

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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...and may the Holy Spirit prepare to lead us into his truth this day. Let's just be quiet for a moment and prepare our hearts. [SILENCE] Merciful Father, your compassion and mercy to us is beyond our comprehension, but the need for it is beyond our description. We just pray, Lord, that you'd be pleased once again to open our eyes that we might catch a glimpse of who you are in all of your majesty, your glory, and that our response will be one of respect, dignity and awe. For Jesus' sake may it be so. Amen.

Continuing our study on the formation and function of the church, we're looking at the essentials of a church organization that makes it a powerful witness for the kingdom. We've spent the last several weeks talking about expository preaching. Why is it a preacher says what he says? That's really what expository preaching is. It's not so much just a style of verse by verse, although that is the normal style. Really what makes a person an expositor is they are exposing the Word. That's what they're doing.

When you ask a preacher, "What is the basis of what you're saying?" You've heard me say over the years that good biblical preaching is plagiarism. You basically take a message that's already given, contained in the 66 books of the Bible, the Scripture, the sufficiency of Scripture, and you re-give it. That's expository preaching. Your text always comes from the Scripture. You just don't take a verse and use it as the springboard to go into other things. You have a hermeneutic that takes that passage, whatever it is, and you look at its historical background, you look at the grammar, and you look at the context of those verses in its context of the other chapters.

That's really what we're saying the first essential ingredient of a local church really is expository preaching because that's how people are fed and how we grow in God's grace. The second thing is biblical theology, which Pastor Rogers did for us a couple of weeks ago with an excellent understanding of why we need to have a biblical theology. In other words, why is it that we deal with the issues we do and how do we deal with them. With do them from a biblical theological perspective. Remember the word theology just means the study of God. We're studying the issue of who God is in the context of all of our issues of the church and life itself.

Again, I want to really affirm Bishop Roger's book on the 39 articles. It's a wonderful, wonderful synopsis of the essentials of the Christian faith. If you don't have a copy of that, I'd really encourage you to get one. It's a wonderful resource for you to have. It's the type of thing that when you have a question, you can go to one of those 39 articles and get some great practical illustration not only of its truth, but also its application in your life. If you don't have a copy of that, I would encourage you to get it because it's an excellent, excellent resource. Keep it alongside your Bible, and when you read the Scripture and you have a question, go to the book on the 39 articles and you'll see some great illustrations and applications of the truth of the Scripture. That's biblical theology.

The third thing we're talking about, which we touched on last week, is what we would call a biblical gospel. A biblical gospel. Now there are many gospels going around. What I gave you is a handout from my dissertation on the Puritan View of the Pulpit, where I compared, years ago, the preaching of this current generation, which from about 1850-1985 and compared that to the preaching of the Puritan Era, which was the 1580's to the 1680's, and basically looked at the content of the focus of the Gospel.

The reason I choose to do that was because there was a period of time when God raised up a group of expositors who really altered society from the position of the church. It was not a political movement, although there was an avenue, an expression of Puritanism, that had its political arm, but that was not the arm that I studied. I studied the biblical arm. I wanted to see how God raised up a group of men who

used the church powerfully to change and alter the conduct of society and increase righteousness. That was the period that I examined. You have that as a handout.

I want us to take look at comparing what I'm calling New-Finneyism—neo meaning new—a new Finneyism, which is a works oriented salvation message compared to that of the Scripture, or the reformed or the traditional biblical one, using a biblical theology of understanding the context of what is the Gospel.

You've heard me say over the years that essentially the Gospel is a message. It is not a methodology. Go to Romans 1 and you'll see what Paul says about his understanding of the Gospel. In Romans 1:16, Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Notice the word "it." "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for *it* is the power." What is the power that you and I have? It is the "it." What is the "it?" The "it" refers to the Gospel. The Gospel is a message. It is not a methodology.

There are many methods of how one might preach or teach the Gospel, but we need to take a look at the content. What Paul is saying is the critical ingredient for us in the local church is the content of a biblical gospel because that content, that message itself, is our greatest weapon, because it is the power unto salvation. It is not our methodology that is the power unto salvation. It is the content of the message.

