

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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There is only one foundation of the church, Lord Jesus, and that is you yourself. We just thank you that you are the one who called us to worship you. You are the one who saved us so that we could worship you. We just pray, Lord, that you are the one who would guide us in our worship of you. We thank you that you are the foundation and there's no other cornerstone on which the church is laid. Father, we just pray that you would cleanse us of all those things that are offensive to you this day. Make us worthy vessels to sit at your feet, that your Holy Spirit might fulfill his job description again, and that is to guide us into all truth, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well we finished up, and I want to thank Carl, last week, for his wonderful teaching on the difference between church growth and church expansion. If you recall, church growth is depth in our knowledge of the person and work of Christ, and expansion is the addition of new members or the expanding of the church. We need to be very, very clear in understanding the difference between church growth and church expansion. Unfortunately, there's a whole movement called church growth and it all has to do with expansion.

Carl did an excellent job helping us to discern the difference between two. We can be advocates of both, certainly, and need to be. But in my judgment, the way the church expands is because of church growth. The deeper we go in our roots and God's grace, the branches of the tree will expand. So many churches are really a mile wide and an Christ deep. We need to be a mile deep and a mile wide. The only way that happens is we understand the difference between church growth and church expansion.

We really finished up our series on the Function and Formation of the Church. As we talked about months ago, learning should not lead to knowledge. It shouldn't stop at knowledge. Learning should lead to living. Living should lead to loving. In other words, that which we've learned about the church, we need to be able to apply to our lives.

The real question we ask ourselves, hopefully every Friday morning after we leave is this—what am I going to do about what I just learned. What am I going to do about what I just learned? That's why you've heard me say over these many years together that when you're in a group Bible study, you don't want to ask the question, "What does it mean to you?" It doesn't mean anything to you. The only one to whom it means any difference is God himself. He's the author of this. So we need to ask ourselves the real question, "What am I going to do about what I've learned," rather than just our saying, "What does it mean to me?" Quite honestly, what it means to you is irrelevant. The real issue is how are you applying that to your life?

What we want to do today is give you the opportunity to have some questions. Perhaps you've had some questions of some of the brothers who've been teaching us over the last year on the whole function and formation of the church, so that we can make some applications and help you really grasp the issues of applying the truths that we've learned about the function and formation of the church. Just let me give you a quick review that might trigger some of the questions you might have.

Our outline of our study really followed a sequence of looking at the essential ingredients of a healthy church. We said that there were three essential ingredients, and the first one was expository preaching. That is how we are taught. We are taught through the Scripture, verse by verse. There's much more to expository teaching than just following verse by verse. It really is the pastor asks the question, "Why are you saying what you're saying?" That's expository preaching. Why are you saying what you're saying? In other words where did you get your text? Where did you get your information? The number one

essential ingredient is expository preaching.

The second essential ingredient that we looked at was biblical theology. That is what we are taught. Expository teaching deals with how we are taught; biblical theology deals with what we are taught. Are we teaching the God of human imagination or the God of biblical revelation? That's biblical theology.

The third essential ingredient we said was an indicator of a healthy church was a biblical gospel—a God-centered versus a man-centered Gospel. We spent a lot of time on the difference between a Gospel that is oriented toward man and his needs or a Gospel that is oriented from God and his glory. It's critical for a healthy church to understand the difference between a biblical gospel and one that is synthetic.

Then we looked at some other important marks. We looked at the biblical understanding of conversion. Conversion is a work of grace. We looked at the biblical view of evangelism. It is authentic or is it synthetic? Is it something that people do or is it something that God does in their evangelistic efforts? So we spent some time on that.

We looked at a biblical understanding of church leadership—the mature under-shepherds that God qualifies. We looked the role of elders and deacons and who qualifies them. Remember that we don't vote for them, we identify them because the church does not pick elders; God qualifies elders and we recognize who they are based upon the 28 characteristics of a biblical qualified leader. What are those? We contrasted that with the typical leadership style the world offers versus that which God qualifies.

Then we looked at a biblical view of membership. Why membership? What is membership? What are the responsibilities of membership? We spent some time on that.

Then we looked at a biblical view of church discipline, looking at the keys to the kingdom, which are three. As Bishop Rogers taught us, the three key to the kingdom are the ordinance or the Lord's Supper, baptism and church discipline. Those the three keys to the kingdom.

