

Paul's God Is Awesome!

Acts 13:16-41

Sermon by Phillip G. Kayser

Intro:

We have come to Paul's first recorded sermon, and there is *so much* that could be addressed that we just won't have the time to tackle. I have debated whether to have one sermon, two or three on this text. It's pretty hard to preach a sermon on a sermon. In fact, in your outlines¹ I give a synopsis of a number of topics that I think would be fruitful for you to study on your own. I think Paul's sermon cuts against the grain of many modern church myths on what constitutes preaching, evangelism and the Gospel. One fad that has had a lot of influence in dumbing down the preaching has been the idea that New Testament was written in simple street language and we may never use theological terms from the pulpit. Well, in recent years that has been shown by many scholars to be absolutely false. One of the translators of the ESV has done a great job of dismissing that idea. And he points out that, yes, it was written in Koine Greek, but a Koine that is often closer to Classical Greek than to street Greek. You don't see slang or coarse language or poor grammar. And the specific kind of Koine that was used had so many Hebraisms and theological terms in it that a pagan would have to be educated a bit in church lingo before he would understand what was being said. I just don't buy this idea that you have to dumb down all your church lingo. People have to use new terms when they get into nursing, engineering, and even janitorial jobs. Well, it's impossible to escape from having to learn in-house lingo in the church. And let me give you one example in Paul's sermon. In this sermon, Paul uses theological terms like justification – a specialized legal term. That's a no-no in many modern eyes. Actually, I was disappointed that the ESV didn't translate the term "justification" in verses 38-39. Usually they are literal enough that they retain theological terms. But in verse 38 they just kept the RSV's translation, because they only changed the RSV where they thought it needed to be

¹ The following information was in the introduction to the outline given to the congregation: "Intro: This summary section of Paul's sermon gives us lessons on 1) Biblical preaching, 2) Biblical evangelism, 3) the nature of the Gospel, 4) limits to contextualization, 5) the sovereignty of God in history and salvation, 6) the imperative of using theological terms (in context of the modern debate on seeker-sensitive discourse, preaching and translation), 7) a defense of the formality of the Bible and apostolic teaching over against the discredited view that the New Testament used coarse "street language"¹ and the centrality of history to Christianity. Though we may address some of these issues, the primary teaching we will focus on today is an examination of the *God* whom Paul preached." The footnote stated, "For example, Detlev Dormeyer says, "Paul strove to attain a sophisticated rhetorical and literary level of Koine." Detlev Dormeyer, *The New Testament Among the Writings of Antiquity*, trans. Rosemarie Kosssov (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 78."

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updated. But my point is that even your philosophy of discourse is addressed by the Bible.

Let me quickly give you three more examples of areas that are addressed by Paul's speech. I think this sermon clearly contradicts the contention of some modern Redemptive Historical preachers that you shouldn't ever give application in the sermon. I think that is nonsense. Paul clearly applies his sermon.

For decisionalist, high pressure evangelists who think that you always need to press for a decision when you present the Gospel, verses 42 and following show a more Reformed approach to evangelism. You don't see an altar call here. There's no high pressure manipulation – no singing of “Just as I am” 20 times.

And speaking of Reformed, there are a lot of Reformed writers who insist that you should never bring up the doctrines of election or predestination in your evangelism. *Paul* would disagree, and you ought to read *Christ's* evangelistic messages. Wow! He scares the daylights out of people with his insistence that God does not choose everyone to salvation.

Anyway, I don't want you to think that just because we are focusing on one topic - the *God* that Paul preaches about, that that is all that this passage has to offer. I'm always having to make choices on what I will cut out when I preach.

But having said all that, I love the awesome God that Paul believes in.

I.A Personal God (v. 17)

He starts in verse 17 by saying, **The God of this people Israel...** God belonged to Israel in a special relationship that was not true of other nations, and Israel belonged to God. He was the God of *this people*, Israel. Throughout Israel's history you see God personally interacting with His people. He used imagery of being married to them. Certainly there were images that spoke of His transcendence and His majesty, but He was also a personal God.

