation as it is clearly expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism which we intend next week, Lord willing, to begin working through yet again.

Let's look at Galatians 1:6 through 9 tonight under the then "A Surprisingly Swift Apostasy." First of all, the apostasy; in the second place, its seriousness; and third, our warning.

Apostasy. Apostasy is essentially the act of moving. The very word conveys activity. It's movement and apostasy is the ongoing turning away from the truth of God, the truth of the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, and a turning unto a false Gospel, the lie. Without using the term "apostasy," the text before us tonight speaks of apostasy when it identifies two different ends, what we might call two different poles, something like the North Pole and the South Pole; a good pole and an evil pole and then movement from one to the other. That's apostasy.

Verse 6, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed." There's the verb expressing activity. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from," here comes the good and the good pole, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him," that's God, "that called you into the grace of Christ unto," now here's the other end, the opposite pole, the evil end, "unto another gospel." Apostasy is the movement away from him, God that called you, unto another Gospel.

Verse 7, "Which is not another," that other Gospel, it's not another as if there are other legitimate Gospels and you can pick which Gospel you want. There is only one Gospel so movement away from the true Gospel to another Gospel is actually movement unto a false Gospel, "Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." There is the good end. The apostasy in the Galatian churches was their movement away from the Gospel of Christ and unto another, that is to say, a false Gospel.

Now, let's take a closer look at that apostasy as it is presented in the text. What the Galatian churches left was the Gospel of Christ. All four of the verses in the text use the term "gospel." They left the Gospel. They left the true Gospel. The Gospel is literally the good news and the Gospel answers the most pressing question in the universe and that is: how can the sinner be right with God? How can the sinner find peace and happiness in his soul? How can the sinner live without fear and terror before God? The answer of the Gospel is what makes the Gospel the Gospel, the good news. The answer of the Gospel is that God freely justifies the sinner. God declares the sinner righteous and, therefore, that individual becomes an heir of everlasting life, and that one is received into the favor and communion of God. God justifies the sinner, the elect sinner, not on the basis of anything the sinner has done, not on the basis of his works, his holiness, his obedience, anything that the sinner may do before the law, but God justifies the sinner on the basis of what Christ has done through his life-long obedience and his perfect sacrifice upon the cross. The sinner does not work, he does not do, he does not perform to be justified, the sinner believes. The elect sinner believes in Jesus Christ. He believes with the faith that God sovereignly and graciously worked in him thereby uniting him to Jesus Christ so that the righteousness of Jesus Christ becomes his by faith.

The Gospel is simply the truth of justification by faith alone and that the apostle hammers home in the epistle. For example, Galatians 2:16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

The Gospel of salvation is fittingly called in the text the Gospel of Christ, verse 7, "Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." It's called the Gospel of Christ not only because it comes from Christ but because Christ is the content of the Gospel. Man is not the content of the Gospel, man and what man can do and what man can perform to try to earn the favor of God, Christ is the content of the Gospel, the crucified Christ. That's why the apostle says in chapter 3, verse 1, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth,

before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" The Galatians were never standing at Golgatha. They never saw the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But the apostle says, "Every time we preach unto you, Jesus Christ is evidently set forth right before your eyes as Christ crucified." It's the content of the Gospel. We preach Christ.

The Gospel of Christ is what the Apostle Paul and others preached in the Galatian churches. He makes that point in verse 8, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you," namely, the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of justification by faith alone, and through that preaching of Christ, God called them out of darkness into his own life. Verse 6, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into," or that called you by, "the grace of Christ." God effectually called them out of darkness and unbelief by the grace of Christ. Not by their works of obedience but by the grace of Christ who died for them were they brought unto God.

The Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of Christ crucified, the Gospel of justification alone, that's the good end, that's the good pole and from the Gospel of Christ they were moving, unto what they were moving was, verse 6, "another gospel: Which," verse 7, "is not another Gospel but a false Gospel." This was the Gospel of the Judaizers. The Judaizers were Jews who converted outwardly to Jesus Christ. The Judaizers confessed Jesus Christ. The Judaizers taught that salvation is by faith in Christ but the Judaizers had a hard time leaving behind all things Jewish, for example, the ceremonies and especially circumcision. Circumcision was so important to the Judaizers that they regarded it as a condition unto salvation and so they taught that salvation is by faith in Christ and by the work of circumcision. In their preaching they said, "God saves and receives you through faith in Jesus Christ and by your obedience to the law in circumcision. You must be circumcised. All of you Gentiles, you must be circumcised or God will not declare you righteous."

Paul refers to this teaching of the Judaizers in chapter 5, verses 2 through 4, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." If you want to find your salvation through a work like circumcision, you're going to have find your salvation through obedience to the whole law. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."

These troublers, the Judaizers, called their teaching the Gospel. They said they preached the Gospel and that's why the apostle calls their teaching "another gospel" at the end of verse 6, but then goes on in verse 7 to say in reality it is not another Gospel. The Gospel of the Judaizers, which is the Gospel of salvation by faith and works, is as different from the salvation that comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone as the flesh is different from the spirit and as bondage is different from liberty, to use two other extreme opposites that the apostle brings out in this epistle. Unto that false Gospel of salvation by faith and works, the Galatian churches were moving and that movement is apostasy, what is referred to in verse 6, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from."

The word "removed" sounds like something very definite; a completed action. However, it is a verb that is indicating continuous activity. The verb means "to change; to transfer; to turn," and the tense of the verb is indicating ongoing continuous activity so that we could read the text this way: I marvel that ye are so quickly moving. They are in the process of moving. The Galatian churches are not apostate, the Galatian churches are not false churches in which Jesus Christ is no longer working salvation by his word in spirit, but the Galatian churches were moving in that direction. They were well on their way. They were in the process of moving away from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ unto the false Gospel by faith and works and so the apostle comes and writes in a critical hour, they are apostatizing.

In order better to understand this apostasy, we do well to ask the question: who are apostatizing? To whom does the apostle refer in verse 6 when he says, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed." First of all, the ones in view here are not individuals. Not individuals but churches. Verse 2, "And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia."

What congregations made up these churches and exactly when they were organized with respect to the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul is a matter of debate. Galatia was an area just to the north of Asia Minor. Evidently, there were several churches in that area and we might even think of them as a small denomination of churches called the Galatian churches, and Paul had once preached among them. They are apostatizing.

In the second place, we must remember that at any given point in history, those who make up a congregation, those who make up a denomination, are those of mixed spiritual identities. There are elect believers and their spiritual seed in the church and even among the elect, there may be many weaknesses and there may be elect believers who are spiritually backsliding. But there are also in the church visible, reprobate souls; unbelievers who make an outward confession of true religion.

Furthermore, there may be at any time those who teach false doctrine in or around the churches. Organically because of the elect in the church, the church is called and the church is viewed as the beloved body of Christ, the church of Christ, and when the apostle speaks of these churches so soon removed from God into the grace of Christ, he's not teaching or implying that elect believing individuals could or were falling away from the gracious salvation they had by virtue of God's calling of them. No one who is effectually called by God into the grace of Christ will ever fall away. An elect believer might temporarily slide backwards but no elect believer will ever apostatize unto eternal ruin.

These churches as a whole from the point of view of their elect believers were called by God into the grace of Christ and now these churches are moving away from the Gospel. There may be some elect believers in them who are weak and they are temporarily tolerating or maybe even approving the heresy of the Judaizers, but there are no doubt unbelievers and often in times of apostasy, the unbelievers get the upper hand and they

follow the heresy, they promote the heresy. Although we make these distinctions among those who make up the Galatian churches, the churches as a whole, the denomination we might say, the denomination as a whole with many believers in it, was moving away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ unto another, that is to say, a false Gospel.

