

## THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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...dear Heavenly Father. We thank you that it is your faithfulness that makes a difference in our lives and not ours. Thank you, Father, that in spite of us you choose to use us. Thank you, Father, that your mercy extends beyond that which we can understand, yet how much we need your mercy. We pray, Father, that you'd be pleased once again just to remove the frustration of this life that we live, that our mind would be focused upon you and you would give us heavenly thoughts, and that you'd be pleased once again to open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake, and be our vision, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We are studying the function and formation of the church and looking at the critical ingredients of a healthy church; healthy meaning one that's alive and growing in grace. We've been looking at the three critical ingredients, which would be expository preaching—exposing people to the Scripture. Good biblical preaching essentially, is plagiarism. You take a message, which has already been given, contained in the 66 books of the Bible, and you figure out a way to re-give that. A pastor should never really have a lack of content for which he should preach because all he has to do is go in and read [UNCLEAR] that's already been given to him, and then figure out how do I expose that to the people. That's what we call expository preaching.

Next thing was biblical theology, that the decisions we make have a foundation not upon political correctness of this world, but rather upon a biblical theology, theology being the study of God. When we make our decisions we basically run it through do I have the right view of God. As we've been saying this for years together, we're here to study the God of Biblical revelation, not the God of human imagination. You could walk down the streets of Pittsburgh and ask people, "Tell me who you think God is. What is God like? What's your opinion of God?" and you'll probably get as many opinions or expressions, discussions on that as the people you would ask." We are really coming onto this, our study, with blinders basically saying we're confining our understanding of the person and work of God based upon what he's chosen to reveal to us in the sufficiency of Scripture.

Our protection in biblical theology is the sufficiency of Scripture. Not only is it our authority, but it is sufficient for everything related to life and godliness, to live life at its highest quality, and godliness is worship rightly directed. So basically we're saying we've got blinders on, and I admit that. Often times, I'm accused of being very narrow minded.

*Audience Member: No! {LAUGHTER}*

And I have to say, "Thank you for recognizing that." {LAUGHTER} They' say, "You're not very open minded." I say, "Well I'm open minded, but not at both ends." {LAUGHTER}

The third thing we're looking at is a biblical gospel. We've learned, over the weeks, and we've seen for years, that in Romans 1 Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel, for *it* (the gospel, the message itself, the content of what you're saying, preaching and teaching)" is the power unto salvation to all who believe." So we're focusing on what does that mean.

We've been looking at, in recent weeks, the comparison of what I'm calling neo-Finneyism or modern evangelism, which had its roots in the genesis of the ministry of a gentleman by the name of Charles Finney back in the 1820's, and its really extended now up into the year 2011 because he has shaped much of what we would call, or I'm calling, modern evangelism. Neo-Finneyism is what I call it. Neo meaning new, sort of a new Finneyism, which we have just sort of re-packaged in the last 75 to 80 years

in America have been practicing that type of evangelism.

I do want to say we're comparing neo-Finneyism or modern evangelism with what I'm saying is a more biblical theological evangelistic approach. I do want to say this. Remember, it is God who changes the heart. God [UNCLEAR] to bring somebody that he's chosen before the foundation of the world to come saving faith. Now it may not be, every jot and tittle may not be exactly the way that we would do it ourselves or what we're saying here in our study. Remember, it's not us. It is God who makes the difference. It is God who opens the heart to cause somebody to come to saving faith. Just because they may have a different dispensational mindset does mean that he's not going to use that to bring the person to saving faith. The real issue is there, not the person's proclamation, it's really the personhood of God that makes the difference.

I do want to help us understand that has God been using modern evangelism to bring people to saving faith: Certainly he has, but that's more of a testimony to his grace than it is to our proclamation. You understand the difference? He makes the difference. That doesn't give us license to be sloppy in our theological presentation of the Gospel, or I wouldn't be spending all the time on this. All I'm saying is if we are more biblically correct, and have a more theological basis for or evangelism, in my judgment, as I understand the Scripture, we will have more impact.

Just in contrast, as I gave you a couple examples a couple of weeks ago, the way that we evaluate ministry now in America in the world today in the evangelistic world, basically is to say how many people came forward. We look for results. Now there's nothing wrong looking for results. The issue is what is the measurement of your results. Is it the raising of a hand? Or is it the signing of a card? Is it the walking forward at a crusade?

