

## 2 Peter 1:12-15 (Application)

### Introduction

We've seen over the last several weeks that the role of the preacher is to teach and explain the meaning of God's Word and to press *that Word* home to the hearts of his hearers. In general, after this the pastor-teacher leaves the fleshing out of that Word to each of his individual listeners who have all been anointed and filled themselves with the Holy Spirit. However, we've also seen that at times, the teacher of God's word may apply the Scripture to a specific situation within the body, or outside the body, or within the culture of his time. Today, I want to take the Scriptures that we've been taught and seek to apply them faithfully to a specific situation within the church of our day and within the "Christian culture" of our time.

□ **2 Peter 1:12** — Therefore I am going to be always reminding you of **these things**, even though you know them and are [already] established in the **truth** that you have.

What is this truth that we already have and are already established in? It's the Gospel—the whole Gospel: – the Gospel as a completed work in our lives, the Gospel as a guarantee and promise, the Gospel as moral obligation *and* enablement, the Gospel as warning, and the Gospel as an eschatological, future hope. Of course, all of this can also be boiled down to the essence of the Gospel which can be explained and summarized with just a few fundamental teachings (doctrines). It's this Gospel that Peter says he will always be reminding us of because it is only this Gospel that is truly powerful to save.

Would you agree that there's nothing more important in all this world than that we rightly understand what the *true* Gospel is? There's a tendency today to believe that if something is *called* the Gospel, then it must *be* the Gospel. And yet the reality is that we are surrounded by false Gospels. These are Gospels that have all the "trappings" of the true Gospel, but are in the end powerless to save. Peter says, "Therefore I am going to be always reminding you of **these things**, even though you know them and are [already] established in the **truth** that you have." Are we firmly established in the truth that we have? And being firmly established in the truth, are we able to discern faithfully the counterfeits? Over the next few minutes were going to consider one specific Gospel summary. Whether it's the true Gospel or a "different Gospel" (a counterfeit Gospel) is what I'm praying that you will be able to discern. After we've looked at this Gospel summary, we'll briefly consider where it comes from.

**I.** A true understanding of the true Gospel begins with a right understanding of **God**, who is the author of this Gospel.

We must understand that as our Creator, He is also our owner, and therefore He is *entitled* to and also commands and requires our obedience and worship. It's in this way that we were intended in the beginning to truly enjoy God forever – in perfect and wholehearted submission to His sovereign rule and will. In other words, a right understanding of God teaches us that the only true happiness is found when we know that **God does not exist for me**, but that I have been brought into existence and am even now sustained each day **for Him**.

- Romans 11:36 (Heb. 2:10) — For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
- 1 Corinthians 8:6 — There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
- Colossians 1:16 — All things were created through him and for him.

There is nothing more fundamental to the Gospel than this reality that God does not exist for me (and yet it's precisely in the Gospel that many think God *does* exist for me). I exist according to His will and pleasure, and therefore I exist for Him, and for His glory (cf. Rev. 4:11). God is not dependent upon me ("He [is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything"; Acts 17:25) and neither does God conform to any of my fallen ideas about Him ("We ought not to think that the divine being is an image formed by the art and imagination of man"; Acts 17:29). We must also understand that "God is... holy and righteous, which means he is completely pure and hates all evil" (Gospel Tract).

- Isaiah 6:3, 6 — "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts..." "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips..."

The upshot of all this is that the true Gospel is wholly **God-centered**. It exalts God and affirms His holiness, righteousness, justice, and sovereignty, and as a direct *result* of affirming these things, it's able to truly affirm the infinite riches of His love. Any Gospel that fails at this point – any Gospel that is not fundamentally God-centered and biblically God-exalting – is a counterfeit Gospel.

