

The Danger of Desertion

THE GOSPEL REVEALED · BIBLE STUDY

Galatians 1:6-7 | Arvin Assembly of God | Pastor Brian Overturf | September 9, 2026

The Big Question (from Sunday's sermon)

The Question: *Is there really only one gospel?*

The Answer: Yes. One gospel. One Savior. One mediator. One way to God. And walking away from it is the most dangerous thing a human being can do, which is why, in the one letter where you expect a thank you, Paul writes a rebuke instead.

Sunday's three answers: The gospel you received. The only gospel there is. The gospel under attack.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this study, you will be able to...

- 1 Define “turning away” as a desertion word, and show from its voice and tense that the Galatians were doing it to themselves and were not yet finished doing it.
- 2 Show why “so soon” is a charge with a history behind it, and say honestly how tight the Exodus 32:8 connection actually is.
- 3 Identify what the Galatians were deserting, a Person rather than a position, and say who did the calling.
- 4 Defend from Acts 4:12 and John 14:6 why a “different gospel” cannot be another gospel.
- 5 Define “trouble” and “pervert,” and trace the word “unless” from Acts 15:1 through every works religion on earth.

The Text

Galatians 1:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

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What a First-Century Room Heard in “I Marvel”

“I am astonished” was a stock opening for a letter of blame. The room knew what kind of letter this was before Paul argued anything.

Most could not read, but these were read aloud, and illiterate is not unintelligent. Not merely form.

The scholars: “I marvel” as a rebuke

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 6</i>	“Later sample letters of blame and reproach often include I’m shocked or “I am astonished” (θαυμάζω, <i>thaumazō</i> ; an expression that appears here in 1:6), as do a number of reproving letters across antiquity’s centuries.”
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 6</i>	“As has long been recognized, Paul was conspicuously skipping formal niceties and getting right down to business—in this case, the business of rebuking his audience.”
Moo • BECNT <i>on v. 6, citing Dunn</i>	“But there is no good basis for ignoring the force of the word; as Dunn puts it, it expresses “more passion than artifice.” Paul is genuinely surprised and chagrined that his converts in Galatia are so quickly being tempted to exchange the true gospel that he preached to them for a substitute and false gospel.”
LABC <i>on v. 6</i>	“expression “I am astonished” (<i>thaumazo</i>) conveys a rebuke similar to our expression, “I can hardly believe what I am hearing about you!””
Osborne <i>on vv. 6–7</i>	“In the Gospels this verb describes the awe or wonder of those who witness the miracles of Jesus, but here Paul uses it negatively to convey his shock at hearing about their abandonment of the true faith.”

1. The Gospel You Received**Galatians 1:6**

⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

First he reminds them what they were handed. You did not earn it and you did not find it. It was given.

“Turning Away”: A Deserter’s Word

In Greek it is a military charge, a soldier changing sides. Defector. Turncoat. AWOL.

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You are removing yourselves. Nobody dragged them off. And the tense is present. Not finished. Which is why Paul writes at all. Not a eulogy. A rope.

What “Reflexive” Actually Means

That is a grammar word. The plain version is this: the verb says the Galatians did this themselves. Nobody did it to them.

Think of a man leaving a job. “He was fired” and “he quit” describe the same man walking out the same door. They are not the same sentence.

The scholars: the verb of desertion

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
MacArthur <i>on v. 6</i>	“It is a present with a reflexive. It should be translated this way. “You are in the process of removing yourselves.” You see, for a Christian to buy what a false teacher is buying is his own problem. Paul blames the false teachers for what they do, but he sure blames the Galatians for what they did.”
MacArthur <i>on v. 6</i>	“That is literally the word to defect. It is used in a military sense of a revolt. It is translated in old lexicons to transfer one’s allegiance. It’s a defection. It’s a deserter. It’s the word used for a turncoat.”
LABC <i>on v. 6</i>	“verb is in the present tense... and was used in military circles to indicate that a soldier was AWOL (absent without leave).”
Moo • BECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	“Paul uses the present tense of this verb to indicate that the apostasy is still being contemplated.”
Schreiner • ZECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	“Elsewhere in Jewish literature the verb “turn” (ἐπατίθη ι) can describe departure or apostasy from the Jewish way of life (e.g., 2 Macc 7:24).”

Goes Deeper: The Irony Buried Inside the Word

It comes out of the Maccabean revolt, the word for a Jew deserting Sabbath, kosher and circumcision. Paul aims it at Gentiles picking those very things up.