And we need to ask ourselves if our God is so formal and so distant that we don't have a personal relationship with Him. I know that we Reformed people have tended to react against Pietism, but we shouldn't over-react. What does Hebrews mean when it promises us the same thing God promised Israel - **I will never leave you nor forsake you.** What does God mean when he calls us to cleave closely to Him, or when He promises, **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you** (James 4:8) or when the Psalmist laments (on that particular day) that he felt like God was distant. He

wanted God to be near and to comfort him. All of those are evidences that God did not intend our Christianity to be devoid of relationship. Our God is a personal God.

II.A God Personally Involved in History (throughout – “God...He... He... He... He... God... etc.)

But it is also important to see that God is personally involved in history and in the day-to-day affairs of your life. Pietists have a tendency to see everything as internal and not to see how God works “out there.” There are many evangelicals who act as if God is not uninvolved in creation moment by moment. They act as if He created all things, then wound up the universe like a clock, and then only intervenes every once in a while. But Hebrews 1:3 tells us that God *upholds* up all things by the word of His power and He *governs* all things with wisdom and goodness. In fact, some Reformed writers have spoken of a cosmic Personalism in this universe. What they mean by that is not New-Agey. They mean that there isn’t a single thing in this universe that isn’t the personal and purposeful touch of Almighty God. So if you read through this passage you will see that God is involved in every detail of its history – not just the important things – all things. In this verse *He* chooses them, *He* makes them great during their sojourn in Egypt, *He* redeems them. In verse 18 *God* put up with them in the wilderness. In verse 19 *He* destroyed nations. Verse 20 – *He* gave them judges. Verse 21, *God* gave them a king. And you see the same all the way through this sermon. Nothing just happens. *God* makes it happen.

And so, this sermon is a beautiful example of how to teach history in your homeschooling. Don’t treat history as boring stuff that just happened. When was the last time you read a history book that shows God at the heart of every facet of history like Paul did here? The history books that I read in grade school and high school assumed a cosmic impersonalism. It wasn’t a long list of things that God did. It was just a list of things that *happened*. Well, that is humanistic history, even though it was taught in a Christian school. The only purposes that I could see were the purposes of *men* to conquer, build and change things, and those purposes were frequently frustrated. Besides human purpose, there didn’t seem to be a lot of purpose. This happened, then this happened, then that happened. And it was boring to memorize a whole bunch of unrelated facts. It was a random listing of random events.

If you have a Biblical philosophy of history in your homeschooling you will be showing how the discovery of America was no accident, how the invention of the plow advanced the purposes of God in Europe, how God

used the Magna Carta as one of several steps to promote liberties throughout the world.

And thankfully, there are more and more history books that are coming out from a Providential perspective. In fact, we would like to see a twice a year homeschooling Providential history fair where our children can do the speeches, or games, or multi-media projects, etc. Providential history is critical to a proper understanding of life. But I urge you to start injecting God into your dialogues in life. Even if you don't yet understand the purpose for some historical fact, you can at least say that God brought that historical fact. History is HIS story. Pray the news that you read in the paper. Learn to practice thinking about the presence of God. Not even a stubbed toe is without meaning. We serve a Personal God who works all things together for our good and His glory. If you start teaching that way, your history will become more and more meaningful and exciting.

III. An Electing God (v. 17b)

The third thing we see about this awesome God is that *He* chooses. Verse 17 again, **The God of this people Israel chose our fathers...** When you read Genesis you do not find Abraham initiating. Instead you see that God chose him. Then you see God choosing Isaac and rejecting Ishmael. You see God choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau. And it wasn't based upon their works. God did it before they had done any works. You see, if God had waited for them to choose Him, it would never have happened because Romans 3 says that there is none who seeks after God. Election is not God choosing those whom He foreknew would choose Him. Jesus said, **You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit** (John 15:16). Look at the second sentence of verse 48. It says, **And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.** It doesn't say "as many as believed were appointed to eternal life." That's putting the cart before the horse. It says, **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.** Their belief flowed out of election and was enabled by God choosing them.

