

## **THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH**

**Taught by Bruce Bickel**

**Session: February 3, 2012**

Gracious and merciful God, we come into a presence with each other because we're constantly in your presence. Because of your omnipresence, we know that we never lose your sight. We just pray, Lord, that we would be recognizing the realization that we are never outside of your gaze, of your concern, your grace or your love. Father, we just pray that today, as we sit at your feet, that you'd be pleased to open our eyes, once again, that we might behold you in all of your glory, for Jesus' sake, and may it be so. Amen.

We're continuing our study on the major theme of the formation and function of the church. We've been going through a series of essential ingredients of a healthy church. A healthy church is a church that is progressively demonstrating the character of God as revealed in the Scripture. A healthy church is one that is constantly growing; growing not only in the depth of understanding the doctrines of grace, but also expanding in its numerical outreach into the lost world.

One of the ingredients that we've been talking about has been leadership. Leadership is essentially influencing the behavior of people. As we've seen, the biblical standards for leadership are quite contrary to the standards of the system of this world. Paul tells us in Romans 12, "Do not be conformed to the system of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

One of the things we've been trying to do here the last couple of weeks is to reshape our thinking patterns about church leadership. Basically we are not what we think we are, but what we think, we are. We are not what we think we are, but what we think, we are. That applies to the church as an organization also. The church is not what it thinks it is. But what the church thinks, it is.

How do we think about church leadership? Is it something that we appoint somebody because of their success in the world? It may be that they are biblically qualified. I'm not suggesting they're not. All I'm saying is there's a different thought pattern about church leadership that we need to understand biblically.

One of the things that I want to talk about today, as we talked about church leadership and the qualifications the last couple of weeks, is how do we develop a study for men. One of my real concerns in the last generation or two, or the last couple of decades, has been what I would call the feminization of Christianity.

What I mean by that is much of the church activity programmatic-wise is aimed at women and children. Nothing wrong with that, but not at the expense of men. Even in my own church, when I look at the litany of programs we have, we have this, this, this, this, this and that, that, that, that, and they're all for women and children, which I'm all for. My only question is why don't we have something for men?

That was really the genesis in Dick Johnson's heart years ago, and some of the men here at Christ Church, about this Friday men's group. They wanted to do something to build up men so that we could exercise our rightful position as leaders in the church. Now when you look at what's going on historically, much of the church in America has become feminized. Now I don't say that derogatorily to put down women. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is there has been an overemphasis on the part of women and children at the expense of the ministry to men. That's one of the beauties why I appreciate so much your faithfulness every Friday to come to the Brave Men of Friday Mornings because your faithfulness is a great encouragement to me to continue to do what I do, and to all of us. There's a mutual ministry that occurs just by our being together as men.

You and I talk about things that I don't talk about with other people. I try to be very vulnerable with all of you. Sometimes I wonder if some of the things I say should not be on tape or should not be transcribed, just because it's private between us as men. There's nothing wrong with that. We need to have that freedom to talk about things that men need to talk about. Again, I'm not excluding the ministry to women. Understand what I'm not saying. All I'm saying is I think we need to have a greater balance in the life of the local church where we have as much emphasis on the ministry to men as we do the ministry to women and children. There needs to be some family balance there.

What I'd like to do today is just walk you through a little process that I've used over the years in the churches about how you begin a men's ministry. That should be your handout number 12. We also have number 13, which is going to be the introduction to our study on the importance of church membership. But today, I just want to walk us through just a little process, and I'd be open to some of your input from your experience, those of you who've been involved in men's ministry, some of the things we can add some definition. But here's just a process that I would suggest that we might pray about that we could take back to our own churches, and how each one of you brothers could be a vital force in the ministry of men in your local church.

Remember, ministry is essentially giving away to somebody else what God has given you. God has been very pleased over these years to give us a lot of himself through the study of the Scripture. How is it that you and I can give that away to somebody else? That's really ministry. Ministry is not creating something that you do and asking the Lord to bless it. Ministry is really taking that which God has given you in the study of our Scripture every Friday and saying, "Now how can I, to whom and where can I give that away?"

