

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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...as he so faithfully does is to reveal himself to us through his words, could we pray together. Father, it's overwhelming when we think of your mercy to us as depraved, depressed sinners. We think of the fact that in eternity past you chose to reveal yourself to us through your word, and how grateful, Father, we are and how flippant we are as we come to the Scripture, trying to make it fit into our culture, rather than realizing that it is designed to refine and direct culture. So we pray, Lord, that you would rid us of all of those presuppositions that we have about who we think you should be and how you should act, and may we be men who are committed to discovering the character of God as his character is revealed in the Scripture, and to that end, Father, we pray that you'd open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

We're continuing our study, and Don did a nice job last week helping us understand the value of preaching. Today we want to continue looking at what are the essential ingredients of a healthy church. Now we use the word healthy because it reminds us that the body of Christ is active, alive. It's growing. It can diminish in its growth, and it can increase in its growth. So the word healthy is a better word than using the word perfect because we know that there's no such thing as the perfect church because if there is, then don't join it, because the moment you and I join it, it will become imperfect. So we want to use the word healthy church.

I'm using an outline by a friend of mine by the name of Mark Dever, who is the pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. He has a wonderful ministry on helping pastors and elders and church leaders understand what a healthy church could be. I'm using his outline, that Mark has put together. I'm just adding some more things to it, taking it a little bit deeper than his outline. But he has a wonderful outline on the essential ingredients of the church. You'll see that in your lesson number six.

Essentially the most important ones that Mark and I would certainly agree upon are the ones that are paramount because if you remove these three things from a local church, you can watch its demise and its destruction and its being more remodeled after the system of this world. The first important thing would be expository preaching, the next would be biblical theology, and then thirdly would be a biblical gospel.

When we get into the Gospel presentation, do we have a synthetic or an authentic Gospel? Often times what we hear in our churches is what I would call a synthetic gospel as opposed to an authentic Gospel. We'll get into that in future weeks.

Today we just want to wrap up what I means to be understanding expository preaching. Now essentially the word expository preaching literally means to expose the Scripture. Its much more than just preaching verse by verse. Now many of us expository preachers like to go verse by verse because you always keep things in the right context. In other words, there's the introduction, there's the meat of the passage, and it leads you to the next verses afterwards. So there's great protection that a preacher who preaches expositoryly is bound by the contents of the Scripture. Expository preaching is not so much a style as it is the preacher would say, "Why are you saying what you're going to say?" Why are you saying it? That's because it comes from the Scripture.

Now there are other kinds of preaching, as Don mentioned. You have historical preaching. You've got biographical preaching. You've got topical preaching. Those are all apparent and good and can be appropriate at the right time. But what a church really needs is a steady diet of exposing the flock to the Scripture. When you look at it biblically, God has always used the word to cause people to grow. God's

people have always grown through the speaking of his word. From creation in Genesis 1, God spoke things into creation, and things came into existence. It doesn't take much for us to realize that what those men in Geneva discovered was something the Scriptures already said, that Jesus will come just like that. We don't need scientific evidence. We've already been given that in biblical revelation, that when the Lord comes, he's going to come with all of his glory and all of his majesty, and that'll just be the blink of an eye. It's nice that science is now proving the validity of what the Scripture has already told us.

Essentially all of God's people really grow by listening to the word—from creation to the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, to the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37, to the coming of the Living Word, Jesus himself, in John 1. God always creates things by his spoken word. When God speaks, things are created, and it's the same thing with us. How is that you and I came to saving faith? It wasn't because somebody was preaching; it was because of the content of the what that someone was preaching. It's not the act of preaching that saves anybody. It's not the act of somebody walking forward that saves anybody. It's the content of a message that creates new life in a dead sinner, a person who's unregenerate. God takes that heart, removes that heart of stone, and he replaces it with a heart of flesh that is now sensitive to spiritual things. That is creation.

