

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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Gracious Father, we come to you with great humility today as we listen to the prayer requests that we verbalized. Father, we know that there are more that we need to lay at the throne of grace, and we do that just in a moment of silence. We just ask, Lord, as the physician of the soul and of the body that would act in a way that would be commensurate with your glory and your majesty and your will, that you would be involved in these prayer requests as you see fit, you would give us the grace and the courage and the stamina and the fortitude to accept those answers, not knowing what you may be pleased to do. So Father, we just come to you with a great deal of trust and in our quietness, we just offer these requests to you for your grace and mercy. (*moment of silence*) You are our King and we come to you because you are the only one who can pardon our sin. You are our Father, for you are the only one who can provide our daily needs. And you are our Master because you are the only one who can ward off the fiery darts of the evil one. We come to you this morning trusting that your Holy Spirit will perform his job description and guide us into all truth, and that you'd be pleased, once again, as you so faithfully do every Friday, open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

We've been studying Mark Dever's outline of the description of a healthy church, going into much more detail. We've been looking at the three essentials of the healthy church. The word healthy really describes something that's alive, something that's maturing, something that is growing, as opposed to the ideal church or the perfect church. We're talking about a healthy church.

What are some of the indicators, the essential ingredients of a healthy, growing church? The first one was expository preaching, and that is where we expose the Scripture. It's based upon our understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture. The great battleground in the church today in America, in my judgment, is not the authority of Scripture; it's the sufficiency of Scripture. Is the Scripture sufficient for all things related to faith and practice? We give a lot of lip service to that when we say yes the authority is the Scripture, but then we act like it's not sufficient because we go to outside sources looking for those things that deal with our spiritual lives. So we just have to be careful.

One of the first essentials is what do we hear from the pulpit? That would be expository preaching. That would be going through verse by verse, not necessarily limited to verse by verse, but really what is means is, you're exposing, to the congregation, the sufficiency of Scripture. It basically is this question to the pastor, "What is the reason you said you said? What's the reason you are saying what you're saying?" That's expositional preaching. In other words, you go to the Scripture.

As you've heard me say over the many years, expository preaching is plagiarism. You take a message that's already given and you just re-give it. That's essentially what expository preaching is. That's the critical ingredient for a church to mature, to be healthy and to grow.

Last week, Bishop Rogers did a superb job of helping us understand biblical theology, which is the second essential of the church. Biblical theology. In other words, expository preaching deals with what we are taught, or how we are taught, and biblical theology deals with what we are taught. Bishop Rogers did a wonderful job last week, and I would encourage you to get his transcript of that, because it is some wonderful information for us to recognize why this is an essential ingredient in a healthy church.

It really basically says theology is the study of God. It's the study of God. When we talk about a biblical theology, it means we're studying the God of Biblical revelation, not the God of human imagination. So it's a critical understanding for us.

I want to expound just a little bit on that. The idea of having a biblical theology really is, in other words, you describe what we mean by a biblical theology and the sufficiency of Scripture is this word soundness. Paul uses the word soundness many times in the Scripture in dealing with his pastoral protégées, Timothy and Titus, when he says, “Be sure that you’re preaching soundly.” You’re soundly exposing the Word of God.

It also means reliable, accurate, faithful. The root word of this word really means healthy or whole. One of the ingredients we need to have an understanding is a biblical theology really guides the whole church. That means a couple of difficult things. It means we need to understand where it requires complete agreement and where there’s some degree of liberty and where there’s some degree of charity. As the ancients used to say, here’s a very good summary, “In the essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things charity.” That’s a good way of summarizing what we’re talking about in the church.

In the essentials, salvation by grace alone. Salvation not by works. That’s an essential. You’ve got to be unified on that. Some of the other things in the Scripture, there may be some dubiety as to the essentiality of that. An example might be the difference between armed resistance or passivism. You can define both sides. Now is that a critical ingredient for one’s salvation? No. It may be for one’s maturity and expression of their faith and their obedience. But to some degree, there’s going to be some liberty in some of those things. So we need to understand the difference between the essentials of the faith—justification by faith alone, a gospel understanding. That’s what we’re going to talk about next. Those are the essentials, but in the non-essentials, there needs to be some degree of liberty.

But in all things, in the church, we need to be characterized by charity. Now also, biblical theology means sometimes, from the pulpit, you have to deal with difficult or unpopular themes, such as the sovereignty of God. People don’t like to hear about the sovereignty of God because we think we’re the captains of our own ship. But from the pulpit, you see, biblical theology says I don’t have an option; I have to teach the sovereignty of God because it comes from the sufficiency of Scripture.