Modern evangelism would say that's the way that you evaluate it. The position I'm taking here is the only way that you can evaluate true ministry is was truth proclaimed, and that will evidence itself in a couple of different ways. The way that Puritan evangelists did it, for which we're making our study on my book, *Light and Heat: The Puritan View of the Evangelism and the Puritan View of the Gospel*, they would come back into an area where they had preached, and they would come back three to five years later and they would look for a couple of different ingredients in the culture to say that evangelism occurred.

First of all, they would see was crime decreased. Was there a decrease in crime in that little village where they preached? Because they would not say, "Just because we proclaimed a biblical gospel and somebody had a response, that does not necessarily mean that that is a true conversion." You will see a true conversion, as we'll see this in our study here in a moment, that there are several ingredients that make that a reality.

They would, first of all, say, before we could say that there was a revival, or before there was an evangelistic crusade, we would need to take a look at the culture. Was there a decrease in crime? Secondly, is there an increase in righteousness? In other words, has the pendulum gone from this direction to this direction? So was there a decrease in crime? Was there an increase in personal, individual righteousness? And thirdly, was there increased church membership?

Now they would say, three to five years later, it might take some time for that to really come into fruition, to really say, "Yes, there was an evangelistic campaign that occurred in this little village or this town." Now that's quite different than the way we do it. We would say today, based upon Finneyism, we would basically say today, "We had 36,000 people show up at the stadium, and 20,000 people indicated they received Christ as their savior." We would then say that's how we evaluate it. Now that may be true. There may have been 20,000 converts. We don't know that. All I'm suggesting is, in more

theological biblical understanding of conversion would say, you can't make that judgment the moment that somebody has a response. You have to take a look at the quality of their life. Is there an indication, and that's why we spent, several years ago, studying the seven traits of a person who's been truly born of God. When you study the book of 1 John, there are seven indications of a person who has truly been reborn, born of God, and it all has the phrase, "born of God." Just as in the book of 1 John, there are seven tests of true saving faith, which basically is, if you say this and you do that, then you are; if you say this and you don't, then you're not. The book of 1 John is a critical book to our understanding the evidence of true biblical conversion.

**Don:** *Bruce, how would you respond, and I've heard this from people before, how would you respond to the person who says, well look at the prodigal son. You know, he came to his father, and his father didn't say, well, we'll see how you are in five years. He embraced him. He said oh let's celebrate. Let's have the fatted calf killed. And they would say, "Well, so that's how we're supposed to...we're just supposed to take somebody's word that they're converted and celebrate and sure that's he's saved." What would you say?*

Well, that's a wonderful story, and I'd say yes, absolutely do that, because that has nothing to do with salvation. That's a come back to his family. That has nothing to do with his spiritual life. You're comparing apples to oranges. You can't take things out of its context. He is celebrating the fact that his son had returned back into his family. That does not say that the man was converted into saving faith. We don't know that. We'll find that out in eternity. You've got to be careful not to compare one apple with an orange because they're two different stories. You have take things in its context.

**Don:** *But he did confess that he had sinned and he did repent.*

Yes. We don't know that because the Scripture doesn't say that, so all we can do is take what the Scripture says. He was welcoming him back into his family. Now I'm in a situation with a family member on my side of the family. I'm not going go into detail. I'm standing, waiting for a return. I don't know if and when it'll ever happen, but I'm just like prodigal father. I'm waiting. When he does return, I'll be the first one to greet him. That does not necessarily say that it's a conversion. It's just saying that I'm welcoming him back into a relationship with me that might lead to a conversion. We don't know that. We've got to be careful. Don't take things out of context.

**Audience Member:** *You have to remember, too, in all four Gospels, when Jesus was asked why he spoke in parables, he said that seeing, we may not see, but perceive, and hearing, they may not understand. He spoke in parables to confuse people.*

Yes, he did. He spoke in parables to confuse people because he did not want everybody to understand. Who are the ones who are going to understand? Those who were chosen before the foundation of the world.