What I'm going to suggest, brothers, is that we just as a group of men go back to your own churches and begin to say, "Is there something I can do with a small group of men?" It doesn't have to be a big one. Dick, when you and I and Frank we started this 18 years ago, we only had about five or six people. The Lord has been pleased to expand that to what we now have. Don't be discouraged if you don't have a lot of receptivity initially. Remember, two people can make a world of difference.

Let me just walk you through a process that might be an encouragement for you just to pray about how can I go back into my church and begin a ministry to men that might help us solidify our commitment to the kingdom.

First of all, you want to begin a Bible study for the men. You want to include those who really desire the office of elder. In other words, one of the 28 qualifications of the office an elder is you desire the office. In the churches where I've had the privilege of being the pastor, I always taught about church leadership and then asked the men, "If you have a desire for that office, come and see me." That's one of the basic desires. Do you have a desire? That doesn't mean that you're qualified; it just means that you're going to explore the possibility of has the Lord, or is the Lord, in the process of qualifying me biblically to be a leader in my church.

You want to start with those men who basically have an understanding of what it means to be a leader in the church, and they basically have a desire for the office of some sort of leadership position. Again, this isn't the final product; it's just identifying those who might be interested in some sort of a study.

You want to look for their availability. You want to look do they have a heart for the Word. Most of all, are they teachable? First of all, you want to identify a couple of guys, a handful of guys, who meet those qualifications, the desire for leadership, teachability, n they have a heart to study the Scripture. Should that ever occur in your church and you need some help, we have resources here. Bishop Rogers, myself,

Ted, Carl, other people, Don, we can help you with material that you might need to start a Bible study with the men in your church if that's something that you believe the Lord would have you do. You've got great resources right here among us. We can help you with that.

Second thing is, as Bishop Rogers taught us several months ago, we want to teach biblical theology. Remember expository teaching is how we are taught; biblical theology is what we are taught. You want to give them a solid foundation of doctrine, including the doctrines of the church and the doctrines of grace. There are many things you could use to do that as a study that would be something that's already given to you. You could use the Westminster Confession. You could use the First London Confession of 1646. You could use the 39 Articles of Bishop Rogers, that wonderful book that he's written. You could take that book, the 39 Articles, and you could have a magnificent study because you'd be teaching them biblical theology.

Remember, when you have a group of men together, you don't want to sit around and pick lint from your navel and have navel operations. [LAUGHTER] You want to sit down and say, "What am I going to do about what I just learned?" You don't ask the question, "What does it mean to you?" It literally doesn't mean anything to you or to me. The only one to whom it means something is the author, God himself. The real question is not what does it mean to me. You'll be just basically sharing your ignorance. What you want to do is ask the question, "What does it mean to me? What am I going to do about what I just learned?" You could take that 39 Articles work of Bishop Rogers, and that could be the basis of your study. Just go through that one by one by one by one. Ted walked us through that some time ago of how to use that as a resource. Take something like that to make sure that you're teaching them biblical theology, just not opinions.

Now there are a lot of good books out in the Christian bookstore, but there is a lot of stuff that you need to avoid because it's too much of a how-to manual. Here are the ten steps to do this, and then you read the next one, the four steps undo the ten you just did, and then the three to correct the five that just undid the ten that you did a month ago. You've got to be careful about the how-to's.

What I'm suggesting is take something like the 39 articles and use that as the basis of your study, or the Westminster Confession or the First London Confession. Those are wonderful places to start. Don't feel the pressure to have to be the answer person. If you're going to lead this study, don't feel that you have to have all the answers. Let the Scriptures be the answer for you. That's why if you take some of these resources that give you a lot of Scripture references and cross-references, that becomes your answer. If you have questions that you can't answer, that's okay. Remember, revelation is progressive. You don't get it all at once. It may be that there are some questions come up, you could come back to this group and we could be helpful to you. So don't put the pressure on you to think that, "Oh, I'm a leader. I've got have all the answers." That's one of the issues we need to deal with as men. We don't need to be the answer personal. Let the Scripture be that.

Make sure that when you do find a group of men, you want to put them and to be exposed to biblical theology. You want to train/teach them to use theology in their life. In other words, how do they relate the Scripture to their life? That's basically answering that question, "What am I going to do about what I just learned?" That's a wonderful time of sharing applications in your life.