The scholars: the Maccabean background

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 6</i>	“In 2 Macc. 7:24, the term that in Gal. 1:6 is translated as abandoning (ἐπατίθη ι, metatithēmi) involves abandoning ancestral Jewish customs; Paul here applies it to those who thought that they were embracing these very customs”

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Moo • BECNT*on v. 6*

“This verb, which was occasionally used to refer to a change of philosophical or political belief,... was also used to describe Jews who apostatized from the faith at the time of the Maccabean rebellion.”

“So Soon”: A Charge With a History Behind It

“So soon” measures more than a calendar.

Exodus 32:8

⁸ *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it...*

The sea had just opened. Moses is gone forty days, and they have melted their jewelry into a calf. Not forty years. Forty days.

Scripture: so quickly, over and over

SCRIPTURE	THE SAME CHARGE, THE SAME SPEED
Exodus 32:8 <i>at Sinai</i>	<i>They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it...</i>
Deuteronomy 9:16 <i>Moses recounting it</i>	<i>And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God—had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you.</i>
Judges 2:17 <i>one generation later</i>	<i>Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so.</i>

A pattern, not an incident. Judges, Kings, Chronicles. We do not only drift slowly. We can turn fast.

The scholars: the golden calf behind “so soon”

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Schreiner • ZECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	“The words “so quickly” (οὕτως ταχύς) echo Exod 32:8 (cf. also Judg 2:17) and the golden calf incident... The Galatians seem to be repeating the error of the wilderness generation by departing from the Lord shortly after being delivered.”
Osborne <i>on v. 6</i>	“This echoes Exodus 32:8, where after the golden calf incident God condemned the people who had been so “quick to turn away from what I commanded.”... Like the Israelites, the Galatians had become a new set of wilderness wanderers.”

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Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 6</i>	“What astonishes him is how quickly they are abandoning the gracious Lord. This is strong language; quickly (ταχέως, tacheōs; cf. 2 Thess. 2:2) might evoke the speed at which ancient Israel turned aside to the golden calf (Exod. 32:8; cf. Deut. 9:12) and other false religion (Judg. 2:17).”
Moo • BECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	“Perhaps the most famous apostasy in the OT is the decision of the Israelites to fashion and worship a golden-calf image—an apostasy all the worse since it occurred “so quickly” after they had heard God’s word at Sinai.”

“From Him Who Called You”: They Were Leaving a Person

Not a doctrine. Not a denomination. Not Paul. Him who called you. A betrayal of a Person, not a change of position.

And we do not call ourselves. Both are true: a person must respond, and God called first.

The scholars: a Person, not a system

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
MacArthur <i>on v. 6</i>	“You’re removing yourselves not from a system, not from a religion, but from what? From a person. From God. From Him who called you into the grace of Christ.”
Osborne <i>on v. 6</i>	“They were not simply deserting Paul’s gospel teaching but were turning away from “the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ”—from God the Father, whose will in verse 4 led to their rescue from evil.”
Moo • BECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	“The one who called” (τοῦ καλέσαντος, tou kalesantos) is God the Father (always the subject of the verb καλέω [kaleō, call] when used in a theological sense in Paul).”
LABC <i>on v. 6</i>	“The believers were turning away from God (or Christ) himself—the God who loved them and called them because of his great grace in Christ.”
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 6</i>	“Paul’s contemporaries considered abandoning a benefactor a terrible offense, and Paul reinforces the connotation of God’s benefaction by explicitly noting generosity (grace, χάρις, charis), language frequently associated with benefaction.”

Word Study: “In the Grace of Christ” ἐν χάριτι (en chariti)

En can mean “by means of,” but most hear sphere. Called into grace, into the realm where grace is the air.

Grace is not the door you walked through on the way to something else. Grace is the house.

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Galatians 5:4

⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Called into grace in chapter one. Fallen from grace in chapter five. Not that Christ's work failed, but that going to law for justification steps off the only ground that holds.

