

Peter's Gospel Message: A Corrective to Modern Error
Acts 10:34-43

This morning I don't want to spend much time on point number 1 because we have already looked at the issue of preaching in Acts chapter 2. *But* if I was teaching *seminary* students I would probably spend a good fifteen or twenty minutes analyzing this sermon. In fact, I wish seminaries would spend more time analyzing the examples of preaching in Scripture.

In any case, I think it would be helpful to be reminded that the Bible shows many styles and formats for preaching. Some sermons are expository, others are topical, others are synthetic, and at least one is redemptive historical. But nowadays I think there is a legalistic tendency of some people to insist that there is only one proper way to preach. We get it on the web all the time – especially from those who advocate the redemptive historical preaching. And if you want a great debate on *that* subject, Greenville Seminary has published a debate between Professor Carrick (whom I agree with) and Professor Dennison (whom I disagree with). Carrick points out that Biblical sermons always have one thing that is almost always missing from redemptive historical preaching, and that is application – or the imperative. And you will find that every sermon in the book of Acts follows the principles laid out by Greenville Seminary professor, John Carrick. It was a thematic communication of God's Revelation that was applied to life.

In verses 34-35 Peter gives the overall theme of the sermon – that God intends to save people from every nation. He then proceeds to develop his theme by way of explanation. Reading Scripture is not preaching. Preaching involves at least three things: the use of Scripture, the explanation of what Scripture means and its application to the current context. Some Bible sermons have illustrations, and some do not. Anyway, in verses 36-38 Peter backs up what he says from the Word of God spoken by Jesus. In verses 39-41 he appeals to apostolic authority (that's also God's revelation), and then in verses 42-43 he appeals to Old Testament prophetic authority. He doesn't have to delve into that extensively because this audience knows the Scriptures. But he clearly appeals to divine authority. Then having proved his point, he asks for a response. In verse 43 he calls for the response of acknowledging sin and believing in Jesus. In verse 48 he calls for a further response of baptism. That in a nutshell contains the essence of preaching. And I won't dwell on it further other than to say that if you run across legalists in the Reformed forums who insist on only one kind of preaching, just ask them which Biblical sermons follow their methods? The Bible really does give variety because there are a variety of needs and a variety of people

being preached to.

I. The Preaching – A Corrective to Homiletic Legalism

- A. What Peter’s sermon was not – it didn’t fit into the normal “homiletic” paradigms mandated in seminaries. The sermons in Acts show a great deal of flexibility.**
- B. What Peter’s sermon was – a thematic communication of God’s Revelation that was applied to life.**
 - 1. Peter doesn’t say everything that could be said. Instead, he adapted his message to the unique audience he was preaching to.**
 - a) The audience was not yet saved (see 11:14 and sermon on Acts 10:1-8)**
 - b) But the audience knew a great deal about the word of Christ (10:37).
Therefore Peter could assume a lot.**
 - 2. Peter begins by giving his theme (vv. 34-35) – God intends to save people from every nation.**
 - 3. Peter develops his theme by way of explanation. He doesn’t just read Scripture.**
 - 4. Peter backs up what he says from the Word of God.**
 - a) Peter appeals to the Word of Christ to substantiate his claim (vv. 36-38)**
 - b) Peter appeals to apostolic authority as an apostle to substantiate his claim (vv. 39-41)**
 - c) Peter appeals to the Old Testament prophets to substantiate his claim (vv. 42-43)**
 - 5. Peter applies his theme to the audience and calls for response (vv. 43,48) – Biblical preaching always had application.**

II. The Gospel Message – A Corrective to Both Legalism and Antinomianism.

- A. What it is not – Many “Gospel defenders” have distorted the Gospel to the point that Peter’s message would not be accepted in their churches. It stands as a corrective to truncated and careless expressions of the Gospel of grace.**

But I want to spend most of my time analyzing the Gospel Message that Peter brings. I think that verse 43 is a corrective to Roman Catholic legalism and even to some Protestant legalism. On the other hand, verse 35 is a needed corrective to evangelical antinomianism (which means a system that neglects the law). And we will look at some other errors. I am convinced that many so-called Gospel defenders have distorted the Gospel so badly that they would consider this sermon to be not only bad homiletics but also horrid theology. Of course, I have not seen them actually say that because it doesn’t make good press to criticize Peter. But having analyzed some of their books, I think their version of the Gospel does not jibe with Peter’s message. So first of all, let’s look at what Peter’s Gospel message was not, and then we will look at what it is.

- 1. The message of Peter was not a message that people can be**

saved with or without the Gospel of Christ.