You have to teach the doctrine of election. People don’t want to hear that because they want to think, “I have a choice.” Well, what does the Scripture say? As we’ve gone through Ephesians 1 and 2, what does the Scripture say? Biblical theology says the most merciful, gracious, compassionate, loving doctrine in all the Scripture is the doctrine of election, because God has taken somebody who’s dead in their trespasses and sin, and out of his absolute mercy, grace and love for that person in eternity past, and he had written their name in the Lamb’s Book of Life, he breathes life into them. That’s an act of mercy, and yet we have this opinion that says, “Oh, I don’t get to make a choice.” You can’t make a choice because you can’t do anything, you can only operate according to your nature. If your nature is a depraved nature, if it is a sinful nature, you can’t make any decision that’s spiritual. Now that’s the whole concept of election. We’ve talked a lot about that over the years.

We have to be understanding that biblical theology means you’re going to have to deal with these difficult issues when they come and have the courage to do that because expository preaching makes sure that you do that, because you can’t avoid it. So there has to be some degree of courage and fortitude in the pulpit to deal with some of those issues.

Let me just give you two other examples. Turn with me in your bibles to John 6. I want to talk about two very unpopular themes that people like to avoid in the Scripture because it doesn’t “make people feel good.” Now sometimes we need to understand that we need to teach what people need to hear, not what they want to hear. So let me just give you two quick examples. Let’s go to John 6:44. It has to do with man’s ability.

In modern day church, we think that man has the ability to make spiritual decisions when he's unregenerate. How can a dead person do anything, spiritually? The Scripture makes it very clear that you're dead in your trespasses and sins, which means you can't do anything spiritual to please God, unless something supernatural happens. That's what Jesus told John in John 3, "Nicodemus, you must be born again. Unless something supernatural happens in your life, Nicodemus, even though you're a Pharisee, you've got a lot of your theology right, you made one fatal error, and that's you have externalized religion. You've made it something that's external. And Nicodemus, you've got to understand this—unless something supernatural happens in your life, where God implants a life that has its origin in heaven, not in this earth, where God supernaturally graciously implants the life that has its origin in heaven in your life, Nicodemus, you can't even see the Kingdom of God." Now that word see means three things. Identify the location, know how to enter, and how to participate in its blessings. He says, "Nicodemus, unless something supernatural happens to you, you can't even see it, even though you're externally thinking you're doing everything." Now that has to do with man's ability. It goes back to our total depravity.

If you ever think about the total depravity of man, and you think that the world is good...yes, there is good in it. Remember, evil is a parasite. Evil exists because of it's in an environment of good. Because what is evil? It's the absence of good. You can have good without evil, but you can't have evil without good, because evil is a parasite. It derives its life from that which is good, and it vacates, it removes it, and therefore you have evil. It's the absence of that which is good. You have to have a good environment for evil to exist.

Now if you want to know what evil exists in this world, go to the airport. I travel a great deal. I have to take off my shoes. I have to take off my belt. I go through this thing that's checking to see if I've got explosive devices on my body. I get frisked. I get all sorts of things. You just look at that. That's a perfect example of the total depravity of man because look at what the evil has done to the rest of the world. When people act irresponsibly, the rest of us suffer needlessly. If you want an example and question the depravity of man, go to the airport and see what has happened over the years, what now we have to go through just to get on an airplane. You see, that's evidence of man's depravity because of the impact it's having upon the world and society. Every time I go to the airport, I'm just reminded of man's absolute depravity, because of the consequences of depravity and its impact upon the rest of the people of this world.

One of the unpopular things that we don't like to talk about is man's inability. Now Jesus talks with it very clearly. Go to John 6:44, when Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." But that's not fair. That's not fair. God can't be loving. I mean, that's not fair. Fairness is not something that we talk about. Remember, fairness is not one of his 28 attributes. Righteousness and justice are, but not fairness. Fairness is a human evaluative. Righteousness and justice are characteristics of God's nature.