A quick overview of the content of the message, biblically, would be this. The Gospel deals with, first of all, the holiness of God. Then it deals with the sinfulness of man. Then it deals with the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and repentance and faith. Those are the six ingredients of what Paul is talking about, which we're going to compare in the next couple of weeks. It starts with the holiness of God, then you deal with the sinfulness of man—man's total depravity—then you deal with the person and work of Christ—his sinless perfection and his perfect obedience—and then you deal with the response, which is to repent and believe—repentance and faith. Those are the six ingredients. What I do in the book, if you're interested, is I compare those six elements of the Puritan Era with our modern evangelism. Each one of those has a chapter on those six elements. What I have for you here today, this handout is just a comparison that you see there in the Word document.

I want us to go through this a little bit and just compare and this will raise some questions that we can discuss as we go. As we started last week, you'll notice on your handout, the modern view of evangelism...the word neo means news. Now Finney, Charles Finney, was a man in the 1820's who created a style of evangelism, which is very popular today, and it's basically what we apply today that basically says that revival is a work of man, not an act of God. And so therefore, revival is something that you and I can create, generate, manipulate and make happen. Now, what he basically says is if you do these six or seven things, then you will have a revival.

Essentially, that's what we've adopted, since the 1820's, is this style of what I'm calling man-made or man-centered evangelism. It's something that you and I can do. It's something that we can create because it's not a function of the sovereign act of a righteous God; it is really the activity of created man. Now that's what I'm calling neo, the word neo, meaning new—new Finneyism—compared to a biblical theological understanding of the Gospel, which is the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man and the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith.

So you notice the very first contrast is, with neo-Finneyism or modern evangelism, the view of the salvation process is determined by the needs of man. You want to have eternal life? Are you restless? Are you discouraged? Are you unhappy? Are you unfulfilled? Are you just discouraged by life? You see, often times, we say that's the Gospel, and we start at that point of the needs of man. There's nothing wrong with understanding the needs of man, but the Gospel doesn't deal with the needs of man; it deals

with the heart of man. It changes the heart, so that those issues that I talked about—eternal life, peace, joy, love—those things are consequences of the Gospel but they're not the Gospel. Often times, we have made the Gospel be the consequences or the evidence of true saving faith. We make that the message. When really it is the consequence of true saving faith that is the Gospel produces. That's the power.

Now you notice the theological version, or the Puritan version, was this—the view of the salvation process is determined by God. It's not determined by the needs of man; it's determined by God himself. Salvation emphasizes what man can receive from God. That's modern evangelism. Eternal life. I mean, look at this logically, guys. Would you like to have eternal life? An idiot's going to say no. {LAUGHTER} “Why would I want that?” And yet we start off with the Gospel saying, “God loves you. Has a wonderful plan for your life. Would you like to have eternal life?” That's where you start. I mean, what does that do to anybody? That doesn't do anything, because an idiot would say, “No, I don't want to live forever. I enjoy what I have. I want it to end one day.” You see, that's how we approach it. We started with the backward position.

What we have done in modern evangelism is we say this is what you can receive from God, when really, salvation emphasizes what God chose to accomplish for man. The issue is what God chose to do for me in the sinless perfection and perfect work of Christ. That's why I need to understand, first of all, the chasm that exists between the holiness of God and my sinfulness. I've got to understand that. If I don't understand that, then why do I need to talk about a Savior? You have to be perfect to get to heaven? Absolutely. Then you need a Savior. Are you perfect? No. You need a Savior. You see, right there is just a synopsis of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man.

I'm just awed and frustrated by the number of times I asked that question in church, “Do you have to be perfect to get to heaven,” and the answer is, “No.” This answer is no. That basically says they have no idea about a holy God and a sinful man. It's because we started off with, “Would you like to have eternal life? Would you like to find out God's plan for your life?” Yes, God has a plan for your life, but it's a consequence of what God chose to do for you, not what you're going to ask him to do for yourself.

