



Session 1 -- Introduction

David Platt

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The purpose of tonight is not to have an event or be entertained but rather to equip and encourage. Our goal is to soak in the gospel and walk away committed to spreading the gospel wherever you live or God may lead you in the world.

The study guide is to enable us to cover as much Biblical and practical material as possible in one setting. When I've gathered together with persecuted brothers and sisters in secret locations around the world at the risk of their lives, they make the most of their time. That is our aim tonight. We want to drink from the fire hydrant of God's Word. There are Scriptures noted so that you can digest this. There are blanks to fill out as well so you can take notes.

I pray that God may do a supernatural work in you so that you will be compelled to give your life in greater and greater ways to proclaiming the gospel of Christ on your school campus, in your office, in your neighborhood and ultimately among the nations.

Our topic—"Cults and Counterfeit Gospels"—is critical to that end.

An estimated 150 million dollars' worth of counterfeit money is currently circulated in the United States. The \$20 bill is the most counterfeited bill in the United States. So, how do you know if a bill is real or counterfeit? The Secret Service and the Treasury Department offer at least five different tips.

One tip is to look for color-shifting ink. Looking straight at the 20 on the bottom right corner of the \$20 bill, it has a copper color. When rotated, the 20 is a greenish color. That is color-shifting ink.

The second tip is to look for a watermark. Holding the bill up to the light, there is a watermark on the right side of the portrait in unprinted space. It is visible from both sides of the bill because the watermark is embedded in the bill not printed on the paper.

Third is the security thread on the left side of the bill. Holding the bill up to the light, a thin, embedded strip is visible running from top to bottom down the face of the banknote to the left of the portrait.

The fourth tip is holding that bill up to an ultraviolet light will show that security thread to be a specific color. Bills of different denominations are different colors. A \$20 bill will glow green, but a \$50 bill will glow yellow.

Fifth is that each bill has a serial number beginning with a letter that corresponds to a particular year. Bills printed in 2009 have serial numbers that begin with the letter J. Bills printed in 2004 have serial numbers starting with the letter E. Every year has a different letter with which each serial number starts.

This is all practically important because once you accept a piece of currency in the United States, that money becomes your responsibility. If you accept a counterfeit bill, try to deposit it into a bank, and the teller explains to you that it is counterfeit and confiscates it, you get nothing in return and lose your money. The significance of that moment is measured by how much money is in play.

If you do something for someone and they give you a \$20 bill which you try to deposit in the bank but then find out it is counterfeit, you lose \$20 with nothing in return. That's unfortunate, but not extremely detrimental. But if you spend your entire life earning and saving \$20 million, then somebody gives it to you and you try to deposit that into the bank only to find out it's counterfeit, you lose all of it. That's extremely detrimental.

Get that picture in your mind because there is a sense in which I can't imagine a more significant topic than what we are talking about. We're not talking about financial currency. We are talking about how people go to Heaven instead of hell forever; how people—sinners—could ever stand before a holy God.

There are counterfeit gospels being given out all over the world including whatever community you live in right now. There are all kinds of counterfeit bills floating around; and people are accepting them and thinking they are the real thing. One day, they will stand before God believing they have eternal life only to realize they received a counterfeit that leaves them completely empty in the end. Instead of experiencing eternal life, they will experience the exact opposite on that day.

This is huge. And it isn't just 'they.' It's you and me. It's every single person and every single location where we are gathered. Whatever country or state you are in right now, what gospel have you received? That's a really important question. Are you holding the real thing in your heart or have you been sold a fake? There is no more important question for you and those around you than that.

Think about the currency. If I'm given a counterfeit bill and then I pass it on to somebody else, then I'm setting them up for emptiness. We are responsible for what we pass on, not just what we accept. When it comes to the gospel, the stakes could not be higher. We aren't talking about \$20 bills or even \$20 million. We are talking about eternal life in Heaven and everlasting suffering in hell. What you accept, receive and believe, and then what you pass on is extremely and eternally significant.

That's why in Galatians 1:6-9—Galatians being the only letter Paul writes that doesn't begin with some kind of commendation or encouragement—Paul jumps right in and says to a church where people were believing a counterfeit gospel:

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Accursed literally means condemned. Paul just said, “If an angel from Heaven brings you a counterfeit gospel, let that angel be damned.” Paul says, “If I bring you a counterfeit gospel, let me be damned.”

What we are talking about is extremely, eternally significant for every one of our lives and all those around us. I want to hold up the true gospel; and for all of us to see all over Scripture what the Bible teaches as the true gospel—not my version or anyone else's—but as clearly and faithfully as possible to see what God's Word says about the gospel. I want us to hold it up, turn it this way and that, look at it under the ultraviolet light and see it from every angle.

Then, I want us to look at some counterfeits. I want us to see where they have the color-shifting ink and the watermarks, but the security thread is missing or it's the wrong color. They have all these things but that serial number and year don't add up. Everything is perfect except for that one thing; and that one thing makes the whole thing counterfeit.

