

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Session: October 7, 2011

...remove the expectations that we have of what we think you should be and what we should do, and let us just settle in and trust the fact of who you are in all of your majesty and glory. We thank you, Father, that you are the sovereign ruler of the universe, and that we have a chance to bring to you all of our supplications and all of our concerns, and so we give you this situation with our brother Tin and the church in Vietnam. We just pray, Lord, that you would superintend all the details of this. Give us wisdom, discernment, and most of all, give us a heart of obedience that we would be obedient to that which you would want to accomplish among us. Help us be aggressive responders to what we see you doing around us, and we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Take a look at handout number seven. I want to thank Ted, last week, for his excellent exposition on the confessions and the need for us to study the confessions and why it's such a good review of the biblical content. We're following Mark Dever's outline of the healthy church. We've seen three critical examples of ingredients of the local church to be expository preaching, next will be biblical theology, and after that a biblical gospel. Then we'll look at some other issues of the church.

We've seen so far, we've looked at the whole issue of expository preaching. We've seen the primacy of preaching in worship. We've seen the definition of preaching. We've seen the ordination of preaching came from both the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament disciples. We've seen the content of preaching, which is the Gospel of Christ, Christ and Him crucified, the centrality message of the Gospel is the person and work of Christ at the cross. Today, we want to take a look at some of the consequences of preaching.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Romans 10, looking at verses 14-17. I want to show you a very interesting transition here, as we see this in Romans 10. We're looking at the consequences of preaching. ¹⁴How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

When you take a look at this passage, brothers, it's what we would call the chain of regression. In other words, it precedes from effect to cause. Most of the time you'll see in the Scripture a cause to effect. Something happens and there's a cause that makes an event occur. This is backwards. In other words, instead of going 1-2-3-4-5, it's really 5-4-3-2-1, and so it's what we would call a regressive series. In other words, calling upon Christ in prayer is mentioned first, though it really is, of course, last. Now it follows having faith in him. Notice the sequence 5-4-3-2-1. It starts with calling upon prayer. That's the result of having faith, which however, is the second link in this chain. Having faith in Christ results from hearing him. The third link is hearing him. Then hearing implies that there must have been a preacher. That's the fourth link. And then, who addressed the people when he preached. He did this because someone earlier, the fifth link, had authorized him to bring the message. So do you see how it goes? It starts from, "How then will they call on him whom they have not believed?" It goes 5-4-3-2-1. And where is the beginning of all of this? Somebody authorized then to preach. That's where it starts.

The real issue for us to recognize is that there are those who are called to preach, and they are sent, and then they preach the message and then someone hears, and then someone listens and someone prays. And so notice the sequence. It's 5-4-3-2-1. "How then will they call on him in whom they have not

believed?” Prayer, then belief, going backwards. Somebody had to hear, then somebody had to preach it and somebody had to send him.

Now as we understand the value of significance of preaching, in other words, we could go to...let's look at Luke 10:16. Do you follow that sequence? How that works? Normally, we would start with somebody sending them, somebody preaching, somebody hearing, somebody praying, and so forth, but in this particular situation, Paul reverses it and has a regressive chain of events. When you go to Luke 10, beginning at verse 16, playing off the idea that somebody sent them to preach. Luke 10:16, “The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.” [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Now you see, there's an authority behind the preaching. This is just not something that is a random event in a thing called the worship service. There's a whole authority of God the Father behind all of this, sending certain people.

Now notice, Jesus assures his disciples, the 72 men, that when they speak, he is speaking. There's their authority. When the people listen to them, they are really listening to who? They're listening to Christ. Not only that, but since he was sent by the Father, and all who faithfully he represents him, anyone who directs those who are commissioned by the Savior, is rejected by the Savior's sender. Do you see how that works? There's significance behind the man who steps up in the pulpit to preach. He's just not there because he's a good orator. He's there because God in his authority has assigned him. That is a gift to the church to be the means by which he's going to do that. When Jesus is saying, “If they reject you, they're rejecting me,” they are essentially rejecting the Father. Now this is serious business. What could be more serious than that? Now all of this places a very heavy burden of responsibility on those people who are called to preach. Not only all of the listeners, but also the 72 missionaries that he's talking about.

Now it's very clear that what they do in word and deed really represents the Lord. So the comforting assurance imparted in verse 10 no longer holds for them. On the other hand, there's an assumption here that the servant of Christ, whether he be a teacher, an evangelist, a minister, a missionary, an elder, a deacon, or just a lay witness, to impress the message of the Lord upon the people and the Savior and the hearts and lives of people is something Christ making himself is this, that who is speaking through that messenger is Jesus himself. Guys, that's why it's so important that we take seriously what we say.