In reading through the whole epistle, you get the impression that the Galatian churches are true churches. Paul repeatedly refers to those in them as brethren, "My brethren," and you even get the impression that the warning did not come too late and God will turn these churches around. For example, we read in chapter 5, verse 10, Paul says by inspiration, "I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be."

Nevertheless, as he writes to them, they are, as churches they are apostatizing. The most outstanding characteristic of this apostasy was its surprising swiftness. The apostle begins in the text, verse 6, by saying, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed." He was stunned. He was shocked. This man had seen so many things throughout his life but when he heard of the apostasy of the Galatian churches, he says, "I marvel."

He completes his five verse introduction by saying, "Amen," in verse 5, "To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." And now he gets to his concern and the substance of his epistle, and the very first words out of his mouth, verse 6 of the text, "I marvel." At what does the apostle marvel? Is this something good? "I marvel that ye are so soon removed." We don't know exactly the timing of the events in the life of these churches but Paul simply marvels. He knew these churches. He had preached among them and he no doubt can remember many many people in the churches. He remembers their names. He remember their faces. He remembers elders whom he talked to. He remembers talking to some aged men and women. He met some of the mothers, some of the ladies in the congregation. He talked to some of the young men and probably thought to himself how they showed so much promise, the church will be in such good standing here, the future is so bright. He had so many conversations with them and no doubt after he left them, they thanked him and they said, "Paul, we cannot thank you enough for coming to us and proclaiming the Gospel of justification by faith alone. Can you even imagine what it was like for all of us to be living in heathendom? We were pagans, now we've been brought into the church. We thank you for preaching to us the Gospel." And a little while later, they are apostatizing and he's shocked. "What's going on? I marvel that ye are so quickly moving away from the Gospel of Christ."

Apostasy does not occur overnight. Apostasy occurs over time. But the situation in Galatia and elsewhere in history indicates it takes less time for a church or for a denomination to apostatize than we might think. It takes less time for a true church to embrace false doctrine and fall away than we might suppose. It may take a whole year to build a house, it may take 30 minutes for a bulldozer to knock it down as many of us saw with our own eyes out in the front of the property just this past week. It may take a long time to establish a congregation, to establish a mission field, to preach the Gospel over and over again by which God brings unbelievers into the church, God brings others from their apostate churches and he brings them into the true church and there is a kind of de-

programming of all of these false doctrines, these erroneous ideas, this vain philosophy, and the teaching, the instruction in the truth of the word, that takes time. It can take many many years and then waiting for these people, these new converts, these believers, to be married, to have children, for a new generation to come and for those children to be catechized. It may take years and years for a congregation to be established and to grow up in the faith but it takes a surprisingly short amount of time for the church to fall away and embrace a false Gospel. It does not take long for error to creep in and after it creeps in and it's not eradicated, it doesn't take very long for it to be embraced and for the church to apostatize.

"I marvel." I marvel how quickly the churches of the Reformation in the Netherlands were infected after the Reformation with Arminianism. How quickly and how quickly many congregations there apostatized and how quickly after the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924, there was the introduction of the heresy of conditional salvation in the covenant, and how quickly many left and apostatized. How swiftly the Galatian churches apostatized from the Gospel of Christ. "I simply marvel. I'm astonished," says the inspired apostle.

This apostasy is serious. It must be serious because the inspired apostle brings this whole subject to its conclusion in verses 8 and 9 by declaring that anyone who troubles the church with preaching false doctrine, that's how apostasy is worked, anyone who preaches this false doctrine, let him be accursed. This is serious. Apostasy is serious and the text gives us two reasons why this apostasy, this swift apostasy, is so serious.