Jesus says this, "No one." "But I'm a good guy. I've been going to church. I'm raised in America. I belong to a church. I'm director of my youth group when I was a kid. I'm a good guy. You're telling me that I can't come unless he draws me? That says that I don't have a choice." Well, that's exactly what it means. You don't have a choice, because you can't do anything. You see, that's an offense to people. But biblical theology says you've got to teach that. Notice the verb in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless who sent me draws him." Notice the word "can." The word "can" has to do with ability. The word "may" has to do with permission. It doesn't say "No one *may* come to me unless the Father." It says, "No one *can*." This is an issue of your inability to come because you can't. Jesus doesn't say a mamby pamby little thing and say, "Oh, you may come if you want to. You have the option of coming." He's saying, "In your total depraved condition, you can't come unless, Nicodemus of the world, something supernatural happens in your life, and God plants a life within you that has its origin in

heaven.” You see, how can a dead man do anything? What does a dead man need? Faith or life? Life.

I’ve told you this story many times. I’ve been involved in several ordination counsels, where you take a young man who’s been called into the Gospel ministry and you ask him their questions after they’ve come out of seminary, and you do it through an exam. It’s sometimes very grueling. I’ve been on five or six of these over my years. I only ask one or two questions. One of them is this, “What comes first? Faith or life?” I’ve asked that question six times. Four times I heard faith. What that tells me? They don’t understand a biblical gospel. They don’t understand what Jesus just said when he said, “You can’t come.” You don’t need faith. You need life. [Ectao tatao d'geneta]—he who has been born of God believes. You see, belief doesn’t save you. Belief is the first evidence of the fact that you are saved, because a dead man can’t do what? A dead man can’t believe? He needs life. Now that’s an unpopular doctrine, because in our modern society, we’re saying, “Oh, all I have to do is say the sinner’s prayer and believe.” Well how can a dead man do that? He can do the externally, but he may just be nothing other than a deceived Nicodemus, because we don’t know that.

Ted: *Bruce, let me ask you a difficult question. Is what you just taught an essential or a non-essential?*

Absolutely an essential. No question about it.

Ted: *Unity would be based on that essential.*

That’s correct.

Ted: *We would go into a church, if we heard them preaching pro-abortion, we would say, “We can’t have unity with that church.” Or we could go into another church and hear them preach the choice is up to you, and we could have, and many of us would...*

Many of us would say, “That’s okay. We need to be tolerant.”

Ted: *I understand.*

Love is defined in America by tolerance, but not in the Scripture. Jesus says, “If you obey me, you love me.”

Audience Member: *Most of the churches, though, are not of a mindset of reformed theology like this.*

Well let’s don’t use the word “reformed.” Use biblical. Don’t get hung up on literature names. This is biblical theology. That’s what we’re talking about. That’s what Bishop Rogers talked about last week. He’s talking about biblical theology. Now in my mind, biblical theology and reformed theology are synonyms. But let’s just talk about biblical theology. That’s what the Scripture says. If you want to argue, argue with Jesus. Don’t argue with me. Now you’re going to lose, but have fun and argue. The issue here is man’s ability, and he says, “No one can.” You don’t have the ability. That, folks, is an essential of the biblical Gospel which we’re going to get into in about five minutes.

Audience Member: *Did you say earlier, Bruce, that the fatal error was that we externalize religion?*

Correct. Meaning a works oriented salvation.

Audience Member: *Okay. I was thinking that so many people say today, “Well, it’s God within us. It’s the spirit within us,” and we [UNCLEAR]...*

What he meant to Nicodemus was, “Your obedience to the Law, you think saves you.” Its external religion...it would be a works oriented salvation.

***Audience Member:** Thank you.*

Yes, this is an essential. It's one of those things that there must be unity, that's a biblical gospel. Let me give you another illustration. While we're in the book of John, let's go to John 8. John 8 down around verses 41 and 42. Now here's the world's mindset says this, “We are all God's children.” Are we? The world says we are. Wait a minute, guys, that's unloving. You mean I'm not one of God's children? Everybody is one of God's creation, but they may not be one of God's children. There's a difference. Yet you walk into so many churches...I heard President George Bush seven years ago say after 9/11, “We all need to come together because we are all God's children.” I heard President Obama say recently, “We all need to come together because the world is one great family; we're all God's children.” Now we just accept that just like its breathing. But folks, that is absolutely wrong. It is an error, and when you teach biblical theology, you've got to say what does the sufficiency of Scripture say?

Let's go to John 8:42. Here again the words of Jesus. Now you notice I'm picking Jesus' words and not mine.