We looked at the value and the necessity of church discipline as it related to the one another commands. Remember church discipline, as we looked at it in Matthew 18, is the last resort, but it is a resort. It's not something that you avoid; it's something that you try to prevent from happening by having good, biblical instruction and all those other things.

All the one another commands we looked really are steps to avoid and prevent us from having to do church discipline, but there may be a time when we do that. When you look at the one another commands, it's our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response to one another, and our restoration of one another. Sometimes it is necessary to restore a sinning brother or sister through biblical church discipline. That's a critical ingredient of a church.

I think I told you that I was candidating for a church in Kansas years ago. One of the leaders who happened to be a mediator for the unions in Kansas City said that he would never be involved in a church that exercised church discipline because it should be mediation, not discipline. Well right away, he just eliminated one of the three keys to the kingdom, so that was not necessarily a church that I was interested in serving, and of course, they didn't end up picking me anyway because I had told them that I believed in church discipline. We had a very good lunch together and that was about it. Pastor Rogers gave us a very good understanding of the history of biblical church discipline, how it applies in the restoration process of a sinning member of the church.

Last week, Carl took us through a good understanding of the difference between church growth and

church expansion and how important it is that we understand the two disciplines of that.

What I'd like to do first of all is give you just a quick outline on why it is important to attend church. Let me ask the first question. As we said, we're going to let you ask some questions today of myself or some of the other brothers who are teaching. Perhaps we can make some applications of what we've been learning about the local church.

Why should you attend church? Do you realize the latest statistics say that 1 out of 8 born again believers in America do not attend church? Forty-seven percent of church members do not attend church in the USA. They are members on a role, but they don't attend church. Forty-seven percent of the people who are on membership roles in the churches of the United States don't go to church. What does that say, not only about them, but what does that say about us as a culture? What does that say about our understanding of the church? That's why we wanted to have this series on the function and formation of the church.

The first question is why should we go to church?

Jay: *I just wanted to say my first thought was Jesus loves the church. He laid his life down for her. Whenever I say her, I know there's another Scripture, so I just, if I'm wrong in saying her, please correct me.*

Jesus is referred to as the Bride of Christ, so there's nothing wrong with that. That's absolutely accurate. Christ loved the church. Therefore if we love Christ, we're going to love what he loves. Correct? That seems rather logical.

Audience Member: *Scripture also say do not forsake assembling together.*

Right. Do not forsake the assembling of the saints. Why? Iron sharpens iron. Absolutely. There are many reasons why we should attend a church.

Audience Member: *We actually commit adultery if we [UNCLEAR] the church, if we don't participate with it, because if we're the bride of Christ, and then we leave the church, we're actually leaving Christ.*

It would be like desertion. We're deserting the bride of Christ.

Audience Member: *And if we take another idol on, then we're, that would be the adultery.*

Let me give you a quick review about several different things dealing why we should attend church, and then we'll entertain your questions. I'm just going to give this quickly. If you want this written up, I can give it to Sig and we can publish it, but it's not just something we're going to teach today, but just to prime your thinking for your questions.

It's a command required of all believers that we do not avoid the assembling of the saints. First of all, it's a command. Secondly, it prevents backsliding and apostasy by attending church. Thirdly, it produces spiritual fellowship and encouragement. Fourthly, it expresses obedience to the great commandment. Fifthly, it reveals support of God's work worldwide. It helps us realize that we're not an isolated island in this world system, that we're part of something bigger, the worldwide church, the catholic church, the small "c," the universal church. By attending church, as we pray for our brothers and sisters and as we look at the Lord's prayer, remember the Lord's Prayer is "Our Father," not my father. As we attend church, it helps us understand that we're involved in something worldwide, just not local.

It enables us to hear in person the preaching of God's Word. It allows us to hear in person the preaching of God's Word, the doctrines of grace. It follows Jesus' example. It allows us to take the Lord's Supper and participate in the height of our communion together. The height of intimacy in the fellowship of the church is observing the Lord's Supper. It enables us to experience spiritual blessings from God because we're mutually encouraged by one another. It helps prevent an unbalanced Christian life—another reason for us to attend church.

It reveals an indication of eternal life. It doesn't earn us eternal life, but it's an indication of our having received eternal life because we love that which Jesus loves and we are in fellowship with him. And the not going is one indication of not being in God's family. Now I'm not saying that that earns your salvation at all, but I'm saying those who do not attend church, you've got to ask the question, "Why don't they?" when you really understand that the church is the bride of Christ. Those are just some reasons that I would throw out for why we need to attend church.