The scholars: called into grace, fallen from grace

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Moo • BECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	"But Paul's point here is to remind the Galatians that God has called them to continue to live and to remain in the grace associated with the decisive, epoch-changing Christ event."
Schreiner • ZECNT <i>on v. 6</i>	"The Galatians' departure is shocking, for they are abandoning the gift of grace that is theirs in Christ. Paul emphasizes that God called them into the realm of Christ's grace."
Keener • Galatians <i>on vv. 6-7</i>	"was a grace that cost God his Son's death, because no law could have accomplished this (2:21); to seek it by keeping the law meant apostasy from God's grace in Christ (5:4)."
LABC <i>on v. 6</i>	"Paul was amazed that someone would insist on attempting to pay for a free (and priceless) gift!"
Rogers <i>on v. 6</i>	"Grace means, it is what God has done for us, through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's unmerited favor, freely bestowed upon Hell-bound, unmeriting sinners, who deserve and merit only Hell."

You received this. It was handed to you by the God you are now walking away from.

2. The Only Gospel There Is**Galatians 1:6-7**

⁶ ...to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another;...

Nobody offers a counterfeit as a counterfeit. They said: this is the complete message. The Galatians thought they were upgrading.

"Which Is Not Another": Paul Takes the Word Back (Sarcastically)

Then he corrects himself mid-sentence. He grants that it is different. He refuses to grant that it is a gospel. There is no other for it to be another of.

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SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
LABC <i>on v. 7</i>	"Paul's sarcastic words in verse 6, "a different gospel," were still too positive for the error he was resisting; so Paul pointed out that the Judaizers' teaching was no gospel at all."
Osborne <i>on v. 7</i>	"Theirs was not simply a "different gospel" but was "really no gospel at all." There is in fact nothing "good" about the "news" they have brought."

The scholars: a substitute sold as the real thing

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Rogers <i>on vv. 6-7</i>	"Well, rather than denying the gospel, the devil would like to distort the gospel. The devil would like, somehow, to pervert the gospel, so that people who feel the need of a gospel will take a substitute gospel—which is not really another gospel—and never will see their need for the genuine and the true gospel, and, therefore, be eternally lost."
MacArthur <i>on v. 7</i>	"And, you see, the thing that was masking the deceit of the false teachers was that it sounded like the same gospel. Why? Because it had Christ dying and rising again and being the Messiah and believing in Him. And all they did was add works at the beginning and works at the end, without changing the middle, and that was the subtlety of Satan."
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 7</i>	"A gospel different from the one Paul proclaims is not a true gospel (Gal. 1:7); a gospel of circumcision is hardly gospel—literally, "good news"—for gentiles!"
Osborne <i>on v. 7</i>	"To replace the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross with anything else—even the law—as the basis for salvation is heresy."

3. The Gospel Under Attack**Galatians 1:7**

7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Now he names the threat, because you cannot resist what you cannot identify.

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“Trouble”: Muddying the Water

To trouble the waters. A kid cannonballs into the still lake. Nothing is destroyed and you cannot see a thing. A false gospel clouds the water.

Word Study: “Trouble” ταρασσω (tarassō)

To stir up, to agitate, to throw into confusion. The word for Herod, for the disciples on the water, and for the heart Jesus says not to have.

Acts 15:24

24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no such commandment...

The Jerusalem council used the same word about the same men. They carried credentials. James: to whom we gave no such commandment.

The scholars: the agitators and Acts 15:24

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 7</i>	“It is probably no coincidence that the same Greek term also appears in the Jerusalem Council’s public disavowal of some law-demanding Jerusalemite believers (tines, “certain persons”) who had earlier disturbed believers in the province directly to Galatia’s south and east (Acts 15:24).”
Moo • BECNT <i>on v. 7</i>	“Paul calls the false teachers in Galatia those who “agitate,” “confuse,” or “trouble” others (all within the semantic range of ταρασσω)... both here and in 5:10... (note also that the verb is applied to Jewish Christians who insist that Gentiles be circumcised and observe the law of Moses in Acts 15:24).”
MacArthur <i>on v. 7</i>	“The word “trouble” means to shake or agitate or stir up. They literally threw them into confusion.”
LABC <i>on v. 7</i>	“Based on Acts 15:24, the elders in Jerusalem denied giving any sanction to the teaching of the Judaizers, so any claim for their authority was false.”
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 7</i>	“Paul uses this Greek term again—the only other time in his extant letters—in Gal. 5:10, where he notes that whoever it is that is unsettling you will face divine judgment.”

“Unsettling Your Souls”: Why Legalism Steals Assurance

It unsettles souls. Rattle concrete before it sets and you have a pile, not a wall.

Assurance and earning cannot share a house. They had peace with God. Somebody told them there was more to do, and the peace went with it.