Let's go back to your list that you have that I gave you comparing modern evangelism with biblical evangelism based upon a biblical theology. Now I hope I'm not beating a dead horse. If you get tired of me going through this, we'll move on. We've looked at the first eight of these so far. I want you to notice one thing here, guys, that all of these really start off with your view of who God is. You see, your view of God is going to determine your evangelism. Your view of God is going to determine what you say. Your view of God is going to determine how you judge results. Everything starts with your view of God.

Notice, on the left-hand side what I'm calling neo-Finneyism. Notice how they view God a certain way and compare that to the one on the right side to compare the same thing. Now you notice number 8—the

Gospel is the offer of the possibility of salvation. It's the Gospel is the offer of a Savior. You see, there's a huge difference. That's based upon your view of who God is. God owes me something so to be fair, he has to offer everybody salvation. Is that true?

*Audience Members: No.*

I mean, you always hear this, "Well, that's not fair." Well, you see, the issue is not fairness; the issue is what has God chosen to do? He's chosen to offer us a Savior to reconcile us back to himself. Because, you see, the real position is, we are an offense to God in our sinful position and in our sinful person. There's two things wrong with us. Our person and our position. Legally, we're sinful before a holy God. That's our legal position. Personally, we've got a rotten heart. So two things need to be dealt with, and so it's not the possibility of salvation.

What does that say when you understand in modern evangelism that God makes your salvation possible? What does that say about you and your ability? What does it say?

*Audience Member: You don't have one.*

You have ability. You see, modern evangelism says you have the ability. We would counteract that by saying what does the Scripture say? You're dead in your trespasses and sins. Can a dead man have ability? No. Modern evangelism, you see, takes the position that God owes us something, and therefore, he's loving enough that he's going to offer us the possibility for us to take our own ability and then decide to come, repent and have saving faith. It all starts with your view of who God is.

I want to show you just a couple of other examples. Modern evangelism's view of God is basically this—that God has contact with sinners because he has something for us. In other words, what God has for you. Biblical evangelism would say God has contact with a sinner because of who God is. It's not that God has something for us; it's because who God is. So they would say God's primary authority is secondary. Modern evangelism would say God's authority is secondary, whereas, biblical evangelism would say God's authority is primary.

Now notice here. Go to a couple of verses. One of the things you might want to do, which I did in my book, that I'm not going to go into all the details, there are 14 evangelical messages in the Book of Acts. Just take the Book of Acts alone. Everybody says the Book of Acts is the standard for the church. It's a transitional book. It's a book of transition between the incarnation of Christ and the formation of the church. Not necessarily everything that occurs in the Book of Acts is to be what we would call normative because it's a book of transition. It goes from the incarnation and the glorification of Christ, now to the implementation of his new body, which is the church, the saved believers of the church, and there's a book of transition that takes us from his incarnation now to the incarnation of the church, which is a result of God's grace. The Book of Acts is a book of transition if you would.

There are 14 evangelical messages in the Book of Acts. If you want those, I'll give them to you next week. I'll just have Sig print those out for you and give you the verses if you want to take a look at them. What I've done is I've just taken those 14 evangelical messages, trying to keep it confined to this period when the proclamation of the Gospel was forming the church. That's why I chose the Book of Acts. There are other evangelical messages in the Epistles, but that was after the formation of the church. I'm just saying what was the message before the church was really brought into fruition, and after the incarnation and glorification of Christ. That's in the Book of Acts. I took the 14 messages of evangelism in the Book of Acts and said now I'm going to dissect those and compare them with modern evangelism versus biblical evangelism, holding the position that the Book of Acts would be biblical evangelism.

Just let me give you a couple for examples. Modern evangelism would basically say God has something for us because he owes us something. He owes us the possibility of having a relationship with him. I would say the Book of Acts...if you go to chapter 14, I'll give you a couple of examples. In Acts 14:14-18, you'll see that God is pictured as the Creator. They start off with who God is, not what God offers, but who God is, <sup>14</sup>“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, <sup>15</sup>“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”

You'll notice right away, the first thing in their evangelism, the presentation, was what?

*Audience Member: God.*

God. It starts with who God is. You see, that's the point I'm trying to make. You see, in biblical evangelism, you start off with the personhood of God. You don't start off with the needs of man or what God's going to give you. You start off with who is God. That's why you see the outline of biblical evangelism is essentially the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man. You see, if you don't understand the holiness of God, you're never going to understand the needs of man. That's because man is a sinner. Then you go to the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith.

