

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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You should have lesson number seven and lesson number eight. I hope to get through lesson number seven today; just one more addition to that outline. We're following the outline of the wonderful little book, *The Healthy Church*, by Mark Dever. I'm just adding things to it as we go.

We're talking about the essentials of a local church that are essential for the healthy church. The word healthy means that the church is alive. We're not using the word perfect because we know that the moment that you and I join the church, it is no longer perfect. We're using the word healthy as an indicator that there's something alive and vibrant, that it can mature, it can grow. It's in a process of development, and so we're looking at the ingredients of a healthy church. With that in mind, let's have Don take us to the throne of grace and just prepare our hearts and in a moment of quiet, realize that he is God.

[Music]

Gracious Lord, we come before you this morning with great anticipation that your Holy Spirit will fulfill his job description and lead us and guide us into all truth. We pray, Lord, that you would open our eyes once again that we might behold you more clearly. We don't ask for answers as much, Lord, as we just ask for a visible understanding of who you are in all of your glory, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We've been talking recently about expository preaching and the need for good, sound exposition in the church—a primary ingredient—because the moment that you begin to move away from what I'm calling expositional preaching, or exposing the Scripture to the congregation, the congregation no longer ceases to grow and it no longer becomes healthy. We've looked at the primacy of preaching in worship. The number one ingredient of worship is really the preaching and the teaching and the listening of the word. Yes, we use other ingredients to help us worship—our music and our confessions and other things, but they really ought to be designed to support the sermon.

Then we've talked about the definition of preaching, which is essentially expositing or exposing people to the word. We've talked about the ordination of preaching. In the Old Testament, it was through prophets. In the New Testament, it was through the apostles. We've talked about the content of preaching, which is the cross of Christ, which is the centrality of the message. It's Christ and Him crucified. That doesn't mean that we don't talk about other things, but everything really centers around, and in and through, the centrality of the message of Christ and Him crucified. We talked last week about the consequences of preaching and our response to preaching.

What I'd like to do today, brothers, as we begin to finish this up, is to give us some indication of remember the consequences of not being associated with the Word of God. We've talked about what it is to respond. We need to listen, we need to respect and pray for our pastors and so forth, but what are some of the symptoms or what are some of the indications of a church that is not exposed to preaching in a sound way through the message of the cross.

Let me give you some suggestions. We need to remember the down side of this as much as the positive side. So first of all, when you look at John 15:22, when a church is not exposed to the Scripture, in other words, they don't have a good diet of expositional preaching, the Holy Spirit will increase our condemnation. An example of that would be in Luke 12:47, where you'll see that the servant knew what he was supposed to do but he didn't do it. When you and I are not exposed to the preaching of the word,

you see, it is the preaching of the word that exposes our sin. One of the greatest comforts we have in all of Scripture is knowing this—that Jesus came to take away the sin of the world.

One of the things that expository preaching does in the local church, week after week after week, is it exposes sin. Now if that's not occurring, there's nothing to repent of, there's nothing to give to Christ that he will forgive for your sins, so there's a whole group of people who don't have their sins exposed. So really, what happens is, when you are not exposed to expositional preaching on a consistent basis, it's going to increase your condemnation because you don't know that you're sinning. When you don't know that you're sinning, you don't have nothing to repent about. You see how that works?

So it's obvious that our condemnation will increase when we are not exposed to the word because the Scripture is the means by which God reveals our sin, which draws us to the person and work of Christ. That's why Paul said, "The law," which exposes sin, "The law was designed as a schoolmaster to lead me to Christ." That doesn't mean that we preach hell, fire and brimstone every week. I'm not saying that. But as you remember 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired (or God breathed), breathed out by God and profitable for four things." The first one is doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, "so that the man of God will be equipped for every good work.

Notice the four things there, as we talked about recently. First of all, it's all God breathed. All the Scripture come out and the first thing it does is it reveals the standard. That's doctrine. The second thing is it reveals the error. That's reproof. The third thing is it reveals the correction. That's the correction in the error in the standard that you had. The fourth thing is it's the training in righteousness. That's the prevention of making the same error again. If you remove the exposition of Scripture from a church body, you're not going to have those four things going on. One of those four things on is the reveal of our sin. The revealing of our sin is what leads us to the person and work of Christ to seek his forgiveness. Our condemnation in the local church will be increased as a result of not having a consistent diet of expositional preaching.