Number 3—the theme of salvation, in modern evangelism, is the reception of eternal life. You see, that's where we start off with. Biblical evangelism says the theme of salvation is the glory of God. It's the glory of God. The reason you and I go out and proclaim a biblical gospel is so that God will receive the glory. You and I can't convert anybody anyway. You don't share the gospel, you don't teach the Gospel to convert people. You can't do that. Of course, now in modern evangelism, you can, because we're going to see in a moment it's I'm going to battle your will and I'm going to run you in the ground and I'm going to cause you to do something and you're going to sign a card in I'm going to say you're a Christian. You see, I'm going to battle your will, because that's what I've been taught to do. You see, the real issue is the reception of eternal life, and I just want to get you to say yes, because when you say yes, I've lead you to Christ. I lead him to Christ.

People often ask me, in other ministerial situations, “How many people have you lead to Christ?” My answer is, “None that I know of, but I have been the OB/GYN who's presided in new birth.” I've been there. I helped them in the new birth, but I didn't lead them to Christ. Who lead them to Christ? The Holy Spirit did through the preaching of a biblical gospel. You see, the issue is not eternal life. The issue is the glory of God. Who received the glory of God when you realized you can't convert anybody? God receives the glory. When something supernatural happens in that person's life and God implants a life that has its origin heaven, not in this earth, you can't take credit for it. The only one to get glorified by that is God himself because he's the one who did it. You see, that's biblical evangelism, not modern manipulation.

Number 4—man is the subject of salvation. Biblical evangelism says God is the subject of salvation. It's

all about God, guys. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's the fact that a holy God has chosen in his compassion and merciful heart to redeem a people for his own, in doing that, he gets the glory and our lives changed. That's the emphasis. That's great. You see, the issue is not subject isn't about us. God is the subject of salvation.

Number 5—there are varying degrees in man's ability to choose God. Biblical evangelism says man is totally unable to choose God. Let me just give you a couple of examples. Let's go to, as we talked about last week, go to John 6:44. My Bible has this in red, so you know it's true. {LAUGHTER} Here are the words of Jesus, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." Notice there's a difference in the word "can" versus the word "may."

Remember when you were in first grade and you asked your teacher, "Miss Ice, can I go to the bathroom?" She said, "Yes you can, and yes you may." Meaning can—you have the ability to get out of your chair and go to the bathroom, but you may because I'm giving you permission to do it. You don't see the word "may" in that verse. These are the words of Christ. He doesn't say, "you may choose me," he says, "You can choose me." In other words, "can" has to do with ability; "may" has to do with permission. There's nothing permission in this verse. It speaks of the absolute inability because of man's total depravity to make a choice in his own nature because a man can only act out of his own nature.

If we are total depraved—now the words totally depraved doesn't mean you're as bad as you can be, because you can always become more depraved. It means this—that every aspect of your being has been totally affected by sin. That's what it means. You're not as bad as you can be; you can always get worse. When everything about has been affected because of sin. The way you think, the way you act, the way you dress, the things you desire. You have a desire that is controlled by your sinful nature. That's total depravity. As a result of that, you can't do anything spiritual, unless something supernatural happens. That's when God implants a life that has its origin in heaven and not in this earth. We're really talking about ability.

Let's take another verse. Go to Ephesians 2. We looked at this earlier. Ephesians 2:1, "¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Notice the next verse, "⁴But man..." {LAUGHTER} Doesn't say that. "⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." What a contrast. Dead. Made alive. Who made you alive? God did. That's not something you chose to do. What can a dead man do? Nothing. A dead man doesn't need faith. A dead man needs what? Life.

The first evidence of your true saving faith, brothers, is the fact that you believe. That's the first evidence. Belief doesn't save you. Belief is the evidence that God has done a work of grace in this life and he's taken a dead person. He's breathed his life into them. The first glimmer of the new salvation is, "I believe." It may be a fledgling embryonic belief, but it's at least a start. You see, a dead man doesn't need faith. A dead man needs life. You can have a dead man here on the floor and we can sing Just As I Am 52 hours in a day and nothing is going to happen because a dead man can't get up. Somebody's got to breathe life into him.

The real issue, guys, back to Pastor Rogers, is biblical theology. Does the word "dead" mean dead or does the word "dead" mean sick? Now in modern evangelism, it means sick. Because here's the logic and the ways we teach modern evangelism in seminaries today—99.9% of salvation is what God does, but you've got that one little tenth, and so you hear this illustration. You're a sinner bobbing up and

down in the water and somebody throws you a life preserver, and in your last dying breath, you summon up all the energy that you have, and you reach up just before you go under and you're drowning, and you reach up and you grab that life preserver, and you're saved. That's a work. That's a work.