That's why we see in 2 Corinthians 5, anybody who becomes a Christian is a brand new creature. It's not a recreation; it's a brand new creature. You used to be dead in your trespasses and sins, but now we are alive. That's what comes when people are exposed to the word.

If we're going to talk about a church becoming healthy, we're really going to have to start with what is the most important ingredient of a healthy, growing church, and that is they are constantly being exposed to the Word of God through the Scripture, and is through expository preaching. That's what we mean when we say that that is an essential ingredient of a healthy church.

Let me give you some definitions of some of the understanding of preaching, without being too redundant. Basically speaking, preaching is defined as proclamation. Now that proclamation can occur in many different ways. Certainly in the pulpit, one proclaims that which comes from the Scripture. There's your proclamation. But that also can happen on a one-on-one basis. When you and I have the opportunity to teach somebody and to share our faith with them, and to teach them the biblical data of a Gospel that is authentic, not synthetic, what you are doing is you are essentially proclaiming. That's what preaching means. It means to proclaim. The critical ingredient is what are we proclaiming?

Paul tells us in Romans 1 that he's not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it is—it referring to the Gospel as the power unto salvation to all who believe. So the critical ingredient is not the act of your sharing your faith, or teaching your faith, or giving your faith away, it's the content of what you're saying. That's the critical ingredient.

You hear a lot of people talk about sharing their faith and it's a nice way they do it, but there's really nothing content wise that's going to create new life. That's we have to make sure that one of the three ingredients of a healthy church is a biblical gospel, not a socialized one, an Americanized version, or a synthetic Gospel, but one that really contains the right content. As we've been talking over the years, you've heard me say that that content really is made up of six ingredients, and that would be the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and repentance and faith. Those are the six ingredients of a pure biblical gospel message.

Recently I was asked if I would come to St. Louis and be the speaker at the St. Louis prayer breakfast in February of 2012. Now I'm not sure I'm going to go or not because I wrote back to the gentleman who asked me to consider coming to speak at their citywide prayer breakfast. He said, "This is an evangelical meeting. It's a time where we want to bring all people of all faiths together and have a time of prayer

together in unification.” Well that’s nice, but I wrote back to him and I said, “Thank you for your thoughtfulness of thinking about me. I understand you said this is an evangelical meeting. Does that mean that I will have the freedom to talk about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, repentance and faith, God’s wrath, repentance and faith? Will I be able to talk about that and can I use the name of Jesus Christ as the primary thought of my presentation?” He says, “Let me check on that.” {LAUGHTER}

If he comes back and says no, then I’m not going to go. I’m not the person to go do that. I mean, I respect that, if that’s not the environment in which they’re giving me the freedom to preach a biblical message, then quite honestly, that’s not something that I would need to give myself to. There will be somebody else who can go do that, but that’s not what I’m called to do.

That doesn’t mean that I’m going to be a Bible basher, but it does mean this, that when you’re in a public situation, [UNCLEAR] to be a Christian environment, the critical thing is not the speaker or what’s going on in the proclamation. The fact is what is the content of what you’re hearing. If they put restrictions on me that I can’t talk about those things—God’s wrath, God’s mercy, God’s love, the person and work of Christ—then you know, that’s just not something at I would want to do. Again, I’m not being critical. I’m sure they would say that I’m too narrow minded, but you know, when you look at the...look at the importance, guys, of the preached word. You see, whether it’s in the pulpit or its one-on-one, the real issue is what is the content of what you’re saying. That’s the critical ingredient, because that’s where God causes growth.

When you look at a healthy church, you have to start with this issue of expositional preaching and say what is it we’re hearing week after week after week after week. Is it about Christ and him crucified?