***Audience Member:** Written in red, right?*

Yes. They're in red, the way he spoke them. Now notice, let me start with verse 39. They, the Pharisees, the priests, were saying, “³⁹They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,⁴⁰but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.⁴¹You are doing the works your father did.’ They said to him,” now notice this, “We were not born of sexual immorality.” Whoa! What are they doing?

***Audience Member:** Slandering him.*

They're slandering him, saying, “Look, we aren't illegitimate. You are. You're illegitimate. We're not born of...” Two meanings that could have. We're not illegitimate spiritual children because we're born of Abraham, but they're also slapping Jesus and saying, “Look, you were born illegitimately; we weren't. Therefore, we're of a higher stature in life than you are.”⁴¹We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.’⁴²Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.’⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Two kinds of people in the world—those who have God as their Father and those who have Satan as their father. That's it. Two kinds of people. Now is that popular? Does the world want to hear that? No! That's not something that the people want to hear.

Now notice, that little word “were” in verse 42, it's the subjunctive tense. Let me take you back to your English high school grammar. A subjunctive verb means this—it's the statement of a fact or condition that possibly could be true but isn't. It's the statement of a fact or condition that possibly could be true but isn't. Notice Jesus says, “If you were,” subjunctive, “If you were God's children, you would love me.” What he's really saying is, “You're not God's children, therefore, you don't love.” He said, “You

are of your father, the devil.”

Guys, we need to realize we are not all God’s children. We are all God’s creatures, but we’re not God’s children apart from God’s saving grace. That’s an essential. That’s an absolute essential for a healthy church. You can’t have people running around saying everybody’s God’s children. It’s a nice, warm, fuzzy thing to say. I understand that. And I understand the the difficulty that pastors have standing in the pulpit teaching this because people are going to leave.

***Audience Member:** That’s the part that bothers me right there, the preaching part. I attend a church that holds to the doctrine of election, but I don’t hear it from the pulpit, and as a result, many of the people that I interact with in the church don’t believe it.*

Well, you’re absolutely right. In my judgement again, and I’m no standard of anything, certainly no prophet, the real issue, the [UNCLEAR] of our loss of power in the church is because we’ve lost the power of preaching from the pulpit. It’s what we hear in the pulpit, that’s where ministry starts in the pulpit. What is the mission of the Holy Spirit? To guide us into all truth. If you want something to happen in the church, the Holy Spirit has to be energized in the lives of individual people. Where is that going to come from? It’s going to come from the preaching of the Word.

***Don:** Bruce, the thing frustrates me, though, is when you’re defining a healthy church, the world would certainly define a healthy...look at Joel Osteen’s church. Crowded. Biggest church in American. Look at other churches that don’t teach election. They teach health and wealth or a feel good Gospel, or [Arminianism] or whatever, and those churches are crowded. People coming in all the time with all the gimmicks that they have. A lot of the churches that would preach election and what you believe and what I believe are the essentials of the Gospel don’t have a lot of people. Not in all cases. There are exceptions. How do you respond to that?*

I can’t respond to that. Church growth has to do with depth of understanding God’s Word. That comes through preaching. Church expansion comes through numbers. There’s a difference. We’ve mixed the two concepts. We think that church growth means numbers; therefore, we make an evaluation of a healthy church upon its growth, defined as numbers, when really, we need to define a church and its healthy status on its growth, which means its depth, not its expansion.

I have a friend who is the pastor of a church of about 6,000. It’s a wonderful, God-centered church and everything that we are saying, he would ascribe to a whole 100%. When you ask him, “What did you do? What did you all do 35 years ago to have this church take on 6,000? What’s the programs?” He said, “It has only one issue here to caused us to expand, and that is the grace and mercy of God.” That’s it. He said, “I cannot tell you what program we did. I cannot tell you what outreach we did. All I can say is this—it is the pure absolute mercy and grace of God that he’s chosen to allow us to expand.” Now that would be my answer. Programs don’t expand. It’s God’s grace and mercy. And where does that come from? It comes from expository preaching and a biblical theology.

Now guys, this is not popular. I have to be honest. Most churches don’t want what I have to offer. Now there people in the churches who do, but the church as an entity in itself, doesn’t want what I have to offer.

The two churches where I was preaching for the last several years—two years at Memorial Park and one year at Bellefield—I said, “You know, I’ve got to be honest with you. If you want me to come and preach, I’d be glad to do that, but are you willing to let people go? People are going to leave,” and I said, “That’s not my desire. Please understand, that’s not my heart. It doesn’t make me feel good when I don’t see people coming back.” But that’s a reality. When you start preaching a biblical theology, much of the

church of America is going to flee, because what do they say? I didn't get a blessing.