First of all, this surprisingly swift apostasy is so serious as all apostasy is so serious because it is apostasy from God. Every verse in the text contains the word "gospel," but is it not striking that the apostle begins by saying, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from," and he does not say "the gospel"? He says, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him," that is, from God, "you are so quickly turned away from God that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." They are turning away from God. Apostasy is never merely the turning away from theological truth, from objective doctrinal propositions, from creeds and confessions. It's not merely the turning away from the three forms of unity, apostasy is never merely the departure from something, but apostasy is always essentially turning away from someone, from God, him that called you into the grace of Christ. That's because the truth is the truth of God, the Gospel is the Gospel of God. Apostasy in the Galatian churches was that they were turning away from God, the God who is so gracious and he called them. He called them into the grace of Christ and shortly thereafter their response as churches, as a denomination, was to turn away from God and the apostle says, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from God. I would marvel if you were a young woman and you got married to a young man and after one year of marriage you turned away from your husband and you went after another lover. I would marvel but this is more serious. You have turned away from God."

And by implication then, the end of apostasy is existence without God. Those who go down the road of apostasy, departing from God, they end up with existence apart from God, that is to say, the world. The church becomes the world. The church looks like the

world. Talks like the world. Behaves like the world. For example, the church will marry two men. That's what happens in apostasy. Because apostasy is fundamentally the turning away from God, the end of apostasy is existence apart from God which is that one becomes the world.

That their apostasy is fundamentally a turning away from God indicates the real and deep spiritual issue in apostasy and it is a lack of love for God. When the churches love the Lord God and his truth, the Gospel of salvation which is justification by faith alone, through Christ alone, the churches love God because he's the God of that truth, and when the churches apostatize, the serious issue is that their love for God has waxed cold. The apostle could write to the Galatian churches as he could write to all of the churches and denominations that are apostatizing today, "Why don't you love God?"

That's the issue and it is not hard to understand what happened in the Galatian churches. Shortly after all that initial enthusiasm for the Gospel, they became more and more spiritually indifferent to the truth. They didn't read. They didn't study. They didn't engross themselves in biblical truth. They wouldn't pick up a standard-bearer, much less read it. They lost an interest in theological issues because they were slowly viewing theological issues as something abstract. That really doesn't matter for day-to-day practical living. But they didn't view theological issues as the truth of God. It's not that they hated the truth, but they didn't love it. They weren't willing to give their lives to the study of the truth and when they came to church for worship, they didn't really listen. They slept. They daydreamed. Maybe they would listen if there was so inspiring practical application, but if the preacher was carefully laying out the doctrine of the text, they really didn't care. It didn't really matter much for their practical life. They were drifting into apathy.

They didn't understand so much the theological issues and then some troubling Judaizers came preaching that man receives the favor of God through faith in Jesus Christ and by his obedience to the law of God and no one was wise enough to hear the error. And you go all the way back to the root and the root was their love for God waxed cold. The serious issue that lies at the heart of all apostasy is that the churches who apostatized no longer loved God. They are turning away from God and that's what makes the issue so serious. Apostasy is no insignificant trifle, it is deadly serious because it is the forsaking of the living God, the God of all grace. Oh, how swiftly they turned from God.

In the second place, this swift apostasy was so serious as all apostasy is so serious because it involves a perversion of the Gospel. Verse 7, "Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert," and are willing to pervert, "the gospel of Christ." The Judaizers came and they claimed to have a faithful expression of the Gospel when they taught that salvation was by faith and some of the good works of the sinner, but they were willing to and they actually did pervert the Gospel.

The word "pervert" there means "to turn about." To pervert the Gospel is not simply to corrupt it but to take the Gospel and turn it about into something else. If you have a cup of coffee with coffee in it and someone added a little lemonade to your coffee, they are

merely corrupting it. It's alright. You could still drink that coffee that's been corrupted a bit. There are no serious consequences. But if someone takes your coffee cup with coffee in it and they add transmission fluid or motor oil or antifreeze, they're not merely corrupting it, they are perverting it. They are turning it into something else that will damage you. It will harm you. It's a perversion. When the Judaizers preached that salvation is by faith and works, they did not merely corrupt the Gospel. To teach that salvation is by faith and works is to pervert the Gospel; to turn it into something else.