Bob asked a good question a couple of weeks ago. He said, “Well, if the message is Christ and him crucified, what about the 28 attributes of God and all the other things of the Scripture?” The point of entry, what I mean by saying Christ and him crucified, is when you talk about Christ and him crucified, you’ve got to talk about everything else. You’ve got to talk about the plan of redemption. You’ve got to talk about creation. You’ve got to talk about transformation. You’ve got to talk about translation into heaven. The whole topic is opened up when you talk about the person and work of Christ. That’s the entry point. It doesn’t mean that that’s the only thing you talk about, but what it is, it’s the central theme of everything that you’re talking about.

When you talk about the 28 attributes of God they come to the focal point of the visible demonstration of all the attributes are really pictured for us in the cross. The person and work of Christ and Christ and him crucified as the Scripture says, that is the entry point in which we do all of our instruction and everything else centers on that. It’s just not that the only thing you talk about is the cross. To talk about the cross, you’ve got to talk about God the Father, you’ve got to talk about God the Son, you’ve got to talk about God the Holy Spirit, you’ve got to talk about depravity, you’ve got to talk about sin. You’ve got to talk about repentance. You’ve got to talk about faith.

You see, when the entry point is Christ and him crucified, it opens up the whole gamut of everything from Genesis to Revelation, which is the whole theme of redemption. You see, when we talk about Christ and Him crucified, you’re talking about the central theme of the Bible is redemption. If anybody ever asks you, “What’s the Bible about?” it’s about one central theme, and that is the theme of redemption. Being redeemed means you’re rescued through the payment of a price. That’s the whole theme of the Bible. God is rescuing you and me through the payment of a price, which is Christ and Him crucified. So that’s the entry point by which we discuss everything else in the Scripture in the whole plan of redemption.

For a healthy church, that's what we need to be exposed to is that week after week after week after week of weekly dialog of being exposed to the whole plan of redemption as revealed in the Scripture, because it is through the word that God really creates new things and takes the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh and gives us spiritual insight.

The whole issue of preaching really has to do with proclamation. That can be done one-on-one, it can be done in public, it can be done by writing a letter, it can be done by giving a tract and following up with that. There are many ways in which one can proclaim. The critical issue, guys, is we need to centralize on this and what is the content of what we're saying. That's the issue when we talk about expository preaching.

Now preaching was ordained in the Old Testament. You'll notice it by Jeremiah 1:5-10. You'll see that preaching was ordained in the Old Testament through prophets. What is it they did? They proclaimed a message. You see, the most powerful weapon we have, brothers, is the message of the person and work of Christ. In the Old Testament, preaching was ordained through the prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus gave himself to preaching, to proclaiming, the message of God's grace. In Matthew 4:17, following the temptation, what is it he does? He preaches. He proclaims the truth of God, the plan of redemption, God's grace.

In Matthew 10:7, Jesus commissioned the 12. Let's take a look at that. Go to Matthew 10.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, what was the Jeremiah...?*

Jeremiah 1:5-10 for the Old Testament ordination of preaching. Now in Matthew 10, look at verse 5. Here he's now beginning to teach his 12 apostles about their job description, "These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" Now that's a reference to the elect. In other words, you want to go where people are going to hear the message. "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Now that's his instruction. He's talking about proclaiming. He's talking about not programs. He's not talking about going and doing a nice event. Now there's nothing wrong with that. Please understand what I'm not saying. But notice his instruction to them was your primary role is to be a proclaimer of the Kingdom of God is at hand. That's the message, and that's when we start talking about it. That's the role of the church. It's primary function is to be a proclaimer of the message that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

You see, that Jesus, even with his disciples, instructed them, and your primary mission is yes, you're going to go heal people, yes you're going to go do other things. You're going to have all kind of other activities, but your primary role is preaching. It is primarily proclaiming the Gospel of grace.

You'll notice in Acts 10:42 when Peter spoke before Cornelius, he referred to his commission. Go back to look at Acts 10, down around verse 42. Let's just back up a few verses. Now here this is in the context of the Gentiles hearing the Good News. Let's look at verse 34, "So Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach.'"