I just ran into somebody the other day who said, "I heard you at Memorial Park and I was there for about six weeks and then I left because every time you preached, the hair on the back of my neck started standing up," {LAUGHTER} "and I left, and I came back when you weren't there."

I had another man come to me and take me to lunch. He said, "Bruce, it's very interesting what you're doing here at the church. I really enjoy it. How long are you going to be here?" {LAUGHTER} I said, "Well, I'm not sure, six or seven more weeks." He said, "Oh great, my wife will come back then." We shouldn't make light of that. That's tragic. As a preacher, that doesn't make you feel good. You don't want to go through those feelings. That hurts. But you've got to realize what you're called to do is to preach a biblical theology, expository preaching, and you have to trust the grace and the mercy of God.

That's why it's so critical that as a preacher you understand that when you stand before him at the day of judgment, he's going to say, "Bruce, why did you say what you said? Why did you say it?"

Sig: *When you make that distinction, Bruce, if God does open my eyes, and now I can see, does that mean I'm automatically going to accept, will I have an option to accept or reject him once I've been raised from the dead?*

The perseverance of the saints would say this. Those who are truly elect before the foundation of the world will persevere and prove their salvation. The Scripture says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." When God breathes life into you, you then have a responsibility, you then have the cause, the motive, to want to be obedient, but that's a growth situation. Yes, you can accept and reject things after you're conversion; in other words, "I don't agree with that. I don't agree with that," but the issue is you now have a motive and a reason that you didn't have before." Once you are in Christ and have been regenerate, then it becomes the responsibility to really grow in those graces.

Revelation is not instantaneous. It's progressive. We learn more all the way...the older we get, the more mature we are. So no, you're not going to grab everything at once. It's a life's progression. But the doctrine of the security of the saints, perseverance of the saints, is because Christ preserves you so that you will persevere. That's one of the great essentials of the church.

Audience Member: *In Mark 16, [UNCLEAR] how this is an essential or non-essential whenever [UNCLEAR] after the resurrection.*

What is it please?

Audience Member: *In Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. How does that, [UNCLEAR] he came back when it was something that he said? How does that [UNCLEAR] as an essential or a non-essential, now how does that become part of a dialogue [UNCLEAR]?"*

What does the word believe mean? Remember? It doesn't mean to give mental assent. It means to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon or trust in. What Jesus is saying is the same thing that's consistent with every other Scripture verse, and that is this. Belief does not mean I'm giving mental assent about some facts about a man who's a great teacher and prophet. It means that I am depending upon the person and work of Christ. I am adhering to the person and work of Christ. I'm relying upon the person and work of Christ. And I am trusting in the person and work of Christ for my salvation. That's what he says...the person who believes will have eternal life, not the one who just gives some mental assent. That's the discussion that he had with Nicodemus in John 3. It's the same thing. Nicodemus.

Ted: *In the unregenerate man, before regeneration, before you're born again, the unregenerate man has no desire to DART. This is the great first step of the regeneration. Once one is regenerated, they're given the desire to do these things. The unregenerate man has no desire to follow the things of God.*

Excellent. That's a key word to understand that concept of desire. Go to 1 John 5. Now guys, I'm just trying to give you some illustrations of biblical theology and playing off of what Bishop Rogers taught us last week about the need to be biblically accurate, sound, accurate, fair, when you treat the Scriptures. It's not necessarily say it's going to be popular. That doesn't mean that you have the license to be a Bible basher. I'm not saying that. If you're going to beat your head on the head with somebody on the Bible, then beat yourself, not anybody else. It's not given to beat other people; it's given to beat yourself if you're going to do that. We need to realize that often times, brothers, when you see truth in the Scripture, it's surrounded by a wonderful word. That's the word grace. You see, its grace in truth.

When we are preaching and teaching, we need to make sure that the truth that we are preaching is surrounded by the magnificent grace of God so that we have the right spirit, we are not offensive in our delivery per se. If something is going to offend, let it be the truth, not your delivery methodology.

Don: *Bruce, I don't want to put words into the person's mouth who asked the question before, but I think maybe his concern might have been the baptism, where in Mark 16 it says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, and he who does not believe shall be condemned." What about the baptism? Is that an essential?*

Baptism doesn't save.

Don: *Right.*

It doesn't save.