It's against this backdrop that we consider the title of a certain Gospel presentation; in large, bold letters, the opening words of this Gospel presentation are these: "**I want Jesus in my life.**" This Gospel presentation *begins*—it *starts out*—with the words "I want" and "my life" – "I want Jesus in my life." Based on this introductory, opening statement, who is it that's at the center? God, or me? The answer is very decisively "me." And so already, the tone has been set. But why do I—why *should* I—want Jesus in my life?

## II. A true understanding of the true Gospel requires a right understanding of **sin**.

According to the Bible, sin is lawlessness and so "sinners" are law-breakers – not only in our outward actions, but at the deepest level of our heart. For example, Jesus says that we are all murderers at heart (Mat. 5:21-22; 1 Jn. 3:15). The nature of all sin as rebellion against God's holy law reveals the judicial, objective fact of our guilt, and also of the penalty for law-breaking that God the righteous law-giver and the righteous Judge will inflict on the final day of judgment. Our sin is a direct assault upon God and provokes his fierce anger and wrath.

The upshot of all this is that the true Gospel is a matter of life and death urgency. It's a matter of being saved from the wrath and judgment that our sin and rebellion has fully merited and deserved. And it's as a direct result of affirming these things that the true Gospel is also able to

truly affirm the infinite riches of God’s saving love. Any Gospel that fails at this point – any Gospel that does not communicate the real life or death urgency of believing because of the nature of our sin and sinfulness and the reality of coming judgment – is a counterfeit Gospel.

- Romans 1:18 — The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
- Romans 5:9 — Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 — You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
- Acts 16:30 — “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”
- Acts 2:40 — And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”
- Romans 10:13 — “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
- Acts 24:24–25 — Felix came with his wife Drusilla... and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.”
- Acts 17:30–31 — The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness...

It’s against this backdrop that we consider what our sample Gospel presentation goes on to say next: “We’ve all made choices outside of God’s plan for us. The Bible calls it sinning, and everyone’s done it...every single one of us.” This is very nice and very kind *sounding*, but in the end it can be very cruel. Here we’re told that the definition of sin is making “choices outside of God’s plan for us” – and that’s all we’re told. But what’s so bad about this? Since there’s still been no mention of who the true God really is, I’m still completely free to think of God as I want to think of Him – as existing for me and for my happiness. So what’s so bad about making choices outside of “God’s” plan for me? Well, if God has planned for me to be happy and if He really wants me to be happy, then maybe it’s the choices that are outside of His plan for me that are keeping me from being happy. So far, then, I can very easily and naturally conclude that the real trouble with sin is that it undermines my happiness – and it’s my happiness that God wants.

But then our sample Gospel presentation continues: “There isn’t one person alive who has lived perfectly in every area of life (Romans 3:10, 23). One little white lie or selfish act is all it takes to sin.” This is very true, *as far as it goes*, but the point of the Bible is not simply that we have *not* lived perfectly in every area of life but rather that we *have* rebelled against God and are His declared “enemies” (cf. Rom. 5:10).

- Ephesians 2:1–3 — You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions

of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The Bible never, ever takes the approach of simply trying to convince us that no one's perfect, and neither should we. *Of course* "no one's 'perfect.'" Everyone in the world already admits that. What we don't understand is that "no one seeks for God [not God as He has revealed Himself to be]. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does [any] good [not the true good that God requires], not even one" (Rom. 3:11-12).