You'll see it every time in these 14 messages that the apostles preach evangelistically, they all start off with the character and nature of God. In the example I just gave you, they create him as The Creator. They say he is the Creator of all things heaven and earth. We're going to start right there. Why are you doing this stuff? You see, you don't understand all that. You gotta understand who God is. He's the Creator. He's the one who created the heavens and the earth. My point is, in all these 14 messages, they always start off with the character and nature of who God is, not with the fact that God owes us something or what God has for us.

Another example would be, in modern evangelism, God's authority is secondary. Well, the apostolic messages in the Book of Acts would say that God's authority is primary. Let me give you an example. Go to Acts 3.

*Ted: What do you mean, Bruce, by saying modern evangelism says that God's authority is secondary? Explain that a little bit.*

They're basically saying that we are the ones, in modern evangelism, we are the ones who have a choice to do what we want to do. It is our ability, because he's made it possible, he hasn't accomplished it; he's made it possible, therefore, the authority finally rests with me and my decision. Do I want to do this or do I not want to do it? It's really up to me. Whereas, the evangelistic messages in the Book of Acts would say no, God has chosen something to do and he's the authority behind it. He's the one who makes it possible. You don't. That's what they're saying.

*Ted: Thank you.*

Here's an illustration, I think, that might help you, Ted. Go to Act 3:17-23, <sup>17</sup>“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. <sup>18</sup>But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup>Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, <sup>20</sup>that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, <sup>21</sup>whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. <sup>22</sup>Moses said, ‘The

Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. <sup>23</sup>And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.”

Now where does the authority rest? It rests with the personhood of God, not in the ability of man to make up his own mind. All I’m trying to say is there’s a difference between the personhood of God in modern evangelism and how the biblical position always starts with the character and nature and characteristics of who God is.

What about personhood of Christ? Just let me give you another illustration here. Let’s go to Acts 13. The authority. You see, the greatest [UNCLEAR] lousy job of helping you understand this. The greatest power we have in proclaiming the Gospel is it is God’s authority behind it. It’s not our ability. It’s in spite of you and me. You see, that’s the point I’m trying to drive home. He makes it...that’s what grace is. Grace is getting what you don’t deserve. The greatest power we have is the authority of God behind the message of a biblical gospel. It doesn’t make up the difference. It isn’t because of my skill in presenting it. It’s the power that he has behind it to take any amount of truth that is biblically founded, theologically sound, and he will take that truth and use that because he has the authority and the power. It is all about him and not about us. You see, that’s the power of evangelism. It’s about him. It’s not about me. It’s not about you. It’s not about our music. It’s not about our testimonies. It’s about the message of a god who is holy and says, “I’m going to redeem my own for my own glory.”

You see, we’ve got to realize we’ve got the most wonderful, powerful authority behind us when we proclaim Christ. It’s the authority of God. That is missing in modern evangelism because it’s basically saying this—God owes you something, because you’re a decent guy, and would you like to come to saving faith. You see, that removes all the power, all the authority behind the message of the proclamation of the biblical gospel.

Let me give you a couple of examples of what I mean. How about Acts 13:48. Let’s go back to 44 and keep it in the right context. <sup>44</sup>The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” Alright. Powerful preaching. <sup>45</sup>But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. <sup>46</sup>And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’” He’s basically saying you’ve rejected the powerful message of the Gospel of Christ, the Messiah; we’re going to now take it to the Gentiles.

<sup>47</sup>For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Now notice, <sup>48</sup>And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life” chose to do so. It doesn’t say that. It says, “as many as were appointed to eternal life,” what?

***Audience Member:** Believed.*

Believed. What’s the power from behind your preaching? It’s the fact that God has the authority to cause somebody to believe because they were appointed before the foundation of the world. You see, “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

The word “believed” means DART—depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in. It doesn’t mean they gave mental assent to a message. It meant something eternal and supernatural happened in their heart that God regenerated them. He took the heart of stone and gave them a heart of life, and all of a sudden, they had this glimmer of belief. They said, “I trust in the Messiah now.” This was a message

they had not heard. You see, the great power we have in biblical preaching is the authority of God.