And if you can once believe in predestination, everything else falls into place. It is not man who predestines life. It is God. And the God of the Bible is a God who chooses some to salvation and leaves others in their sin and judgment. He is an electing God. Which means that He is *really* God, rather than a limited being who is simply reacting to our choices. That's the kind of God that the Openness of God Theology promotes. The God of Paul is an awesome God who has a plan from eternity past to eternity future. He is not a God who is subject to chance. From God's perspective there is no

chance because everything had a purpose. And I praise God that my salvation did not hang on my choice. It hung on God's choice.

IV.A Protective God (v. 17b)

A fourth thing that we see is that this God is a protective and gracious God. His choices are not blind fate. No, we don't believe in fatalism. Though God is an electing God, His election is consistent with His kindness, love, protection, plan and all the other things listed in your outline. The second part of verse 17 says, **and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt**. This is talking about the period of history when Joseph was elevated to second in command and the Israelites for some time to come were exalted, provided for and protected. God was for them. He was blessing them. Even though Deuteronomy 28 hadn't been written yet, God was historically blessing and cursing. And we can count on the fact that God continues to be a protective, caring God in His sovereignty. He loves us.

V.A Redeeming God (v. 17c)

Paul skips over the generations that did not know God and had fallen into idolatry. They came under God's historical judgments – slavery in Egypt. But the third phrase speaks of Paul's God as being a redeeming God. It says, **and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it**. Every generation must find redemption in God. And redemption is not an oddity that occurs once every so many generations. It is of God's very character to redeem. That's why He calls Himself "Redeemer" numerous times. God *can* lift us out of the mire and slavery that we find in America. Why? Because He is a redeeming God. He loves to redeem. It's the way He is.

VI.A Patient God (v. 18)

The sixth thing that is so encouraging about God is that He is a patient God. Verse 18 says, **Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness**. Now at first blush, that may not seem like a terribly encouraging thought. And it wouldn't be very encouraging if we knew that God didn't love us, but that He just put up with us. I wouldn't really like it if I knew that God didn't care for me, but he was willing to put up with me. But when you realize that both the Old and the New Testament say that the generation God put up with was an unbelieving generation, and when you realize that He put up with that unbelieving generation for the sake of Joshua, Caleb, Moses and the believers who were under 20, suddenly that patience takes on a new meaning. You begin to realize this is

patience with those who are headed to hell for the sake of His elect.

Think about that for a second. The reason nations aren't instantly judged today is because God cares about His true people. It's not that he is careless about the sin in America that He is so patient. God wants the meek to inherit the earth. But if we are not to inherit a scorched earth, it has to be preserved. Thank God for His patience. It was His patience with the Canaanites that enabled Israel to inherit the houses, vineyards and other riches of Canaan rather than inheriting a desert. God's patience enabled the Israelites to possess the land little by little. As we seek to do what we can to inherit this land, God's patience will mean that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. He's a patient God and we need to learn to appreciate His patience.

VII.A God of Judgment (v. 19a)

But that doesn't mean that judgment never comes. Verse 19 indicates that He is indeed a God of judgment. It says, **And when He destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.** That little verse shows that God is a God of judgment. But His judgments have a perfect timing. Do you remember how He told the Israelites that they couldn't go in earlier because the cup of the Amorite's iniquity was not yet full?

VIII.A Generous God (v. 19b)

And point VIII shows that His attributes do not contradict one another. Though He is a God of judgment, He is also a very generous God. The reason the nations were dispossessed was because of their sin, and the reason Israel could inherit the land (and receive God's generosity) was because Jesus bore the judgment in their place. Every time you get a good blessing from God, realize that you didn't get that on your own. It was a mercy you didn't deserve. God's generosity on your behalf was purchased by His judgment against Jesus. In a sin sick world there is always judgment. It is either judgment upon *men* or a judgment that was borne by Jesus. There could be no generosity to us without judgment. So God is a God of judgment and He is also a very generous God. Reformed people speak of these as being His redemptive judgments.