The next step on our study, after this exposition, of understanding the value of preaching is going to be biblical theology. In other words, we need to make sure that our theology is biblically oriented, because the critical ingredient is what is it we are saying. As Paul says in Romans 1, “I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power unto salvation to all who believe.” What is our greatest weapon? It is not our oratory skills. That doesn't mean that we can be sloppy in our presentation. I'm not saying that. It doesn't mean that we don't study how to preach and how to communicate. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying this. That the heart of all preaching is the content of what you're saying. That's the whole issue of expository preaching. It is why am I saying what I'm saying. It's more than just verse by verse by verse preaching. It's really the answer to the question is this. Why have I chosen to say what I've chosen to say? That's the heart of expository preaching, because you're exposing the Scripture. That has to be the centrality of the worship service of the church is expository preaching because when the person stands up to preach, he is speaking the words of Christ, and because he's speaking the words of Christ, he's speaking the words of the One who sent Christ who sent the person to preach. You see how that works in Romans 10? Also here in Luke?

The significance of preaching is the issue that the sender is really the representative. So it's critical that when you have an opportunity, as a layperson or a Sunday school teacher or an elder or a deacon, whatever it may be, when you have a chance to speak about the person and work of Christ, we've got to make sure that it is the correct message. It comes from the Scripture. That's the whole concept that the

church is founded upon that one principle, is that Christ has sent people to teach people about himself, and that's the representative of God himself. So when somebody rejects the Gospel, they're rejecting more than just words. You see how serious that is? They're rejecting not only the Savior but the One who sent the Savior. Critical, serious issue when think about what we have to [UNCLEAR].

Ted: Someone might say, "My pastor, when he preaches, it's one Bible verse after another," and yet I might sit there and say, "That was not biblical preaching." It's possible to stack up lots of verses, and yet the conclusions that are drawn, I would object to on biblical grounds.

That's true. That's what I'm saying. Expository preaching is just not defined as verse by verse by verse. It's really defined simply in a much more intense description. It's really this. Why did I choose to say what I chose to say? That's different than just reading a bunch of verses and giving your own opinion. The bottom line is why did I say what I chose to say? That comes from the study of the Scripture. That's why we have to have what we know as a hermeneutic. It's the science of biblical interpretation. Most people, when you see...I've talked with several pastors and said, "What is your hermeneutic?" and he said, "I don't have one. It's just whatever the Lord gives me." [UNINTELLIGIBLE]...

Now let me just give you a very basic standard hermeneutic. When you study the Scripture, we want to look at three things. First of all, you want to look at the historical background. That's why it's so important, and you will hear me so often times tell you, what's going on in that passage, historically.

Secondly, you want to look at the grammar. The sentence structure. The verb tenses. An example would be the doctrine of assurance of salvation is always in present tense verb. You'll never see the doctrine of salvation saying, "Oh, I look back on 22 years ago what I did to be saved." You'll notice that in 1 John, the seven tests, the seven traits of a true believer, the evidence of your salvation is always present tense verb. That means this. That when you wake up today, you know that you have true saving faith. It's not because of something you did 20 years ago. You have the reality of that in your life right now, this day, this moment, and you're going to have it again tomorrow because it's present tense verb. You see, that's critical information.

Most people say, "When did you become a Christian? How did you become a Christian?" "Well, 30 years ago, I went forward." Now that may have been the point of their conversion, but that's not the confirmation of the assurance of your salvation. The assurance of your salvation is what's the evidence say today? When you wake up this morning, what's the evidence say? That's present tense reality. So you see, we need to take a look at grammar. Word meaning. The word abide. The word [UNCLEAR]. it means literally to pitch your tent with and feel at home. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, I'll abide in You." You understand the significance of that? He's basically saying, "Look, Bruce, when you pitch your tent with Me, and you feel at home with Me, I'm going to pitch my tent with you, and we're going to be together." You see, that little understanding of that Greek word [UNCLEAR] means, is significant when you study it hermeneutically and you take a look at the passage. The issue of expository preaching is just not reciting verse after verse. It's really, to the guts of it is this, is why am I saying what I have chosen to say and why have I chosen to say it.