First, the message Peter gives is not that people can be saved with or without the message of Christ. There are more and more Universalist articles on the web that claim that Jesus will save everyone – even those who have never heard the Gospel. I have noticed that some evangelicals are buying into these arguments. And it distresses me. Two of the arguments come from this chapter. First, they say, in verses 11-15 Peter is commanded not to call any man unclean. They say that this means that all men are washed and saved, and our goal in missions is to tell them that they are already saved; that they are not unclean. Schuler preaches this Gospel of Self-Esteem. A second argument they give is the phrase in verse 34 – “**God shows no partiality,**” which (they claim) means that God will treat everyone as saved. If he didn’t then He would be partial to one person by saving him and discriminating against another by not saving him. Obviously they have much stronger arguments from other portions of Scripture, and some of the articles have been so convincing that numerous evangelicals (including some in this city) have started denying the doctrine of hell, and believing that redemption reconciles everyone to God. If you have done much web searching you have probably already run across these articles, and I don’t want you to be sucked in. I think that Peter’s message is a clear corrective to this notion.

a) Peter had to open his mouth and proclaim (v. 34 with 11:14)

First, Peter had to open his mouth and proclaim the Gospel before these men were saved. Verse 34 says, **Then Peter opened his mouth and said...** Why would he have to if people are already saved? Why bother? Well, because the angel had told Cornelius to listen to Peter’s words, and that when he listened, he would be saved. When I was looking at verses 1-8 I think I clearly demonstrated that they were not saved yet. But just by way of reminder, look at chapter 11:14. This was a recall of the angel’s words. **...who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.** Well, you put those two verses together and you see that God did not save them apart from them hearing the words of the Gospel. This was Peter’s Gospel message, and it was necessary for their salvation.

b) God does not reveal the Gospel to every man, woman and child (vv. 40-41). Instead, He sent preachers (vv. 36-42)

Secondly, look at verses 40-41. **Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God...** It’s significant that it says that He chose not to reveal Himself to everybody. God had not given the Gospel through general revelation. He hadn’t sent angels to preach the Gospel. Even with dreams

and visions, the Gospel is not preached. Instead, he sent preachers and commanded them to preach. I have had several evangelicals tell me that if preachers hadn't made it to Africa, that God would have revealed the Gospel to them some other way. But in Romans 10 Paul makes it clear that without a preacher, how can they believe? Acts 11:14 says the same thing.

c) There is no other way to be saved than Christ (v. 43).

Finally, verse 43 says that it is through Christ's name and belief in Christ that anyone will be saved. The debate in some denominations as to whether people can be saved through other religions and not through Christ is clearly contradicted throughout the Bible.

2. The message of Peter was not a message of lawless grace (v. 35).

Let's look at the second major error. The message of Peter was not a message of lawless grace. Verse 35 says, **But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.** This verse is a very important corrective to the defective Gospel that many people preach. Many people have good news of salvation from hell, but they don't have any good news of salvation from sin. There was a missionary in Africa who had a hard time getting good workers. They would work when he was present, but would slack off as soon as he was gone. One day he took his glass eye out of its socket and laid it on a stump, telling them he was watching. They were horrified, never having seen such a thing. But after three days, when the missionary got back he found a tin can covering his glass eye, and they were back to business as usual. That's the way that I sometimes think people treat grace. They treat it as if their sins are invisible to God and they can now be comfortable in their sin.

Let's make a few clarifications so that there is not any misunderstanding.

a) Clarifications

(1) Note first that Peter sees no contradiction between verse 35 (law-keeping people are accepted) and verse 43 (grace cannot be earned).

The first thing that needs to be said is that Peter is not contradicting Himself in verses 35 and 43. Those harmonize. They obviously harmonize because they are inspired. But Peter's not an idiot who contradicts himself in one paragraph.

Verse 43 indicates that the only way we can be justified is by faith alone through Christ alone. Grace cannot be earned. Justification cannot be earned. Justification is our security. It is our acceptance from which we cannot fall. It is what makes sanctification a joy rather than a fearful misery.

So we value justification. It is our legal standing that moves us from having to relate to God as a judge to now relating to Him as a father. And yet verse 35 is just as clear that God accepts law-keeping people. How do we reconcile those two verses? You can't reconcile them by ignoring one or the other.

(2) Note that verse 35 does not say “whoever fears Him and works righteousness will be accepted by Him [future tense].” No. Such a law-keeping person already “is” [present tense] accepted by Him. No one but an “accepted” person could have this personal transformation. Verse 35 is the goal and the result of verse 43. Thus, verse 35 is consistent with verse 43.

The first thing that I want you to notice is that this verse does not say, “whoever fears Him and works righteousness *will be* accepted by Him” as if it was in the future tense. If it said that, it would clearly mean that we earn our salvation – that the works precede the acceptance. But it says something quite different. Let me give you the Greek. “fears him” is a participle that can act as a noun. The same is true of “works righteousness.” Literally it is, “the fearing Him one and the working righteousness one.” Those participles indicate that there is an ongoing character to this person that enables him to be described as a fearer and a worker of righteousness. The next verb, the verb “is,” is in the present tense. The meaning of the Greek is that wherever you find a person who is a true law-keeper inwardly and outwardly, God already accepts him. He already *is* justified. No one but an “accepted” person could have this personal transformation. So at any given point where there is fear and working of righteousness, there already is acceptance by God that preceded it. So verse 35 is the goal and the result of the justification spoken of in verse 43. So there is no contradiction. The works of verse 35 are the results of grace, not the earning of grace. You can just circle that word “is.” It's a key word to interpreting the verse.