IX.A Sovereign God (v. 20-22)

Verses 20-22 indicate that He is a sovereign God. Webster's Dictionary defines the adjective "sovereign" as "above or superior to all others. Supreme in power, rank or authority." The term implies both that there are rulers or ranks underneath God, but that they are accountable to

God and that He rules over everything. He is the supreme ruler. To think that American Presidents, Congressmen, Mayor's or judges can ignore God's law (as many Christians nowadays think that they can) is to deny that our God is sovereign. It is to reject the God of the Bible. Verse 20 says, **After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.** Notice that God appointed the judges. He is the sovereign and they are the vassals. Verse 21 - **And afterward they asked for a king** [why would they ask God for a king? Because as Sovereign, He is the only one who can authorize such a thing.] **So God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him** [Notice that God can also disapprove of kings when they become tyrants. "When He had removed him"], **He raised up for them David as king...**

If you read the actual texts where God raised up Saul and then later David, you will find that He didn't do it unilaterally. He always worked through the people. The heads of families in each of the 12 states of Israel voted for Saul and David, and those twelve states then put Saul and then later David into office. But neither the citizens nor the states were the highest authority. That's the key point. God still was the one who put David into office, even though he did it through the means of a limited state sovereignty.

Your belief that God is sovereign ought to inform your politics, your views of church and family and your own individual piety. Nothing trumps God and His law. And by the way, if you read Junius Brutus' book, *A Defence of Liberty Against Tyrants*, which was written in the 1500's, you will see how those passages helped Reformed people to define state's rights, limited sovereignty, what a covenanted (or federal) government is, delegated powers, enumerated powers and limited powers. It's a marvelous study, and it all flows out of the doctrine of God's unlimited sovereignty. That book had a huge influence on the framing of America.

X.A God of Law (v. 22)

And verse 22 indicates that God's sovereignty was either recognized or rebelled against *through adherence to the law*. The God that Paul knew was a God of law. A king who breaks God's law is a rebel king and a king after God's own heart will be a king who follows God's laws. Verse 22 again: **And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, "I have found David the Son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will."** Why was Saul rejected as being a legitimate king? Because he rejected God's law,

rejected limited sovereignty and tried to embrace unlimited sovereignty – which always leads to tyranny. We can't claim to submit to God's sovereignty if we are not seeking to follow all God's will. That would be a contradiction in terms. Sovereignty and law go hand in hand. And yet you have many Reformed people in our day and age who pretend to believe in God's sovereignty and yet throw out God's law. But that is a non-Reformed view that is devoid of sovereignty. Sovereignty is always expressed through law. The God of Paul was a God of law.

XI.A Saving God (v. 23-28)

Yet in no way does that contradict the fact that He is a saving God. The very next breath says, **From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior – Jesus.** It is our very inability to keep God's law perfectly that necessitates a Savior. And the Savior had to keep God's law perfectly in order to save us. But He saves us in order to enable us to keep the law. It is not a lawless grace nor a graceless law that can save us. Notice how law and grace are kept together as the Holy God prepares our salvation in verse 24-28.

XII.A Holy God (vv. 24-28)

Acts 13:24 after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Let me talk about that repentance. Though faith alone receives justification from God's hand, you can never separate saving faith from repentance. The reason repentance was needed was because God is a holy God who hates sin and rebellion. He demands holiness. But the reason faith is needed is because we need to get our righteous record and our righteous life from Jesus. It is received by faith. But don't ever separate faith and repentance. They are two sides of one coin. Verse 25:

Acts 13:25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, "Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose." Paul's whole sermon has been leading to the coming of Christ and His provision of salvation. Even John was not worthy. Even he needed a Savior. All the saints of the Old Testament trusted in this coming Savior. And the Savior Jesus is the only hope of standing before a holy God. Verse 26:

Acts 13:26 ¶ "Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. [What word of salvation? It was the word to repent of lawlessness and the command to look to the Jesus of whom we are not

worthy. Without the call of the law to repentance we cannot see the need for salvation. Without turning our eyes away from our own lawless unworthiness and to the holy worthiness of Jesus, we can't achieve salvation. Can you see how salvation and holiness are constantly linked?]

XIII.A Planning God (vv. 27-29)

And all of this was planned by God before the foundation of the world. Verses 27-29 show that this was not an afterthought of God, but that the death of Jesus had been planned long before.

Acts 13:27 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*.

Acts 13:28 And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.