So what are the consequences of not being perfect – of that "little white lie" or that little "selfish act"? The very next words and the bold headline of our sample "Gospel" presentation is this: **"The Good News."** Underneath this headline is this short sentence: "The bad news is sin separates us from God, and the relationship He wants to have with us (Isaiah 59:2)." What's the bad news? We don't have the relationship with God that He wants to have with us. What are the consequences of sin? Separation from God and the relationship He wants to have with us. I might ask as an unbeliever, "Is that all?" And I might also ask as a believer, "Is that *really all*?" In this definition of the bad news, who remains at the center? It's very much "me" who's still at the center with God existing for me and revolving around me – "Sin separates us from... the relationship God *wants* to have with us." "Poor God! He wants to have a relationship with me, but because of the choices that I make that are outside of His plan for me, He just can't because I just won't let Him." But I have to ask this question: What if I feel like I'm doing fine without a relationship with God? From all I've been told so far, what's the real urgency here? What's the real *necessity* of this "relationship" that God is wanting to have with me? Then again, maybe I don't feel like I'm doing just fine. Maybe my life *would* improve if Jesus was in it and if I let God have that relationship with me that He wants to have. Based on this opening definition of "sin" and of the results of sin, is there really any recognizable Gospel when measured against the genuine, biblical article? Based on this opening definition of "sin" and of the results of sin, is it God or is it me who remains at the center? And is there any real danger that I've been made aware of? Is there really any life or death urgency?

**III.** A true understanding of the true Gospel requires a right understanding of Jesus and the nature of His atoning sacrifice on the **cross**.

Christ's death was a satisfaction of God's righteous anger and wrath.

□ 1 John 2:2 — He is the propitiation for our sins.

When Christ hung on the cross, he was bearing the full curse and penalty of the law. God was inflicting upon Jesus the sum total of all the plagues and judgments that were due to sinners like us.

□ Isaiah 53:4–5 — Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our diseases; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought

us peace, and with his wounds we are healed... It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has made him sick...

- Galatians 3:13 — Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

The result of all this is that when we are united with Christ through faith, our sins are forgiven because the justice of God and the righteous requirement of the law has been fully satisfied. And that’s not all. When we’re united with Christ through faith, His perfect life of obedience is counted/imputed to us so that we are clothed, as it were, in an “alien” righteousness – the righteousness of Christ.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 (Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:9) — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

It’s only here that we see the truly infinite display of God’s love and the awesome power of His salvation. It’s against this backdrop that we consider what our sample presentation of the “Gospel” goes on to say next:

“The bad news is sin separates us from God, and the relationship He wants to have with us. The GOOD NEWS is He made a way for us back from sin. God sent His only Son to be born as a human, to show us HOW to live in relationship with Him, and then to die for us. When He rose from the dead on the third day, sin was conquered forever. Jesus’ sacrifice closed the gap! Offering His perfect life for ours means our sins can be not only forgiven...but also forgotten. We just have to accept God’s perfect gift and begin a journey with Him (Romans 3:24-25).”

I feel when I read these words that the death of Christ has just been treated lightly. What really just *happened*? What does it mean that Jesus died “for us”? What does it mean that He offered His perfect life for ours? It’s *impossible* to say, because on the one hand, the only thing we’ve learned so far about God is that He seems to exist for us, and the only thing we’ve learned so far about sin is that it’s outside of God’s plan for us. In light of these things, what are we to conclude is the meaning of Jesus’ “sacrifice” for us and offering His perfect life for ours? In our day, this has all just become a nebulous expression of “love”—that’s all!—by which I can somehow have again that relationship with God that He so very much wants to have with me. We’re told in our sample “Gospel” presentation that when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, sin was conquered forever, and that Jesus’ sacrifice “closed the gap” but we have no idea why or how this could have happened. Perhaps it just *did* because God is so loving and because sin was apparently never *that* big of a deal in the first place. There’s no mention here of Christ bearing the curse of the law and the judgment and wrath of God on the cross. There’s no mention here of Christ’s provision of an “alien” righteousness—the very righteousness of God—in which we can be clothed. We’re told that our sins can be forgiven, but we have no idea how this could be. Furthermore, we’re told that our sins can be “**not only** forgiven...**but also** forgotten.” God not only forgives our sins, but actually forgets that our sins ever happened. But think about this: If it was for our sins that Jesus was suffering God’s righteous judgments on the cross, then the only way for God to “forget” our sin would be to “forget” the atoning blood sacrifice of His only Son.