(3) On the other hand, note that verse 35 does not make law-keeping optional. It is law-keepers and only law-keepers who are accepted by God. As Jonathan Edwards says, “Perseverance is acknowledged by Calvinian divines to be necessary to salvation.” (Works, vol II, p. 596). Another way of saying this is that the five points of Calvinism hang together – all those who are saved will persevere and those who do not persevere in sanctification are not saved (see Tit. 1:16; Heb. 12:14; Matt 7:21-23; 1 John 3:3). Jerry Bridges says, “It is not those who profess to know Christ

*who will enter heaven, but those whose lives are holy”
(The Pursuit of Holiness, p. 43).*

On the other hand, you can't just stop there and say, "Great. It's reconciled, so I can just ignore this verse." This verse makes it crystal clear that law-keeping is not optional. It is law-keepers and only law-keepers who are accepted by God, and all those who are accepted by God are law-keepers. As Paul worded it in Romans 8:13, "**For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.**" The Reformers pointed out that holiness is not an option. Jonathan Edwards said, "Perseverance is acknowledged by Calvinian divines to be necessary to salvation." Jerry Bridges said, "It is not those who profess to know Christ who will enter heaven, but those whose lives are holy." Another way of saying this is that the five points of Calvinism necessitate each other. All those who are saved will persevere and those who do not persevere in sanctification are not saved. Titus 1:16 describes such people in these words: **They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him...** You see, the good news of the Gospel is not just that we are saved from hell. The first mention of the Gospel that we have in the New Testament is Matthew 1:21 which says: **And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.** That is indeed good news – that we can be saved from the bondage and power of sin. As Paul said in Romans 6:14, **sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.** The law has no power to give us victory over sin. Only grace can make us law-keepers. And so verse 36 makes it clear that holiness is not an option. The good news is that God's grace will make those accepted by God into law-keepers.

(4) Notice that verse 35 does not say that such people have no sin or perfectly keep the law. Instead he "works righteousness" – there is some righteousness that he is working at. Jerry Bridges says, "God does not require a perfect, sinless life ... but He does require that we be serious about our holiness, that we grieve over sin in our lives instead of justifying it, and that we earnestly pursue holiness as a way of life" (Ibid., p. 41).

But there is one other clarification that we need to make. Notice that verse 35 does not say that such people who are accepted law-keepers are perfect law keepers. It doesn't say that the perfect are accepted by God. Instead, it says, the one who works righteousness. That participle indicates that it is a characteristic of his life. Because the Spirit indwells him, this

person fights against sin and works at righteousness. And so the question is not, “Are you perfect?” The question is, “Are you working at it?” Jerry Bridges said, “God does not require a perfect, sinless life ... but He does require that we be serious about our holiness, that we grieve over sin in our lives instead of justifying it, and that we earnestly pursue holiness as a way of life” As 1 Thesalonians 4:7 says, **God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness.**

(5) Thus, the Gospel is concerned not only with God making us accepted in justification (v. 43), but it is also concerned with God changing the ones who are accepted (v. 35). Justification [legal righteousness] and sanctification [personal righteousness] are always indissolubly connected. For people struggling with bondage, this is indeed good news. Grace can accomplish what “the law could not do” (Rom. 8:3; See also Matt 1:21; 1 Thes. 4:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Tit. 2:11-12; James 2:14-26.

And thus we see that the Gospel is concerned not only with God making us accepted in justification (that’s verse 43), but it is also concerned with God changing the ones who are accepted (that’s verse 35). For people struggling with bondage, this is indeed good news (which is what the word Gospel means). Thus Romans 8:3 indicates that grace can accomplish what the law could not do. Praise God. Grace *can* accomplish what the law could not do.

b) Grace changes the inner man (“fears Him”) and the outer man (“works righteousness”) rather than ignoring the lawlessness of sin (“and sin is lawlessness” – 1 John 3:4). The good news is that Jesus came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21; Phil. 2:13).

Another observation on this verse is that grace changes not only what we do outwardly, but how we think inwardly. It is transformational. The words “fears Him” deals with the inward heart, and the words “works righteousness” deals with the overflow of the heart into actions. Here’s how Paul worded it in Philippians 2:13. **Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling** [do your Gospel books teach that? I wish Steve Brown were more careful in his words. But Paul says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. But here is the good part], **for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.** (Phi. 2:13). The willing is the inward, and the doing is the outward. All of this is an essential part of the good news of the Gospel.