***Audience Member:** Would you please repeat those four again. I write as fast as I can.*

Absolute. Okay. Certainly. 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God breathed and profitable for four things." First of all is for doctrine. That's the word standard. The very first thing that the Holy Spirit will do through leading and guiding us into all truth is to reveal the standard of the Kingdom of God. We talk about being a mission minded member of a movement. That movement is the Kingdom of God. The Scripture reveals that standard. That's doctrine. Its teaching. That's why the gift of the church is the gift of the pastor/teacher. There has to be teaching involved in the pastoralship of a person who's at the pulpit. So the very first thing the Holy Spirit does is it reveals the standard.

The next word is the word reproof. That means to reveal an error. An error in what? An error in the standard. The second thing the Scripture will do, by expository preaching, will reveal the standard. It will reveal the error in the standard that you might have.

The third thing the Scripture says there, it's profitable for correction. In other words, that corrects the error, the reproof, in the standard that you had. It might be that I, I know the doctrine. I didn't know I had the error. How do I correct it? The Scripture's going to teach you to do that. If you're not exposed to the Scripture, you're not going to see that sequence.

The last thing is training in righteousness. That is to reveal the prevention of making the same error again in the standard.

It goes like this. Reveal the standard, reveal the error, reveal the correction, and reveal the prevention, to

prevent you from doing it again. Now that's a summary, brothers, of the value of expositional preaching week after week after week on the Lord's day for a group of people coming together called the local church. When you do not have that, condemnation is going to increase in the membership because they will not be exposed. They will not be exposed.

***Brian:** This was quite a while back and it made logical sense to me that those who didn't hear the word, you would actually have less condemnation than those who showed up to church, heard the word, but didn't respond to it or do anything to it. Could you maybe touch on that?*

Sure. The next one is this. Let's take a look at Luke 12:47. It's a both/and, Brian. People will think that they're not being...they will think they're not being increased in their condemnation, but they are, because they're not being exposed, they're not dealing with their sin. That's increased condemnation. Let me just show you an example. Go to Luke 12:47, "And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating." In other words, a person's got to know it, and then they've got to do it. If we don't preach, people are never going to know what they need to correct. That's why that 2 Timothy 3:16 is so important to understand that sequence—standard, error, correction, prevention. That's what Scripture does. Somewhere the Holy Spirit's going to apply one of those four applications to every verse of Scripture that you and I read and every verse of Scripture that you and I hear preached. It's going to be one of those four applications.

That's why you don't want to sit around in a Bible study and ask yourself the question, "What does this mean to me?" It doesn't make any difference what it means to you or to me. Ironically, and realistically, our opinions are irrelevant. The only thing that matters is this. What am I going to do about what I just learned? Is it a standard? Is it an error? Is it a correction? Or is it a prevention. One of those four things I've got to act on.

I've told you before that I have errors in my theology. I just don't know where they are yet. When I have them, I've changed, and I've done that over the years, because they've been refined. As I study the Scripture, I've said, "Whoa! I'm a little off track on that. It really is about election and not my free will." There are things that have happened in my mind as I've just studied the Scripture.

***Don:** You have said, or the gentleman said about members who don't hear the word and their condemnation, but I think that, I really shudder for some pastors who don't preach the word. For example, I had read a couple of days ago in a certain denomination about a pastor who ordained a homosexual. If that person doesn't repent, I shudder to think what his condemnation will be. So I think that the onus is on pastors as well as members of congregations.*

Absolutely right. Don's got a great point. There are two responsibilities. The responsibility of the pastor to preach the word and Christ and Him crucified, and the responsibility of the congregation to hold and assure that he does it. It's a both/and not an either/or. You and I, as church members, have an absolute responsibility for what we hear in the pulpit. Now that doesn't mean that you go, you evaluate and give him a grade, "You got an "F" this week and a "B" last week." I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is there is a degree of responsibility that we have. But the first responsibility is in the pulpit.