The third thing in the hermeneutic besides historical background, grammar, is context. Where does this verse fit in the context of the other verses in that particular chapter, in the paragraph or in book or in the whole Bible itself? You've got to take a look at things in its context. So you don't take things out of context.

A classic example would be Luke 6 where we talk about mercy. You hear that verse. Give, press down and it'll be given back to you. Now that's the favorite verse for every stewardship Sunday. They're basically saying, "Look, if you give ten dollars, you're going to get twelve back." That's the mentality.

What's the context of that verse? It's mercy. It's about mercy. He's saying, "When you give mercy away, it's going to come back to you." That's consistent with the Beatitudes. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. That has nothing to do with stewardship. If I hear one more stewardship sermon on Luke 6, I'm going to barf. {LAUGHTER} Because they're taking it out of context. But I did that when I was the director of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, no question about it, in Chicago. [UNCLEAR] said, "Hey if you give this, you're going to get more back." I was a marvelous manipulator. I motivated people by guilt.

***Audience Member:** Have you repented?*

Oh absolutely. Over and over. {LAUGHTER} You see, you've got to be careful, guys. You gotta take things in context. When you take a verse, you say, "Now what are the verses above and before?" An example would be Romans 12, "Therefore since through God's mercy," or "Therefore," well, turn to Romans. {LAUGHTER} Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Now see that little word, therefore? "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present yourself." The critical issue is the word "therefore." You have to ask yourself the question what's the therefore there for. Is there for to remind you to go to the previous verses, because the whole context is as a result of you're understanding God's mercy, now you present yourself as a living sacrifice, which is your spiritual act of worship. It is not something I bet you do on a Sunday morning. It's a style of life. Worship is living. It's a way that you live your life as a active, constant worship that you're offering this to the Father, because you're saying thank you for your mercy. Where are you going to find the mercy? In the first 11 chapters of Romans. Read the first 11 chapters. You'll find out all about God's mercies. Now a result of that, I'm going to live like this. That's worship. You see, that's taking things in its context.

***Don:** Yeah, people do that a lot with judge not lest you but judged, too.*

Yeah.

***Don:** Any time that you decry the behavior of someone, "Oh, judge not lest you but judged," and they don't consider the verses after that or about what the context of it is, well make sure that your life is in order before you go telling somebody else how to live. But we're to make judgments, good is good and evil is evil and people just take that out of context.*

Yeah. You've got to be careful about that, guys.

***Ian:** Just going back a little bit to your comment that rejecting the word is rejecting the Word. I wrestle with that when I think about how have you taught us to respond to others when we present the Gospel to others, when we present the Word to others, and I've always understood you to say we are not other's Holy Spirit, and in fact, the Holy Spirit, a person cannot understand the Word until they have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and that allows me to be gracious when I share the Word and its rejected. But what you just said, in my own humanity, causes me to be critical when I listen to someone who rejects the Word because they're rejecting my Savior. Can you help me deal with that?*

Anybody want to deal with that?

***Audience Member:** It's the same thing.*

The same thing. You can't be somebody's Holy Spirit, so you can be gracious in their rejection. You can grieve for them, but I don't think you can be critical because they can't do anything other than reject it.

How can a blind man see or a deaf man hear? They can't do that until something happens. They cannot understand the Gospel until they're regenerate, until God plants within them the grace of God that gives them the ears to hear. He takes the heart of stone and removes it and puts a heart of flesh in them, they can't hear that, so therefore, we can't be critical of them because they can do nothing more than what they do is live out their nature. Until their nature is changed, they can't do anything. We need to have compassion, not criticism.

Audience Member: Thank you.

That's what I would say.

Audience Member: Because we're in the same boat. I mean, that's the way we were. We're no different than they were before we were before we were changed.

We were dead to trespasses of sin. But God, in his mercy, gave us life.

Audience Member: Your teaching on that, for years, has been all the same, and yet, when I just heard what you said about rejecting the Savior, I don't know, just the part of who I am got the...the hair on my neck got raised.

Audience Member: They are rejecting it. I mean, that's part, why you're compassionate is that they're doing exactly what you can expect them to do.

Audience Member: That comes naturally.

They can't do anything other than that.

Audience Member: They're doing what comes naturally.

That's right.

Audience Member: They are doing what comes naturally.

[UNCLEAR]...[OVERLAPPING] They can't do anything...that's why Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because it," the message is the power. You see, somebody is not saved...they're not saved by preaching, they're saved through preaching. There's a difference. They're not saved by my act of preaching, they're saved through the act of preaching. The content is there, which God uses as a means to all people who come to believe.