Because this Gospel message has been so distorted in the last 50 years, I want to make a few further points to show how this all fits in with the rest of the Scripture. Philip Melancton, Martin Luther's friend, once said, "nothing can be stated so perfectly as not to be misunderstood." He said that it really doesn't matter how clearly you state yourself, someone is bound to misunderstand you. And I am sure that some people think that I have misunderstood them. But I think it is important that we at least try. And I will do so by making a number of contrasts between what law can accomplish and what grace can accomplish, and in the process we will see that while law cannot save, grace is not lawless.

c) That this is consistent with the Gospel message preached elsewhere in Scripture can be seen by the following:

(1) While law cannot justify sinners (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:11), the Gospel of grace saves sinners from lawlessness/sin (1 John 3:4-5; Matt 1:21; 7:23; 13:41)

First, while law cannot justify sinners, the grace of the Gospel saves sinners from lawlessness. Acts 13:39 says, **by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses.** The law cannot justify us. The law just exposes the fact that we are lawless, it doesn't stop us from being lawless. Romans 3:20 words it this way: **Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.** But where the law can't do anything but expose our lawlessness, grace saves us from our lawlessness. 1 John 3:4-5 says, **Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins.** Matthew 1:21; 7:23; 13:41 and many other Scriptures tell us that Christ came to save us from our lawlessness. Titus 2:14 says Jesus **gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.** So grace is not the opposite of law. It's the opposite of fleshly endeavor or self-endeavor. Grace is the only means by which we can be law-keepers.

(2) While the Gospel is a message of justification by faith alone (i.e., "faith apart from the deeds of the law" - Rom. 3:28), that faith does not "make void the law of God" (v. 31). Instead, Paul says that this Gospel of sola fide acts to "establish the law" for saved people (v. 31).

Turn with me to Romans 3 and we will look at a second contrast. We will start with Romans 3:28 which is an important verse to memorize. It speaks of justification by faith alone. It's a glorious, glorious doctrine.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Faith apart from the deeds of the law is faith alone. What a blessed truth that is. But it is only part of the truth. Look at verse 31

Romans 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? [That is the conclusion that some people jump to. But not Paul. Verse 31 goes on to say,] **Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.** [We can't pick and choose which verses we will reference. We need to understand the Scripture in context. Paul wants to beat off any thinking that the law can justify us. But at the same time, he concludes that those who are justified by faith establish the law in their lives. Why? Because faith lays hold of grace, and grace is not lawless. The Gospel of *sola fide* (faith alone) establishes the law according to Paul. We keep the law as accepted, secure people, but we do seek to keep it.

(3) While grace liberates us from slavery to sin, that same grace makes us “slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18-19,22). The question comes, “How can being slaves of righteousness be consistent with the liberty which the Gospel brings?”

(a) Liberty does not mean doing what we want; it means doing what we were created for. (Psalm 119:45) ill. Train has most liberty when it is a slave to the tracks.

(b) The law is “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12), or “the law that gives freedom” [NIV].

Turn to Romans 6 and we will look at a third contrast. Some people misunderstand the freedom and liberty to which we have been saved, and they desperately try to make people feel happy in their bondage. There is no liberty in that. They conclude that there can be no obligation upon the saint who is free. They say that freedom is not freedom unless it is freedom to do whatever you want. In fact, Steve Brown says that. Let me give a couple quotes: On page 7 of Scandalous Freedom he says,

“Many of us say, ‘as Christians, of course we're free – but that doesn't mean we're free to do whatever we want’. But if we aren't free to do what we want, then we aren't really free. Or, if we are, it is a weird sort of freedom...” (Scandalous Freedom, p. 7)

Well, on the contrary, his definition of freedom is Arminian to the core. It is not Reformed, and it is certainly not Biblical.

ON the next page he says, “Some reveal their flight from freedom in the comment “Of course we're free, but that doesn't mean we're free to sin. It means we're free not to sin.” That sounds so very

spiritual and I believe there is something to it... Still if that freedom doesn't include the freedom not to obey, then it isn't real freedom.”
(Scandalous Freedom, pp. 8-9).

Steve is a master with words, and he does get a lot of things right. But if you analyze his idea of freedom, you will see that it is not Biblical. Let's start at verse 18. Romans 6:18.

Romans 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. [We are analyzing the word “freedom” and we can see here that it is not absolute. To be free from one option is always to be bound by the other one. Paul's statement is a very logical statement. Think about it: If we are freed from sin, we are freed from lawlessness, right? 1 John 3:4-5 says, “...sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins...” So you can't be freed from lawlessness and be free to be lawless at the same time. So it is a perfectly logical step for Paul to say, “having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” Let's keep reading. Verse 19.

Romans 6:19 I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness.

Romans 6:20 ¶ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [notice how he uses the term freedom: free from one thing, but not free from the other.]

Romans 6:21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death.