I know this—the thing that motivates me, and I don't say fearfully, but it holds me in awe, and why I try to take it so seriously is this. I know that when I stand before the Lord, just my conjecture of what he's going to ask me, he's going to say, "Why did you say that? What is the basis, what was your reason for saying what you said?" You see, that's a tremendous responsibility that we have as pastor/teachers is that, "Why did you say what you said when I gave you what to say? Why did you do that? What was your motive? Did you really think that you're being creative was better than my being the Creator, when I created all things?"

You see, there is a degree where we need to hold our pastors accountable, but that doesn't mean that you're a judge of them. You're not a judge of them. You need to come along side them and be their prayer warrior and be their partner and whatever you can do. But that doesn't mean that you and I evaluate them. But we do have, as a church, the responsibility to make sure that we are being exposed to the Scripture because of these reasons.

Another one would be this. In 1 Samuel 2:12, "God will consider your hearing as not hearing if you do not make intention to obey." In other words, just because you're hearing it, if you do not have the intention to be obedient to him, he's going to consider it as not listening.

***Audience Member:** What Scripture is that, Bruce?*

1 Samuel 2:12. The idea is this. You and I might listen, but if there's not the intent to apply, if there's not the intent to make that happen, if there's not the intent to say, "What am I going to do about what I just learned," God's going to view that as saying he's not listening at all. It's just not the words that you're listening to, it's the application in your heart. That's why, friends, in your Bible study, you always want to ask the question, "What am going to do about what I just learned?" That's the critical question. You don't share your ignorance. You share your desire to be obedient.

We need to realize that God's going to view, if we don't have the intent to be obedient, he's going to view that as, "They're not listening at all," because this is just not some rhetoric, some words, that I want you to digest. Remember, knowledge, or learning, should not stop at knowledge. Learning should lead to living. That's the application. Living should lead to loving, because God is love. And so it moves in that direction.

***Sig:** Is there no room for tradition? I know that's a wide open question, but I think more so of some denominations that have things in their rituals or whatever that may not have a specific biblical basis, but it's been a tradition.*

Well, I think you have to be careful about... we have our Christian traditions. The Lord's Supper is a tradition. It's an instruction. It's an ordinance. It's something the Lord gave us to do. It's a tradition that we observe. Baptism is a tradition in that sense. We need to be careful. There are certain traditions that are profound and are very, very applicable for us as followers of Christ. I think we need to be careful when we come up with man-made traditions, that we begin to worship them rather than the means behind it who is the person and work of Christ. There's a fine line that we have responsibility. There's nothing wrong with tradition, as long as it leads you to the person and work of Christ and not something else, and that's where we have to be wise and very, very discerning.

***Sig:** Thank you.*

So we do have our own traditions. Here's another one. In John 14:15, "If your people are not exposed to the Scripture, its evidence that they don't have a love for God." When they are not being exposed to the Scripture, it reveals to that group of people, if they do not desire hearing the preached word, its an indication that they really don't have a love for God. Exodus 20:6 would be an illustration of that, "Where there is a love for God, there will be a desire to keep the commandments." Let's go to Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. Just let me read this. We want to get down to verse 6, but let me read you in the context, beginning at verse 4, "⁴You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Now, do you see there, the definition of love, at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, is obedience? How do you love God? You jump up and down and get all excited and say, “Oh I love God.” That may be a response. I’m not saying that’s not right. But I’m saying this—the real test of your love for God is your desire to be obedient.

I’m going to read you something from Christopher Love at the end, if I have time, that’s going to help us understand, because you and I might have a desire to do something that you just can’t do it. Do you ever get that way? “Lord, you know, I just, I really want to do that, but I just failed again. I just can’t do it. Am I doomed?” I want to read you something from one of my favorite Puritan authors in a moment to help us balance that out.

But I want you to understand this. When a congregation does not have a love for the word, they’re basically saying this, “We don’t have a love for God,” because your love for God is based upon your response to the Scripture.

Let me show you something in Amos 8—one of my great concerns about our nation—beginning at verse 9, ⁹“And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. ¹¹Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land,” now notice this, “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.””