Another illustration you hear this. You're dying in a hospital bed. You've got a terminal disease. It's called sin. The doctor comes in and says, "Son/daughter, if you just take this medicine, this one last pill. We've done everything else and it doesn't work. But if you will just take this one last pill, you'll be alive. It'll save you." So 99% of you are dead, but in your last dying breath, you grab that glass of water and you take that pill and you drink it down and you're saved. That's a work. How can you do that if you're dead? You can't do that. Jesus says, "No one *can* come." No one *can*. Something supernatural must happen.

That's the conversation he had with Nicodemus in John 3. He said, "Nicodemus, you're a good theologian. You're one of the Pharisees. You've got a lot of things right. But you've made one fatal flaw in your understanding, and that is this—you've externalized religion," meaning, "you've made it a works, and unless something happens supernaturally, Nicodemus, you can't even see the kingdom, let alone enter it and enjoy the benefits. Nicodemus, something supernatural must happen, and that is you must be born again."

You see, who gave you life? Dead in your trespasses and sins. But God, who is rich in mercy, made you alive, even when you were dead. Who made you alive? Why are you breathing? Why are you here this day? It's a function of God's absolute mercy, compassion and grace. You're a living testimony to the glory of God of a biblical gospel, because God was pleased in his mercy to breathe life into you so that the first flicker of your faith was, "I believe. I need to be there on Friday so I can grow in grace."

Guys, you see, we should never, ever forget the supernaturality of the power of the Gospel. That's what Paul says in Romans 1. It's not my battling your will. It's not getting the organ to play Just As I Am for an hour and a half to make you feel guilty to walk the aisle. It's the proclamation of a message that God does supernatural things in your heart when he takes a heart that is dead and all of a sudden he gives you a desire that you didn't have before.

You see, the first evidence of true saving faith is your desire to believe. You go from not having a desire, totally depraved and dead in your trespasses and sins, and all of a sudden, you wake up and you say, "I've got this desire. I've got this desire to explore the person and work of Christ. Something happened to me." And what is it? You were dead. God's made you alive. Now you went from no desire to a desire. You went from no faith to a faith. All of a sudden you want to start building that faith because something happened in you that you've got a brand new desire you never had before. That is called grace. That is called salvation. It's called redemption. It's called regeneration. It's not manipulation.

Look at this logically. If you really think the word "dead" means sick, then works salvation is correct. If you really think the word "dead" means sick, then those guys who say, "reach for the life jacket" are correct. The one who says take the doctor's pill is correct, because logically...this is logic, guys, just follow it. I'm sick. I can do something. That means I can work and earn my salvation by doing one last thing. That's logically correct. Theologically incorrect, but logically correct.

Look at the other side of life. I have no ability. I can't do it. I have no desire. But God did something supernatural and I heard the message of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man and the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith and all of a sudden I've got a desire that I didn't have before. It's called faith. It's called belief. [Ectao tatao d'genetai]—1 John 5:1, "Having been born of God, you believe."

What's the first evidence of true saving faith? Belief. Belief doesn't save anybody. I believe that's a chair. Oh great, I've got eternal life. You see, belief doesn't save anything. What saves you is God saves you. When you were dead, now you're alive. You see, what is that makes that possible? Paul says this, "It is the power of the Gospel. *It is the power unto salvation for all who believe.*" You see, the greatest weapon we have, brothers, in our churches is a biblical gospel based upon the biblical theology that comes from expository preaching. Expository preaching is going to give you a biblical gospel which is going to teach you biblical theology.

Sig: *What about the argument that people would look at creation and see the great works of God and be awed by that and, I mean, is there any...how would you respond to someone saying, well, you know, I'm in touch with the creator. I feel this. I see this. I mean, how can I not believe there is a God and I began to understand that God is because what I see in creation?*

Well, the Scripture says in Romans 1 that there is evidence of God's existence. Let's go to Romans 1. The reason that no one can say, "I have an excuse" is because of this. Let's start with verse 16. Keep it in context. ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it..." What is the it? Gospel. Message. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them."