We can praise God that the Gospel of grace saved us from death. Yes! It saved us from the curse of lawlessness. Yes! It brought us into liberty. Yes. But liberty does not mean doing what we want. It means doing what we were created for. Here's how Psalm 119:45 words it: **And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.** You can only have liberty as you seek by God's grace to obey what James calls the perfect law of liberty. In a sense, the railroad tracks *do* enslave a train to what it was designed for, but this enslavement is liberty, power, speed. It is only when the train seeks to jump the tracks that it is mired in the mud and powerless. So the train is rescued from slavery to mud so that it can have the liberating slavery of the tracks. In the same way, the good news of the Gospel is that we are saved from bondage to sin so that we can be set free to obey the liberty of the law. Once again grace is not lawless.

(4) While law without grace condemns and is burdensome (2 Cor. 3:9), the true Gospel of grace enables the sinner to

find joy and satisfaction in law-keeping (1 John 5:3; Ps. 19:8; Ps. 119:97).

A fourth contrast is that while law without grace condemns us and is burdensome, the true Gospel of grace enables the sinner to find joy and satisfaction. In fact, 1 John says that John wrote his epistle on holiness so that our joy might be full. Pastor Glenn preached a few weeks ago on Psalm 19:8 which says, **the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.** This is why David said, **O how I love your law...** There are teachers out there trying to make the law an enemy of the saints. The law is only an enemy of the person who is outside of Christ and outside of grace. Grace is not lawless. It causes us to delight in the law.

(5) While we are not under the covenant of law in Adam (Gal. 3:17; 4:21-31), the Gospel does not thereby make us under a lawless covenant. Instead, we are saved to be “under law toward Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21) and only through Christ’s powerful grace can we find the law to be “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12).

A fifth contrast is that while we are not under the covenant of law in Adam, but are under a new covenant, this new covenant is not a lawless covenant. 1 Corinthians 9:21 says, **...not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ...** The problem is not with the law, but with us as sinners. The solution is not to try harder, but to be in Christ and to receive grace through Christ. The person who has been accepted by God is a person who is being conformed to the image of Christ by His power.

(6) In summary, grace makes no sense if there is no law (Rom. 5:20-21). It is law that necessitates grace (v. 20) and grace that enables law keeping (v. 21) A lawless grace is not good news because it never rescues us from bondage to sin. The Bible states that “the grace of God... teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Tit. 2:11-12 NIV).

I’ve spent a long time on this point because it is a point that is under constant attack in America. Much of the American church believes in a lawless grace. Most of this sermon was directed towards non-Reformed, but there are antinomians in Reformed circles too. While Steve Brown insists that he is not antinomian, most of his writings lead in that direction. And he recognizes it. In his book, *When Being Good Isn’t Enough*, he says,

“Now hear something very important: while the apostle Paul was not antinomian, he was very close to it. [It just shocks me when he says

things like this. He goes on]... Paul would never have had to write a defense of his teaching on freedom if he had not been very close to heresy. ...

That brings me to a syllogism with two premises and a conclusion. Premise: The real Christian faith is close to antinomianism. Premise: A lot of modern day Christianity is not at all close to antinomianism. Conclusion: A lot of modern day Christianity is not real Christianity.”

But we have seen that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not even remotely a lawless grace. It establishes the law. It motivates to holiness. It empowers us for holiness. It does not, as some of Steve’s writings do, leave us in our bondage, but feeling better about it.

So let me read subpoint 6 to sum up. “In summary, grace makes no sense if there is no law (Rom. 5:20-21). It is law that necessitates grace (v. 20) and grace that enables law keeping (v. 21) A lawless grace is not good news because it never rescues us from bondage to sin. The Bible states that **“the grace of God... teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”** (Tit. 2:11-12 NIV). Can you see that? He is saying that the grace of God is not lawless. Let me read that verse one more time and then we will move on. **“the grace of God... teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”**

3. The message of Peter was not a message that proclaims Christ’s Saviorhood but ignores His Lordship (v. 36).

a) This theory makes two classes of believers: carnal and submitted.

Verse 36 corrects a third error in the church. It is the error that says that Christ’s lordship is optional. It’s the carnal Christian theory. In a sense it is related to the previous point. But these people divide Christians up into two classes: carnal Christians and spiritual Christians. They teach that people must receive Christ as Savior to be saved, but they don’t need to receive Him as Lord.

b) They indicate that submitting to Christ’s lordship is optional.

c) They teach that it is “another gospel” to preach repentance or call upon people to receive Christ as Lord. However:

(1) “We do not “make” Christ Lord; He is Lord! Those who will not receive Him as Lord are guilty of rejecting Him.