This is basically showing them how to deal with some of the problems in their life from a biblical perspective. It would be what Paul just told us, "Do not be confirmed to the system of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." We need to teach them how to think right so they will act right so they will feel right. The world says feel-act-think. The Scripture says think-act-feel. We need to teach men how to think differently.

I heard a statement the other day that often times in the church we have too much entertainment coming in the back of our mind and not enough reason in the front of our mind. You see, we don't reason much anymore in the church. We just don't reason because we're so oriented to the quick fix, the entertainment. When you sit down and study biblical theology, it's going to teach you how to think differently. What we want to make sure that we do in a men's study is help us understand how you apply those biblical truths that you're learning. How do you apply that to your life? That's where application becomes important. We want to make sure that we can teach them how to relate biblical theology to their lives.

The next thing I would suggest is share your heart as well as your mind. Let them see who you are as a person in Christ; that yes, you have the same struggles, you have the same victories they do. Give them your passion for Christ. Let them see your great pathos of the love of the kingdom. Help them understand what it means to become an M8, a missionminded member of a movement motivated by mercy for ministry in the marketplace. Let them see that in your life.

Let them also see your commitment to the local church. The two things that will last forever are God's word and the church. Anything else is going to be destroyed. If you really want to hook your wagon to something that's going to have eternal consequence, it's got to be one of two things, and both of them come together, and that is the word, the Scripture, and the church.

Let them see your passion for the church and the reason you're doing this. That would be very important for them. Let them see your joys as well as your frustrations. Let them see that you're real. You're not coming in to be the guru, to be the answer person. You want to take them on a journey that you're going along with them.

I think sometimes we have a misconstrued idea of discipleship. Sometimes I think that we have an idea that there's a teacher/pupil relationship. Well there is that to some degree, but discipleship is really something bigger than that. It's when two brothers come together, sit at the feet of the throne of grace, and God the Holy Spirit is your teacher, and you learn from each other.

I had one of my mentors in Scotland years ago told me, "Bruce, probably, in discipleship, you can probably only disciple about five or six people in your whole life, because to do it right, it's going to take you that long, and to do it well, because really, it's not...mentoring is not my reproducing you and reproducing me in you, it's really finding out who God is producing in you. That's what mentoring is. It's not a reproduction of me building into you, reproducing myself into you. It's helping you find out how God is building himself into you. That's mentoring.

We need to understand that discipleship is really a couple of guys getting together, letting the Scripture be the means by which you study, and the Holy Spirit becomes your teacher and you learn from each other. That's why it's important that you share your joys and your frustrations with them and they see that you're not just the answer person, but you're really on this journey of discipleship with them.

Like-mindedness is necessary for oneness. There's got to be a like-minded oneness of committed to the Scripture, and that comes because you have a like-minded instruction of the doctrines of your soul and your mind and your spirit. It's critical that you have the basis of all of this is going to be biblical theology.

Make them feel a part of every significant decision you make. This is very important. You're training them to make decisions in a biblical framework. Let them see how you make your decisions. One of the classic ways of making decisions, which we talked about several months ago, is if you go to 1 Corinthians 6. Let me show you something. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 6:10. What you want to do,

brothers, is you want give them illustrations of how you made your decisions based upon your biblical theology that you learned. In 1 Corinthians 6, look at verse 12. Here Paul gives us a huge picture of the freedom that we have in Christ. Brothers, we need to recognize the freedom that we have in Christ. That doesn't mean licentiousness or sloppiness. It means a love response in obedience because you understand the freedom you have.

Notice what Paul says in verse 12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything." There you have two principles of decision making. I call them the principle of personal progress and the principle of personal authority. Notice the first one. Paul says, "All things are lawful." That means that God has redeemed all things in Christ. You and I have great freedom in Christ, but not everything that you have the freedom to choose to do because you are the agent of choice, you are the agent who does that, we have free agency. You are the one who's responsible to make your own decisions. Nobody can hold you accountable but yourself on making those decisions. You are responsible to make those decisions. He's saying this—there's a world of things out there that are lawful because they've already been redeemed by Christ; however, you need to understand that there's some limitation to your liberty, and that is this, that not all the choices that are available to you, which are lawful, are going to be good for you.