He's talking to Cornelius and to the Gentiles, and he reminds them of his primary responsibility. You'll see that in verse 42, "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Now there you see even in the apostles, and specifically we see here, that when Peter had the opportunity to tell people what his primary mission was, he said, "My primary mission is preaching." Now that's the primary function of a pastor/teacher in the church. It is preaching. That's the primary issue that a preacher does. So when you're looking for somebody, one of the reasons that we ought to be going to a specific church or a certain church, is what is the content and quality of the preaching, because that is where you and I are going to grow, and other people will grow in grace. The critical ingredient, one of the critical ingredients we'll see in selecting a proper church is what's the quality of the preaching?

I was invited to come to a church recently. I met with the young pastor and he's a very delightful young man. We were talking about the service, and I said, "How much time do you give for the message?" He said, "Oh, about 12 minutes." I said, "Well, that would be my introduction," and he said, "Well how much do you preach?" I said, "I normally go 45 to 50," and his response was, "Whoa! People actually listen that long?" was his response, "People actually listen that long?"

Audience Member: No, but I keep preaching. {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: We listen to you that long, Bruce, but [UNCLEAR]...{LAUGHTER}

My point is, you see, often times in our church today, we have marginalized preaching. Now I'm not saying that preaching is the only thing we do in worship. Please understand I'm not saying that. It's not a lecture. It's not a dialog. It's really helping people come into the presence of the Living God, and we do that by exposing the flock week after week after week, exposing them to God's word through the preaching.

So yes, we have music, and yes, we have the recitation of our creeds and other things of that nature, to bring some meat to all of the worship service, to make it an experience of not only listening but participating. And yes, we have prayer. Those things are all wrapped up in the worship service. But my concern today in the church of America is what we have marginalized preaching. We've reduced it to something other than an expression of worship. Even in our church bulletins, you'll have somebody will say something like, "praise and worship," and you list the things that we do, and then down here, you have sermon. It's almost like you're subtly saying the sermon really isn't praise and worship is it, because we've already done that. Now we've got to listen. You go from praise and worship, now you go to the second thing of the worship service, and that's preaching. What is the greatest act of our praise and worship? Its preaching. It's the expositional exposing of God's word to the flock.

You see it historically, both in the Old Testament and New Testament, the primary role of the prophets and the disciples and the apostles was to be preachers. Now notice in Galatians 1. Let's go to Galatians 1—here we begin to see some of Paul's methodology—down to verse 22...well let's go back to 18 to understand the context, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God because of me."

Now there you begin to see his methodology of building churches. What was his methodology? It was

really preaching. That's how he built the church. Notice, when you look at what's going on historically in the context of this passage in Galatia, drama was started in Greece. That's where we began to have drama—plays, productions of that nature. That originated in Greece. He could have used music as a means of drawing people, but he doesn't say that. He said it was just his preaching. He could have featured the Olympian athletes to come and give their testimony, but he didn't do that. What is that Paul used? His methodology of building the local church was preaching, and that was the message of the person and work of Christ.

When you look at it historically, you begin to see the value of what produces a healthy church is always going to be the quality of its preaching. Now that doesn't mean that the pastor doesn't do other things in the church, but primarily, the role of the pastor/teacher is to be that, is to preach the word to the people. To do that, faithfully, and do that expositively, meaning exposing the Scripture to the people.

Remember, the issue of expository preaching really is this—it's why is the pastor saying what he's saying. Why is he saying it? It's because it came from the Scripture. And so that's one of the things critical ingredients of a healthy church.

What is the content of biblical preaching? Let me take you to 1 Corinthians 1:17. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 1:17-25. Now here is what Paul is reminding people of his responsibilities. Let's pick it up at verse 17 of chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." Now notice, he's contrasting words of wisdom. Now what he's talking about there, friends, is the origin of wisdom came from the system of the world. There was a great deal of eloquence in the proclaimers at that time who were public speakers. It was a sense of eloquence in their rhetoric. He's saying that the content of what he does doesn't come from the wisdom, words of wisdom, of the system of this world, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. In other words, when you wrap in the wisdom of this world into a biblical message, you begin to lessen the power of the message of Christ. Now that doesn't mean that we don't use words of wisdom as illustration.

