

# Jesus: The Only Savior

By Prof. Barry Gritters



**Bible Text:** Galatians 1:1-9; 3:1-3; 5:1-12  
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We read the word of God this morning in the book of Galatians, Paul's epistle to the Galatians in three chapters, chapter 1, chapter 3 and chapter 5. And I read Galatians because if there's one brief way to say what Lord's Day 11 teaches, what Lord's Day 11 teaches it's this, Christ is all or nothing. Christ is all or nothing. Either you find all of your salvation in Christ or you find none of it in him, and that's what Paul is teaching in Galatians. So let's read the first nine verses of chapter 1, and then we'll read the first three of 3, and the first 12 of 5. The first nine verses of 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.

If I may pause here a minute looking at the end of verse 6 and the beginning of 7, those are two different words in the Greek, "another gospel which is not another." Another can be another of the same kind or another of a different kind. Paul is saying, "What you learned is not another gospel of the same kind but another gospel of a different kind." So verse 8,

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.

And now chapter 3.

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? 2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

And then we turn to chapter 5 and see the same kind of theme. It's all Christ or nothing from Christ. Chapter 5, the first 12 verses,

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. 2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. 3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. 4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. 7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? 8 This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. 9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. 10 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. 11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. 12 I would [that is, I wish] they were even cut off which trouble you.

It's on the basis of this book really of Galatians and other scriptures that we'll look at that we have the teaching of the Catechism in Lord's Day 11. Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 11 is found on page 8 in the back of the psalter. You'll remember that we're finished with the first part of the Catechism that asks how great is our misery. We're in the second part of the Catechism that asks how are we saved? Answer: faith, we're saved by faith and then what is faith? It's a knowledge of everything the Bible teaches and a confidence that it applies to me. A knowledge of everything the Bible teaches, that's faith. And the Bible is summarized in the Apostles' Creed and now we are up to that part of the Apostles' Creed that has us confess, "I believe in Jesus, the Christ, the only begotten Son of God our Lord." Jesus is in Lord's Day 11.

So Question 29 asks,

Q. 29. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, a Savior?

A. Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.

Q. 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

I'm going to pause with this question because for years I misunderstood the question and I always thought that that expression "welfare of saints" was a noun but it isn't. This is how you need to read that Question 30, "Do they really believe in Jesus, the only Savior, who seek their salvation and their welfare from the saints, or from themselves, or from anywhere else?" This is the noun, the double noun "salvation and welfare" or well being. You need to seek your salvation and your well being from where? It says from the saints, or from yourselves, or from anywhere else? And those who do, the Answer says,

- A. They do not [believe in Jesus]; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.

And now you understand why I began the Bible reading by saying it's all or nothing. It's all your salvation in Jesus or none of your salvation in Jesus and then you're in trouble. All or nothing and that's what Paul teaches in the book of Galatians and we'll look at that a little bit more at length in the course of the sermon.

I've said before in a sermon recently, and I don't remember if I preached that sermon here or not, that if anyone asks you what it means to be Protestant Reformed, you can probably not do much better than just say we believe in grace. Just say the word grace and then explain grace. The name of your congregation, Grace Protestant Reformed Church, and say that we believe, we confess, we defend, and we're willing to die for the doctrine of grace. And then you add grace alone is what we believe and confess as Protestant Reformed churches. That's not a bad answer to give someone who asks you what it means to be Protestant Reformed but if you're trying to aim at the bull's-eye when you answer that question and get to the very center of that bull's-eye, a better answer would be simply this: we believe in Jesus Christ alone.

We believe in grace alone but we believe in Christ alone and what we believe about grace alone, like the other Solas of the Reformation, help us see what's at the very center of our confession, Christ Jesus alone. Remember that when you studied the Reformation there are five what we call Solas, that's the Latin word for alone or only. We preach and teach and stand for Sola Scriptura, that is, the scripture alone, because only the Bible is the source of what we must believe and how we must live. Sola Scriptura. We believe and confess Sola Fide, that is, faith because it's by faith alone that we're saved. We confess in the end Soli Deo Gloria because we believe that to God alone belongs the glory. And we say Sola Gratia because we believe and confess grace alone. But all of those other Solas really serve this one Sola, Solo Christo, is how they would put it in the Latin, Christ alone, and that's the subject of the sermon this morning; that's what the Catechism teaches in Lord's Day 11.