The word "profitable" there literally means correctable or it means cooperative. It's the idea of taking a stick and throwing it into a stream, and the stream is moving in this direction, and what you're doing is you jump in the middle of that stream and you're moving in that direction and you're cooperating with the movement that's going in your life. The real issue is this—what is God doing in my life? As a man, I think that's the most important question we can ask every day. Lord, what is it you're doing in my life? I want to cooperate with you. I want to jump in the mainstream of that and head in that direction, and I want it to be profitable in my life.

There's a restriction, a limitation, to our liberty. It might mean this. You have the freedom to go visit and go see any movie you want. However, not all movies are going to be profitable for you, because it might be that a particular movie in its content and visual descriptions is going to stimulate within you things that are not appropriate. You need to know yourself well enough to know that yes, I've got the freedom to do that, but no, I'm not going to because it will not be profitable. That's a decision making process.

Let the men who you work with understand how you make your decisions. You've got great freedom in Christ, but not all freedoms are going to be profitable for you.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, would you relate that to verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 6?*

"Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened, for Christ our Passover has already been sacrificed."

***Audience Member:** It's 6:7.*

"Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Corinthians 6:7) That's in the context of one believer suing another believer. He said take the high road. The high road is this. Why not be wrong? That's the high road. Why not be wrong. Because the moment you to go settle a spiritual issue in a local church magistrate or local legal office, you've already been defeated, because you're basically saying the world can handle my spiritual problems. You're basically saying the world is wiser than what we have the resources in the church. So he's saying if you go to one brother sues another brother, you've already lost.

Notice this. Why not be wrong? Take the high road. You can't do that apart from being led by the Holy Spirit of God and understanding his grace is sufficient. Why not be wrong? Why not be wrong? Do you think that's being mamby-pamby? You think that's being weak? You think that's being a doormat, being stepped on? Try it. Try it next time.

**Ted:** *It's the hardest.*

It's the hardest thing you can do. Absolutely.

**Ted:** *Humanly impossible.*

You can't do that apart from the Holy Spirit, because the world's going to say, "You have a right." Well friends, you gave up your rights when you trusted Christ. They became responsibilities.

Jesus says in the beautiful Beatitudes, "Blessed are the meek." Now meekness does not mean weakness. Meekness means living according to the power of God. The word "meek" there is a description of a person putting a bit into a horse. It means power under control. You put this bit in the mouth of the horse and you can now all of a sudden you can control the power of that magnificent beast. Until you put that bit into the horse's mouth, he's uncontrollable. Meekness is controllable power. Living according to the power of God. You cannot do what we just described in 1 Corinthians 6:7 apart from the magnificent mercy and grace of the Holy Spirit in your life. He's saying this. When you go to court, you're basically telling the world that the world can resolve spiritual issues, and they are smarter than the resources we have in the Kingdom of God. You've already lost. You've already lost.

**Audience Member:** *Some time ago, you made available a book on success. It's interesting because I've been studying that particular chapter and this is exactly what that chapter that you provided explains. So if you really want to get an encyclopedia version, go to Bruce Bickel and you'll have it.*

It was on priorities and how you make decisions. One of the things you want to help men do when you work with them is to help them see how you integrate biblical theology into your thought process of how you make your decisions. That's important for them to see that integration of theology into practicality of life.

Remember we don't base our life on principles. We base our life on the accomplishments of the person and work of Christ. But in the context of that, God in his grace gives us these things that we can learn from the Scripture. Biblical theology helps us make those wise decisions. We need to teach men to learn how to reason in the front of their mind rather than being entertained in the back of their mind.