And that's serious. The Galatians tolerated this false Gospel. Some even approved of it. Men must have been coming to the pulpits preaching it. Maybe lecturers were coming in and giving speeches, as it were, some were writing books that salvation was by faith and works and the Galatian churches as a whole, they did not object. They didn't protest. They didn't seek ecclesiastical discipline but they tolerated it, perhaps even approved this perversion of the Gospel, and thus they apostatized.

Apostasy through a perversion of the Gospel is deadly serious. This is why after a five verse introduction that concludes with "Amen" in verse 5, the apostle goes right to the issue of apostasy and he rebukes the Galatians without giving his customary expression of gratitude. Even when he addresses the Corinthians with all their abuses, he gives his introduction and then he says, "I thank my God always on your behalf." He doesn't do that. He did it to the Corinthians but he doesn't do that to the Galatians. He gives his five verse introduction and then he goes right to the issue, "I marvel at your swift apostasy."

The Galatians were not fighting over leaders. "I'm of Paul. I'm of Cephas. I'm of Apollos." The Galatians were not bringing each other to court. The Galatians were not abusing spiritual gifts like tongues and prophesying. The Galatian churches were not fornicating with prostitutes in the pagan temples. They were doing something far worse, they were tolerating or even approving the false Gospel of the Judaizers that salvation is by faith and works. That is, they were tolerating or even approving a perversion of the Gospel.

There is no perversion of anything on earth more deadly serious than the perversion of the Gospel by preaching faith and works as the way of salvation. This perversion robs God of his infinite glory by giving man a reason to boast. This perversion injures Christ and his perfect work by supposing that the sinner's work must be added to Christ. This perversion destroys the church's distinctive witness in the world and to the world with all of its pagan religions that are works based. This perversion sends men and women and boys and girls home from church thinking that they can do good works to contribute to the accomplishing of their salvation and either they become very arrogant, anticipating appearing in the judgment day before the tribunal of God and standing on the basis of, at least in part, some of their works, or they despair of God's mercy and they sink into hopelessness because they know God will never receive them because of the works that they do which are polluted. So if men and women and boys and girls are going home from church believing that they must add some of their works to Christ in order to be saved, they are being led to hell. If a man perverts the gasoline or the oil that he puts in his automobile, he may blow up his engine and that's serious. If a man has his drink, his

mug, perverted he may fall ill, even deadly ill. That's serious. But if a man perverts the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is nothing more serious because that perversion leads souls to hell.

The Galatian apostasy like all apostasy is so serious because it involved a perversion of the Gospel, turning the Gospel on its head, and what brings astonishment to the apostle is the fact that these churches in whom the Gospel of justification by faith alone was once preached and embraced, this little denomination of churches was so quickly moving unto the false Gospel. "I marvel."

Because the perversion of the Gospel is what works apostasy and leads the church away from God and sometimes very swiftly as it did in the Galatian churches, the apostle concludes with this warning that sends a shiver down the spine of and tremors into the soul of every sane man, and particularly in every preacher. Verses 8 and 9, "But though we, or an angel from heaven," this is the warning, "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." He begins narrowly with himself and an angel from heaven, and the meaning is, "If we should, never have. We never have but if we should preach any other Gospel than the Gospel of Jesus Christ which we did preach unto you, then let us be accursed." But then he broadens the warning to include everyone and he repeats the warning for emphasis, verse 9, "As we said before," maybe years prior, maybe in his last breath, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received," you received the Gospel of justification by faith alone, any Gospel other than that, "let him be accursed." Literally, let him be anathema. That is, let him be consecrated unto God as an object upon which God can pour out all of his divine fury. That is, if he preaches any other Gospel than the Gospel of justification by faith alone, let him fall into the hands of an angry God. Let him be damned to hell. Let him be accursed.