Don: *Just one more thing, Bruce. the reason that people who claim to be born again Christians don't attend church is we live in a culture of individualism. Me and Jesus. They don't see the corporate nature of the bride of Christ that is all through the New Testament. Yes, it's certainly important to have an individual relationship with Christ, but Christ died and gave his life for his bride, the church. People, we live in this individualistic time of society we it's just me and my, me, myself and I, the unholy trinity.*

Yeah, amen to that. That's a good insight. When you are reborn, you are born into a family; you're not born into an individual relationship.

Audience Member: *Family duties.*

Family duties. That's the one another commands we talked about. There are responsibilities that we have. When you're reborn, you're born into a family.

Audience Member: *I think one of the things we overlook is that the Holy Spirit gives us all spiritual gifts, but they are for the common good, they're for the edification and the building up of the body, and that's where you do that is through the church. If you don't come together, it's not for me to get something; it's for me to give something.*

Remember our study on spiritual gifts? Spiritual gift motivations? The gifts are for the benefit of the church, not for the benefit of your reputation. They're really for the benefit of the church. Where are you going to discern your spiritual gift? You're not going to discern it individually. You don't discern your spiritual gift in a vacuum. You discern that in the context of the local church. The gift is for the benefit of the family, therefore, the family should recognize that you have this gift or not have it, and they should affirm or deny it. Often times you hear somebody say, "Well God has called me to preach." Based upon what? What's the old saying? Few went but many are sent. A lot of people go, but some of them are never really chosen to go to that. You discern your spiritual gift in the context of a family. That's one of our family relationships.

Bob *I think it's fair to say, too, that it sets an example for our children. It helps to lay a spiritual foundation for them.*

Amen to that. We need to take a look at our children and their perspective of the church and the body of Christ. Where are they going to learn it? They're going to learn that from us. I can say that I owe that to my mother and father. I came to saving father through the doctrines of grace through my parents. I didn't have any miracle conversion. The angels weren't bounding off the walls at my conversion. I just grew up in a family where I saw that Jesus was loved and was the priority of the family. I grew up in

that. The Lord was pleased, when I was in Jr. High, when I was reading Romans 5, and the read the verse that says, “If in fact when we were God’s enemy, God died for us,” I didn’t want to be an enemy. I talked to my father about that. I had the freedom to go to my dad and I was very, very grateful that my dad had the courage when I asked him the question, “Dad, am I God’s enemy,” and he said yes. He said, “Yes, you are. In your unregenerate state, you’re God’s enemy.” I said, “Dad, I don’t want to be one.” I had the context of a Christian family that I had the freedom to go to my father and ask him that. My father is no longer with us, but I’m very, very grateful that he had the courage to give me the right answer because it was in that context of my Christian family that I was able to discuss those things. My dad was pleased then to take me down to my pastor and he introduced me to the doctrines of grace, and I understood what it meant to come to saving faith because I was no longer an enemy.

It’s very, very critical. Bob’s got a great point. You see, what we do now at our level will set the stage for our children.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, that’s the reason why the Bible does tell us, it says, “Live for your children’s inheritance.” Well thought inheritance is not about just money; it’s about God’s spirit, it’s about the God in you.*

Amen.

***Audience Member:** What did Paul tell us? He said, “Be ye followers of me as I am following Christ.” He said, “as Christ is the head, then you follow Christ.”*

Amen. We have a responsibility to pass this on to the next generation. When you look at it biblically, one of the reasons God gives children to families is to preserve a holy race of people. How is that holy race of people preserved? It’s by the local church and how we get them involved in a biblically oriented church that really is teaching biblical theology. That is the means by which God in his sovereign grace has ordained us to preserve a holy race of people. Certainly, we have children for the sake of our joy, but there’s something bigger than that, and that is to preserve a holy race of people.

***Brian:** The church also helps us in two other areas. One, for protection, and two, the practice of submission. You really get to practice submission every week when we go to church and have to interact with folks. It really helps you in all those different areas. I couldn’t see outside of the church where you’d be able to practice that.*

Amen. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 9? Somebody always asks me, “What’s a disciple of Christ?” Well somebody who’s gone through the ten steps of this or the 12 steps of that and knows so many Bible verses? Those thing can be very helpful, but let Jesus define what a disciple is. He says, “If you want to come after me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow me.” He’s basically saying three things. Here’s what a disciple is. It’s a person who is growing in the understanding of three character qualities—self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission.