**Audience Member:** *Bruce, there's a second question with that. I understand you're dealing with brothers, but what do you do if you're not dealing with a brother? Or is that the same situation? You still lose if you go before a court?*

Let me put this caveat on here. I can't be your Holy Spirit. I know some of you would like me to be that. But we cannot somebody else's Holy Spirit. All I can say, if you're in a situation like that, in the gray areas, I would go back to this principle. Look at this, it says what? "All things are lawful but...not all things are profitable." What is God doing in your life? That's the critical issue for the reason you make your decisions. You've got to figure that out before you answer all the what if's, the how come's and the why for's? You've got say, "Lord, this is what you're doing in my life. Therefore, I'm going to make this decision because I want to cooperate with you and what you're doing in my life, and I'm going to trust Christ with the rest. You see, brothers, the one thing we can do is do the best you can and trust

Christ with the rest. That's all you can do. Do the best you can.

I would encourage in a situation like that to get the counsel of many brothers. There's wisdom in the counsel of many brothers—you've got great resources here—to sit down and talk about those things. What should we do? Let's pray about this. Let's study the Scripture. Don't make a rash decision. Not everything is covered in the Scripture. Deuteronomy 29:20 says, "The secret things belong to God." There's a lot of secret stuff that you and I rack our brains about trying to find out, but we're never going to find them because they're secret.

Here's anything thing guys. You don't find "out" God's will; you're found "in" God's will. There's a difference. We're always looking for what "is" God's will. You don't find it "out"; you're found "in" it. Am I "in" God's will? Am I trying to be holy? For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Am I being thankful? For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The six revealed wills of God are this—that I'm saved, that I'm sanctified, that I'm submissive, that I'm spirit filled, that I'm suffering, and I'm saying thanks. Now you are in God's will when you're in those six things. You see, you are found "in" that. It's when you're found "in" that that you find out what the "out's" are. So often times, we're looking to find, I want to find "out" God's will. The issue is this. I want to be found "in" it. When you're found "in" it, you'll find out what it is.

So often times, we look at God's will as something like a dot. Let's just hypothetically say that God in his providence wanted Bishop Rogers and I to go to West Point. We both went to Annapolis. Let's just say that God's will was a college. That means that you're listening to two men teach you who are outside the will of God because we don't wear the right ring. You see how ludicrous that is? You see, there's freedom in Christ. All things are lawful. West Point is lawful. We just knew it would be more profitable to go Navy. {LAUGHTER} We had naval operations.

My point is this, guys, the critical issue for us as men is what is God doing in my life, and then you want to make your decisions profitable, that are cooperative with that direction and movement in your life. That's not something you're going to discover by yourself. You need to be in the fellowship of other believers. You need to be in the church. You need to be studying the Scripture. You need to be praying. You need to be trusting the work of the Holy Spirit in your life to guide you. Get some counsel. Find out what the Lord's doing in my life and then begin to make your decisions based upon I'm going to cooperate with that. That's what Paul means when he says, "You've got the freedom to do this." But if it's not going to be profitable, to help you move in the direction of what God's doing in your life, don't do it. You've got the freedom to say no.

*Ted: Bruce, could you go through those five "S's"?*

Six "S's."

*Ted: Six. I'm sorry. [UNCLEAR] once again more slowly. [UNCLEAR]...*

These are the differences between what I'm calling the secret things of God. Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to God." There's a lot of stuff that you and I just don't know. We frustrate ourselves because we're always looking for the dot. I'm looking for *the* job. I'm looking for *the* house. I'm looking for *the* position. I'm looking for *the* car. You can buy any car you want. You have the freedom in Christ. But not all cars are going to be profitable for you. If you're going to tremendously in debt by buying a Maserati, you have the freedom to do that, but it's not going to be profitable for the rest of your life to be in debt by having a Maserati. So you go by a Volkswagen. You see, there's freedom there. But there are limitations to your freedom. You've got to understand the bigger picture of what God is doing

in your life. So you make those decisions.

Now here are the six things, that as I look at the Scripture that is you and I will be found in God's will. If you want, I'll bring you the verses next week. I don't think I've got them with me. First of all, that you're saved; that you have a saving relationship with Christ. That's being found in his will. You're in his will. You're saved.

Secondly is you're spirit-filled. You're being led by the spirit. This does not mean a second blessing. It doesn't mean that you've been baptized here and then you're baptized with a second blessing. It means that you're being kept filled, it means by you're being led constantly, progressively, moment by moment by the Holy Spirit. You're spirit-filled. You're spirit led.