Now, certainly a man may ignorantly and mistakenly in his preaching, perhaps in a sermon, confuse justification and sanctification. That may happen and a man should apologize and be willing to be taught and be instructed. But the apostle is referring to the man who continues to preach another Gospel, the man who arrogantly and stubbornly and defiantly and willingly and knowingly even in spite of admonitions to him, continually preaches another Gospel, of him, he says, let him be accursed. Let God have him and damn him. The warning to the Galatian churches and the warning to all churches whatever their condition at the time may be, however they may compare to the Galatian churches, the warning is: if you preach any Gospel other than the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, be accursed. May God have you and curse you.

Even if an angel should come. Now, of course, it is impossible that a holy angel of God would come down from heaven and preach something other than justification by faith alone. That's impossible but the apostle is making an emphatic point and his point is, "I don't care who he is." He will go on to say in verse 10, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." His point in verse 8 when he speaks of the angel is, "I don't care who he is. I

don't care if he's your own minister. I don't care if he's a professor in your theological school. I don't care if he's one of your aged, well-respected, high-esteemed retired ministers who had been preaching in your churches for 50 years. I don't care who he is. If an angel should come down and all the glory of heaven and stand in the pulpit and continue stubbornly to preach anything other than justification by faith alone, let him be accursed."

If the pope with all of his papal claims and with his book of anathemas, as the Roman Catholic Church pronounces anathemas upon Protestants, if the pope with all of his papal claims and with all of his millions of supporters, if a leader of the Federal Vision movement with all of his academic accomplishments and accolades, if one should come and preach another Gospel, as they do, let him be accursed. If your own minister, if your own teacher in your theological school comes and stubbornly continues to preach something other than justification by faith alone, let that man be consecrated unto God as an object upon whom God can pour out all of his fury. If a member of the congregation or one of the elders incessantly demands that the minister preach a righteousness that is attained, at least in part through our own works, let that member of the congregation or that elder be damned. Let me say it again for emphasis, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Beloved, how gracious is our God that he did not leave these Galatian churches to themselves as they are on the road to apostasy, but God came to them through the sharp warnings of the Apostle Paul hopefully causing them to marvel at their own wickedness and their own swift apostasy and to bring them to repentance. God didn't leave them, he came in his grace with a warning. And the Apostle Paul who brought this warning is a true servant of Jesus Christ with a heart of selfless love and he practices what he preaches. This is what he says in chapter 6, verse 1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault," brethren, if a congregation be overtaken in a fault, brethren, if a denomination be overtaken in a fault, "ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

May God preserve us in the faith with this sharp warning tonight, especially through the preaching of the Gospel of salvation as it is found in the sacred Scriptures and so clearly summarized for us in our three forms of unity, particularly now in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Catechism which we are about to begin again next week, the Catechism is our safeguard. How can we weakened sinful preachers and consistories and congregations stand in the truth when so many are apostatizing? And the answer is by grace alone, by the almighty saving grace of God alone. And God in his grace has given to us this time-tested, battle-proven Confession which is among other things a safeguard to keep us from departing away from the Scriptures and the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ and to keep us preaching the true biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, to the glory of God alone, and for the honor of Christ alone, and for the salvation of our souls. Through it, through the Catechism, may God preserve us as he is the one who so graciously gave it to us and has preserved it among us for so many centuries now. To God be the glory for his Gospel now and forever. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we deserve to perish, every single one of us. We do not love thy truth as we ought to. We do not love thee as we ought to. We are prone by nature to fall away and we are warned tonight and we simply fall before thee in humility and we pray, "O God, be merciful to us sinners! Save us from our own sinfulness and give to us to the very end of our pilgrimage, a love for and a seeking of the pure Gospel of justification by faith alone and may it be preached in the world as the Gospel of salvation until Jesus Christ himself, who is our salvation, returns in the clouds of glory. O God, preserve us by thy might and in thy faithfulness!" We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.