“Faith” that rejects His sovereign authority is really unbelief. Conversely, acknowledging His lordship is no more a human work than repentance (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25) or faith itself (cf. Eph. 2:8–9). In fact, surrender to Christ is an important aspect of divinely produced saving faith, not something added to faith... No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ’s lordship. Thus there is no salvation except “lordship” salvation... No one who comes for salvation with genuine faith, sincerely believing that Jesus is the eternal, almighty, sovereign God, will willfully reject His authority. True faith is not lip service. Our Lord himself pronounced condemnation on those who worshiped Him with their lips but not with their lives (Matt. 15:7–9). He does not become anyone’s Savior until that person receives Him for who He is—Lord of all (Acts 10:36)”
(John MacArthur, Wrongly Dividing the Word).

But this verse says that He *is* Lord. He is Lord of everyone. The question is only whether we will submit or rebel. We don’t make Him Lord of our lives. He is Lord whether we like it or not. Look at the last phrase of 36: ***He is Lord of all.*** That declaration is part of the Gospel according to Peter. This group of people also insist that repentance is only for the Jews, and that you are preaching another Gospel if you call people to repentance. When I hear people say this it almost takes my breath away because there are so many Scriptures that call all men to repentance. Look at chapter 11:18. This is a good verse to give to these hyper-dispensationalists. It says, **When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.** It’s not just Jews who must submit to repentance. And Acts 10:36 appeals to Christ’s message preached to Israel. And over and over it was a Gospel that called people to repentance. For example, Mark 1:14 **Repent, and believe the Gospel.** There is no indication that repentance is optional or that the Lordship of Christ is optional.

Here’s what John MacArthur said so well.

“We do not “make” Christ Lord; He is Lord! Those who will not receive Him as Lord are guilty of rejecting Him. “Faith” that rejects His sovereign authority is really unbelief. Conversely, acknowledging His lordship is no more a human work than repentance (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25) or faith itself (cf. Eph. 2:8–9). In fact, surrender to Christ is an important aspect of divinely produced saving

faith, not something added to faith... No promise of salvation is ever extended to those who refuse to accede to Christ's lordship. Thus there is no salvation except "lordship" salvation... No one who comes for salvation with genuine faith, sincerely believing that Jesus is the eternal, almighty, sovereign God, will willfully reject His authority. True faith is not lip service. Our Lord himself pronounced condemnation on those who worshiped Him with their lips but not with their lives (Matt. 15:7-9). He does not become anyone's Savior until that person receives Him for who He is—Lord of all (Acts 10:36)" (John MacArthur, Wrongly Dividing the Word).

(2) "The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is—the anointed Saviour and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords! He would not be Who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives." A. W. Tozer, I Call It Heresy! [Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1974], 18-19)

And one more quote, this time from A.W. Tozer. "The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command. He will not divide His offices. You cannot believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is—the anointed Saviour and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of all lords! He would not be Who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives." A. W. Tozer, I Call It Heresy! [Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1974], 18-19] And I say "Amen." The non-Lordship Gospel that is being preached is another Gospel.

4. The message of Peter was not a message that pits the "Gospel of the kingdom" (Christ's message) over against the Gospel of grace (the message of Acts and following) (vv. 36-42).

The fourth error is also a dispensational error. Point 4 says, "The message of Peter was not a message that pits the Gospel of the kingdom (as if that was before the cross) against the Gospel of grace (as if that was after the cross). Instead Peter ties together the Gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached with the Gospel he was preaching. They are not two different messages. Look at verses 36-42.

Acts 10:36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—

Acts 10:37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Acts 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

Acts 10:40 Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,

Acts 10:41 not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

Acts 10:42 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead.

You could not get a more devastating critique of this dispensational view of the Gospel than this one. These people insist that the Gospel of grace was for the church, not for Israel and that the gospel of the kingdom was only for Israel. But turn with me to Acts 20 and you will see that this is a false distinction.

- a) **This particular brand of dispensationalism insists that we are not in the kingdom**
 - (1) **They claim that there is the kingdom era in the Gospels and before**
 - (2) **the era of church and grace in the epistles**
 - (3) **and the kingdom era again in a future 1000 year period.**
- b) **They contrast the “gospel of the kingdom” in the Gospels from the “Gospel of grace” in Paul’s epistles. However,**
 - (1) **The only place that “the gospel of the grace of God” or anything closely resembling it appears is in Acts 20:24, and yet in the very next verse Paul insists that he has been “preaching the kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25). There is no difference.**

The only place that the term “Gospel of grace” occurs is in this verse. But look at how it is worded. Acts 20:24-25.

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the

grace of God. [Is that Gospel of grace a totally different thing than the kingdom? No. Look at the next verse.]

Acts 20:25 ¶ **“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.**

For Paul, preaching the Gospel is preaching the kingdom. And I give several other verses in your outlines that show that the gospel of the kingdom is the same as the gospel of grace.

(2) Preaching the good news of the kingdom can be found elsewhere in Acts (Acts 8:12; 14:21-22)

(3) Likewise, Mark indicates that the “Gospel of Jesus” (Mark 1:1) is the same as the “Gospel of the kingdom” (Mark 1:14)

(4) In Hebrews, “kingdom” and “grace” go together.