Thirdly is you're submissive—submissive to the Lordship of Christ in your life. He is my King. Now I submit myself to the kingly world of the Kingdom of God and I submit myself to that.

You're saved. You're spirit-filled. You're submissive. You're sanctified. Sanctified means you're set apart for a specific purpose. That's for the glory of God. That's what sanctification means. You now are being set apart for something unique. Do you view yourself that way? Are you found in that? Do you understand that?

Saved. Spirit-filled. Submissive. Sanctified. Next is suffering. Those who are faithful in Christ Jesus who desire to live a holy life will suffer persecution. Do you realize that suffering is part of God's will? How often times do we want to lose a job because I'm suffering at work; God doesn't want me here anymore? Oh really? Based upon what? You see, so many times I hear somebody say, "The Lord's leading me to a different job." "Why is that?" "Because I don't like my boss." "Well did you ever think that being a sanctified, saved, submissive, spirit-filled, led person that you should be right that because that's the means by which God is going to do something in your life for the glory of God and the Kingdom of God?" You see, suffering is part of God's will. Peter talks about that several times. You suffer. It's better to suffer for the kingdom. So don't try to avoid suffering by thinking it's not part of God's will. It may be.

Lastly, saying thanks. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In all things give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

All those verses have the phrase or the thought behind it—God's will in Christ Jesus. That's why I say those are revealed wills of God. That means this, brothers. That God's will for you and God's will for me is identically the same. It's those six things. That I'm saved, that I'm submissive, that I'm spirit-filled, that I'm sanctified, that I'm suffering, that I'm saying thanks. That's what you want to be found "in." You ask yourself the question, am I "in" this? When you are "n" "that, you're going to find out what the "out's" are. What we do is we forget all that other stuff about the revealed will of God and we start looking for the "it."

Another ludicrous example. Let's just say that the Lord wanted me to wear brown socks today. I've got black ones on. That means you're listening to a man who's outside the will of God because I'm not wearing the right color socks. You see how that works? Where should my son go to college? Honestly, it doesn't make any difference. The issue where will they be found. Should they go to Geneva or Penn State? Well it doesn't make any difference in the big picture. The real issue is if you can't be holy and give thanks, don't go to Penn State. If you need to be holy and give thanks better at Geneva, go to Geneva, because you'll be found "in" God's will. God's will is being holy and giving thanks, not Penn State or Geneva.



You see, often times, we're looking for the trying to find out God's will. Brothers, there's great freedom there's great joy, there's great power, when you realize that I'm found "in" God's will. That's what you want to do every day. Am I in God's will today? The rest will take care of it itself.

***Don:** Bruce, I always think this comes back to a misunderstanding of what obedience means, because we want to obey rules rather than the Lord. When you're talking [UNCLEAR], I always think of Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, becoming like him death." That's Paul's goal. That should be our goal, not my socks or school or church or whatever.*

You see, the whole goal of Christian growth is maturity.

***Audience Member:** Two things. One is the charismatic movement has really caused a lot of [UNCLEAR] because they're constantly looking at is God speaking to me or God doing [UNCLEAR] caution there. The second thing is looking at Romans 14 where it talks about the weak and the strong, accepting those [UNCLEAR] without passing judgment. If we're to bring up fellow believers and help them be more grounded, how do we convict them without passing judgment? Is this just sharing Scripture and allowing the Holy Spirit to do that?*

First of all, you can't change anybody. Neither can I. So get over that. We always think I'm going to go here because I'm going to change something. You can't change a thing. I would love for one politician to never use the word change because they say, "Vote for me, I'm going to change Washington." That's ludicrous. Nobody's going to change Washington at all. You can reform, but you can't change. We vote for people because we want change. Did he change anything? No. He can't! Yet we vote for people because "he's a change agent." Well brothers, you and I can't change a thing.

First of all, we can't convict anybody. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to convict, convince, convert and comfort. We can't convict anybody of anything. The least thing I can do is take a blind person and teach them how to believe. I can't do that. All I can do is expose them to the Scripture because it is the Scripture that's going to bring life into people. It's the power of the supernatural of conversion. We need to stick with the Scripture to let that be the agent. It is the Holy Spirit that is the convicting agent, not me.