Notice the phrase, "have fulfilled them in condemning Him." From the time of Genesis 3:15 God prophesied that Jesus would have to be condemned before we could be saved. The rulers of Jerusalem didn't know what they were doing. They thought they were in control, but in reality they were puppets to God's master plan of redemption. In opposing God they were fulfilling God's plan all along. Verse 29 says,

Acts 13:29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. God's plan could not be defeated. Not one single prophecy about the first coming was unfulfilled. God's plan could not be destroyed. Which, by the way, means that He can't be defeated in his purposes for our future. When Jesus said, **I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it**, He will not be defeated. He's got a perfect plan. When He gave us the Great Commission, He does not expect to be defeated. It's not a hopeless plan. All nations must be discipled. All nations must become Christian nations that obey His laws.

XIV.A God of Power (v. 30-37)

Nor could His *power* be overthrown. Verse 30 goes on: **But God raised Him from the dead** and verses 31-37 continue to speak of the awesome fact of the resurrection. What is so cool to me is that this same resurrection power is at work in all who believe. Ephesians 1:19-20 prays that we might know **what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places...** The same power that raised Jesus

is a power at work in those who believe. Our God is a God of power. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. We shouldn't just think of these things as dead history. He is a God of power today and is at work in us.

XV.A God of Promise (vv. 32-35)

Of course, if God had not also been a God of promise and a God of mercy, that power may have just condemned us to hell. But verses 32-35 speak of our God as being a God of promise. **And we declare to you glad tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm...** and he goes on to give three promises from this God who always keeps His promises.

If you are one of those who could care less about eschatology, think about this: Unless we know what the promises of God are, we cannot have faith. For the people before Paul's day, all of this was eschatology. It was still future to them. For hundreds of years they were looking forward to the promise being fulfilled. If they had taken a careless attitude toward prophecy, they would not have had faith to believe. It is precisely because our God is a God of promise that we simply cannot ignore prophecy and say that prophecy is immaterial. His promises were intended to give us faith and hope and confidence. Our God is a God of promise.

XVI.A Merciful God (v. 34)

Those same verses also point to the fact that our God is a merciful God. Verse 34 says, **I will give you the sure mercies of David.** What a wonderful phrase! It's not that we are just hoping for mercies. Because of the resurrection, these are *sure* mercies; they are *certain* mercies. We can bank on receiving mercy when we put our faith in Jesus Christ because God's very nature necessitates that mercy flow to those who trust Jesus. So when Satan tempts you to think that you are hopeless, and unworthy, and he beats up on you by bringing your sins and your dirty laundry before your eyes, do this in response: take your eyes off of your own unworthiness and place your eyes on the Second David (Jesus), whose resurrection guarantees that we can obtain mercy in our time of need. Remind yourself that this mercy isn't just hoped for; it is *sure*.

XVII.A Victorious God (vv. 35-37)

And part of the reason we can be so sure is that our God is a victorious God. The resurrection of Christ was not simply an act of *power*. It

was a manifestation of the victory of God over the enemies of Satan, our flesh and death. From the time of Adam on, death reigned. Verse 36 says that David could not conquer death. He died and his body rotted. The promise was not about him. But in Christ, death was conquered. Verse 35 says, **Therefore He also says in another Psalm: “You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.** God would not allow it. Corruption might seek victory, but God would not allow it. He is a victorious God.

XVIII.A Forgiving God (v. 38)

He is a forgiving God in verse 38. **Therefore let it be known to you brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.** There cannot be forgiveness of sin through any other than through Jesus. God never sweeps sin under the carpet. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil. He is a perfect judge who always condemns sin. So for God to forgive anyone is a miracle. And yet, forgiveness is part of God’s nature. In fact, in Numbers 14:18 where God defines His character, He puts those two concepts together in tension. It says, **The LORD is long suffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears *the guilty*...** Doesn’t that seem odd? “forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He by no means clears the guilty.” How can that be possible? Isn’t forgiveness clearing the guilty? And Paul reconciles those two doctrines in verse 39 where God is portrayed as a justifying God.