You must deny yourself. Learning self-denial. That’s discipleship. You’re learning to deny yourself. Take up your cross daily. That’s self-sacrifice. In the context of that verse of what Jesus meant in his culture, that meant might be the sacrifice of your life. It might be giving your whole life. So there may be the possibility a follower of Christ may give his or her life. We need to develop the character quality of self-denial, self-sacrifice and the last one is self-submission. Follow me. That’s the one that is most difficult for us in the Western culture because of our individualism. Our individuality says that it’s me and Jesus; that’s all I need. Well, that’s nice theory, but not good, sound theology because it’s really I need you and you need me and I need to submit to that. One of the ways in which we do that is submit to our elders.

What is one of the responsibilities of church leadership? It's to be in a position that somebody would want to follow you. What is one of the responsibilities of church membership? Submit to your elders. When you're looking at a church to join, one of the questions you have to ask is, "Can I submit to the leadership?" If you can't, don't join, because you've violated your number one responsibility besides showing up. You show up as a church member, and the second thing is obey your leaders. Can you obey them? Do you know what they teach? Do you know who they are? Do you know the quality of their life? Do you know their character? Do you know their history? What's the story of the church? What do they teach? What do you hear from the pulpit? Those are things that we need to explore when you're looking at a church. You just don't go find it because it's some social club. Your primary responsibility is to show up and to obey the leaders. That's submission. We need to understand that a disciple is three things—self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission.

Audience Member: *Don brought up people outside the church who think it's just me and Jesus. I think that's the biggest problem in the church.*

Yeah. Bill's point is that much of the problem of the church in America is we think it's just me and Jesus. How many times have you heard somebody say, "Well I don't need to go to church. I have a relationship with Jesus on my own." That's unique in the New Testament revelation because you don't ever see a person who is converted to Christ who is not involved with some fellowship experience known as the church. We have to be careful that people in our individual American way just say it's just me and Jesus. We got to be careful of that.

Audience Member: *I'm saying that's the problem in the church.*

Yes. I'm saying in the church.

Audience Member: *People are like that. That's why it's not self-sacrifice.*

That's why you only have 47% of church members attending, because it's me and Jesus. Yeah, I agree.

Audience Member: *Let's probe the concept you were talking about of biblical revelation versus human...*

Right. It boils down to those basic elements. Expository preaching, biblical theology and a biblical gospel. You see, when those three things are not prevalent in a church and predominant, all the other things we talked about are going to go down the hill. All the other things—church membership, church discipline, conversion, worship. All those things are going to go down the hill when those first three essential ingredients, which are expository preaching (how we are taught), biblical theology (what we are taught) and the biblical gospel (the difference between the God of biblical revelation and the God of human imagination). Those are the three essentials of the church. When you're looking for a church, you've got to look for those three things.

Audience Member: *Everything you just said, when you apply that to today, because of only 47% being active biblical members, that's why there's even a discussion about contraceptives and this Obama Care thing, because if you create a vacuum, something's going to fill it, and that vacuum is being created because of biblically minded people are backing away, unfortunately, but there's still a remnant that will stand. But that's why we could have...I said to my wife yesterday, listening to this mess on TV, I said, "You want to know why Christ is coming sooner than you think he is?" and I don't know when he's coming, but I know he's coming—Hallelujah!—because this kind of a mess that even, we can even discuss that in Western culture! Come on!*

You know, sometimes when I don't know what to pray, the one thing I just say is, "Come Lord Jesus." When I run out of things to say, I say, "Come Lord Jesus."

Audience Member: *Bruce, I think a lot of people think of church as a service they attend, like going to a doctor, you know, get a little help for the week, but not as a community of which they're a part.*

Amen. It's not something you attend; it's a community in which you're involved. Great insight. Thank you.

Audience Member: *You told us what a healthy church looks like and what it should look like, but I think that a lot of times, we go into churches and maybe we're a member of a church where it's not exactly where it ought to be. Could you speak a little bit to as a member, when is the time to cut and run, and when is the time that we could still be a part of the solution for that church?*

This is not a copout. But I can't be your Holy Spirit. That's something that you and the Holy Spirit have to wrestle with, as you go to the Scripture, as you seek your own conscience. You look at yourself, "Have I fulfilled my responsibilities. Have I done what I need to do?" I can't answer that and give you a when and a how to. All I can say is that is something that you must be obedient to the Holy Spirit in the depths of your own soul and conscience. There are certain things that one can do. Certainly you go talk to the leadership. You do that with reverence and respect. You ask them questions. But I can't tell you how to do that or when to do that. We've got to be very, very careful that don't try to be somebody else's Holy Spirit. Now that's not a copout, brothers. Please understand. That's not a copout.