Do they really believe, we can paraphrase the second Question and Answer, do they really believe in Jesus as the only Savior who seek part of their salvation and welfare from the saints, or from themselves, or from any other creature? They don't and you don't

either. You may boast of Christ alone in word but in deeds you deny him because after you're finished in the congregational worship saying Solo Christo, Christ alone, you go home and you depend on something else. "Not only something else," you'd say, well, of course not only something else, I trust in Christ but in your deeds and in my deeds I deny that confession because I'm trying to find a part of my salvation in something other than Christ. Don't boast of him in words and in deeds deny him. You ought not seek neither can you find salvation in any other. It's all Christ or nothing in Christ. That's the message of the book of Galatians. That's the message of the whole of the scripture. Jesus is the only Savior.

Let's look at how we make that confession this morning and see, in the first place, what we believe and confess with our mouth; in the second place, how we live that out in our lives, not denying him in deeds, that's the point; and then in the third place, how we glory in this, humbly glory in that great truth because I don't want any other truth and there's no other truth that will make me have the joy that this truth has, than this one, all my salvation is in Jesus and in Jesus alone. Let's truly confess that. Let's actively live that and let's humbly glory in that. Those are the three points of the sermon this morning.

What Paul taught in Galatians you might imagine is Paul's hobbyhorse because probably no one other than Paul is as emphatic as Paul in his epistles with regard to that point. He pounds the pulpit, as it were, and says Christ alone, and those three sections in Galatians emphasize that. He was stern in his teaching. He threatened those who taught otherwise that they ought to be and must be cut off. Christ will avail you nothing if you want all of your salvation mostly from Christ and a little bit from something else. You must be cut off. That's the point of Paul.

Now you might say, "Well, that's Paul's hobbyhorse but the other apostles didn't teach that." And you need to see that this is the teaching of the entirety of the scripture, Peter included, and if you look at Peter's second sermon that he preached after Pentecost you'll hear him say that. When the man was healed of his lameness and Peter was asked by what power or right that man was healed, Peter said by the name of Jesus. Then in order to be very clear, not only by the name of Jesus but there's no other name given among men under heaven by which a man may be saved. Jesus alone. And Peter set the standard there and Paul followed it too, that we must not only say salvation by Jesus but there's no other name by which we may find salvation. Jesus alone.

Paul taught it. Peter taught it. Why? Because they heard Jesus teach it, and what Jesus said was something very similar but in different language. "No man can come unto the Father but by me. I'm the door of the sheep. If you try to enter into the sheepfold, have access to the Father in any other way, you're a thief and a robber. I am the door of the sheep. There is no other door." So Paul taught that, Peter taught that, and they both taught that because Jesus taught that. Solo Christo, Christ Jesus alone.

Now it's the burden of this first point to explain what that means because it's possible to say that but not really understand what it means and then because of that misunderstanding, one little bit of our salvation outside of Jesus. There are five things

that we need to say with regard to that truth that we confess to help us confess it rightly. First of all, Jesus is Savior from sin. The Catechism makes that clear. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Savior? Because he saves us and delivers us from our sins. Isn't that how the book of Galatians began? That's why I emphasize that one word, perhaps you wondered why, verse 4, "Who gave himself for our sins." He didn't give himself for us for any other reason than to deal with our sins.

Then you read what Jesus said, "I am the way to the Father," in this light, "You don't have access to the Father but by me because I am the only one who is able to deal with your sins." There's a great barrier that stands between you and your Father and the only one who is able to remove that barrier and give you access to him is Jesus. Jesus alone is Savior because Jesus alone is able to deal with sin, and that's why the angel said to Joseph at the very beginning of the gospel of Matthew, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their poverty." No. Nakedness. No. Famine. No. War. No. Sin, "call his name Jesus because he'll save his people from their sin."