I’ll tell you what, folks, my great concern for our country is that we’re beginning to see a famine. It’s not of water. It’s not of food. We’ve got all the food we need. We’ve got all the water we need; we just need to manage it better. But my fear is this—we are beginning to see a famine of the word, and that is the most severe famine that a culture could ever experience. I’ll give you some symptoms of that in a moment. Brothers, we need to make sure that the churches we’re involved in are exposing us to the Scripture, because it’s a direct correlation to our condemnation to our love for God. My fear is that we’re in the midst of a famine of hearing the word preached in our churches. Very serious stuff. The result of that will be Matthew 21:43, “The kingdom will be taken away and all the Gospel and associate ministry will be removed.” When there’s a famine of the word, the Kingdom of God ministry and its impact will be taken away and removed from that country or that local church. Serious stuff.

Let me give you symptoms of a famine. Here’s a symptom of the famine. No eternal fruit as a result of all ministry activity. No eternal fruit. Isaiah 44:4, “No eternal fruit as a result of all the ministry activity.” A lot of activity. A lot of stuff going on. But what are the eternal consequences?

You’ve heard me speak of Charles Spurgeon, the great reformed Baptist preacher in London in the 1800’s. In his pulpit, which I had the privilege of preaching at years ago, you would walk up to the podium where he would preach and it was elevated because he wanted the word to be elevated among the people. Basically, the balcony was eye-level with him. He said, “I want to look directly to the eye level of people in the balcony, and the people were down here, but, “I want the word to be elevated. I want them to see the sample of the word being elevated, because that’s what I want to do when I preach. I want to elevate them to the word.” There were 13 or 14 steps to get him up to this pulpit. One day, somebody asked him, “Pastor Spurgeon, why does it take you so long to get up to preach?” Here’s what Spurgeon said, “I take each step at a time and I say this, ‘I’m trusting the Holy Spirit. (step) I’m trusting the Holy Spirit. (step) I’m trusting the Holy Spirit,’” and he did that 14 times because he said, “I know this. If the Holy Spirit does not go before me, there will be no eternal consequence of what I do.” Guys,

that is a powerful illustration.

You see, when a church, or a nation, or a culture is in a famine of the word, eternal consequences of ministry are removed and all you have is activity. That's one of the symptoms of a famine.

Another one would be this. There is no holy violence for the truth of the Gospel (Matthew 11:12). What I mean by holy violence is, what we've been talking about, about having a warrior mentality. Not war-like activity, but warrior mentality. How violent are we? That's the word that is used here. How violent are we in our aggressiveness, sensitively aggressive, at preaching the word? That's what I mean by that. When I say there's no holy violence; in other words, do we really view ourselves as warriors in the cause of Christ? Or do we just sit ourselves back and say, "Oh love is tolerance." Now there's got to be wisdom there.

***Don:** Yeah, it used to be that the favorite Scripture of many people was John 3:16, you know, "God so loved that world he gave his only begotten son." Now it's Matthew 7:1, "Judge not lest you be judged." So if anyone would say anything, moral conduct is wrong, or the exclusivity of Christ, immediately, "Judge not lest you be judged," so your point is well taken.*

Yeah, that's a good illustration, Don. You see, we've lost this sense of we're involved in spiritual warfare. That's why we keep using the phrase here, "Brave Men." That doesn't mean that we're better than anybody else. We're just trying to set the mentality that says this—we are involved in spiritual warfare, and we need to have a warrior mentality in the proclamation of the Gospel in our churches. That's what I'm saying by that reference, that we've lost the holy violence for the cause of Christ.

***Audience Member:** Dr. Bickel, in response that, Don, it's just three verses later in John 3:19, "But this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world and men have chosen the darkness over the light." So that's just, you know, in terms of if you're in that type of a dialog, you can respond that way in terms of what Scripture says.*

Thank you. Here's another one. Another symptom of a famine. There is opposition by Gospel professors to Gospel preachers. In other words, Gospel professors are people who say, "Oh yes, I'm a follower of Christ, but I don't want to hear that." There's opposition to the masses to what the Gospel preachers are preaching, and so they're criticized. And what do we do? "Oh, I didn't get a blessing from that church. I'm going to go over here where we have this style of worship," or "I like this type of music," whatever it may be. Now I'm not knocking styles of worship or music. All I'm saying is this—one of the symptoms of a famine is when those people who are preaching the word, and doing it consistently, there is opposition from the people who are listening. They are Gospel professors.