Don: *Exactly. Then why did Jesus say it?*

Baptism means you are brought into the body of Christ. There's an identity where you are brought...when you're baptized, you are baptized into a family relationship. You're brought into. That's what the big concept of baptism is, whether it be by immersion or by sprinkling, the concept is this. You are now being identified and being brought into, you're unified into a body of Christ by experience. The word baptism means to be identified with. You can get into the mode of baptism. That's what he's not referring to. He's talking about the concept of being identified with the family, the person and work of Christ. It's that person who believes and is baptized brought into that. So it's not a mode issue.

Ted: *And if you believe and are not immersed into Christ, then you probably didn't believe.*

If you're not immersed interest Christ. Not immersed into water. But immersed into Christ. That's why 127 times Paul uses the phrase, "in Christ." He doesn't say "Christian." You're in Christ. It means you have been immersed—baptized if you would—you've been immersed into the relationship of a redemptive work of the person and work of Christ. You're brought into that. That's the person who's going to believe. And so those two things are consistent.

Audience Member: *But isn't the water baptism merely the outward physical sign of the inward baptism by Christ.*

That's correct. That's what it is.

Audience Member: Because you have to be baptized by Christ.

Christ is the baptizer. You're baptized in Christ. Now we have two different modes, which we could talk about, but we will not today. {LAUGHTER}

Ted: It's not so much the modes, it's the chronology.

That's right.

Ted: The chronology is the contention.

That's right. What I'm trying to give you some idea, guys, is the importance of biblical theology. You see that? We just took two verses and we could spend the next two hours on it. Look what it's doing. Just think what that would do in the church. You have a lot of people leave when they say, "You mean I can't come to Christ?" "Yeah, you really can't." "Well, what if I want to?" "Well then repent and believe." "Well I can't."

You've heard me say this. You've heard me give the illustration of Charles Spurgeon. One day he was walking across a bridge and a woman came up to him and said, "Pastor Spurgeon, your sermon today almost made me become a believer, and I almost repented." He said, "You must." She said, "I can't." He said, "You must!" She said, "I can't." He said, "You must." She said, "I can't." He said, "You must." She said, "I can't!" He said, "You must." She said, "God help me!" He said, "You just did." {LAUGHTER} Now you see. The world says, "I have a choice to do this," but you really can't. But you must! That's where the sovereignty of God comes in. You see, that's not the message the church wants to hear. But that's the message the church must hear because it's part of our biblical theology.

Now that takes us to the next essential, the three essentials being expository preaching, a biblical theology, and the next is a biblical gospel. Now this is an essential. These are that three things there must be unity in—expository preaching, a biblical theology and biblical understanding of the Gospel.

The Gospel is not about your needs. The Gospel is not about God meeting your needs. The Gospel is not about the fact that God loves you. The Gospel is not about the fact that he has a wonderful plan for your life. It is not about taking care of your earthly situation. It is not about eternal life. The Gospel is about this—that God sent his Son to be to substitutionary sacrifice for your total depravity, so that you could be reconciled to God and it cost him his life. That's the Gospel. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about God.

I did my doctoral dissertation on the focus of the Gospel in Puritan preaching. It's in this book *Light and Heat*. What I have given you, in your handout today, is a summary of modern evangelism verses Puritan evangelism or reformed theology. Biblical theology. I did the dissertation because I wanted to compare the content of the Gospel that had been preached in America from 1820 to 1984 when I did my doctoral dissertation at Oxford, versus the Gospel that was preached in the 1600's and 1700's by the Puritans. That's what this is about. Therefore I call it the *Focus of the Gospel in Puritan Preaching*. *Light and heat*—Light from the Scripture and heat from the passion of the pulpit. That was an expression that one of them used. Light and heat. You've got to have light and heat in the pulpit. Light from the Word of God and the heart of pastor must be full of heat, passion, for the truth.

You can get this if you want it. I'm not going to try to sell you this thing, but basically what it does, it basically deals with a biblical gospel, and it deals with this, starts with the holiness of God. There's a chapter on that in it compares the two. What did the Puritans say? What do we now say? The next one is

this—the sinfulness of man. What did the Puritans say? What are we now saying? The third one is this—the person of Christ. What did the Puritans say? What are we now saying? The next chapter is the work of Christ. What did the Puritans say? What are we saying? The next one is faith, repentance. What did the Puritans say about repentance? You know what the best definition of repentance is this? Taking sides with God against yourself. That’s what it is. It’s taking sides with God against me. That’s repentance. That’s not what you hear today. The last thing is faith. What do the Puritans say versus what do we say in our modern evangelism?