Now perhaps for us that's a truism, perhaps for us that's obvious, but we need to hear that if there is any other Jesus that's ever preached to you that isn't a Savior from sin but wants to save you in order to give you something other than the Father and access to the Father, he's not Jesus. He's an antichrist. And that's why the Bible says even today there are many antichrists and in the end there are going to be more antichrists, and an antichrist is one who's going to deny the essence of the work of Christ, that is, be a Savior of you from sin. He's going to propose that he'll be a savior of you but from poverty and hunger and nakedness and cold and injustice and all of the rest, and we're inclined to say, "Yes, I like those saviors too." And Jesus said, "No, I am your Savior and I am your Savior from sin."

If you have an ear for what other churches are teaching, and we mustn't always talk only about other churches but we need to guard our young people that go to the colleges and maybe are tempted to go to other churches and hear what they say, by showing what so many others teach about the work of the church and the ministry of God's people, and they suppose that the work of the church and the ministry of God's people is to give food to those who are hungry, and water to those who only have infected water, and clothing to those who are naked, and justice to those who have been served up injustice. And though those do touch the gospel, those other realities, food and clothing and justice and so forth, they're not the gospel and we as a church need to preach the gospel.

I think to underline that point, we need to look at what Jesus faced in his ministry, two crucial crossroads that he came to, one at the very beginning of his ministry, and one a little bit into his ministry, and they were these. Do you remember that after Jesus was baptized in the wilderness by John, immediately he didn't go to Jerusalem to preach, he went out into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil and that ought to say something to us immediately about what Jesus needed to do and get straight. He needed to get straight that he had to go to the cross and nowhere other than the cross to be a Savior of his people. And do you know what the devil proposed to him first? What was the first temptation? If you compare Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you might mix up temptations 2 and 3 but there's no question from the gospel accounts that the very first

temptation is, "Turn these stones into bread." He was hungry, of course he was hungry, he hadn't eaten for 40 days and 40 nights. He'd been wrestling with the devil that whole time.

Here's the first temptation, "Turn these stones into bread," and we often imagine that that was to satisfy his own hunger and because God hadn't told him to turn the stones into bread in order to eat, would have been sin for him to do that, and that's to miss the whole point of that temptation. The devil wanted Jesus not to turn a stone into bread which would have been enough to satisfy his hunger but to turn all of the stones of the wilderness into bread which would have deterred him from going to the cross because had he turned the stones into bread, all of the people would come flocking to him and said to him, "You are what we need. We are hungry. We are poor. We are naked. We are thirsty. We've been served up all kinds of injustice by the Romans. You are the Savior we need." The very first activity in his earthly ministry was to be tempted by the devil with that temptation and Jesus had to say to that temptation, "No, because that's not my work. It's not my work to feed the bellies of the people. It's my work to feed the people with my own flesh and blood after I've offered myself on the cross."

And if you have an ear for that and an eye for that, when you read the gospel accounts you'll see that temptation appear over and over, two obvious times but other times too with regard to the healing miracles, but two other times with regard to the feeding miracle, the feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000. Now those miracles point out that Jesus isn't uninterested in our earthly belly, that is, the fact that we need to eat. He was preaching to them. They didn't have food, they couldn't go to buy food. Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes so that they could eat and then they could stay and hear him preach, but they misunderstood the purpose of the miracle. They wanted to make him the king. Why? Not because they heard what he said but because they ate what he gave them in that multiplying of the bread. And again, he had to leave them. They wanted to make him king. Why? Because they saw him going to the cross and they said, "No, that's not the best way to be our Savior. The best way to be our Savior is to feed us." Over and over and over again Jesus made that point.