Tom: I think the other half of that is what does that mean for me? How do I apply that? In Romans 12:2, it says "Don't be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." We ignore that part it. That's where growth is.

Yes it is. Absolutely.

Audience Member: Doesn't that tie into what Paul says in Corinthians about we're not to judge those outside the church, but those inside the church?

Yeah. Where does revival occur? Where should it occur? In the church. Revival implies that there's life already there. Revive. You don't revive the world. What happens is, what is revived is where life is. Life is inside the church. That's where revival occurs. You don't have revival outside. What happens is

there's revival inside the body of Christ. It comes alive again. And then you take that out into the world and it overflows and begins to evangelize and change the world. But where does revival occur?

We need to pray for revival inside of our churches. Inside of our denominations. Not Three Rivers Stadium or PNC Park. Now that doesn't mean we don't have an evangelistic campaign. I'm not saying that. But understand what revival is. We say we're going to schedule a revival. I think I've told you about this. I did my doctoral work on the focus of the Gospel in Puritan preaching. One of the things I came to conclusion is you don't schedule revival. Revival is a sovereign act of God, a demonstration of all of His power and righteousness. Now you go to the Billy Graham center in Wheaton, Illinois, and you're going to see a statement on the wall from Charley Finney that says this, "There are seven things you can do to cause revival. Revival is an act of man, not an act of God." That's what it says in the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism, "Revival is an act of man, not of God." [UNINTELLIGIBLE]... So I contrasted the biblical view with the [UNCLEAR] view, which do now have in our culture today. One of the things I realized was the whole issue of I can't change anybody's mind. But the powerful thing is what is the content of message we're saying.

As we take a look at this, at my doctoral graduation, the chancellor of the seminary was given an award for having scheduled his 300th revival. {LAUGHTER} I was asked...I was the doctoral student asked to give a 15-minute review of my doctoral dissertation. {LAUGHTER} So the Chancellor just got this wonderful plaque and a standing ovation. He was a wonderful man of God. I really enjoyed him. But he got it for having scheduled his 300th revival. The first statement that came out of my mouth was, "You can't schedule revival." {LAUGHTER} He was very gracious. He came up to me and said, "You did a nice job," {LAUGHTER} [UNCLEAR]...[OVERLAPPING]...

Let's say we schedule revival Wednesday night from 7:00 to 9:00. What if the Holy Spirit doesn't show up. What do you have?

***Audience Member:** There won't be any.*

There won't be any. You have a nice event. But what do we do? We begin to say, "Oh, so many people came forward, so many people raised their hand." We start looking for the results of that and vindication to confirm what we had just scheduled. Revival. When you look at it from a biblical point of view, revival...look at it historically. Revival is a sovereign act of God and the demonstration of all of his power and righteousness.

Do you know what one of the great signs of revival, historically, has been? Silence. Because people are in awe about the fact that God visited them through the Holy Spirit. When you read the great Scottish revival, there was a sense of awe, there was a sense of quietness. What would you do, guys, if God just appeared to us in a magnificent way we've never seen before? I don't think you'd be saying, "Go! Go Steelers!" I think there'd be a sense of just reverential awe at the fact that God has chosen to visit us in all of his power and righteousness. That's powerful. I don't know what I would need to say. And I hope that you wouldn't say anything else. We'd just be in as awe. You see, that's one of the characteristics when you look at true biblical revival. It's silence. It's just not necessarily jumping up and down. I'm not saying that emotion is not appropriate. All I'm saying, guys, is sometimes we construct emotion to validate what we create.

I was in a church when I was filling in at one of the churches here in Pittsburgh for about year. A gentleman came up to me after their contemporary worship service and said, "Boy, the Holy Spirit was really here." I said, "Based upon what?" He said, "Look at the enthusiasm people had. They were jumping up and down and raising their hands." I said, "Isn't that terrific. You can get that at a Steeler rally." Now is that the sign of the Holy Spirit? No, the Holy Spirit may prompt emotion. It may happen.

But that's not the sign of it. I said, "Yes, the Holy Spirit was here because truth was proclaimed." Truth was proclaimed. That's the evidence of the Holy Spirit. That's why it's so important that we understand that one of the key ingredients of the local church has got to be expository preaching. It's got to be the preaching, because when the people reject what they hear, they're rejecting the Savior. When they reject the Savior, they're rejecting the One who sent him. Serious business.