We can go in freely and let the Scripture do its work and not judge people. We take them and say, "Compare yourself to the Scripture." I'm not going to compare you to what I think you ought to be. Compare ourselves to the Scripture. Let the Holy Spirit do his work. The Holy Spirit is the convicting agent, he's the convincing agent, he's the converting agent, and he's the comforting agent—four things that you and I cannot do. The greatest thing we have is I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it is the power unto salvation to all who believe. Our greatest weapon, guys, is the Scripture. Let it do its work, so you can go freely without judgment. Just let the Scripture do its work. Trust the providence of God. Do the best you can and trust Christ with the rest.

***Ted:** Hence the importance of teaching the Scripture.*

Amen. That's what Bishop Rogers taught us months ago about biblical theology. That's why I'm saying when you start a men's study, start with the 39 Articles. Use that book. You know it's going to be grounded in the Scripture. That's what you want. Let it be the resource for you. Does that help? Got you?

Let's continue just quickly here, and continue at 1 Corinthians. The second principle is this, "All things are lawful, but I will not be mastered by anything." This is what I call the principle of personal authority.

You have the freedom to do a lot of things, but you've got to make sure you only have one Master but the Scripture says you can't serve two masters. That means this. Yes, you are free to pursue a career. You have the freedom to do that. But your career can't master you. Yes, you have the freedom to play golf, but recreation and entertainment can't master you. Yes, you're free to pursue wealth, but wealth can't master you. You see, the point here is you've got a lot freedom to do a lot of things, but you've got to make sure that none of those things that you're pursuing gain mastery over you. It means to control the decisions of your mind. It means to regulate the reason of your thought processes. That's what control means; to regulate the reason of your thought processes. You can't have a career regulating the reason of your thought processes to teach you how to make your decisions. That comes because of your commitment to Christ to be found in his will. So yes, you have the freedom to pursue a career, but you've got to make sure that career does not form the reason of the decisions in your mind. Christ alone does that.

There's one more. 1 Corinthians 10:23. He repeats the first one again, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable." Why do you think he says that twice? Because it's important. He's repeating it. He's saying, "The most important decision you ever make is, "Is what I'm doing cooperating with what God's doing." Is it profitable for that? That's why he says it twice.

Then he adds another one, "All things are lawful, but not all things edify." The word "edify" means to build up or encourage. It means this—you have the freedom to do a lot of things in your life, but you've got to be careful that all the decisions you make may not be edifying to somebody else, encouraging to them, building them up. It doesn't mean that you become a slave to their expectations or their presuppositions at what you should do or be. It doesn't mean you become a slave to other people's expectations. It does mean this—as a member of the body of Christ, I do have a responsibility for your well-being to some degree, and that means I have the freedom to do this, but I'm going to choose not to do it because a brother or sister who may be weaker in their faith, it may be a stumbling block. Therefore, I'm going to say thanks, but no thanks.

You see, there is a responsibility of the one another commands, which we're going to talk about in a couple of weeks, about how my decisions impact you and how your decisions impact me. Again, we are not at the mercy of people's expectations, but there is a responsibility we have as members of the family of God in how we make our decisions and the impact it makes upon other people. You see, that's what I call the principle of personal relationships. The principle of personal responsibility, or profitability, personal progress, personal authority and personal relationships with other people. Wonderful counsel there on how to make decisions.

When you're working with men, you want them to understand how you make your decisions based upon the Scripture. I would take them to those three verses and say, "Let me show you how I'm trying to work on these things. Not that I've perfected them, but here's part of my thought process. This is how I reason in the front of my mind before I make decisions. Is it going to help me cooperate with what God is doing in my life?" You see, you start there. Is it going to interfere with who's the master of my life? And what's the potential impact upon the body of Christ? Three great principles of decision making right there. Help men understand that.

***Audience Member:** In verse 24, "nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others," [UNCLEAR] ...by you teaching this, what that really allows us to do is stop thinking of ourselves [UNCLEAR] mindset and stop the selfish pride and really focus on [UNCLEAR]...*

Amen. Do not think more highly of yourselves than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment.