God reveals a part of himself here, but not all of himself. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." No one has the excuse of saying, "I didn't have a chance." All you gotta do is look at creation, and that prompts some question. Now the question is, "Do I stop right there?"

When Ravi Zacharias worked with the Muslims, he says there are three things that the Muslims cannot answer, and that is this. First of all, creation. They can't deal with something that exists in ex nihilo—out of nothing, something was created. They've got to have a starting point. Our starting point is who? God. You see, that's why the most important verse in the Bible is what?

Audience Members: *In the beginning.*

Genesis 1:1—absolutely the most important verse in all of Scripture. If you don't understand Genesis 1:1, the rest of John 3:6 doesn't make any sense. It all starts there, you see. The Muslims can't deal with that, you see, so we start with creation. Yes, there's visible attributes, but they're not all of them. That's just a means of God wooing somebody to himself because of creation. When you sit there and look at that, on top of that you see our command is to what? Go into all the world and preach?

Audience Members: *The Gospel.*

The Gospel. You take somebody who might be sitting on a log by a stream and saying, "You know, there's got to be something here with creation. There's just something going on," and then we come along and say, "Let me explain all that. In the beginning, God..." He's a holy God. You start with the holiness of God, then the sinfulness of man.

Audience Member: *Dr. Bickel, in this Romans 1:20, it says, "for ever since the world was created*

[UNCLEAR] the earth and the sky.” I’m sitting here and I want t know, is the earth part of heaven?

Is the earth part of heaven? Heaven’s a different place. Heaven is its own place. The earth is part of God’s creation, but no, it is not heaven. Heaven is its own place.

Audience Member: *There’s nothing that comes from us. We don’t reach to the life preserver. Why wouldn’t God want to save us all?*

The question is why would he save any of us. {LAUGHTER} That’s the real issue. You’re dead in your trespasses and sins. Why would a holy God want to be associated with anybody that’s not righteous and holy? The real issue is why would he want to save anyone. Not all of us. God is self-sufficient, self-contained, self-satisfied. He doesn’t need us. Yet we take a Gospel that says here, you hear this, “Bruce, I want to help you understand how important you are. Do you realize that God created you because he’s lonely and needs you? You really need this. God is just lonely. The reason he created you, Bruce, and all of other mankind is because he lives in heaven, so lonely, just saying, ‘Oh I wish I had Bruce around me.’” No. You see, that’s why we spent three years studying the 28 attributes of God. God is self-sufficient, self-contained and self-satisfied, by nature. That means he doesn’t need us at all. He’s got a wonderful relationship called the what?

Audience Member: *The Holy Trinity.*

The Trinity—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He’s in wonderful, holy, pure fellowship. Why would he want to contain himself and contaminate himself by saving me, a sinner who’s totally depraved? The real issue is why would God want to save anyone? The issue is it’s for his glory. You see, that’s the Gospel. The Gospel is the greatest message of the glory of God because you’re showing that a holy God has chosen from the depths of his own soul, his own heart and mind, that he’s going to choose to save people so that he receives the glory. So the real issue is not why didn’t he save us all. You see, if he only saved one person, in all of creation, you would have to say that is the single most important loving act in all of creation, that god chose to save one.

What does the Scripture say? [UNCLEAR] they outnumber the stars in the sky and the sand on the beaches. We just don’t know how many...what a great, great God we have who’s chosen to do that. But it cost the life of his son. It was the sinless perfection and perfect obedience that made it possible. So the real issue is why did he save me?

Don: *Often we get misconceived that the salvation of mankind is the end result of what God’s after, and it’s just a step in the whole process.*

Amen.