Now if you read the book of Galatians, you understand that the qualification I made comes right from the book of Galatians itself. "Do good to all men especially those that are of the household of faith," which means feed all men. You may. If you have a neighbor that's hungry, the deacons may provide for him. If you don't use the deacons, you ought to bring a meal to them even if they're non-Christians. Do good to all men especially those of the household of faith but everyone. And the form for the installation of deacons and elders quotes that verse to show that this is the reformed understanding of it. It's not that we aren't interested in caring for people's clothing needs and financial needs, that's the office of deacon, but that's not the gospel. The gospel is that Jesus comes to take care of our sin and take down this great barrier that stand between us and the Father. We need to come to him. How? By the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

You can't make the confession that Jesus is the only Savior unless you start there and that's number 1, he's the Savior of us from our sins. 2. And we can be more brief with

these others, we must say that with regard to sin Jesus is a complete Savior because every aspect of sin he has dealt with or he will deal with. There's not one aspect of sin that isn't covered by Christ, and if there is, then Jesus isn't the only Savior and you mustn't try to find what you need in him. And what we mean by that is that he's a Savior from the guilt of sin, he's the Savior from the power of sin, and he's the Savior from all of the effects of sin, the miserable effects of sin. The guilt of sin he took care of by his blood on the cross and that's really what Paul is pointing out in the book of Galatians. Jesus justifies us and all of our righteousness before God comes from no one other than Jesus and his blood and his righteousness. All of it is from him.

Having cared for us with regard to the guilt of our sin, Jesus also cares for us with regard to the power of sin, and that's the doctrine of sanctification. Having delivered us from the guilt, he also delivers us from its power. Power, that's sanctification and he also delivers us from all of the consequences of sin, some now, some in the future, and that's where you're tempted to make a mistake and say, "But hunger is because of sin and nakedness is because of sin, and illness is because of sin. You know, Jesus saves us from all of those and we need to be ministers to others in that regard too." To which we say, "Of course we do. That's the office of deacon but that's not the heart of the gospel. You start with sin. Sin."

He delivers us from death and delivers us from hell, those are the consequences of sin that we need to hear about from Jesus, but then with regard to all of the aspects of sin don't just look at what he delivered us from, from guilt, and from sin's power, and from sin's effects. Look at what he does for us and gives to us. Not guilty means righteous, innocent. You look to Jesus to hear the declaration, "You are right in the eyes of God. When God looks at you, he sees perfection. He doesn't see any sin. He approves you absolutely." And not only does he deliver you from the awful power of sin so that you're a slave to all kinds of iniquity, he gives you the strength to live in godliness, to obey the commandments, to bear the burdens, and not only bear them reluctantly but to bear them with joy. He not only delivers you from loneliness, the isolation that sin brings you into but he brings you into the fellowship of the Father in heaven so that you're satisfied with him and say to live apart from God is death, it's good to seek his face. He takes care of all of the aspects of sin and he gives you everything that you lost in the fall.

He saves from sin in the beginning, he saves from sin in the middle, and he saves from sin in the very end. That's why the apostle says in the book of Hebrews he's the author and he's the finisher of our faith. That doesn't mean he started it and he someday is going to end it and you must do all the beginning. No, he's all of our salvation and that's what Paul was teaching in Galatians. It's striking, I don't know that any apostle speaks the way Paul does to the Galatians and says at the very beginning after that nice introduction, "I'm marveling that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ into another gospel." A very different gospel which is not another of the same kind but a different gospel. That's a powerful way to speak.

Then in chapter 3, he comes back and says even more strongly, "You foolish Galatians, who bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth? I'd like to learn from you just

this, did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Answer that question for me," he says. "Are ye so foolish?" verse 3, "having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" There's the beginning, there's the end. Having begun in the Spirit, you started right, you trusted in Jesus, now you abandon Jesus because you said, "A part of my salvation needs to come from me and my works. I'm going to depend on him for most but when it comes to sanctification or maybe part of my approval before God, I'm going to say let's still require circumcision. Just one little work. Let's abandon all of the Old Testament law and all of those ceremonial requirements and all of the standards that were impossible to keep, let's trust in Jesus but one little work let's trust in the flesh." No, everything, everything. Children, let's perhaps compare salvation to all of the sand in all of the sand dunes at Silver Lake. All of those grains of sand represent all of salvation for you. Every grain is Christ and there's nothing that you need that isn't found in Christ. All of it in him.