When God says, “I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34), He’s not saying that He’ll “forget” what they were or that they were committed (this would be the ultimate trivialization of sin), but that He’ll never bring them up again at His tribunal or recall them for judgment. I would caution us that to say that God “not only” forgives, but “also” forgets our sins may easily cause us to be cavalier about our sin in a way that God never is.

Finally, all we have to do according to our sample Gospel presentation is “*just accept* God’s perfect gift and begin a journey with Him.” Throughout this entire Gospel presentation, the almighty power of God revealed in the Gospel has been hidden from our view. God is portrayed as offering something to us and then waiting rather helplessly upon us, and we are portrayed as being in the driver’s seat from start to finish. God is always there, waiting in the wings for whenever we decide it would be advantageous to us to make time for Him. But how do we “accept” God’s perfect gift and begin this “journey” (this “adventure”?) with Him? Or, as our sample Gospel presentation asks: “What’s the next step?”

“First, believe in your heart Jesus is God’s son. Next, **simply** believe He died to pay the price for your sin. Finally, pray and **invite** Him to be your Savior.” Here, for the first time, we hear about Christ dying to “pay the price” for our sin. But what is this “price”? Brothers and sisters, today there are at least three different “theories” of the atonement that can all use this language of “paying the price” and at the same time also completely deny that Jesus was our substitute and bore the penalty for our sin in our place. In other words, in our day to say that Jesus died to pay the price for our sin is simply “generic” language that can mean anything and everything *but* the truth. Given that in this “Gospel,” we’ve heard nothing at all about God’s holiness and his wrath against sin, nothing at all about the true nature of sin, and nothing at all about the reality of coming judgment, it’s safe to say that the organization that preaches this Gospel is at the very least refusing to take a stand on this most essential doctrine of the Gospel at the very time and in the very place where it matters *most*. It’s also safe to say that no unbeliever reading this “Gospel” will ever have any true idea of the meaning of Christ’s death and what it was that really happened on the cross. It’s not only in what’s said, but what’s left unsaid that the counterfeit “gospels” are revealed.

We’re told that the final step is to “**simply**... pray and **invite** Jesus to be our Savior.” But how does this language of “inviting” fit with the language of “calling upon” the name of the Lord, and crying out to Him for salvation from the wrath to come? It doesn’t. It’s tame, it’s comfortable, and it puts me in the driver’s seat and leaves God at my beck and call. And so now we’re ready for the sample prayer that it’s suggested a person could pray:

*“God, I admit I’ve gone my own direction and tried to do things my way instead of Yours. [I have to ask again, ‘What’s the problem with this? What’s wrong with this?'] Because of my sin, **I haven’t been able to have a real relationship with You**. Please forgive me of my wrong choices. **I’m tired of living without You**. [Is this **why** I’m asking God to forgive my wrong choices? Because **I’m tired** of living without Him?] I believe You sent Your only Son, Jesus, to die as a payment for my sin [What does this mean? What is sin?] and to bridge the gap between us. [How did this happen?] I believe You raised Jesus from the dead and, in doing so, conquered death forever. [What does it mean to conquer*

*death? I still haven't been told that death, both physical and spiritual, is the wages of my sin.] I confess there is **no way to Heaven** but through Your Son. [What is the alternative to Heaven? Is there a hell? Is there a literal place of eternal torment away from the presence of God?] Please take over in my life and help me follow You in every way. [WHY??? So that my life will be better? Because I've finally grown 'tired' of trying to do things my way?] Amen!"*

There is nothing of the glory of God here. There is nothing of the true power of the Gospel. How foreign are the words of this prayer to words like these:

"I confess that I have broken your holy law and rebelled against you. I confess that I fully deserve your wrath and judgment. And I cry out to you now to save me. I believe that Christ suffered the curse and penalty of the law in the place of lawbreakers and sinners like me. I believe that you have raised Him up from the dead, and now I am trusting wholly in His work on the cross for my salvation and deliverance from the wrath to come. Thank you for your great love. Thank you for calling me, and saving me, and making me—who was once your enemy—your beloved child. To you alone be all the glory forever! Amen."