You know, when you're really preaching and you put together a message, it goes in four stages. First of all, you have information. Then you have illustration. Then you have incarnation. And then you have incorporation. That's how you put together a message. It starts with information. The information is your preaching to the mind. Illumination. Illustration. That's where you take the content of your biblical information and give illustrations of that. You go from information, next you come to illustration. You're also preaching to the mind, giving them an illustration of what this means. I'm trying to do that now by giving you some illustrations from the Scripture about the value of preaching. The information is the church is built by preaching. Let me give you some illustrations of that. I just gave you one from Paul's letter to Galatia, how he built the church was through preaching. That's an illustration of a biblical truth.

Now your best illustrations always come from the Scripture, if you can find it. Your best ones. Now that doesn't mean that you don't use the illustrations of the world. You can do that. But the first two elements of biblical preaching would be information and illustration. You're appealing to the mind.

Then the next thing, you've got to appeal to the will. That's where you get incarnation. How do you take that information, which you've illustrated, and to make that applicable so a person begins to take that into themselves? That's incarnation. They make it their own. They own it. They believe it. They trust it. They absorb it. That's incarnation. That's when you're preaching to the will. You've got to overcome the will of that person by taking the biblical truth, illustrating that, and now you appeal to their will to do something about it.

The last thing is incorporation. How does the person, the hearer, incorporate that into their life so that when they walk out of the worship service, they're now going to be a changed person because they're incorporating biblical truth which they heard, in their mind, but they're now going to act on it. That's why you've always heard me say the most important thing you can do after you've done a Bible study or studied a passage or heard a passage, the most important thing is this—what am I going to do about what I just learned. That's information, and that's incorporation. You incorporate that truth into your life.

That's the sequence of putting together a message. When I put together a sermon, I follow that outline. What is the information? What are the illustrations I can give. How do I make that applicable to them that they begin to own it, incarnate into their lives, make it their own, become real? And then how do they incorporate it applicationally into their life? You see, that's expository preaching.

We see here, that's what Paul is saying, that he doesn't mix the wisdom of this world because it would diminish the power of the cross. And then in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Now we need to realize there that in our preaching and in our teaching, you can't change anybody's life. One of the first things I had to realize years ago which really made a tremendous impact on my life, is that I can't make any difference to anybody. I can't do that personally. It is not going to be my act of preaching or my act of teaching that's going to change anybody. What will happen will be in the act of the preaching, and in the act of the teaching, they're going to hear something of God's word that's going to create something in them. It's the creative power of the preached word, not the preacher himself, that makes the difference, and we've got to understand that.

Now notice what Paul says next, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Now there that's the system of this world. Now that would mean such things as psychology, psychiatry. Now there's nothing wrong with that. Gotta be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water. But all I'm saying is we don't build the church on psychology. You don't build the church on psychiatrists. You build it on preaching. You build it on preaching.

"Has not God made the foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom." In other words, you're not going to learn to know God through the wisdom of this world. "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Now notice, how is Christ defined? Power and wisdom. Where is wisdom found? It's in the person and work of Christ. It's not found in the system of this world. That's what Paul is saying. Christ is defined in two ways—the power and the wisdom of God.

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." Now there's a wonderful instruction there of what Paul is saying. Now you notice, you have to understand the verses before that, because right before that, he's talking about divisions in the church because people were following the preacher. They were following a certain guy. Some people followed Paul, some people followed Peter, some people followed John, some people followed somebody else. What he's reminding, he reminds them of this—it's not the person you're following. What you're following is the message that that person is saying, and that message is about the centrality of the person and work of Christ. As we look at that passage, he's saying don't follow a person.