One of the indicators of a church where you and I attend has got to be what we hear from the pulpit. Let's now take a look at some of the, what we call our response to preaching. We've seen the consequences of preaching. Let's take a look at the response to preaching. First of all, I think we reverently need to listen to the preaching. We need to reverently listen to the sermon. Listening is an act of worship because who is speaking?

Audience Member: God.

God is speaking. It's an act of worship. Martin Luther said, "The highest worship of God is the preaching and the listening of the Word." The highest act of worship is the preaching and the listening of the Word. Now do you notice how our culture, unfortunately, we have marginalized this message of the sermons. We can take a look at our bulletins, how they're organized—praise and worship, sermon. It's almost like we're saying the sermon is an afterthought. So to some degree we've got to be careful, even in the structure of our worship service, that we don't give the idea that we're going to have praise and worship and then you gotta listen to a sermon. If you have praise and worship, it prepares us to listen to the sermon, because the highest act of worship is the preaching and the listening of the preached word.

You can listen to it on the radio. You can see it on TV. Those things may be supplemental, but there's no substitute for the public corporate worship with the family of God and the Lord today. You cannot replace that. Sometimes people say, "I don't need to go to church. I'm not involved in a church." I say, "Man, I'm really glad to meet you because you're the first person that I've ever met, outside of the Scripture, who's not associated with the local body." It may supplement, but it cannot replace corporate worship.

I think preaching should be a primary consideration when choosing a church. You've got to take a look at that. Preaching's got to be a primary consideration when you're choosing where to worship with the church. It's God's Word that changes hearts, lives, not social activity.

Romans 1:16, the message is the method. The message is the message. I think it's important we pray for our preachers. That's a response to our preaching. We have to pray for our preachers. Because of the responsibility that they've been given, as I just outlined for you in Luke 10, and also because of spiritual warfare. Satan is a far better theologian than all of us pastors. He will want churches filled with people who are getting a weak, synthetic Gospel as opposed to a biblical gospel, because it makes him look good. But there's no good there. So we've got to be careful. Just pray for your pastors. Pray for your preaching. It's a serious thing. Pray for their protection.

Charles Spurgeon was asked once, when he was preaching at Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, was asked about the power behind his preaching, and this is what he said, "Four hundred men pray for me before worship. That's our heating plan." Four hundred men were downstairs in a room praying for him while he was preaching. He said, "That is what brings heat to our church." It was not some HVAC system; it was the prayers of men who were praying for him as he was preaching, and he recognized that, and he was dependent upon that.

Notice in Ephesians 6 that Paul requested prayer for himself, that he would pray the words that he

needed to say. You'll see that in Colossians 4:2-4 also.

I think another important response to expository preaching, guys, would be this. Let's just be...we've got to be serious now. Look at yourself for a moment. Evaluate your own spiritual health on your hunger for preaching. Evaluate your own spiritual health on your hunger for preaching.

What do you look for when you go to church? Are you looking for a blessing? Or do you go to give one? Remember, worship is a verb. Worship is not something you get. Worship is something you give. Literally it means to kiss toward. When you and I go to church to worship on the Lord's day with the family of God, do we go with the attitude of saying "I'm want to give back to you. I want to give you something"? Or do you go, coming out of church and say, "Well, I didn't get a blessing. I'm not going to go there." You see, there's a difference in attitude.

You've got to realize, you've got to evaluate your own spiritual maturity by your hunger for the preached Word. Because what is it that's going to feed you? It's not going to be social activity. Now I'm not saying that social activities are inappropriate. Please understand what I'm not saying. I'm saying when you begin to evaluate your own spiritual maturity, one of those barometers has got to be do I have a real hunger to hear a preached Word. That's got to be an indication for us is our response to Him through the Scripture. You'll notice that in 2 Timothy 4. We have to evaluate ourselves and our desire for the preached Word.

Then I want you to understand some of the blessings, understand some of the blessings of the preached Word. Let's look at some of those. Take a look at this. Go to Luke 11:28. Notice revival might have the paragraph titled here of True Blessedness. "²⁷As he (Jesus) said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!' ²⁸But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" Now what's he saying? Jesus affirmed and expanded the blessing of what was talked about in the context of those verses. And notice this, a believer hearing or obeying the Word is blessed than Mary who merely brought Christ into the world. You realize that? Jesus is saying, "The person who listens to the Word and obeys it, is more blessed than the woman who gave me birth," because the woman would say, "Blessed is woman that gave you birth." He's saying, "Truth...but real blessing is this. Not the woman who gave me birth and who nursed me at her breast. Real blessings is the one who listens to the Word and obeys it." That's true blessing.