**Audience Member:** *I think that what you just taught us is an example in churches is whether it is wine or grape juice at communion.*

**Ted:** *Wait a second.*

We'll move on, off of that.

**Audience Member:** *We'll continue that later.*

We'll move off of that.

**Ted:** *I was going to say, we can say this is the way we should be, but I think we underestimate how contrary to our flesh this is.*

Absolutely.

**Ted:** *What we're talking about is so impossible, humanly speaking, as [UNCLEAR] supernatural realm.*

Amen. I want to read you a verse that's going to play off that because I was just thinking that same thought, Ted. Guys, this is countercultural. It's not according to our human nature. We don't want to do what I just said the Scripture says we need to do. We don't want to do that. That's where we are so absolutely dependent upon the grace of God, because apart of from that, you can do nothing. Apart from me you can do nothing. You've got to realize it starts right there.

Let me just show you 1 Thessalonians 5. I find great encouragement—I came across this the other day—in my own weakness because I was just saying, man, I'm such a failure in doing what I teach.

**Audience Member:** *[UNCLEAR] {LAUGHTER}*

I was looking for some encouragement (I don't look for Ted) {LAUGHTER}.

**Ted:** *Find your encouragement.*

That's right. Not in Ted. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, <sup>23</sup>“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely.” The word “sanctify” means to set apart. Notice “may the God of peace himself,” very personally, set you apart, “sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now notice this, <sup>24</sup>“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.” He'll do it! “Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.” Guys there's our encouragement. Yes, you know, this is absolutely impossible apart from the grace of God, but faithful; faithful is the one who called you into a saving relationship, into a submissive relationship, into a sanctified relationship, into a suffering relationship, into a thankful relationship. You see, faithful is He who called you. That's why it's so important, brothers, that you and I don't look to find “out” what God's will is; we say am I “in” God's will, and faithful is he who calls you, and he will do it. He'll do it.

**Audience Member:** *What you said earlier, Bruce, ties into this about, and of course, Ted's encouraging, where you said this is humanly impossible. The biggest thing, I think for me, is asking other men's counsel.*

Absolutely.

***Audience Member:** And maybe that's why men's groups became popular because we really didn't want to go to our girlfriends or wives or women in our, you know, did that open up a can of worms sometimes, but to go to another man and ask for his help is very vulnerable and scary.*

That's why it's so important, brothers, that you and I take what the Lord's giving us here on Friday morning and say, "Lord, how can I give that away back to my church with a group of men?" Only start with a couple of guys. You can go through the litany of these other issues here related to how you develop a men's study and you can read the outline there. I won't have time to go through it today. But you could just take that as a skeleton approach. But just get them in front of the Scripture. If you need a source, I would suggest, the best thing you could start with in a men's study, is start with the 39 Articles by Bishop Rogers. Just start with that book because it's going to keep you into a biblically theologically mindset of reason, and that's the critical issue.

Guys, there are tremendous resources in this room. We just need to count on each other. Be dependent upon each other. Come and ask each other advice. Go have coffee with one another. Develop friendships with each other. The degree to which we relate to one another in this room will be the degree to which we will be effective in our own churches. If the Lord is doing anything, perhaps he's creating a group of men right in this little room who can go and become salt and light in their own churches. Remember, you're not going to go change your church. That's not the reason you go. You can't do that. All you want to do is you want to expose men to the Scripture and expose them to your life, to your frailties, to your successes, to your frustrations, to your joys, and let them see this. The one who called you is faithful, and he will do it. He will do it.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that you take the pressure off of us and put it on yourself. You alone are the only one who can make this possible. The things we've talked about today, Father, are not part of our human nature, and that's why you remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh that is now sensitive to spiritual things, and you've put us in an absolute dependency relationship upon you and your Holy Spirit. Father, sanctify us by the truth. Sanctify us by your Word. Set us apart to be the means by which people will see that the local church is really a group of healthy men attempting to let the character of Christ as revealed in the Scripture be manifested in their own lives. Father, we just trust the fact that it's not our abilities, that it's your faithfulness that will make the difference, and because you have called us, we will know that you will do it because you're faithful, and may it be so for Christ's sake. All the Brave Men said...Amen!