Now as I, in my own life, experienced this at various levels, I think there are four things that really hinder a man in the pulpit. First of all, money. That can warp a man in the pulpit when you start thinking of money. Jeremiah Burroughs said in 1645, “When money becomes the central message of the church, numbers become important and doctrine is watered down.” How about that. Listen to this, “When money becomes the issue, numbers become important, and doctrine is watered down.” That was said in the 16th century. What do we see now? Churches are in debt. They’re in debt because they’ve borrowed to build or whatever they do. Because they think, “We’re going to follow the American system; we’re going to go just do it like everybody else.” Why is it that we’re in a financial mess throughout the world? Not only in Europe but also in the U.S.? It’s because people, individuals and companies and corporations, borrowed so much money over the past and they can’t pay it back now. That’s why we’re in financial stress. It’s because of borrowing.

When money becomes important, numbers are critical, and doctrine is watered down. It means you’re not going to proclaim the Gospel of Christ because people may not come. You’ve got to be careful of that. So one of the great hindrances to preaching, in my judgment, would be money would be one issue.

Audience Member: Excuse me. Who was that quote from?

Jeremiah Burroughs, a Puritan pastor in 1647.

The second issue I think that could hinder a man in the pulpit would be pride. Just pride. Thinking that you can make a difference. Oh, that is so prideful, to think, the audacity to think that I can change a person’s heart. And we actually think we can do that? You see, it’s pride of thinking, “I make the difference.” That I make the difference.

The third thing I think that can hinder a man in the pulpit, in addition to money and pride, would be unbridled ambition. Unbridled ambition. Just thinking that, “Wow! Look what I can create. Look what I can begin to do.” It’s all that stuff. Building an empire. Now God may be pleased to have one pastor have 6,000 people in his church and another one to have 150, but that doesn’t mean that the one that has 6,000 is more successful or more excellent than the one with 150. That may just be a function of God’s redeeming grace, that he’s chosen to do that.

I have a close friend who’s the pastor of a church of 6,000. When you ask him, “What’s the ingredient that permitted you to grow to 6,000?” his response is, “God’s grace.” It’s a function of grace. He said, “It was nothing that I or we ever did. It was just God has been mercifully graceful to us, and for reasons only known to him, he’s permitted that.” He never came up with here’s our strategy.

Now what do we do? Pastors are like football coaches. It worked over here in Arizona; therefore, it’s going to work in Pittsburgh. Really? Well what if the Holy Spirit wants to do something different in Pittsburgh than he did in Arizona? If we’re plagiarizing what they did in Arizona, we’re going to miss. We’re going to miss what the Holy Spirit wants to do in us. That’s why the most important question we can be asking in our church is this. What’s God doing in our midst? And then we become an aggressive responder to that.

That doesn’t mean that we don’t learn from others. I’m not suggesting that. What I am saying, brothers, is this. The critical ingredient is asking this question. What’s God doing around me? Because we want to respond to that, rather than saying, “Let’s copy what they did someplace else and ask the Holy Spirit to bless it.” That’s far different than saying, “Holy Spirit, what are you doing? We want to join that.” Remember Jesus’ words in John 5 and John 8, “I initiate nothing on my own. I only do those things I see the Father doing.” So what did Jesus do? He kept asking himself the question, “Lord, what are you

doing around me?” That’s what I want to join, because that’s what I’m going to do.

I think if we spent more time just in prayer and meditation and studying the Scripture, just asking ourselves, “Lord what is you’re doing in our little flock? What’s going on here? What are you doing? What’s the Holy Spirit doing through the proclamation of the preached word? What’s transpiring as you’re creating new things through the exposition of preaching?” Let’s respond to that, rather than thinking, you know, “They use this book over here and it really worked. So let’s take that book and let’s bring it over here because it’ll really work,” and so we become plagiarizers.