Often times we start thinking and telling people what they should be doing, and that can be very, very erroneous. But I'm open to some of your comments. Bishop Rogers, you want to help us with that question please.

Bishop Rogers: *I think your...one of the brothers rightly accused me of being flip when I said change, you know, that's, I think of the call of Isaiah, "You will preach and they not hear you."*

They'll not listen to you.

Bishop Rogers: *There are all kinds of vocations that you're right...that's not a one size fits all. I think your frequent reference that we hold, try to bring people to an awareness of the biblical material, the biblical Word, and that's all you can really do. You can't make them hear it, but you can share it.*

We need to understand are we basing our convictions upon the sufficiency of Scripture? That's the real battleground. It's the sufficiency of Scripture. There are things that one could do. I mean, sometimes you're going to have come to a point of realizing that change does not occur unless the other side is willing to listen. If there's no ability to want to listen, to get into dialogue about that which is true and that which is sufficient from the Scripture, then you're never going to bring about change.

First of all, you can't change anything. Your being in the church is not going to change anything. The only thing that's going to change is the preaching of the Word. Now if that's not happening in the environment of which you're worshiping, then you've got to realize my presence is not going to change anything.

I had a situation the other day where a family came to me and just wanted some advice. It had to do with someone who is living in sin, was coming to their home. Well, I'll just be honest. It was two young homosexuals. Two young men were coming into this family. The family wanted to know where should

we have them sleep because their guest room is a double bed. What should we do? I said, “What do you think you should do?” The response was this, “Well I think we need to show that Jesus is loving and let them stay here.” I said, “You never witness for Christ by violating a standard.” You never lower the standard to witness for Christ. You never do that. Her comment was, “Well I think I can witness to them by showing that we’re tolerant, we’re acceptive, because they think that all Christians are narrow minded.” I said, “You’ve got to realize this. You never witness for Christ by lowering the standard.”

Now I don’t know what they did because I left that up to them. All I would wanted to say was you never witness for Christ by lowering the standard and thinking that tolerance is going to win the day. You’re never going to change anything unless there’s receptivity. The one thing that we have to realize, brothers, is we can’t change a thing. Only God can do that. You do that by the preaching of the Word. You take them to the biblical revelation. Let the Holy Spirit do his work. His work is four-fold. It is to convince them, it is to convert them, it is to convict them, and it is to comfort them after their salvation, if he leads them to grace. But you have to let the Holy Spirit do his work. Our greatest weapon is the Scripture. Just don’t compromise that, and the Holy Spirit will do his work.

Tom: *I think a lot of this goes back to your diagram of think-feel-act. A lot of people, it’s how they feel. They don’t go on what is God’s truth. We have all these mistakes we make because it’s not against, I mean, it goes against what God really has.*

Don: *I think, Bruce, what you said before about not being your Holy Spirit was very, very wise. I would say, I know that I would start seriously considering running if my church started teaching heresies concerning the deity of Christ or like what you pointed out a couple of minutes ago as far as the lifestyle of permitting or ordaining pastors that would engage in lifestyles that are clearly unbiblical, that kind of thing.*

Absolutely. Right.

Dean: *I guess what I’m asking for is your permission to add a word in front of think-act-feel. I’d like to put pray in front of it.*

Audience Member: *Amen.*

You can’t think right without praying first.

Audience Member: *Amen.*

No question about that. So you have my permission. {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: *That’s not enough. You have to put Word in front of it. Well that’s a given. If the Bible isn’t in it, it’s garbage.*

No. Prayer is a critical ingredient in everything that we do. Before you do anything, you must pray. You need the discernment. You see, the great fallacy of the American church in my judgment is the church lacks discernment. And why is that? It’s because we’re not a praying church. We really need to pray that God will give us the discernment to know how to think correctly, act correctly and then feel the consequences.