Now there's a difference between professing Christ and confessing Christ. A professor makes a statement about Christ. It could be strictly up here in the brain, "Yes, I know that Jesus is a good teacher." Making a statement about him. A person who confesses Christ agrees with what somebody else has already said about Christ. The word confess is the Greek word *homologeō*, and it means to say the same thing as. A confessor says, "I am saying the same thing about the person and work of Jesus Christ that someone else has already said about the person and work of Jesus Christ and that is what God the Father has said this, that 'I sent my son into the world to save sinners.'" Now do you confess that? Or do you make a nice statement about Jesus? That's why we take people into the church who confess Christ, not profess Christ.

Now I know I hear a lot of churches say, "We're coming because of their transferring their confession of Christ, the profession of their membership." I think a stronger word is, "We're doing it for the confession of Christ, because we're agreeing with what somebody's already said."

Who determines what Christ is? You and I don't do that. There's a philosophy, a tradition, in evangelicalism that says you take Jesus as your Savior and make him Lord later. According to Acts 2, God's already beat you to the punch. He made him Lord. So I have to say that Christ is Lord. I don't make him anything. I accept him on his terms, not on my terms on what I think he should be. So I don't make profession; I make a confession. You see the difference? So there are many Gospel professors who really attack Gospel preachers because they're not agreeing with what the Gospel preacher has been saying because they have their own imagination of Jesus of their own imagination rather than the Jesus of biblical revelation.

Another symptom of the famine of the word. It's living above the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:12) Now Sig, this may deal something with your traditions. If you go to 1 Corinthians 1:12.

***Audience Member:** What is the principle again?*

This is this, that you live above the Gospel. In other words, you found some other tradition in which you're embracing. I'm calling that living above the Gospel, or in place of the Gospel. Go to 1 Corinthians 1:12, "¹²What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.' ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" What I'm saying there is this—that there are times people will follow a follower. They'll follow a person. They'll follow a man. "Oh, I really like this guy." There's nothing wrong with that. All I'm saying is you don't live above the Gospel. Sometimes what Paul is warning here is, "No, you don't follow men. You don't follow traditions. You follow Christ." Don't live above the Gospel. That's what I mean by that.

Lastly, if you go to Revelation 12:15 of the final, at least the final observation I would make about a famine in the land would be this—there's an increase in heresy. Increase in heresies. Revelation 12 is a picture of the remnant, of the saints of the Old and the New Testament, coming together. They're described as a body, and described Mary as one of those people. You'll notice in Revelation 12, "And a great sign appeared on the heaven, a woman..." Okay, Revelation 12:15 says this, "It says that the evil one, Satan, will spew out of his mouth." That's symbolic of speaking, of teaching, of what comes out of one's mouth. What you're going to see is the intent is that he will deceive. It's a picture of deception to the remnant. It's a picture of Satan coming and deceiving the remnant by producing erroneous heresies, errors in theology. That's why we're going to talk next week about the critical aspect of healthy church is biblical theology, to prevent error, to prevent heresies.

One of the symptoms of a famine of the word is also, the final stage, in my judgment, is Satan's attempt to, inside the church, create new heresies. We're just full of those. We're just full of those. That's because we're at warfare. Guys, remember this. The three words that the Bible always uses to describe God's people, his remnant, are three words. Remnant—it's not everybody. Secondly, is persecution. The church will be persecuted. The remnant will be persecuted because the world does not love us. Jesus said, "They don't love you because they didn't love me." Why should we think that the world's going to think we're the greatest thing since sliced bread? If we're following Christ, we're going to realize there are going to be consequences to that. That's called persecution. The third thing is warfare. The church is involved in warfare. Remnant, persecution and warfare.

***Audience Member:** What do those three words describe?*

The church. The church, the body of Christ. The body of Christ at large. Next time somebody wants to join your church, find out if they're one of the remnant. Ask them if they understand that. Are they confessors or professors? Secondly, are you ready for persecution? Join the church, We're going to

make sure you're persecuted. It's going to happen. An thirdly, are you ready to go to war? Spiritual warfare. That ought to be part of church membership. People need to understand that.