A football coach says, “It worked on the West Coast, so I’m going to run the West Coast offense in Pennsylvania.” We may not have the talents to run the West Coast offense. We may need to be a three yards in a cloud of dust. {LAUGHTER} That’s okay. You don’t make the program fit the talent. You’ve got to have the talent for the right program. The talent we have is what is the Holy Spirit doing in our midst, and ask ourselves, “What is that? I want to see that,” because that’s what I want to be an aggressive responder. Jesus was an aggressive responder. He wasn’t an initiator. God just says this, “I just want to do what the Father does. I’m going to respond to that.” That all comes, you see, when a group of people constantly are being exposed to the preached word. Things begin to create in that, and that’s why the leadership must be saying, “What’s going on as a result of this new creation through the proclamation of the preached word.”

The fourth thing that would be a hindrance to men in the pulpit is women. {LAUGHTER} Now I say that respectfully, but I say it cautiously.

***Audience Member:** You’re on tape...remember.*

Yeah, I know I’m on tape. That’s why I’m thinking. {LAUGHTER}

***Audience Member:** And it’s being typed up by a woman.*

We can edit out any...no, but seriously, look. What’s the temptation for men? Be honest. Be honest. The temptation is there for any man, be it preacher or anybody else. I’m not singling out preachers. All I’m just saying, guys, is we’ve got to be realistic. Those things you’ve got to fight and resist because they’re there. That’s the system of the world, and that’s why it’s so important that we as members of the church be praying for our pastor. Pray that God will protect him from those four things. From money, protecting from pride, protecting from an unbridled ambition and protecting from temptation.

You see, in the local church, we’re all in this together. It’s just not him and us. It’s we. We have a responsibility to the men in our pulpits, and that is to pray for them, to protect them, to surround them, to guard them, to be that front line defense against them as we see the system of this world attacking them. Because what does Satan want to do? He’s probably going to do more than anything else, he’s the best church growth expert there is. He knows far more theology than I’ll ever learn. What he would love to have is our churches filled with people, masses coming to the church, but hearing nothing. That’s his strategy.

We have an obligation as members of our flocks to take a serious, serious understanding of my role and our role of protecting the men in the pulpit because of the temptations that are going to be thrust upon him that may be unique.

***Audience Member:** A word of praise for your strength of wisdom to go in conflict with the guy in Missouri, but how do we know, and I know there’s a biblical passage, but how as a brave man, when you see the pleasing, the posing, the preaching to please and be popular and fall into sin, how do you*

get these guys, they're, forgive me, the test of an alcoholic, he's laying in this gutter, drunk on his butt, and he don't know that he's in the gutter, he's an alcoholic. So often times, you observe these comfort clubs that they happen to call a church of 6,000 people, but you don't have the umph to go against the committee and conflict and say, "Excuse me. Here's a little checklist you all might want to think about this."

Well, first of all, they're not going to listen to your checklist, so don't give it. They're not going to listen to that.

***Audience Member:** But it's conflict. How do we handle the conflict?*

Grace and truth. You proclaim truth, but you do it graciously. The critical thing...I tried to be, when I contacted this guy again in St. Louis. The thing I was more concerned about was the gracious way in which I was going to say what I was going to say because I knew what I was going to say.

{LAUGHTER}

***Audience Member:** Conflict.*

Yeah. I knew that. So I was saying, "Lord, give me the grace so that when I say these convictions that it will be received, rather than being inflammatory." That's grace. You see, most often times when you see the word truth in the Scripture, you see it surrounded by the word grace. Sometimes we really feel good about ourselves, "Boy, I nailed that guy, didn't I, because I gave him truth." Well what I may have done is I might have hindered the very truth that I wanted to proclaim, because it wasn't done with graciousness.

Now that doesn't mean we're mamby-pamby. We can be...we're steel and velvet. You want people to come up and bump against you and feel your strength of your convictions, biblically, but you don't want them to be bruised. That's a function of grace, and I can't control that. All I can do is absolutely plead the Holy Spirit to be the means of the demonstration of that grace so that when truth is proclaimed it is wrapped in grace. Then you have to let the Holy Spirit work his final result. I can't change that person's mind. I don't know what they will say. I just try to be gracious and try to be truthful, and I will trust the end result of that to the Holy Spirit because God himself will work it out according to his sovereign providence. Remember, we can't change their mind. We can't do that. We just need to be proclaimers of truth, but do it graciously.