5. The message of Peter was not a Gospel that was different from that preached in the Old Testament (v. 43; see Acts 26:22-23; Heb. 4:2; Rom. 3:21).

Fifth, the message of Peter was not a Gospel that was different from that preached in the Old Testament. Verse 43 is quite clear: To him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. The Old Testament proclaimed the Gospel, and any view of the Gospel that cannot be found in the Old Testament is a faulty view. Hebrews 4:2 says of the first generation under Moses, **For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.** Same Gospel. You should read the Gospel that God preached to that wilderness generation and compare it to the Gospels being preached today. Are they the same? They should be. Hebrews 4:21 says that it was the same Gospel that the apostles preached.

a) The Old Testament saints looked forward to this grace

b) We look backward to it.

c) But it is the same Gospel (Heb. 4:2)

6. The message of Peter was not the Gospel preached by Romanists or other legalists (v. 43).

a) Peter’s message is that forgiveness comes through faith alone.

b) Peter’s message is that forgiveness is received, not earned.

c) Peter’s message is that sin is remitted, not compensated for

Sixth, the message of Peter was not the Gospel preached by Romanists or other legalists. Verse 43 gives the means of receiving forgiveness of sins and becoming a Christian. It says, ...**whoever believes**

in Him will receive remission of sins. Peter's message is that forgiveness comes through faith alone; that the forgiveness is received, not earned; and that the sins are remitted or forgiven, not compensated for. There is a tendency even amongst true believers to somehow think that we have to do something to be forgiven when we blow it. We have to mourn hard enough, or compensate by trying harder. That is the flesh speaking, not grace. The flesh can contribute nothing to forgiveness. But those who are forgiven can receive grace from above to continue to strive toward the upward call that we have in Christ Jesus.

So that was what the Gospel message was not. Since this is a fine summary of the Gospel, I thought I would very quickly go through what the Gospel message is so that we don't leave anything out. And I have put this into the outline so that you don't have to write like mad. I'm just going to read and briefly comment.

B. What the Gospel Message Was

1. It is a message (v. 34). It is "Good News."

It is a *message* according to verse 34. Gospel means good news. So the Gospel is something that we communicate with others.

2. It is good news to everyone (v. 34)

Second, it is good news to everyone, as verse 34 words it, **without partiality**. There is no caste system in the Gospel. It is the same message to Jew and Gentile, Male and female, slave or free, high caste or low caste, gutter sinner or sophisticated sinner. All are brought down to an even playing field of being equally unworthy and equally exalted in Christ.

There was a hardened criminal in England in the 1800's who had gotten converted and was quickly being transformed. When he got out of prison, he started attending Anglican church. And one day unknown to the criminal he stood side by side with the judge who had sentenced him to receive the Lord's Table together. The judge recognized the man, and after the service told the pastor who that was. The judge said, "It struck me how remarkable this was." The pastor said, "that the criminal was saved?" And the judge said, "No. I thought how remarkable it was that God's grace could make an upright, successful, self-disciplined person like me recognize that I am equally a sinner and equally in need of grace as that man was. It is good news to everyone.

3. It is good news to those who feel helpless with their sins (v. 35)

Third, verse 35 indicates that it is good news to those who feel helpless with their sins because it guarantees that God's grace will be so at

work in an accepted person's life that he will fear God and he will work righteousness. Victory is possible.

4. It is good news that continues to be good news long after we are "saved" (v. 35)

And the participles that describe the fearing one and the righteousness working one indicate that this grace continues to be good news long after we are initially saved. Grace characterizes us as we pursue sanctification.

5. It is good news on which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united (vv. 34-42)

Contrary to four point Calvinism, it is good news on which Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united. Four point Calvinism claims that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were not united on how many would be saved – one electing only some and another willing all to be saved, and a third only applying redemption to the elect. But verses 34-42 show an absolutely unity of purpose between the three members of the Trinity. I don't think we have any four pointers here, but if there were, I would try to show this marvelous unity.

6. It is good news that gives us peace (v. 36)

Sixth, it is good news that gives us peace. Verse 36 speaks of **preaching peace through Jesus Christ**. This speaks of God's favor. We aren't at peace with the world or the devil. We are at peace with God. And this peace is both objective and subjective. It is truly good news.

7. This peace can only be found in Jesus Christ (v. 36)

8. It is good news that makes us submit to His lordship (v. 36)

9. The good news was preached by Jesus and any theory of Gospel that cannot be found in the Gospel accounts is a false Gospel (vv. 37-38)

I threw that one in there because some people have taken some of Paul's statements so out of context (and sometimes they are taken out of the immediate context) that they hold to a view of the Gospel that you cannot find in the four Gospels or on the mouth of Christ. They keep emphasizing gospel, gospel, gospel, but it is rather strange that the Four Gospels don't contain their version of the Gospel.