You're not joining a society just to go feel good. You're involved in something that has eternal consequences. When we are not exposed to the word, we are going to have a famine of the word in our land, and you're going to have the consequences of the symptoms that I just outlined. May God prevent us, in our country, from having him impose a famine of the word in our culture.

I want to read you a little transcript. I normally don't do this, but I was studying this recently, and I went back and revisited this. I want to read you a comment by a Puritan by the name Christopher Love. Ironically, he was beheaded in the Tower of London by...

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...

No. Who was the guy that took over? Cromwell. Thank you. Oliver Cromwell. Beheaded by Cromwell. Remember Cromwell was attempting to overthrow James the First. And he did. He threw Christopher Love in prison because Christopher Love is a believer. Both believers. Said this, according to Romans 13, James has a divine appointment over us. The king has an appointment over us. Therefore, yes, he needs to be removed. But the Scripture says I need to give my obedience to the king, even though he's a rotten king. Now I've got to figure out how to do that, but in clear conscience, I've got to do what the Scripture says, and that is I've got to be obedient to the government because they have a divine authority, and Cromwell says, "No you're a traitor," and he cut his head off.

Let me read something from Christopher Love. If you've been listening to what I'm saying the last couple of weeks, you know, I'm overwhelmed with my ineffectiveness to be what the Scripture just says we need to be. I can't do all the stuff that I've just been teaching you guys. Sometimes it frustrates the daylight out of me and saying, "What right do I have to stand up in front of a group of friends and teach them the Scripture when I can't be that." Do you ever get that feeling? I just can't do it.

Let me read you something from Christopher Love on the sermon...this sermon that he preached was on Luke 11:28, what he calls a description of true blessedness, and the verse is this, "But he said, yea rather, blessed are those that hear the word of God, and keep it." He's saying that's the verse. The one who is truly blessed is the one who hears and keeps it. Then he talks, his whole sermon is about keeping the word. But then he deals with this, because he knows this, "I know you can't keep it." I know you can't do what I just asked you to do." Let me read that.

One of the things the Puritans used to do, in their sermons, they would always deal with objections. They would go doctrine, illustration, application, objections. In other words, they were teaching the congregation, now, I'm teaching you a truth, but when somebody comes up and says, "What about this?" they would try to give you a handle on how to know how to deal with that. So let me read you his last objection to this particular sermon.

"But you will say, if they only are blessed who hear the word of God and keep it, who practice what they hear, then where is there a blessed man to be found? For where is there a man alive who can keep, who can live answerably to what he hears? I hear many a sin reprov'd, which I cannot forbear. I hear many a duty press'd, which I cannot perform. I hear many a grace persuad'd unto which I cannot act and keep. Now how can any man be blessed seeing he cannot keep what he hears? That's a great question. Now here's his answer. This is where we need to have balance in what we're talking about. "If you indeed lived under a covenant of works, you could never be blessed because you can never keep what you hear according to that exactness, which a covenant of works requires. For that commands a man to keep the whole law, to keep it perfectly, and to keep it personally. But for your comfort, know

that you are not under a covenant of works, but under a covenant of grace, which does not require a perfect, but a sincere obedience to the law of God,” now notice this, “which accepts the will for the deed.”

Now guys, do you get this? Do you realize this? In the covenant of grace? You get credit for the intention, even when you can't keep it. That doesn't mean it gives us license. Let me protect us now. That doesn't mean, “Oh boy! I can go do what I want.” I'm not saying that. Look at the other side of this. In a covenant of grace, when you have the desire, the intention, to want to keep it, and you can't, who kept it for you? Christ kept it for you.