Bill: *I think the question that was floated up, and I forget which brother asked the question, but it’s not unique to our time. We need to understand this is not a question unique to America today. Christians have been dealing with this question for centuries. Take a look at Paul’s instructions to the churches in*

his epistles. These were issues that there have been questions with regard to church structure since the beginning of the church. Number one, my brothers, we're not alone.

Amen to that.

Bill: *Number two, you need to also understand Bruce's earlier teaching that we are possibly salt and light within the situations we're in, and maybe our whole presence there is to retard; maybe not to cure, but to retard.*

Sure.

Bill: *I think as you go through these processes and question what your role and responsibility is, maybe if you're not in a role of leadership, maybe if your family is not necessarily being negatively affected by the situation, maybe your role there is to be the salt and light within the community and a prayer base to persevere and to be the prayer warrior to say, "Come Jesus now" there. That's my comment that as you're going through that, maybe you're looking for your spiritual direction and feeding and biblical instruction in a circle that's somewhere outside that group while you're praying for that group, and I say that respectfully.*

That's wise counsel. That's good advice. I would also that this. In dealing with that question, seek the counsel of mature brothers. Get advice. Don't act in a vacuum. Your part of a family, and brothers, there's great, tremendous, spiritual insight and spiritual giftedness in this room alone. You look at the power of the church of God in this room, just through you men, and you brothers, who've been here year after year after year just gathering together to sit at the feet of the One who's teaching us. There's tremendous wisdom here.

So I would say that when you have a decision to make like that and you realize that I can't be your Holy Spirit, and no one else can, seek the counsel of many brothers. There's wisdom and there's power in that because you're part of a family, and you weren't designed to make that decision by yourself. You were designed to have the resources of the family of God around you help you discern that.

Bill's point is excellent. It might be that you need to be salt and light. Salt slows down corruption. Light exposes sin. Maybe that's your role. It doesn't mean you'll change anything. But for a season, at least, there is somebody holding up the standard of conviction rather than convenience. I can't tell you if that's what your role is or not. That's what you have to discern. But I would say this. In the counsel of many brothers, you can discern that more quickly and more safely than you could just doing it on your own. So seek the counsel of brothers.

Audience Member: *You pointed out that your Father was the spiritual head of your family. That's a biblical model of the father being the spiritual head of the family. Don't you think that...your statistics that you're quoting are part of what has happened in that's country, that there are 50% single parent families without fathers.*

Well no question. That's a tremendous impact because we've violated the standard...we've confused the difference between morals and ethics. Morals comes from the Greek word "mores," and it means "ever changing." It literally means this. It's going to change. So we, in the body of Christ, should not talk about Christian morals because what has happened? They've changed over the last 50 years. Look at 50 years ago compared to now. Look at 50 years down the road compared to now. The morals in Christianity are going to change because of the winds of society and because of the loss of the commitment of the sufficiency of Scripture.

But when you talk about ethics, ethics really talks about the idea of stability and security. It's something like a plumb line that you go back to the same point. The reason you have a plumb line in building a building is you want a strong edifice. You want the building to be secure. You want it to be stable. So you always go back to the same measuring point. The Scripture is our "ethos," and that becomes the measuring rod by which we go back. Every time we move away from that Christian ethos, our ethics, we then begin to weaken the structure of the church. We need to understand the difference between Christian morals and Christian ethics. That's why in my leadership series I don't talk about morality. I talk about ethics. Because you and I have a standard. And the problem is this. When imagination and reality merge, cultures are changed. When imagination and reality conflict, and cross, then cultures change, because somebody has an imagination. They see something on TV...just a classic example.

In recent studies, they've indicated that all this violence on TV, some of these school shootings that we see rampant across the country, somebody's imagined this in their mind and they've got a gun, and the imagination of what they have seen and developed in their mind focuses with reality and they go shoot somebody. Cultures are changed.

When imagination and reality intersect, our cultures are changed. We need to realize that we need to go back to our convictions, not a convenience, and have our imagination shaped by conviction, rather than having it shaped by convenience or just our imagination.

When you imagine things, and you're fed by this mass media, all those things begin to create imaginations in us, and when that becomes reality, your cultures change. We need to realize that the same thing happens in the church through our conviction of a biblical ethic.