Notice the number of times you'll see the word of God in that phrase, in that illustration. The word of God. The word of God. "And when they heard the Word of God, as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." That's the authority that God gives us in proclaiming a biblical gospel.

All I'm saying is, in contrasting a biblical gospel from the Book of Acts, with modern evangelism is, we've removed the power of evangelism in our presentation, because we've removed the authority of God behind it. You see, it's when we proclaim the authority of God behind evangelism that things begin to happen eternally.

Here's another illustration.

***Ted:** It's not that modern evangelism doesn't have power. It has great power. But it doesn't have the power of God. You can have power in the quality of the preaching...*

Manipulation

***Ted:** ...the manipulation, the music, the scene, the setting. All of that has great power. It's not that being evangelized in a modern setting does not have a powerful experience; it's that it's not God's power.*

Good point. Thank you, Ted. You see the difference? We have a lot of power in our human ability. Like in leadership, when respect for the leader is not there, the leader has to rely upon force or manipulation. When there's no respect for the leadership, you have to rely upon force and manipulation. That's because we have a lot of power ability in ourselves. Ted's exactly right. What I'm trying to say is the power that is missing in modern evangelism is the power of God, not the power of man. We can construct something that will have an emotional experience. That's very powerful. But it may not be the power of God that manifests itself in eternal life. Thanks, Ted.

Go to Acts 16:44.

***Audience Member:** I'm curious. Whenever you said not the power of God, so that would mean that it's false.*

Correct.

***Ted:** That's correct.*

That's correct. That's what you have...when I used the phrase last week, a spurious conversion. It means false. There may be a lot of people who are in our churches who think they are in Christ, but they may not be. It's because they had a false conversion because they did something that they thought achieved their salvation as opposed to God having given them the grace to receive their salvation. So it could be a false conversation. Correct.

***Audience Member:** The other problem is there's a lack of discipleship, of follow up on conversions, so many times a person can walk forward or mark a card or whatever, and it's only in the following Bible study and so forth they realize nothing happened, and then they repent [UNCLEAR].*

That's correct. Very little follow up. We'll get into that later. One of the things the Puritans always did, is that's why they would go back into a community five years later and say, "Well let me see the number of increased church members." It's exactly what you're saying. It was just not a one-time event. It was a

life changing walk of life that changed. That requires discipleship. One of my mentors in Scotland told me, he said, “Bruce, realistically, you can probably only disciple five or six people in your life.”

*Audience Member: Oh, praise God. That’s amazing.*

And do it well. He said, “We have this idea of mass discipleship. When you understand biblical discipleship, you can probably only do that to five or six people in your whole life.” That radically changed my thought of discipleship. We think discipleship is just getting somebody to do a bunch of activity.

*Audience Member: But isn’t that what happened in the end of Finney’s life? The thing I’ve read about him, this whole district of western and northern New York where he started, they now refer to as the burned out district, where a lot of his revivals were held. It really didn’t take root.*

Correct.

*Audience Member: I think, if I’m correct, he either lamented that his own son never came to saving faith, and it, like, you go, you were saying about the revival, you go back five years later and see what’s there, well at the end of his life, he goes back and I think he even lamented that it didn’t work. I don’t know if that’s completely accurate.*

I think it’s bit of an overstatement. He did say that he began to see that the fruit was not long-lasting. There was not long-lasting fruit, was his phraseology.

We really need to understand, guys, that what produces long-lasting fruit is the power of God, not the power of manipulation of man. Again, understand this. That does not mean that the Lord is not going to use any element of truth to bring somebody to saving faith. Yes, he will use the four spiritual laws. Yes, he will use the Billy Graham Crusades. Yes, he will use all the other things that we’re involved in, in modern evangelism. That’s more of a testimony to him than it is to us. So please understand I’m not saying that you have to have your jot and tittle right for it to work. What makes it work is what?

*Audience Member: God.*

God does, not us. That’s the power I’m trying to help you understand. That’s the authority behind the preaching. All I’m saying is when we have a theologically-based biblical evangelistic approach to the Gospel, you’re going to have more long-lasting results because you’re going to have less confusion about that which is false versus which is true in the conversion.