Lets read on, “Oh remember that you are not under a covenant of works, but a covenant of grace, which accepts what Christ has done and suffered for you if you are a believer, as if it were done in your own person. Though, indeed, that it is true what Christ said to the young man, ‘If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17),’ yet you must know that Christ spoke this unto him because he knew him to be a Pharisee temper and that he thought to be saved by his good works. But if Christ should say this unto us, ‘You shall go to heaven if you keep every command, and you shall never go to heaven if you break any one command,’ the Lord have mercy on all of us. We should then all perish to eternity, but Christ said, ‘Believe and live.’ Now promise, not work is the object of our faith (Romans 4:16). Therefore Ambrose was want to say, ‘Let us hope for pardon as of our faith, not of debts.’ In a word, what makes conscious to keep what you hear, bewail your inability to fulfill the law of God? Do what you can and mourn that you cannot do better, and then God will say, ‘Though you cannot keep the law completely, yet my son has kept it for you. I accept his obedience as your obedience, and his righteousness as your righteousness.’ There's justification by faith alone. You get credit for the righteousness of Christ, even when your intent, you want to do it, and you fail, because you're one of his remnant, he says, ‘I'm giving you credit for the obedience of my son at that moment in your life, and yes, you failed, but you get credit for what he accomplished, not what you intended to do.’ You get credit for the intention.

“Oh what grace and mercy is here. How may this cheer up your hearts in the midst of all your discouragements that lie upon you? Again, for your comfort, know that if it's sincerely of heart, you endeavor to keep what you hear, in divine acceptance, it is all the same as if you had perfectly kept all that you hear yourself. It is the desire and labor of your soul to obey God's will and observe his commands. In divine acceptance, it is looked upon as if you were actually done this because of Christ.”

Guys, do you see the mercy in that? I mean, I find so much comfort in my failures, realizing that I'm not being evaluated on my failures. I'm being evaluated on my acceptance and confession of the person and work of Jesus Christ in my life. It doesn't give us license. It ought to be our motivation. That's why we say, we're mission minded members of a movement motivated by mercy. Do you understand the mercy that we're hearing here? This mercy, in spite of our failure, God gives us credit for the obedience of Christ.

“It is worth your noting what is said in Scripture, ‘By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and that he had received the promise, offered up his only begotten son (Hebrews 11:17).’ Abraham did not actually do what is said here. But because Abraham did it in the purpose of his heart, because the desire and resolution of his soul was to obey God's command, therefore the Scripture counts it as done. Oh take this for your comfort, dear friend, you who are a child of Abraham, who walk in the steps and faith of Abraham. The very desires and purpose of your heart are looked upon as if they were really and actually done. If you would pray better, hear better and practice more than you do, in divine account, that is looked upon as if you had already done it, because of Christ.”

Guys, how can we think that we have the audacity to say that you can earn your salvation? That is a

heresy that has crept into the church. Just a heresy. Because take a look at this. The covenant of works would say this—perfect obedience, every time, every moment, and do it personally. Can you do that? No. The great message of the cross is this—Christ paid for your disobedience. Now guys, this does not give us license. Please understand, it doesn't give us license to be sloppy. It ought to be a motivation for us to just fall on our knees and say, "Thank you. Thank you for your mercy. Thank you for your grace."

What is our motivation in life? It's not achievement. It's receipt. We have received the obedience of Christ. It's in receiving that, that our motivation is, "I just want to express my gratitude for what you have done that I could never do myself, and that is achieve your righteousness." You see, it's through the blood of Christ that God makes up for all of our moral failures. It's through the blood of Christ that God achieves all of his righteous demands of the law. It's because of the blood of Christ that God removes his wrath and his just indignation from our disobedience and sin. You see, it's mercy.

So brothers, we are mission minded members of a movement motivated by mercy for ministry in the marketplace. The marketplace, brother, is wherever you are, at that moment in time, is your marketplace. Brothers, we need to be aggressive responders to what we see the Lord doing in our midst. We need to have a warrior mentality about our proclaiming the message of the gospel of mercy and the covenant of grace. May God be pleased to bind our hearts in humble allegiance to the cross and render us more radiant for the benefit of a dark and perishing world, through the praise of the glory of his grace. And all of God's Brave Men said...Amen! And amen.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for our brother, Christopher Love, and I thank you that we can look back upon the saints who've gone before us and learn. Father, may our knowledge not be the result of our learning, but may our living be the result of our learning, and may our loving be the result of our living. We just pray this for Jesus' sake, and may it be so. Amen!