***Audience Member:** What that comes down to, I think, is the difference between grace and pride.*

Yeah.

***Audience Member:** Grace is thinking of the other person and going to him where he's at, or she's at, try this, am I doing God's work. [UNCLEAR]...*

Right That's good.

***Audience Member:** Am I being successful?*

Remember, P = I? Perception equals intention. In communication, you want to make sure that the perception of the hearer is the same thing as the intention of the speaker. Now my intention was that he would understand, his perception would be, he really wants to come and talk about the Gospel of Christ authentically. Now I want to make sure that the way I say that, that that his perception, rather than his having the perception of, "Who does he think he is? He's judging us." Now I can't control that. But

that's where we have to pray as much for grace in our proclamation of truth as we do the truth of the content what we're going to say. And then you have to trust the Holy Spirit to do it. Remember guys, we can't change anybody. It's the word that changes. It's the word that changes, not us.

Let me read you a quote from Spurgeon, and we'll wrap up this morning and pick it up next week. Sig, could you send out lesson number 7 for next week?

Sig: I don't have it.

I'll get it to you.

Sig: Thank you.

Charles Spurgeon says this, about preaching and its role in the church, of a healthy church, "Don't go where it is all fine music and grand talk and beautiful architecture. Those things will neither fill anybody's stomach nor feed his soul. Go where Christ is preached, the message that really feeds your soul, and go often." That's a good illustration for us. Go often. Where do you and I go to church? We go often where we hear the message of the proclamation of the biblical doctrine of the person and work of Christ. That's one of our responsibilities.

So as we talk about a healthy church, we have to start with what are we hearing from the pulpit. In my judgment, all ministry starts in the pulpit. It's because that's what people are going to hear, and that's what God will create within them, they can become aggressive responders and can ask themselves the question, "How do I incarnate and how do I incorporate the illustrations and the information I just heard?" And so they walk out, they're saying this, "What am I going to do about what I just learned?" rather than saying, "Oh this is what the means to me." It doesn't make any difference what it means to them. The critical ingredient is what am I going to do about what I just learned.

Brian: Realistically speaking, to have a [UNCLEAR] body of believers, you really have [UNCLEAR] because therefore they don't have the word in them, they're not [UNCLEAR]...from the front, there's no way that they would know how to [UNCLEAR]...

That's right. Now please understand, brothers, I trust I'm not coming across critical. I trust I'm giving us some information that each of you, individually, can say, "What am I going to do about what I'm learning from the Scripture about preaching in my church?" Now I'm not saying you go nail your pastor. I'm not saying that. Please understand. And I'm not being critical saying you need to move to another church because you're not hearing good preaching. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is this—ask yourself the question, "What am I going to do about what I'm learning about a healthy church?" What am I going to do about that? I don't know what the answer to that is. That's where you have to, in your own relationship to God the Father through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, become an aggressive responder to what he's incarnating in you as a result of the truth that's he's creating something within you. God always creates through the proclamation of biblical truth. Let the Holy Spirit guide what that creation is and just trust him.

Let's pray. Father, if we've said anything that is contrary to your nature, to your attributes or to your glory or to your truth as revealed in the Scripture, if we've said anything that is contrary to your character, as your character is revealed in the Scripture, then would you be gracious and kind to remove that from our mind, and only those things, Lord, that are consistent with who you are and what you want us to be would be the things that we'll remember. And may your Holy Spirit, Father, give us the insight to realize that you are creating things within us. Give us the grace to become aggressive responders to that which we see you doing around us. And to that end, all the Brave Men said...Amen! Thank you Brothers.