Let me give you one other illustration. Go to Acts 16:13. Now here is the historical evidence of the first conversion in the church in the Middle East. Acts 16:13, <sup>13</sup>“And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. <sup>14</sup>One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.” Now notice, a worshiper, but she wasn’t saved. <sup>14</sup>“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup>And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.” Notice, what was her condition before she was converted?

*Audience Member: A worshiper.*

A worshiper. But that does not necessarily mean, in our culture, that somebody who comes to worship



with us has had their heart opened to respond to a biblical gospel. Do you understand that? That's why every message from the pulpit has to be evangelistic, even in our churches. There's got to be some evangelistic emphasis in your preaching, because you're preaching to the wheat and the tares, you're preaching to the sheep and the goats. You just don't know who is who. You may have a lot of worshipers there who are very faithful in their worship, but they may not be in Christ. We don't know that and it is not our job to go figure that out. Our job is to what? To proclaim a biblical gospel that God will be pleased in his power and authority to take the message of biblical truth based upon biblical theology, that he will take that and he will use that as a means of opening up his chosen people's hearts to respond through regeneration. That's exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus in John [UNCLEAR], "Nicodemus, something supernatural is going to happen to you." You see, we should never, ever forget the supernaturality of the presentation of the Gospel. It's powerful. It has God's authority behind it. And that is our greatest weapon. Just because people are worshipers in our church does not necessarily mean that they're in Christ.

This is not for us to go beat people over the head with, in our churches. That's not the purpose of this. If you're going to beat somebody up, who are you going to beat up?

***Audience Member:** Yourself.*

Yourself. You've got to look yourself in the eye and say, "Am I a worshiper or have I been converted? Where am I?" You have to look at that yourself. You're going to have to take a look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Where am I? Am I just a worshiper going through the motions? Or has God in his grace really changed my heart and caused me to believe, to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in the person and work of Christ for my salvation and for my destiny?"

You see, guys, you have to take a look at that question yourself before you go start rippin' this on other people. You've got to look at yourself and say, "Is that me? Am I a Lydia? Have I been churchgoer all my life? Or is God really doing something as I come to these Friday morning sessions and God is doing a work of grace in my heart that my heart's all of a sudden becoming a flame for the desire for the Scripture?" That's why I keep coming back on a Friday. Is something happening to me, that has taken me from being a worshiper, now to being a regenerate person who now wants to love Christ and live for his glory? You see, guys, you've got to ask yourself that question. But please don't go start taking this and dumping this on people in your church. Dump it on yourself. You've got to evaluate yourself.

***Ted:** Absolutely everything you've said is true, so I won't say but. There is a frustration, and a number of the brothers have expressed it to me, that what they do is they go back to their churches and they still hear this modern evangelism Sunday after Sunday. I've had brothers come to me and say, "What do we do?" It's very frustrating. I mean, it's interesting. I began to look at Acts and I said if this is the example...I did a study...it's interesting for you to say this, I did a study just like you did on Acts, and I tried to say how does our preaching today reflect what was in Acts. I found it wasn't reflected at all.*

Correct.

***Ted:** The preaching, the subject matter, the focus in Acts was entirely different than what I was hearing. I was stunned by what I found. I mean, I'm not saying it's good or bad, I'm just saying there is a frustration in folks don't know quite what to do with it, therefore, we start church hopping. We'll go to this church because it's more faithful than this, and then that doesn't get...it's a difficult situation.*

Oh yes. It's very difficult. Have you guys ever have an answer, please let me know. {LAUGHTER}

***Ted:** I'll have one for you next week.*

**Don:** Bruce, to me, this is a little off the subject. Since you've studied the Puritans, are you familiar with what they said about the phenomenon of seeking, where you evangelize somebody [UNCLEAR] that you're in a position where you take God, God is your enemy, etc., and there's nothing that you can do to come to Christ and what you have to do is you have to come hear the Word preached, because that's the way that God has chosen to make his Gospel known is through the preaching of the word, come to the church where the Bible is preached and beg God for mercy. He may give it to you; he may not. I don't know if all the Puritans followed this, but what I was wondering was, do you believe that that is part of their biblical evangelism, and is that Scriptural? I know in the Book of Acts, for example, and a lot of the conversions seem to be immediate. There isn't this going home and groveling for 20 years—and I'm exaggerating here—until do I know that I'm saved, do I not know. How do I know? Are you familiar with that?