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“Pervert”: Not Damaged. Reversed.

They want to pervert it. That word means to turn a thing into its opposite.

The scholars: a reversal, not a dent

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
LABC <i>on v. 7</i>	“term “pervert” (metastrepsai) goes beyond the idea of confusion or complication; it implies reversal, or making something the opposite of what it was originally.”
MacArthur <i>on v. 7</i>	“You know what the word “pervert” literally means? Reverse. You add one work to grace, and you’ve reversed it and turned it into a works system... You cannot modify grace. You just destroy it.”
Keener • Galatians <i>footnote on v. 7</i>	“Here, “twist” can mean simply “turn” or “change,” but changing something good to something bad twists or perverts it (as also in Sir. 11:31).”
Rogers <i>on vv. 6–7</i>	“The devil does not deny the gospel so much as he does pervert, or change, the gospel of Christ:”

Goes Deeper: A Twist Is Harder to Catch Than a Lie

Open denial is loud and the room would catch it. These kept the cross, the name, the Messiah, and said you needed more. The serpent did not contradict God. He bent it into a question.

Genesis 3:1

¹ Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”

Satan is rarely original. He is a re-arranger. And a re-arrangement passes inspection in a way a contradiction never will.

The scholars: they kept Christ and added to Him

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
LABC <i>sidebar, on v. 7</i>	“twisting of the truth is more difficult to spot than an outright lie. The Judaizers were twisting the truth about Christ. They claimed to follow him, but they denied that Jesus’ work on the cross was sufficient for salvation.”
Keener • Galatians <i>on v. 7</i>	“It is doubtful that Paul’s rivals were denying Jesus’s death or resurrection, which seems not to have been at issue in Galatia... Christ was exclusively sufficient.”
LABC <i>on v. 6</i>	“Note that they may have included in their teachings the need for faith in Christ for salvation, but they taught that additional requirements had to be met before true salvation could occur. Their message was “faith plus.””

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They Added One Word: Unless

So how did they actually do it? Luke tells us, and it comes down to a single word.

Acts 15:1

¹ And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Unless. Yes to Jesus, yes to grace, yes to the cross. Unless. Bolt that on and the finished work is no longer finished.

Galatians 5:2-3

² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

Christ will profit you nothing. Not less. Nothing.

The scholars: one drop is enough

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
MacArthur <i>on v. 6</i>	"Take a nice, pure glass of water. All it takes to kill you is one drop of poison. Just one drop. The right poison. And Paul isn't going to tolerate one drop of legalism in a grace salvation, not one."
MacArthur <i>on v. 6</i>	"So salvation was by works getting in and works staying in, and Christ was sort of incidental in there. It was a situation of you're saved by faith plus works. And that was what they were teaching."
LABC <i>on v. 6</i>	"When people set up additional requirements for salvation, they deny the power of Christ's death on the cross"
Moo • BECNT <i>on vv. 6-10</i>	"these false teachers were insisting that the Galatian Gentiles be circumcised and submit to the law of Moses in order to be counted among the true people of God and to achieve the righteous standing that they would need to go free in the judgment"
Rogers <i>on the gospel of grace</i>	"But I want to tell you, Bible religion is spelled done—done. Jesus, when he died on the cross, said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). And that means, it is paid in full. There is nothing you need do except receive the finished work of Calvary."

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Every Works Religion Runs on the “Unless”

Once you have seen the word you will see it everywhere. Every religious system on earth is built on some version of unless.

Trent anathematized faith alone and made standing rest on sacraments and on merit maintained to death. Not a smaller assurance. No assurance, by design.

Mormonism with a different Christ. The Watchtower with a different Jesus. Every earn-it religion runs on that word.

Systems, not people. Most inside a works religion were born into it and never handed the real thing, and you cannot walk away from what you never had. That is why we go.

And not only outward. God loves you, unless. You're forgiven, unless. Same word, nicer accent.

A danger zone is a danger zone either way. These Galatians had the real thing and stood on the edge of it.