That's second. 1. He's a Savior from sin. 2. He's a complete Savior. 3. He's a sovereign Savior in that he doesn't just try to save but he does save. I know this falls sometimes, forgive me if you need to adjust that. 3. The salvation that Christ earns for us is an effectual salvation. That comes out in the Catechism when it says in Question 29 and the Answer, "because he saves us and delivers us." Think that through for a moment. It doesn't say because he tries to save us. It doesn't say because he accomplishes everything that we need for salvation, though that would be one thing, but then leaves it up to you to finish it, that would be the other and that's wrong. Why is he called Jesus as the Savior? Because he saves us and delivers us. Let's just say he has accomplished all of the aspects of salvation, he covered every grain of sand in those sand dunes by him and him alone, and then he sets them aside and says, "Now you may have all of them but it's up to you to get them." And then you've denied that Jesus is a complete Savior and you've denied that Jesus is the only Savior because though he has made it available for you, it's up to you to be saved and then salvation is not by Christ, salvation is by you.

Then you ought not call this a church of Christ, you ought to call it the church of man. And in fact, if you read the book of Revelation, you realize that that's exactly antichrist, isn't it? 666, the Christ is the Christ of all salvation in him and him alone. The antichrist says salvation is going to be in man. Man. In your works. In your efforts. In your will. In your merits. No, he's a Savior. He's a Savior completely.

Fourth, he's a Savior of all of the elect and only the elect. He isn't, to put it this way, by his intention the Savior of everybody because if he is by his intention the Savior of everyone, then he's not a sovereign Savior. But if he is by his intention the Savior of his elect, the ones that God gave him, read John 17, then he's the only Savior and then he's a complete Savior. Lord's Day 11, he saves us and delivers us from all our sins and that's what Paul says in the gospel to the Galatians and in the book to the Romans.

We need to move on. There's more that I could say but we need to be on to the second point because there's where really the application comes. It's possible, you see, to confess Jesus that way with our mouths but deny him in our deeds. So we must not only rightly confess this, we must actively live this and see how it is that we actually live this. The

Catechism makes clear what we need to explain. First of all, the Catechism says in Question 30, "Seek salvation." You must seek your salvation. How do you seek your salvation and where do you find your salvation from and welfare from the saints, from yourselves, or from anywhere else? That's now what we need to ask about. It's one thing to say it in your mouth, your words, it's another thing to seek salvation in your deeds. In your deeds.

What does it mean to seek salvation in your deeds? I'm not talking about working for your salvation. I'm talking about the activity that you are engaged in with regard to your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see all your salvation from him or do you seek part of it from somewhere else? The Catechism gives us a very very sharp warning that they don't who boast of him in words but in deeds deny him. There is deeds, it's the deed of seeking the Lord Jesus Christ. So there are two errors here: one is that you speak a good word but don't act it properly, that is, in your seeking; and the other is that you do not only speak that you trust Jesus but you seek Jesus for almost everything but not everything. That's the warning of Galatians. That's the warning of Galatians that really couldn't be more clear, and if you haven't read Galatians before carefully or studied it, you need to see that it's worse than it seems to be because the apostle wasn't warning the Galatians with this other gospel to come back from Buddhism. He started in Christianity now why did you go to Buddhism or Hinduism or the Muslim faith or some other Eastern religion? That's not the problem at all. That's not the error that the Galatian church fell into. This was the error that the Galatian church fell into: they wanted all their salvation from Christ but they also wanted to keep circumcision. One little work, one commandment from the Old Testament and they said to their adherents, "You trust in Christ for everything but this we require of you, to a work of the flesh, be circumcised and if you're not circumcised you can't be saved." Paul says that's another gospel. It's not another of the same, it's another that's altogether different. It's as bad as being a Buddhist, worshiping the Hindu gods, and following Mohammed with the Muslims. That's how bad it is.

Now that makes the application for us sharper and clearer. If I may use an analogy, I don't know even if this is permitted anymore but it used to be the case that if you'd get an insurance policy to cover you and it didn't cover everything that you wanted it to cover, you'd get a rider or a supplemental policy to cover what the main policy didn't cover. Maybe you can still do that and you understand the analogy, and you can do that spiritually too, say, "Jesus, I want you to cover everything that I need but if you don't cover everything that I need, I want to cover myself a little bit. I want to get a rider for my insurance policy with regard to heaven. I want to have a supplemental insurance policy." That's what the Catechism is talking about. The Roman Catholic Church never denied that they found their salvation in Jesus, they simply denied that it was all there and said, "You can trust in Mary too, pray to her. When you travel you trust in St. Christopher. When you have other needs, you trust in other saints and you may pray to them for your needs." It's Christ plus. Christ is the main policy, the saints and the angels and maybe you, yourselves, are supplements of policies.