XIX.A Justifying God (v. 39)

And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. It is unfortunate that the ESV does not translate the word literally as “justified.” Their translation doesn’t convey the legal concept found in the term. And frankly, it’s because they based their revision on the RSV which is a liberal translation. AS good as the ESV is as a translation, you get these anomalies here and there. The ESV translates it, “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” But that’s not what the word means. The word is a legal courtroom term. It is a judge who tells a person that he is not guilty but is justified – is declared to be righteous. And what is remarkable about these verses is that the judge is telling a guilty person who needs forgiveness (that’s the context) that he is *not* guilty – he’s perfect; he’s justified. It’s a deliberate tension that Paul sets up.

How can God be a good judge and let criminals off the hook? Paul says, **by Him** – by Jesus. Notice that these people who are justified could

never get off the hook if they were judged by the law apart from Christ. The condemnation of Jesus mentioned in verse 27 is our condemnation. The death of Jesus mentioned in verses 28-29 is legally our death. The resurrection of Jesus in verses 30 and following is legally our resurrection. And Paul said all of that was promised. We aren't told all of the Scriptures that he gave to them in that service. But Hosea 6:1-2 may have been one of them. Hosea spoke of all saints punished in Christ, dying in Christ, and three days later rising in Christ. It is **by Him** that we are forgiving and it is **by Him** that we are justified.

It is popular in some circles (including some who hold to the New Perspective on Paul) to teach that the legal concept of being declared righteous in God's courtroom apart from the law and apart from our works was a scholastic invention. Do not believe it. It is rooted in the Old and the New Testaments. The sinners of verse 38 are justified from all things (that would include past, present and future sins). And they are justified by faith, not by keeping the law. In fact, Paul says in verse 39 that it is impossible for anyone to be justified by the law. So here we have the doctrine of justification by faith alone through the merits of Christ alone. And Paul had to later write the book of Galatians to the churches he established on this trip because someone was causing them to slip away from the purity of the Gospel. To meddle with the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a dangerous thing. Let me read you the words of Paul in Galatians 1:6-8. These were written to the same people who were coming to Christ in Acts 13, but some years later. Paul said, **I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As I said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.**

XX.A Fearful (Awesome) God (vv. 40-41)

Well, that's in effect how Paul ends this sermon. Paul indicates that those who reject the Gospel will be accursed in hell because our God is a fearful and awesome God. Verses 40-41: **Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: "Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you."** Who was Paul talking to? To people who considered themselves saved. They were

members of the synagogue. So Paul was doing exactly what the prophets in the Old Testament did. The prophets wrote to the church. They knew there were false believers in the church. They didn't treat every circumcised Israelite as going to heaven (like some want us to treat all baptized members). They preached the Gospel and warned those who did not believe it that they would fall under God's awesome curse even if they were objectively in the covenant.

And God says the same to us. Like the Jews Paul was preaching to, there may be some covenant children who have grown up in our church and yet who have never put their trust in God. They have no fear of God's judgments. When they consider the doctrine that God is a personal God, it is not an experienced doctrine, but a theoretical one. When they consider election, they take comfort that they are elect even though they show no evidences of election. Their God is a God who sweeps their sins under a carpet rather than judging sin. In short, they have a different God than Paul's awesome God. For many years this was true of me when I was growing up. I didn't see Christ as coming to save me from my sins (like Matthew 1:21 said that He did). I liked my sins. I wanted to be saved from hell, not from sin. I wanted a God who would meet my needs, not who would command my services in His army.

And we must evaluate which God we serve. Is your God a sovereign God, or a cosmic vending machine who is there for your convenience? Is He a powerful and victorious God, or a God whom you can't trust in the midst of scary trials? Do you value both His promises and laws or do you pick and choose? Is your God a generous God that gives you faith to entreat Him or only a God of judgment? On the other hand, do you see God as being so generous and kind that you think it inappropriate to ask for judgments? Our conception of who God is must be consistent with the testimony of Scripture and the history that the Scripture spells out. And it is my prayer that this passage would help to realign our sense of wonder and amazement of who God is. Our God is an awesome God if He is the same God as the God of Paul. Amen. Let's pray.

Children of God, I charge you to reject the god of your own imagination and to trust, worship and serve the God of Scripture. Amen.