10. The good news includes more than redemption of the soul (v. 38). It includes the empowering of the Spirit, healing and breaking the bondage of Satan. The good news is really as comprehensive as the eventual restoration of a new heavens and new earth. As Joy to the World words it, "His blessings flow far as the curse is found."

But the good news that Jesus preached included more than simply the redemption of the soul. Verse 38 says, **how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.** This Gospel included empowering by the Holy Spirit, healing and breaking the bondage of Satan. The good news is really as comprehensive as the eventual restoration of a new heavens and new earth. As the hymn “Joy to the Word” puts it, “His blessings flow far as the curse is found.” God’s good news doesn’t just end with justification. It moves on to sanctification, resurrection and glorification and transformation of cultures. Yet many books on the Gospel only show you how to get in. They don’t show you how to use the Gospel all your days. They’ve got a truncated Gospel.

11. The good news includes the perfect life of Christ (vv. 38-39)

Obviously the good news includes the perfect life of Christ which is described in verses 38-39. Because His righteousness has to be imputed to us.

12. The good news includes the death of Christ as our curse (v. 39).

He had to become a curse in our place so that we would not be cursed.

13. The good news includes the resurrection of Jesus into a real body (v. 40-41)

1 Corinthians 15 says that without the resurrection we are lost and hopeless. So those hyper-preterists who mess with the doctrine of His resurrection are distorting the Gospel. And Christ’s resurrection guarantees power for us. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in us who believe according to the Scriptures. Philippians 4:10 gives Paul’s longing **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.** Our bodies even will be conformable to His resurrection. It is an important part of the Gospel.

14. The good news was entrusted to and preached by the apostles of Jesus (vv. 40-42). Any good news that conflicts with the good news of the other apostles has misunderstood Paul’s Gospel.

Verses 40-42 indicate that the apostles are united on the Gospel. There are many people who are only interested in Pauline Gospel. But Paul’s Gospel is not different from Peter’s or James. You have misunderstood Paul’s Gospel if you can’t see the same Gospel in the epistles of Peter, James and John. And many people can’t.

15. The good news of Peter was an imperative news (“commanded”) that was not optional for salvation (v. 42). Any good news that makes preaching about Christ optional for the

salvation of the nations is a false Gospel.

We have already dealt with point 15 – there can be no other way of salvation than through Jesus.

16. The good news includes the ascension of Jesus to His position as Judge of the living and the dead (present and future – (v. 42). Any Gospel that makes grace incompatible with the judgment of Christ is also false.

The good news includes the ascension of Jesus to His position as Judge of the living and the dead, both present and future. Some views of the gospel are inconsistent with judgment and condemnation. But Jesus is the Rock of offense, and He Himself said that anyone who stumbles over Him will be crushed. Grace and judgment are not opposites. According to Scripture they have kissed each other in Jesus. He receives judgment for those who cling to Him. He dishes out judgment on all who are outside of Him and who pursue ungodliness. But He never ceases to be judge. Some people get frustrated whenever there is a critique of error. “Let’s be positive,” they say. But read the Bible and you will discover that 4/5th of it exposes error. It’s a very important part of ministry. Jesus commands us to “judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

17. The good news of Peter can be found in all the prophets (v. 43). Any good news which cannot be found in the Old Testament is a false Gospel.

I’ve already mentioned 17. If verse 43 says that the prophets taught the Gospel, you better be able to find the Gospel in the Old Testament. Some views of the Gospel are only condemned in the Old Testament.

18. The good news is that faith in Jesus remits our sins (v. 43). Any good news that adds to Christ alone (as the basis) and faith alone (as the means of receiving) is a false Gospel.

Verse 43 indicates that the good news is that faith in Jesus remits our sins. **To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.** First, the Gospel means that we can have nothing apart from the name of Jesus. Our identity is in Him, our security is in Him. The only way we can get anything from our bank account in heaven is by signing in Jesus name. We must pray in Jesus name. Everything comes through His name. Secondly, it is by faith alone that we sign, and on the merits of Christ alone that we get access.

19. The good news has people come to God in the name of Christ (v. 43)

And so Peter has summed up the genius of the Reformation in this little paragraph. If you have never put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to

wash away your sins, do so today. His forgiveness is free and full and ushers you into God's family. And having been cleansed by His grace, continue to look to His grace to make you holy. The Gospel doesn't stop with justification. Do not strive in your own strength. Galatians 3 calls us to strive in His strength. Keep your eyes on Jesus who is the author and finisher of your faith. From beginning to end the good news is Jesus.

Isaiah 48:17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,

The Holy One of Israel:

"I *am* the LORD your God,

Who teaches you to profit,

Who leads you by the way you should go.

Isaiah 48:18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments!

Then your peace would have been like a river,

And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Make is so Lord Jesus. Amen.

Charge

Children of God, I charge you to look to your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; the one who alone can teach you to profit; the one who alone can bring your peace like a river and your righteousness like waves of the sea. He is your Alpha and Omega. He is your Gospel. Amen.