Now we're not interested anymore in the Roman Catholic Church but we are interested in applying the errors that they were guilty of to ourselves and see that. Who are your supplemental coverages? You don't pray to Mary, you don't pray to St. Christopher, who do you trust? Let's first look outside of ourselves as to whom we would depend upon and then let's look at inside of ourselves as to what we would depend upon in ourselves. You don't trust in Mary but do you trust in a counselor? Is it possible that you trust in a preacher? Is it possible that there's a teacher that you talk to so often because you know he or she gives you good counsel? When you wake up in the morning you can't wait to have your next appointment formal or informal with him or her because you feel so good after you leave visiting with him or her? I warn you, I warn you, I may be or an elder may be, or your parent or teacher may be one of those supplements that you must put away. Not that you don't come to us to hear the gospel but that when you come to us, you don't depend upon us but you depend upon Jesus to whom we point you. Be very careful. There are the Mary's, the St. Mary's and the St. Christopher's and the St. Augustine's in Protestantism also.

But what about you and what about your own works? Because there's the real need and the warning that's justified for us. You trust in your own works for justification, you trust in your own strength for sanctification, and you trust in your own possessions or pleasures for your own satisfaction. Those three areas let's see for a moment. Your own works for justification, your own will and strength for sanctification, and your own possessions or pleasures for your satisfaction, that is, to fill you up when you feel empty.

Now we know and we confess that with our mouth justification by faith alone. That's one of the five Solas of the Reformation. If we as Protestant Reformed people don't know that, then we've got to go back to the Catechism and learn it. Why does God declare us righteous? It's not because of any works we've performed, it's because of the works and worth, the blood and sacrifice of Christ alone. So when you go to bed at night and you feel guilty and you know you need to remedy that sense of guilt, you need to go to Christ and Christ alone and that's why you end your prayers, children, always, "For Jesus' sake. Forgive my sins for Jesus' sake." Not forgive my sins, God, because tomorrow I'm going to do better. Not forgive my sins, Father, because it really wasn't as bad as dad and mom think it was. It's not forgive my sins because my intentions were good but I slipped up in the process of doing good. It's forgive my sins because of Jesus and Jesus alone.

And yet how often don't we make that mistake and imagine that God will approve us and receive us and bless us because of us. "God, I'm going to do better. I'm sorry, I'm going to do better." Now you must say that, "I'm sorry, I'm going to do better," but you must never say, "God, forgive me because I'm going to do better or because it wasn't so bad as others imagined." You always says, "Forgive and justify me, please, freely in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ." And if you trust in one work that you've performed or are going to perform in order for God to approve of you, Christ is nothing for you. It's all or nothing. God justified you because of him. He covers every aspect of your sin, all of your guilt, his merits and his alone.

Or when you come to me or an elder or a teacher or a counselor with regard to a sin that you're struggling with, maybe you can't break with an addiction, whatever that addiction might be, and you've struggled for a long time and the counselor helps you with that, and maybe says this, that and the other thing, and you leave that meeting of the counselor or the minister or elder and say, "I'm going to try harder tomorrow. I'm going to try harder. I'm really going to make up my mind not to do it." And if the counselor, minister, elder or teacher allows you to leave with that in your mouth, those words that you're confessing, you're finished because your sanctification is not dependent on your willpower and your effort and how much you try. Your sanctification too, that's salvation, isn't it? It all depends upon Jesus. When you battle that sin and you hate that sin, and you go back to that sin the very next day and do it over and over again, and you say, "I need help." If you go to a counselor, whoever he may be or she, make sure that counselor is one who points you not to him or her but to this one, the Lord Jesus, so that you go home and say, "I'm undone. I can't. I have no strength in myself. I've no ability to stop drinking or watching pornography or abusing my wife or being angry with my children, or whatever sin it may be that continues in my life. I've got no power to do it in myself. It's all in Jesus and Jesus alone."