Calling people to pray with words like these may not build mega churches and it may not make hit records or albums, but it will confront lost and guilty sinners with the wonderful, true Gospel that is powerful to save.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this Gospel presentation, there was nothing about the Law, nothing about the glory of God, nothing about the penalty of sin, nothing about a substitute dying in the sinner's place, nothing about coming judgment; there was a minimizing and trivializing of sin; God was utterly peripheral, man was wholly at the center and in the driver's seat from beginning to end; and finally, there was never any true sense of urgency. If I don't happen to *want* a relationship with God, then why *should* I believe? And for that matter, why *should* I want a relationship with God? We haven't been given a single compelling reason to repent and believe other than perhaps improving my life and making me happier, and also granting me a ticket to eternal life in heaven. Brothers and sisters, is this Gospel a *counterfeit* Gospel – an unbiblical, unscriptural Gospel? I believe it is. At the very least, we should all agree that it's an anemic Gospel. But at the end of the day, what really is the difference between an anemic Gospel and a counterfeit Gospel (cf. Rom. 1:16)?

If you were to guess at what one of Satan's primary strategies would be, don't you think it would be to counterfeit the Gospel? And don't you think that this "Gospel" would look and sound as much like the real Gospel as possible without truly being powerful to save? Can people be saved by reading this "Gospel" presentation? I believe the answer is "yes" because I believe the Holy Spirit can overrule and even work through these words to convict a sinner's heart of sin, of righteousness, and of coming judgment (Jn. 16:8-11). Do people have to comprehend and be able to explain all of these distinctions between the true Gospel and a counterfeit before they can be

saved? **Not at all!** But we're still *responsible* before God to preach the true Gospel and not a counterfeit.

I think of what we've been preaching from 2 Peter. I think of the many warnings to believers scattered throughout the New Testament. What does a "Christianity" built on this "Gospel" end up doing with these warnings? This Gospel hinders people, in the end, from being able to receive the whole counsel of God's Word (cf. Acts 20:27). I honestly don't understand how the purveyors of this "Gospel" can seriously be reading the Bible.

But who are the purveyors of this "Gospel"? The scary thing is that it's a great deal of the professing church that's all around us. But this particular "Gospel" presentation is taken from the WBGL (Christian radio) website. I'm in no way judging the heart of anyone who works with or at WBGL. Even the one who wrote this Gospel summary may himself be a beloved brother in Christ who is himself being misled and deceived. I'm in no way judging the heart of anyone who listens to WBGL. But not judging hearts doesn't mean that we're not responsible to discern between the true Gospel and anemic, or even false "Gospels." Not judging hearts doesn't mean that I'm not responsible as a pastor to discern between the true and false Gospels and to caution and warn God's flock. There are some good songs (in terms of lyrics) that are played on WBGL, but after sampling the lyrics of twenty of the songs currently playing, I would caution, and even warn you that the overall diet of songs on WBGL very much reflects this anemic, if not counterfeit Gospel that we've been examining this morning and that's presented on the WBGL website. I would caution you that the overall diet of songs is at times wholly unbiblical and in general so imbalanced as to be spiritually detrimental and unhealthy. We must always remember that it's not about how the music or words make us feel, but about "truth."

I'm *not* here to self-righteously "judge" what *anyone* listens to. I'm just here by God's grace to remind us of the true Gospel that we know and in which we have been established. Let us *so* love this truth that we are able to discern the counterfeits. Let us *so* love and cherish this truth that it's no hard thing for us to reject all that doesn't fully measure up to this most basic, most fundamental standard of *truth*. Let us love and cherish the true Gospel so that in the end we might not fall into eternal ruin, but instead be richly, graciously granted an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.