Don: *Why did he even create us?*

Yeah, you see, you’ve got to go back to Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God.” You just gotta start right there, and then you begin to see. That’s why the Scripture is, revelation is progressive. You don’t get it all at once. In Genesis 1:1, we see certain attributes of God. In Romans 1, you see certain attributes, but they’re not all of them. You have to read the entire Scripture and let it go from Genesis to Revelation to see the glorious picture of all the attributes of God. Revelation is progressive. You don’t get it all at once. That’s what we call growth. That’s what church growth is. Church growth is not expansion; it’s not numbers. Church growth is depth of understanding of our theology of God. That’s church growth. Church expansion is numbers. People say, “Bruce, are you a church growth advocate?” “Absolutely.” “How many people do you want to bring in?” “Well, that’s not the issue. The issue is how can we take

the ones who are already in and take them deeper? As a result of that, you're going to have church expansion."

Bob: *Bruce, this is a human question, so I'm sure I'll get a human answer. God created all of us. What do you think his purpose was in creating a number that were not going to be drawn to him?*

His glory. That's it. Everything God does is for one reason. His glory. Now do you and I understand that? We may not understand that right now, but the Scripture is going to teach us why everything is for his glory. So why does God do this? It's for his glory. Why does God permit that? For his glory. Why does God decree this? It's for his glory.

Now you notice our purpose in Ezekiel 36:22-27, "I will show the fact that I'm holy through you, when I let the world know that I'm holy." You see, God's purpose in creating you and me is to be one of the primary means by which other people who are just like us—the weakest things he ever created—will begin to sense that God is holy. "I will demonstrate my holiness when through you the world sees that I'm holy." It's his glory. Whatever God does it's for his glory.

Audience Member: *Bruce, what happens to that person, though, who God wants to give them the heart of flesh, and they choose the heart of stone?*

Well, there is a...

Ted: *What is that?*

The question was what about person who wants to have, but doesn't have. There's a wonderful doctrine in Scripture called the perseverance of the saints. All that God has chosen before the foundation of the world will come to saving faith. They will come. The reason Jesus has not returned, yet, even though our friends say that's it's going to happen next Thursday, is because not all of the elect have come to saving faith. You see, Jesus will not come back until whoever God was pleased to choose before the foundation of the world come to saving faith. That's when we know that Jesus returns in all of his glory. That person, right now, if they desire to have it and they don't have it, they will have it before the Lord returns.

We need to make sure that we're preaching a Gospel that is the power to generate that regeneration, because that's the power that makes it happen, not our manipulation. The evidence of this, all of God's people will persevere. The reason they persevere is because Jesus preserves them. I like to say it's the preservation of the saints. It's the same thing. Jesus preserves us. John 10, "No one—no one—is going to snatch them out of my hand, and just to make sure my Father is stronger than me. You're in my hand, but my Father's going to wrap his around my hand and no one is going to snatch you out of my hand." That's preservation of the saints, and that preservation on the part of Christ, our mediator, we will persevere. So those who have come to saving faith will persevere. Wonderful biblical theology to help us understand that.

Ted: *I understand that the will, if the person has the desire, it's a supernatural desire and a supernatural desire is compulsive, it...natural man's desire is not compulsive.*

Amen.

Ted: *That's why people make New Year's resolutions and break them or whatever over the long haul. But if you are given a supernatural desire, as you said, that will get you there and there are people that do not finish the race. They appear to have this compulsive desire, but in the end, they don't finish the*

race, which says something about their spiritual state in the first place.

That's what you would call, theologically, a spurious conversion. A false conversion. That's why we studied several years ago the seven tests and seven traits of a true saving faith in the book of 1 John. If you say you do and you don't, you're not. If you say you do and you do, you are. That's 1 John. Just gave you an overview of that in one sentence. If you say you do, believe, and you don't act like it, then you're not. If you say you do, believe, and you act like it, then you are. Those are the seven tests and the seven traits of a person who's truly been born. The book of 1 John. That's why it's such a powerful book for us to understand, and our churches need to hear that.

There are a lot of people in there who say they do. You'll notice those seven traits of a person truly born again, they all start with "if you say" or "if you confess." All start with your mouth. Jesus says this, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." You see, guys, that's why we need to take so seriously the words that we say, that come out of our mouth. Because it's a reflection of what? Your educational background. No. It's a reflection of your heart. Is it a heart of stone? That has no desire other than human desire. Or is it a heart of flesh? Alive, that God has breathed into it through regeneration, that now gives us a gracious spiritual desire that's a supernatural desire that's contrary to our human desire.