***Audience Member:** A frightening statement that was made at a seminar I heard a couple of months ago underline your point. If you look at all of the devices that were used in some of the shootings—Columbine shooting, some of those—I can't remember what year he said, but they were all available to anyone under 18, 50 or 60 years ago through mail order. So it wasn't the availability of the weapons that caused these things. Something else changed. And that's the scary part to me. They're blaming the device, but in reality, these devices were hanging on the walls in homes 50, 60, 100 years ago and we didn't have this dynamic.*

They didn't act on it because there was not the feeding of the imagination. You see, that's where the mass media is really controlling much of what our life is about. Our culture is being shaped by what is formed in the imagination of somebody's mind by the input they get. That's a good point. The weapons are always available, but it wasn't, what triggered the weapon was the imagination of that becoming merged into reality, and that's when culture changed.

***Dean:** The original question...[UNCLEAR]...I think the church helps us in marriage. The study we're on with the oneness, the fellowship with the oneness, [UNCLEAR] that you don't leap frog over a marriage to our neighbor. I would hope that we first take what we're talking about and encompass in our marriages, as oneness, and then take it our neighbor.*

Very good point. Take all the things we learn right back in your own environment, and that starts with our families. The point of we're the model for our families is the critical issue, and it starts with our marriage. Excellent.

***Sig:** One of the questions that came up earlier, and then my brother here brought up again, about when do you make a decision to stay or leave in the church context. My concern is a lot of people I grew up with, that came to know Christ in high school and got involved in church ministry in high school and college, some went on to seminary, and now that it's 2012, 21st century, there's this whole fluctuation of*

the church. A lot of my friends, I could name eight or ten of them right off the top of my head that don't go to church anymore. They are frustrated by it. They're disappointed with it. And yet they still think of themselves meeting together as the church. I'll challenge them on, "Why don't you go to a church?" They think it's, we get together, and they will have Bible studies, and they'll think that's the church. I'm wondering do I just say, like you said, Bruce, I shouldn't try and be their Holy Spirit, but yet, should I challenge them, because of our character and our strength and our history, these people have a lot to offer other believers, and I'm thinking, and a lot of them are single, a lot of them are divorced, a lot of their kids have grown up. I just think, it's frustrating to see that they would abandon the church. I'm not sure, maybe I should let it go or maybe I should be more vocal to them.

Bishop Rogers: *Pray about it. Pray them up.*

I think that Bishop Rogers had a good statement there. Help them recognize then when you're reborn, you're born into a family, and those families have some responsibilities. I think you talk about responsibilities rather than convenience. Often times people copout of the local church because of convenience because they have an excuse, "I've been discouraged," "It's not perfect," and so forth, whatever they use, rather than realize then when you're born again, you're born into a family, and that family membership has some responsibilities. I think I would approach it from the point of what are our responsibilities as a family member in the context of the local church.

Audience Member: *Bruce, when I came here this morning, I think that, you walk in part of the in crowd [UNCLEAR] out crowd. When I come in here there's times I get convicted about something, but there's times I get [UNCLEAR] ...part of this family...[UNCLEAR]...one, but I just can't imagine anybody not going, and that's a very painful thing to think that there are people that won't come. Why won't they come? Why won't they go? That's a very painful thing to think.*

Yeah, it is. It is a question. It goes back to look at the three essentials. What we were saying was this. A healthy church, the three essentials, everything's important, but the three essentials are expository preaching, biblical theology and a biblical understanding of the Gospel. When those three things are not predominant in a local church, everything else happens. Membership goes down, people become irresponsible, they don't fulfill their membership responsibilities, all the other things are dissipated and are weakened because of those three things. That's why I put those three things as the essentials. Everything else is important, but those three things, when those three things are not predominant in the local church, everything else dissipates and is weakened. Part of that is some of those people have not been exposed to those three things in a healthy church environment. The word, I use healthy there, is to show that it's growing in its grace. It doesn't mean it's perfect but it's alive and it's functioning well.

Part of that reason is that the church exposure they've been to have not been really maintaining the essentials of what a healthy church is defined biblically. There are all sorts of ramifications. The real question for us is what am I going to do in my local church based upon what I've learned about a healthy church.