What I’ve done, the handout I have for you, is an appendix at the end of this book on a...I tried to summarize everything. The handout you have, you will see modern evangelism, which I call Neo-Finneyism. Charles Finney, in the 1820’s, began something that changed radically the whole mindset of evangelical Christianity in the United States and around the world. It was basically the one who basically said, “It is your choice. And what you have to do, preacher, is you battle their will. And you have to come up with a way to get them to respond.” So you have such things now as the anxious seat or you now have something called an invitation, because it’s your job to battle their will and to get them to decide. Now that shapes everything we do. That’s why I call modern evangelism Neo-Finneyism. I go through a lot of this.

When you go to the Billy Graham center in Wheaton, Illinois, you’re going to see on the wall a quote by Charles Finney that says this, “Revival is not an act of God. It’s an act of man.” And you do these seven things—rent a stadium, you get a prayer team, and you go through the seven things—you will have a revival. Now that’s on the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism. That’s Charles Finney. My whole purpose was is that right? Is that really true? What does the Scripture say and was there a group of people who in God’s sovereign grace of moving his church toward eternity, was there a group of men who really preached something that might have been different? That might have been more oriented toward a biblical theological presentation of the Gospel? That’s why I went to England and I read 3,000 Puritan sermons. This is the summary of those 3,000 Puritan sermons. This is not so much about what I think they said, it’s what they said themselves. So you’re going to read this with a lot of quotes.

Let me be honest with you, brothers, this is not commode reading. {LAUGHTER} This is not something you sit on the commode while you’re taking a dump and you read two or three pages and say, “Oh wasn’t that nice.” Most people who read this don’t finish it because they just say, “Wow! I just can’t wade through all that.”

Audience Member: *That is your dissertation, right?*

Yes.

Audience Member: *That’s got to be [UNCLEAR].*

My point is, with all due respect, this isn’t Joel Osteen. You know, it’s not. It’s a group of men who believed this—that God is sovereign in the work of salvation. They believed that, and that’s what gave them their power, because they knew this. Our job is to preach the truth, not manipulate the truth. We’re not about a response. We’re about declaration of a message that Paul says this, “I’m not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power unto salvation to all who believe.” What is the it? It’s a biblical gospel.

Now this is not a best seller. I think there’s a very small group of people who would probably even want to read that. I gave it to several people at Memorial Park and they never finished it. They just said, “That’s not what we’re hearing today. That raises the hair on the back of my head. That’s not what I want to hear.”

Let's just start this a little bit. You have that handout I gave you, which is the appendix to this?

Audience Member: You left us hanging with 1 John 5.

Oh, I did. Thank you. Yeah. Great. Thank you. Let's go to 1 John 5. Thank you, sir. This is going to summarize something we just were talking about. We lose a lot in the original translation of 1 John 5. 1 John 5:1, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." Now that's reversed. That's how we translate English. It's a good English translation. In the Greek, it's the Greek phraseology, [ectao tatao d'geneta]. Now that doesn't mean anything, but this is how you translate it. Having been born of God, one believes. Having been born of God, it's in a tense that says this—there was a past act in your life that now has the present result or consequence of your believing, and that is this. There was something that occurred in your life. You were born of God, and the present evidence of that is the fact you believe. So we translate this, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." Now we lose a little bit of that. Do you understand the difference. It's basically saying which comes first? Faith or life? And the verse is this—life comes first. "Having been born of God." That's regeneration. That's, "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him." When that happens, there is now a desire for you to want to do what? Believe.

The first evidence of your true saving faith is the fact that you have a desire to believe. The belief doesn't save you. Who saves you? Christ does. Your belief doesn't save you. Your belief is the evidence that God has done a supernatural act of establishing in your life that has its origin in heaven in your life and all of a sudden you have this different desire that you've never had before, and that's you just want to cling to Christ. You want to DART. You want to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in the person and work of Christ. You see, that's what the biblical gospel does. It regenerates people, and therefore, the first evidence of the regeneration is belief.

Let's go to your handout, the appendix to the book. This will take us some weeks to go through because I want to go through these items. This is sort of a summary of the whole book here of comparing modern evangelism, Neo-Finneyism, with the Puritan or Reformed theological understanding of evangelism and sovereignty of God.