Then at times you say, "Well, it's not really my justification that I'm having a problem with, what God thinks of me, not really thinking about my sanctification so much," though this third relates to sanctification, "I'm not thinking of any sin that I have to battle with like pornography or alcohol addiction or anything like that, I'm really thinking of this, when I get up in the morning I feel empty. I don't feel like there's any purpose in life. I don't feel satisfied at the end of the day. I don't know what's wrong but I'm lonely, I feel worthless. I'm empty." That's probably the best way to describe it. And then we're tempted to say, "I've got money in the bank and I'm going to buy something that will satisfy me and fill my emptiness. Or there's a vacation I've seen other people have taken and it looks good and I'm going to sign up for that cruise or that nice winter getaway and that's going to satisfy me." And the warning of the gospel to you with regard to those things too is just as sharp as what Paul gave to the church at Galatia: be careful as to what you think will satisfy you, will fill you, will give you what you need at the beginning, at the end of the day. It's Jesus. He fills you. He's the friend that sticks closer than a brother. When all others have abandoned you, he's the friend that sticks closer than a brother. He's the mighty rock in whose shadow you find refuge in the wilderness when there's nothing else. Jesus is, go to him.

And we may say that with words too and speak highly of going to Jesus but that means in very practical ways, people of God, begin your day with Jesus. Fill up with him. Speak to him and let him speak to you. Go to his word. Be praying without ceasing to him. Let him be indeed your friend who is closer than a brother so that when all others forsake you, he will be there for you and fill you up when you feel empty and give you satisfaction when nothing else satisfies. Go to Jesus in his word and in prayer, in church on the Sabbath day, but in church in Bible study, and in church in Catechism. But come to him every day and let him be, by your own experience, what satisfies you and you will say eventually as you grow older, "I don't need these possessions. I really don't. I want them, I still find it in my sinful nature to crave for them. I have but a small beginning of

the new obedience but I've got a beginning and that beginning is this, why this house? Why this car? Why this vacation? God permits me to have them, there's no sin in having them except when my having of them is what I use to satisfy my longings and to make me happy. That's my salvation and my salvation is all in Jesus."

And when after the sermon, as it were, rebukes you and rebukes me with regard to justification and sanctification and my own satisfaction of my emptiness, after it's finished rebuking you, you and I say to ourselves, "We don't want it any other way. We want to glory in this and boast in this, humbly glory in this. I don't want it any other way because I've tried these other things, I've tried to work to find approval before God and it didn't work. I went to bed and woke up guilty. I've tried to overcome my sins by exercising my willpower and being more disciplined in my life. I've tried that and it doesn't work. And I've tried to fill myself up with all my possessions and activities and vacations and it didn't satisfy. It didn't. But I've also tried this, I've sought my salvation and my well being in Jesus and I've been able to go to sleep not guilty because of the righteousness of him imputed to me. And I've found that there is in Jesus the strength to do what I'm supposed to do, obey the commandments and bear the burdens and even be happy in them. I've found that to be true. Not always, I'm sinful, but I've found that to be true and that's what I want and he has filled me and given me what I need. Jesus is what I want. Jesus is what I need. Jesus is what I have, only Jesus."

So though to go back to the beginning, it wouldn't be wrong to say when someone asks you who are you as a Christian, you say, "I'm a Christian who defends grace." It wouldn't be wrong to say, "I believe grace and grace alone," but shift the focus to the very center, the very center, "I believe Jesus and only Jesus and I trust in Jesus and only Jesus, and I've found him to be my righteousness and my sanctification and my redemption and my everything. Jesus alone." Amen.

Let's pray.

*Our Father which art in heaven, send us home with that blessing that we hear Jesus speak to us, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." Father, forgive us when we have tried to enter into the sheepfold in some other way than the door who is Jesus, and to find in some other name given among men under heaven our salvation, our help, and our healing and forgive us. And now may this afternoon be a meditation upon that word and may that word be a source of hope for us when we are hopeless and help when we are helpless and righteousness when we are guilty. In Jesus' name we pray. Amenn.*