That's the deal, much like with money. The Secret Service responsible for currency protection doesn't look at a bill that has everything but the right color of security thread and say, “It's close—mostly authentic. Let's just count it.” No. One missing element makes the whole bill counterfeit.

So it is with the gospel. We don't say, “It's close.” This is why we have become so light with doctrine in the church today. You can't be close or off in one way with the gospel. I'm not talking about questions in the Bible that Christians might disagree on. I'm talking about the core of the gospel; and once we see it, we can't look at other gospels and say, “They are close—mostly authentic. Let's count it.” No. One missing element or distorted truth of the gospel makes the whole gospel counterfeit. We want the real deal. We want to see the true gospel and then see it side-by-side with counterfeits for our sakes and for others.

I pray that some people in this and all kinds of different rooms will receive the true gospel and put aside false ones. May tonight be the moment of salvation for some. I pray for many.

I was talking with somebody last week at a conference who said to me, “I trusted in Christ in the Secret Church a couple years ago.” I've been praying, “God, please do that again tonight. Take people by

the power of Your Spirit and give them the real deal, even those who thought they were Christians but received a counterfeit in their heart. Bring people to truly trust in Christ.”

So we'll see the true gospel, then see counterfeits side by side for our sake and for others' sake.

I pray we will not leave here silent with that which is true.

There are common myths that we need to acknowledge.

One myth is that many believe cults and counterfeit gospels are very small when the reality is many are extremely large and pervasive.

Second is many people believe cults and counterfeit gospels are normally isolated when the reality is many are extremely influential in your life in ways you may not even realize.

The third myth is that cults and counterfeit gospels are clearly immoral, crazy or out-there such as the Branch Davidian Compound from years ago. Not long ago, Heather and I were in Arizona and we heard about a cult given over to all kinds of sexual immorality. The reality is many cults and counterfeit gospels are quite moral, and in some cases more moral than you are.

Fourth is the idea that cults and counterfeit gospels are located far from me such as out on a compound somewhere when the reality is cults and counterfeit gospels are right around me. I have all kinds of friendships with all kinds of people who fall into some of the groups we will talk about.

The final myth is that cults and counterfeit gospels are merely a matter of personal preference. We have seen already and it will be clearer yet that cults and counterfeit gospels are ultimately a matter of eternal truth.

Our purposes tonight are clear. One, we want to believe the gospel in our lives which is my prayer for every single person in this gathering. Thank you if you've come here tonight and don't profess to be a Christian. Maybe you are exploring what Christians believe or even hold to one of these beliefs that we call a counterfeit gospel. I have many friends along these lines and my aim in any conversation with them as well as here is not to win an argument or assert I am right over you. It is to seek out truth according to God and His Word, not according to me or you.

It is not just so we would believe something but rather believe God and believe John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* What does that mean? I want us to look all over God's Word to understand what it means to believe in Jesus and the gospel.

What we are after tonight is to believe the gospel in our lives. We want to guard the gospel in our churches. Everyone of us needs to realize that in our lives, families and churches there are false gospels, and an adversary who wants those false gospels to creep into our lives, families, marriages and brothers and sisters in Christ. This is why we all have a responsibility in our lives, families and churches to, as it says in 2 Timothy 1:14, *“Guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”*

We also want to spread the gospel in the world. Remember “soak and spread.” Not one Christian in the world is intended simply to soak in this gospel. Every Christian in the world is intended to spread this gospel. We have currency that leads to eternal life and God has told us to give it away. That’s what disciple making in Matthew 28:19 is all about: “*Go therefore and make disciples...*” If Secret Church doesn’t lead to that, then we’ve missed the whole point.

Part of my hope in looking at the gospel is that God would renew your perspective on what really matters in this world.

As I was praying for this gathering, I was thinking about perspective. A few months ago, Heather and I had taken our kids to a college football game here in the south. Our alma matter was playing in a championship game and ended up winning. It was so much fun enjoying the game with the boys who are 11 and 10. We get back that night and as I’m tucking them in, totally unsolicited, one of them says to me, “Dad, will you pray for me?” And I said, “Sure, buddy. What can I pray for specifically?” Earlier in the week, we had been in Luke 15 in the daily Bible plan we walk through together. In our family worship time we had talked about this picture of God seeking after the lost, and the rejoicing and exhilaration in Heaven over one person who repents and comes to Christ, and how we have the opportunity to be a part of that by sharing the gospel and leading people to Christ. So, he said, “I had so much fun at the game. It was so exciting. But I find myself getting more excited about our team winning than I would be about somebody trusting in Christ. I need you to pray that I wouldn’t lose perspective.” I said, “Yeah, buddy. I’ll pray for that for you, your brother and me.”

We are so tempted to get consumed with things that do not matter. What’s going to matter ten billion years from now? Your team is not on the list, as well as so many things that we get so focused on and worked up over. I am praying that God would give fresh perspective tonight and that we walk away believing that this matters. It’s not that there aren’t things in our lives that are important and we need to be focused on, but I pray that we would put them into a fresh, eternal perspective about what really matters in the world.

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PO Box 380602, Birmingham, AL 35238

205-547-2777 ♦ <http://www.radical.net/secret-church>

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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