Essentially, another way of looking at this summary is this—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, revealed in the Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone—the Five Solas. This page is really summarized by those five statements. By grace alone—that's an essential. Through faith alone—that's an essential. In Christ alone—that's an absolute essential. Revealed in the Scripture alone—that's an absolute essential. And for the glory of God alone—it's an absolute essential. That, folks, is what the local church must be unified about and there's no argument on that. That is an essential that requires absolute unity. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, revealed in the Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone. That's a summary of the handout you have. Let's just walk through it.

We'll just start with one or two of these. We'll pick this up...bring this up next week because we're going to go through this for a couple of weeks. This is what I'm suggesting, brothers, is our understanding of a biblical gospel, which is an essential in the church. The first one is this. Modern evangelism teaches that the view of salvation process is determined by the needs of man. The biblical gospel presentation would say this—the view of salvation process is determined by God.

Now notice. How do we start off our presentations on the Gospel? Are you lonely? Are you depressed? Do you not have any meaning in your life? Would you like to get involved in something that has some eternal consequence? Now those are all legitimate questions, but that's the way that we approach evangelism. Are you discouraged? Are you depressed? Are you downtrodden? Are you lonely? Then let me introduce you to Jesus. Because what you see, what Jesus will do is he's going to come alongside

you are life and you won't be lonely anymore. Now is that the Gospel? No. That's a consequence of the gospel, but it is not *the* Gospel.

The Gospel is you're lost in your sin, you're totally depraved, but God desired something for you in eternity past and let me tell you how he wants reconcile you to himself. And so I'll go through the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. But you see, our modern evangelism, which had its roots in Finneyism, was basically this. You approach people on their felt needs. I'm going to address your felt needs because that's the point of entry. No! The point of entry is this—God is holy. God is holy, you and I are totally depraved. We're sinful people. But yet God has a means by which he can reconcile us to himself and have an eternal relationship with him. You see, it's in the person and work of Christ.

The very first ingredient we need to look at is what's the focus of the Gospel? In modern evangelism, it's the needs of man. In the biblical gospel, it's the process established and determined by God.

Next one—salvation emphasizes what man can receive from god. Biblical evangelism says salvation emphasizes what God chose to accomplish for man. Not what you receive. What did God choose to do for you? He chose to die for you and to pay for your sins so that you could be reconciled to him. It's not something you receive from him. He wasn't the one...this is what God gives you. What did God do for you? Now the receiving comes after all of that. You understand what he did for me. He did what I could not do myself, and that was pay for the heinousness of my cosmic treason against his holiness. Do you need to be perfect to get to heaven? Absolutely yes! I can't be. Let me tell you what God did for you. He died for you on the cross so that you now put your faith in his sinless perfection and perfect obedience and he will justify you by faith alone. Do you see the different emphasis? One is on what do I get? Are you going to get a friend? You're going to get a companion. You're going to get a relationship. You're going to get all these things. You're no longer going to be lonely.

Now I understand, folks, and I'm not belittling that. Those are consequences. Yes, when I gave my life to Christ as a result of God drawing me to himself, many of those issues of my felt needs began to move away. They were the consequence of the gospel. They were not the Gospel itself. Do you see the difference?

One more and then we'll take a break. The theme of salvation is the reception of eternal life. Biblical gospel is the theme of salvation is the glory of God. Eternal life is a consequence. It's not the center focus. The glory of God, folks, in dying for lost, unregenerate sinners, is his glory, and we need to start off with the holiness of God and his glory. So what is the purpose of our evangelism? It's not conversion. It's the glory of God exposing people to God's magnificent glory in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You see, when God is glorified, things begin to happen because the Holy Spirit fulfills his job description and that is to call attention to the person and work of Christ and to guide us into all truth.

So I'll leave you with that. Bring this back next week and we'll walk through these because some of these are going to cause some questions for us, and we'll continue doing that.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your mercy and your grace. Father, if I said anything that's inconsistent with your nature or your attributes or your glory, then be merciful to me and to the group and remove that from our minds. May only those things that your Holy Spirit confirms as biblical truth, biblical theology, be that which we remember. And Father, we humbly pray this because we are deceived by our own egos. We are deceived by our own pride. We are deceived by our own unadulterated desire for position. So Father, just override all that in your mercy and be gracious to us. Prevent us from believing ourselves. Give us a belief in the sufficiency of your Word through Jesus. In His Name we pray. And all Brave Men said...Amen!