Audience Member: *What I was saying about, to Sig, about praying it up, and I'll give an example. Late February of 2002, and I was an over the road truck driver, I was in Chicago and I was talking to my daughter. My son-in-law had been pulled back to active duty, he was upstate New York at Fort (?), and he was frustrated with just everything. He wasn't being spiritually fed in the denomination that he attended at that time. My daughter was telling me about his frustration. I said, "He needs a visit by the Holy Spirit." I told her just to continue to pray about that. I went to my knees that night. I was on my way to Kansas City, and as you know, that's West of upstate New York. I prayed for my son-in-law for the Holy Spirit to come and to work in his heart, mind and soul, to get him on track with the Gospel, not with a group of people, because the world will give you all the baloney in the world along efforts. I said,*

I asked, I said could I be the vessel that you would use to bring to him, be he knew of my walk with the Lord, but he's trying to connect with [UNCLEAR]. Sure enough, I go to Kansas City. Where do I get load to? Upstate New York. I spent two days at the Pilot truck stop in Syracuse, and my son-in-law and I had the most wonderful afternoon, guided by the Holy Spirit. We sat in the back of my truck. Would you believe the week before I pick up at a truck stop ministry a cute little book that says how to pray? The first thing he says to me, "I can't pray like you." I said, "Good. Because the Holy Spirit will deal with you, but he gave me this booklet for you to read and to study." I said, "You gotta seek him and quit trying to force the issue with your commanders and everybody else and everybody's frustrating you. You know my background. You know I've had a lot of frustrations." And this isn't a flippant thing with me about praying. It's how would you use me or somebody else.

Good excellent.

Audience Member: *It is a vessel. It's that chalice of life. He said to me, and this is really cute, and he's like, "Well, okay, we want to see some truth..." I said, "Brad, I prayed in Chicago to come here, to go to Jersey," where they lived at the time, southern Jersey, and then to go home to Pittsburgh because being on the road I was gone three or four weeks at a time. He looks on my on-board computer and says, "You're not going to New Jersey." I said, "The week's not over yet." I delivered my load 80 miles east of Syracuse, came back to Syracuse. Friday afternoon, I called him and said, "I'm in front of 309 Baker street, [UNCLEAR], New Jersey." That's his house where my daughter and two granddaughters were, and I said, "I'm on my way to Pittsburgh tonight. Trust the Lord. Don't trust any man, including me."*

Amen. Good Thank you.

Don: *I think it's both/and not either/or. Definitely pray for the individual that comes your way. But I think, particularly if that person claims to be a Christian, I think that we need to point them to Scriptures. Christ died for his bride. We're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. And all the things that you said, Bruce, as far as why it's vital for a Christian to attend church.*

It's part of our life system. It's critical.

Don: *Invite them...*

Invite them to church. How many times have we invited people to church? That's one of the real issues we need to deal with.

Audience Member: *I think we've gone a circle to come to this thing about the bride of Christ. It's so important, I think, to understand, and that's what most people don't see. It's like a light that's been turned down, and they don't see that we're that. The overriding condition ought to be to understand and know that, that we are the bride of Christ and that we're brought with a price, and that we should be a slave to righteousness and not to sin...[UNCLEAR]...give them that hope, and then they get to that point where they're living in a vacuum [UNCLEAR].*

Who does Jesus say the church is versus who do I think the church is? That's the real issue. Who does Christ say the church is? It's his bride and he died for it, therefore, if you love Christ, you're going to give yourself to that which Christ loved.

I'll tell you what we're going to begin next week, brothers. We're going to begin a series on the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 5, 6 and 7. That will take us the next couple of years. {LAUGHTER} I think it's a good one to follow right after our talking about the church body, the function and formation of the

church. Now we need to see how is it that we live as church citizens. The Sermon on the Mount basically is our Christian manifesto. In other words, it's how does one enter into the Kingdom and how does one live as a Kingdom citizen within the context of what is known as the local church. We'll begin that next week. Just pray that the Lord will begin to form that for us in our teaching. I would encourage you to read Matthew 5, 6 and 7 before we come back next week, and we'll begin some introduction on the Sermon on the Mount, just trust Lord will be pleased to help us recognize what it means to be a Kingdom citizen and how do we live out our Kingdom citizenry in this day and age, because that is the most applicable understanding we can have is what it means to be a Kingdom citizen in our age and how do we live that out. So we'll begin the Sermon on the Mount next week.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this study on the church. There's much that we had not uncovered, but there's much we have uncovered, and we pray that which you've revealed to us would deeply put into our souls, into you are consciences and with conviction, that we would pray for our church pastors, that we would be salt and light, we would be whatever your Holy Spirit wants us to be in our local church. Father, help us solidify the ministry of the church based upon the sufficiency of Scripture, and to that end we just pray for Jesus' sake, and may it be so for his glory. All the Brave Men said...Amen!!