The scholars: the fatal flaw in every other gospel

SCHOLAR	KEY CONTRIBUTION
LABC <i>sidebar, on v. 6</i>	“fatal flaw in every different gospel lies in ignoring or trying to bypass grace”
LABC <i>on v. 7</i>	“Paul was rightly amazed that the Galatian believers were swallowing the pseudomedicine of those who offered a works religion when they already knew they could be healed by God’s grace.”
MacArthur <i>on v. 6</i>	“Well, you see, if you take grace and add anything to it, grace is no more grace. And, don’t you see, that’s the subtlety of Satan? Of course he wants to make it so much like the truth that we mistake it.”
Osborne <i>on v. 7</i>	“This is critically important for us today, when many so-called churches are looking to alternate sources—such as good works or adherence to certain church practices—for salvation.”
Rogers <i>on vv. 6-7</i>	“Any gospel that is not a grace gospel is not a true gospel.”

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Pastoral Takeaways

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| 1 | Astonishment is a spiritual vital sign. The day the gospel stops amazing you is not the day you graduated. It is the day something died. Paul never got over grace, and neither should we. |
| 2 | Nobody drags you off. Paul's verb is reflexive: they are removing themselves. That is bad news and good news in the same breath. If the turning is yours, so is the turning back. |
| 3 | It is not finished until it is finished. The tense is present, not past. Paul wrote because there was still time. If you can feel the drift, you are still standing inside the window he wrote into. |
| 4 | Grace is the house, not the door. You were not saved by grace and then handed over to your own performance. You were called to live in it, and Galatians 5:4 is what stepping off that ground looks like. |
| 5 | The most dangerous teaching keeps the cross. It will not deny Jesus. It will simply add a requirement, and adding to grace does not improve grace. It reverses it. |
| 6 | Go after the system; go after the people with the gospel. Most people in a works religion have never once been handed the real thing, and you cannot walk away from what you never had. Arguments rarely rescue anyone. The gospel does. |

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Discussion Questions for Home or Group

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| 1 | Observation: Read verses 6-7 slowly and underline every word that describes what the false teachers are doing. Put the words together. What is the total picture Paul paints of them? |
| 2 | Observation: Circle the phrase "from Him who called you." Why does Paul word it that way instead of writing "from the gospel"? |
| 3 | Interpretation: Paul's verb is reflexive: you are removing yourselves. How does that change who is responsible, and what hope does it leave open? |
| 4 | Interpretation: What does "so soon" add to the charge? Read Exodus 32:8 and describe what Paul is putting into the Galatians' minds. |
| 5 | Interpretation: Paul calls the rival message "different" and then refuses to call it "another." What is he doing in that correction, and what does it settle? |
| 6 | Interpretation: "Pervert" means to reverse, not to damage. Why is a reversal harder to detect than an outright denial? Give an example you have actually run into. |
| 7 | Application: Scripture describes three ways of turning away: exchange, departure, and drift. Which one is the live danger in your life right now? Be specific rather than general. |
| 8 | Application: Where does an "unless" still attach itself to grace in your own thinking? Finish this sentence honestly: "God accepts me, unless..." |
| 9 | Application: Name one person you know who has probably never once been handed the actual gospel. What is one thing you could do about that this week? |

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Quick Review

This isn't a test. It's a chance to see how much of Sunday's truth is already yours. The answers are at the bottom. Take it as encouragement.

1	Galatians is unusual among Paul's letters because it is missing: (a) a greeting (b) a thanksgiving section (c) a closing
2	True or False: Paul says the Galatians were removed from the gospel by somebody else.
3	In the ancient world, "turning away" was the word for a soldier who _____ his post.
4	"So soon" echoes which Old Testament event?
5	They are turning away from _____ who called them. (a) Paul (b) the church (c) God the Father
6	In Galatians 5:4, those who attempt to be justified by law have fallen from _____.
7	True or False: Paul concedes that the rival message is a real gospel, just an inferior one.
8	The word "trouble" (tarassō) means to: (a) destroy outright (b) stir up and throw into confusion (c) discourage
9	"Pervert" does not mean to damage a little. It means to _____.
10	According to Acts 15:1, the false teachers added one word to the gospel. What was it?

Answer Key: 1) b · 2) False. The verb is reflexive: "you are removing yourselves." Nobody dragged them off · 3) deserted (left; went AWOL) · 4) the golden calf, Exodus 32:8 · 5) c, God the Father, the one who called them · 6) grace · 7) False. He grants that it is different and denies that it is a gospel at all · 8) b · 9) reverse it, turn it into its exact opposite · 10) Unless.

If those came easily, you have hold of the very thing Paul was willing to skip the pleasantries to say. One gospel. One Savior. One way. Now stay in the grace you were called into.