What the Puritans would say, in general, across the board, would be this. It is the responsibility of mankind to position themselves to receive the grace of God however they can. Go where the grace of God is being presented. That's in the church. They were saying that is your responsibility that you have to avail yourself to the means of grace. The means of grace would be the preaching of the Word.

That's what they would say would be, that is your seeking responsibility. Some took that to a greater extreme than others, but generally speaking, they were all uniformly say you need to put yourself in the position where you can receive and afford yourself to understand the grace of God. That's going to come through biblical preaching. That's why they were so serious about what they said in the pulpit, because they realized this—that there were a lot of people who were coming just to afford themselves to the means of grace; they'd never heard it before. That's why they took the pulpit so seriously, because they understood at the same time they were telling people to go to position themselves to receive grace, they need to make sure they were preaching grace. So there was a balance there. But some went a little further than others, but in generality, Don, that would be the overriding.

**Tom:** Going back to what you said about it's the power of God and this concern about what's preached and follow up and all of that. I keep going in a circle with this, really, the power of God that ultimately determines your personal conversion, your personal faith, then it doesn't matter whether there's follow up. The follow up is coming from God. I get a little confused and I keep going in circles, because then, as you say, what the Puritans, they believe that it was very important [UNCLEAR] to preach the Word, so you see [UNCLEAR].

Yeah, we need to understand there are two things that really are equally compatible, and that is the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Can you and I figure that out? No. Has God figured that out? Yes. We really just have to trust that God knows the balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. You and I are responsible. That's part of evangelism. When we get into repentance and faith, you're going to see that repentance is a responsibility. God is the one who gives us the grace because repentance is a gift. Did you ever notice the number of times that Jesus offered repentance as much as he did forgiveness? Do a study on that. The number of times that God offered repentance. God gave them repentance. You see, God gave them repentance. It's a gift. Repentance is a function of grace.

You and I have a response to respond to that grace. That is called human responsibility. That's the last part of the Gospel when you'll hear talk about repentance and faith. There's a balance, Ted, between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. The best I can say is you just trust a holy God who can balance that out because you and I in our humanness and our finite mind and our inability to understand spiritual things, we can't resolve that. So yes, we have to do what the Scripture says is to remind them.

One of the great themes of the Scripture is the word “remind.” It means to keep them in remembrance. Paul always says, seven times he tells Timothy in Titus, “Remind them of these things.” He’s just saying remind them of the things that brought them not saving faith [UNCLEAR] discipleship. So there’s a responsibility that we have to keep reminding people of the basics of the Christian faith.

Why is it the nation of Israel when they crossed the Jordan the elders said go build a tower of rocks? Why? So the next generation with say, “Hey Dad, what are those rocks for?” And he’ll say, “Well those are reminders that God lead us out of Egypt and delivered us.” You see, it’s a reminder. So you see, the theme of reminding or bringing to remembrance, to cause people to think about is part of our discipleship, and that’s part of our responsibility. We need to keep reminding people of the things that brought them to saving faith, the power of God and the authority of God.

**Frank:** *What would you say would be the difference between those rocks being an idol or a reminder?*

The person’s heart. It’s the heart of the person. It would have to be that person’s heart. What do they think about the rock? You’d have to ask them. It’s their heart’s condition that would determine whether it’s an idol. Remember an idol is this. Trusting someone or some thing to give you only what God can give you. If the person looked at that rock and said, “Oh that’s an idol. I’m going to worship it,” that’s their heart condition. Somebody else might say, “That’s a great reminder of God’s grace.” The real issue there is the person’s heart. The heart condition of the person who looks at it.

That’s why you and I have to be careful what are idols. Sometimes we make our children idols. The issue is your heart. It’s not your child; it’s your issue of the heart. How do I look at my child? Is my child the means by which I get my total satisfaction and fulfillment in life? Or does that come from Christ? If I look to my children for that, then I’ve made it an idol; I’ve made my kids an idol. We’ve got to be careful about that. Idolatry is a function of the heart. It’s a function of the heart.