You see, there's a contrast between the heart of stone and the heart of flesh. One's dead, that can't do anything, and one's alive, that now under the supernatural act of God's grace has a desire to fulfill that, and it's possible because Jesus preserves us. You see, it all fits together. It's just magnificent when you put it all together. And you don't water it down. When you water it down, you create loopholes. We've just got thousands of loopholes in our message of the Gospel. What if? How come? Why not? You see, when you understand it starts with God and ends with God, and we're not the reason, there aren't any loopholes.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, in response to that question about the natural religion, Paul, in that exposition, seems to me is saying that given the fallenness of man, we twist the very gift of general revelation and creation and make it the basis of false religion.*

Right.

***Audience Member:** So that it actually is a terrible thing that we do.*

Yes. Excellent. He's taken that which is, something that is beautiful for us and we've convoluted it, twisted it around and made it its own religion. As opposed to seeing part of his revealed revelation, we've now created our own religion. You see, what is the word "religion"? It literally means to bind back. Religion is something that man creates. It's something that we do. We create a religion, when Christianity is a revelation. It's a relationship. It's not something we create.

***Audience Member:** Scripture says, "I stand at the door and knock."*

Yeah, Revelation 3.

***Audience Member:** But we have to open the door.*

No. How can a dead man open the door? Alright, go to Revelation 3. I was going to get to that later, but now that you've brought it up. {LAUGHTER} You see, guys, it took me four years to do this. I can't do this all in one day. {LAUGHTER} Go to Revelation 3:20. This is the letter to the church at Laodicea. First of all, apply your hermeneutic. What's the context of this? To whom is he writing?

Audience Member: The church.

He's writing to a church. Which means what? Believers. They're alive. He's not talking to unsaved people. He's writing to a group of people who are bound together in the person and work of Christ who've got some problems. This is not an invitation to salvation. This is an invitation to return to fellowship. The people who open the door, he's saying this, "I wish you were hot or cold. You're like the Laodiceans. You're lukewarm. I'm just going to spit you out." You need to understand the context of this.

Laodicea was a city near Colossae and Hierapolis. In Hierapolis, there was hot springs. When Jesus says, "I wish you were hot," what he's talking about is the streams of the water that came out of the Hierapolis were a healthy stream that had medicinal healing content. It was a healing phrase of water—hot. On the other side, he says, "I wish you were cold." Colossae had cold water springs coming out of the mountains. That was very refreshing. So he said, "I want you to be healing or I want you to be refreshing. I don't want you to be like you are, Laodiceans, because you're taking the water out of the pipes that have salt and calcium in it and it tastes terrible, and when you drink it, it's going to be spilled out; you're going to spit it out." He said, "I want you to be like the hot, and you have a healing aspect, and I want you to be cold where you're refreshing. I don't want you to be lukewarm in between because I'm going to spit you out, and the reason you've become that way is because you're neither hot nor are you cold; you're not healing nor are you refreshing; therefore, come back into me. I'm standing there. I invite you to come back in to me because that's where we started. You want to get rid of being lukewarm, then come back to me."

You see, he's inviting the church back. This is not an invitation to the lost. How can a dead man open the door? This is to the church. You've got to look at its context. What we've done is we have said this, "All you have to do, Bruce, is open the door and you'll be saved." We didn't tell them that they don't have the ability to open the door, let alone see the knob. Yet we've done that. And thousands of people have said, "I opened the door. There's no change in my life." "Oh well, just made him your Savior; you haven't made him Lord yet," so now we've got to deal with the loophole. Let's create another theology here. But we can separate his Savior role from his Lordship role. "Yeah, he came forward. He opened the door when he was 20, but there's been no evidence in his life. Oh well, he just trusted him as Savior. He'll get his fire insurance, but he'll make him his Lord later." Another loophole.

You've got to realize, guys, when you take Revelation 3:20, this is to the church. It's inviting the church to come back and be refreshing and be healing. Don't be lukewarm. Don't be like the church at Laodicea which had no impact. He's telling the church, "Have an impact. I want you to be refreshing, like the cold water, and I want you to be healing like the hot water. Don't remain the way you are and have insignificant impact on society because you're lukewarm. You're neither hot nor you're cold. So come back to me. Come back to me. I'm the head of the church." It's the invitation to the church, brothers; it's not an invitation to the lost.