Guys, we have to evaluate ourselves about our hunger to hear the preached Word. What does that say about me? Not about the preacher. What's it say about me? True blessedness of hearing and obeying.

Let's see Matthew 13. Here's the parable of the sower explained in verses 18-23. You're very familiar with this perhaps. "¹⁸Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

There's just a wonderful illustration, explanation there of the value of listening to the preached word. However we look at it guys, we've got to have some understanding that the most important thing in the local church, it's why I'm starting with this first, is expository preaching. What is it you hear from the

pulpit? There's a seriousness there that we don't understand in our culture anymore because we've abdicated preaching as something that's been marginalized for something now entertaining. We've just got to be careful. Guys, pray for your pastors. Pray for your preachers. They're under tremendous pressure. [UNCLEAR]...a lot of pressure in life, and we just understand the role of the pastor/teacher. If you have got 400 members, you've got 400 job descriptions. It's really difficult. It's difficult. You can't please anybody.

I think I told you a situation. Some years ago, there was a large reformed Baptist church in Tennessee that approached me about becoming a candidate for the role of their Senior Pastor. They said, "Dr. Bickel, what's the one thing you can guarantee us?" {LAUGHTER} I said, "The one thing I'll guarantee you is that I'll fail." "No we want...what are you guaranteeing?" I said, "The only thing I can guarantee you is I'll fail." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "How many member do you have?" They said, "We have 1,200." I said, "Well, 1,199 are going to be displeased because I can't meet everybody expectations, but I'm going to work my butt off. But that's the one thing that tell you is that I'll fail because I will not be able to meet everybody's expectations."

We've got to realize, guys, the importance of our praying for our pastors. Whoever God has been pleased to put as the pastor of your church, you and I have a responsibility to pray for his protection and for his power. And become a friend. Come along side and be a friend. Sometimes they just need somebody to walk down the street and go to Panera's with and have a bagel. Just be their friend. You've got to minister to your pastors because of the significance of the role that they hold. The degree to which we protect them and hold them responsible hopefully will be a degree to which they will be responsible in the performance of their duties in preaching God's word, that we can be great asset to them. We can be a great help to them. Don't forget to pray for your pastor.

God's word, when we talk about listening to the word, is not only restricted to the words of Christ, but also to all of Scripture. Glory and honor are given to all the preachers of the Gospel. What are some of the blessed effects of listening to the Scripture? Of listening to the word preached? Well, in Revelation 1:3, there's power in our life. One of the results is just power in your life when you hear the preached word. 1 Peter 3:1, you bring others into the blessedness of hearing God's word.

In 1 Peter 2:12, it changes the way that we talk. It changes our conversations. Remember what Jesus says? Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Guys, one of the greatest barometers of your and my spiritual maturity are the words that we say, because it's a reflection of what? Not your oratory skills. It's the reflection of your heart. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Why do you say what you say in a given situation? Why did you choose these words? Why did you use those words? What is it somebody stimulated within you? How do you respond? You see, thoughts become our words. Words become our actions. Actions become our habits. Habits become our character. And character becomes our destiny. You see, brothers, it all starts with how you and I think. And what is a way that God begins to change the way that we think? It's by being, our having been exposed to the preached word, the Scripture, the sufficiency of Scripture.

Examine yourself the next time you're in a conversation. I had to do that the other night. I just said, "Whoops!" I missed it. Why did I say that? I had to go back to that friend and say, "Would you forgive me for what I just said," and he said, "I didn't think about it." I said, "But I did, because it was a reflection of my heart, not what you did to me. The thing that I was exposed was the condition of my own heart, not your conduct toward me."

Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. May God give us the grace, brothers, to really examine our response to the Scripture and to the preached word. The degree to which you and I have a hunger for the Scripture and the preached word is one of the better barometers of our spiritual condition.

I can't answer that for you. All I'm saying is that has got to be one of our responses to hearing preaching. You'll have hunger for it.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that in your providence and your sovereign grace you were pleased to put people in the position to preach the word. May we do that in season and out of season, and may we do it with grace realizing that you alone are the one who can change hearts. That means this, Father, that every time that you and I, as brothers, have a chance to proclaim the person and work of Christ, we are successful. Success is not determined by the response of the hearer; it's really determined by the words of the proclaimed. Whenever we can proclaim the cross of Christ and him crucified, we are successful. We're just going to trust you for the results, and make it so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!