You gotta take things in its context. That's why you have a hermeneutic. That's why you have to study the Scripture and you just don't take something that somebody says and just accept it. You've got to go back and look at that historical background, grammar, context. That prevents you from making errors in your biblical theology. That's why you need to have Bishop Roger's book {LAUGHTER}, so you can refer to that and say let me get a better explanation of what that means. There's a great resource right at your disposal if you had that.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] society where there's a famous painting showing Jesus standing at the door, but the latch is on the inside.

Yeah, there's no latch.

Audience Member: Yeah, [UNCLEAR] you have to open the door.

Yeah. That's a great illustration, but it's theologically wrong. But it came from the mindset of neo-Finneyism, which says, "I'm sick. I found the doorknob. I can reach for it. I'm just about dead, but I've seen it. I can reach for it. I just worked my way into heaven."

Audience Member: Bruce, through Finneyism, when a minister studies in school, do they actually have a course that's called Finneyism?

No. It's evangelism.

Audience Member: So today's ministers, [UNCLEAR] Finneysim is built into evangelism.

Correct.

Audience Member: If you were seeking a minister for your church, Bruce, or for a church, would you bring that up?

I'd ask them this question, "Which comes first? Faith or life?" That's the question. If they're Finneyism, they're going to say what? Faith. If they understand a biblical gospel and biblical theology, they're going to say what? Life. A dead man can't do anything. I'd ask that question.

I've told you before that many times I've been in ordination councils, and that's one of the questions I asked. Which comes first? Faith or life? I've been in six of these in my life. Four out of the six said faith. Four out of the six said faith, which means that they had no understanding of a biblical gospel and yet, they're in our pulpits saying, "Knock on the door. All you gotta do. Invite me in."

Audience Member: No need to teach Finneyism, because it's the natural man's religion.

Yes. Amen.

Audience Member: It's in the air we breathe.

Yeah.

Audience Member: Every culture. It's everywhere.

Amen. Good.

Audience Member: You gotta teach against it.

That's right.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] a gift, but we have a choice. We have to reach out and receive the gift. Actually there is an invitation in the Scripture to those outside the body of believers.

Yeah, and do you know what it is?

Audience Member: God calls all men everywhere to repent.

That's the call. Repent. Jesus' first sermon was repent and believe. That's the invitation. It's repent. It's repent.

Audience Member: Bruce, didn't he have to wake you up first?

Repentance is a function of grace. Yeah. Repentance is a gift that God gives you. It's a gift. It's not something you decide to do out of logic. A dead man can't repent. Guys, the issue is this. Are you dead or are you sick? You gotta deal with that. I can't convince you. All I'm saying is there's Scriptural evidence that says you're dead. Now you've got to take that statement as biblical truth, your biblical theology, and work to its end, which means I'm lost. I can't do a thing. God save me.

I told you about Spurgeon walking across the bridge last week. Gave a very strong sermon. A woman said, "You know, Pastor, you almost made me repent." 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 did."

You see, it's not of man. You see, the critical ingredient for us, brothers, is this. Are we preaching a biblical gospel? That's critical for our churches. Where are powerless. Bishop Rogers is absolutely right, neo-Finneyism, modern evangelism, is the natural man's religion because it's all about me and my ability, not about the fact that Jesus says, "No one *can* come." No one can come.

May God give us the grace to be courageous. Guys, we need to be bold and courageous. We're not Bible bashers. We don't have to defend anything. We just need to communicate it and preach it. God the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest. Make sure that what you and I teach is grace and truth, that our truth is surrounded by grace, because truth without grace is a half-truth, and grace without truth is no grace at all. It's all about God, guys. We'll continue this next week, so bring your little sheet with you.

Let's pray. Father, it's amazing how we've taken that which is so beautiful and we've contaminated it by thinking that we are the reason for it and that we're the ones that can make it happen. Father, we repent of our pride of thinking that we are the means as well as the focus of salvation. Remind us, Father, that you are not only the means, but you're the cause and you're the effect. And may it be so for Jesus' sake as all the Brave Men said...Amen!!