**Audience Member:** *Back to Ted. Ted, after your study of Acts, how did that change you and what are you doing differently now?*

**Ted:** *Well I think it changed what I would preach or teach on. I mean, I want to get my teaching...if Acts is kind of the blueprint for what the preaching ought to be about, I want to find out what was in Acts. Now, of course, it’s not, as Bruce has said, not complete. You’ve got Epistles, but we ought to see what they were...what did they talk about in Acts? I agree. I was surprised how many messages there were. I only thought there were three or four, but when I got into it, there were like maybe 14 or more messages in there, so that’s what it did. I think it put, and I agree with Bruce, for me, it put a greater, much greater emphasis on sovereignty of God and his power to do things, and not about my decision or coming forward and this kind of thing. That’s what I came to the conclusion.*

You see, that’s why I studied those 14, what I found, were 14 evangelistic messages in the Book of Acts. I said I’m going to take those as the standard and find out and dissect all 14 of those and I’m going to look at these six issues. What do those messages say about the personhood of God? What do those messages say about the personhood of man? What do those messages say about the person and the work of Christ? And what do those messages say about repentance and faith? I’m going to take a look at those 14 messages and say, I’m going to dissect them, and I’m going to take that and compare that to what we’re doing in the pulpit today. I went back to the...I wanted to go back and have a standard, to have a litmus test. It’s like a, it’s a contractor drops down a plumb line. You see, the Book of Acts, those 14 evangelistic messages, for me, became a plumb line. I need to go back and say does everything I say fit into this plumb line, which is the standard. That’s where I came up with understanding that they talk about it in this order. They always talk about the personhood of God. Then they talk about the sinfulness

of man. Then they talked about the person and work of Christ. Then they talked about their responsibility of repentance and faith. That comes out of that examination of those 14 messages. That's the biblical gospel that I saw in the Book of Acts. All I was doing was comparing that with what we do [UNCLEAR].

***Audience Member:** Bruce, since God, in his sovereignty, knows who are his, throughout eternity and he's going to save those who are his, is the purpose of preaching just as much to the unbeliever to expose their [UNCLEAR], to show the guiltiness of the unbeliever as much as it is to bring to salvation those who are [UNCLEAR].*

Very much so. Remember, the role of the Holy Spirit is to do this—to guide us into all truth. The first thing is going to be to convict us of our sin. Convict us. Second to convince you of it. You may be convicted, but you may not be convinced. [UNCLEAR] So it's convict us of our sin, convince us of our sin, and then convert us from our sin, and then comfort us in our new way of life. Part of that is a warning to the non-believer of the seriousness and the conviction of their sin. Correct.

One of the most loving verses we can see in all of Scripture is Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. You see, the greatest thing that can happen to me is when my sin is exposed. Now we don't like to preach that because they're going to say, "Well, you're going to turn them off." What you gotta do, guys, is you've got to realize that when they're turned off, they realize there's a solution. The solution is the person and work of Christ. As uncomfortable as that is to have your sin exposed, it's one of the healthiest things that can happen to you. Because you know this—I've got a Savior [UNCLEAR] deal with that for me because I can't deal with that myself. [UNCLEAR] I've got a problem, I need help. Will you help me? The answer is, "Yes, my son, the Savior, has dealt with that for you." Our being exposed in our sin really can be one of the healthiest things in our walk in Christ, because we know this, that Christ came to take away my sin, and when he did that, he didn't make it possible at the cross, he accomplished it at the cross. He accomplished that. It is the achievement. We have the receiptment of the achievement, if there's such a word.

***Audience Member:** One more thing about this. So the non-believer can be convicted, can be convinced, but it will be up to God as to whether he's converted.*

Correct. That's correct.

We can't manipulate that. We'll see next week, as we look at the next some of these things, basically, modern evangelism sets the time for conversion. We set the time for conversion. God determines the time for response. We'll look at that next week.

Let's pray. Father, we've been probing the depths of your soul and your heart. Forgive us, Father, when we try to make it to our own understanding. We need to keep it [UNCLEAR]. We need to realize there are certain things that you've chosen to reveal about yourself and other things you haven't, and may we just give our lives to that which you've chosen to reveal and not to search for the things that we think you should reveal. May your Holy Spirit guide us into all truth, and Father, if we've said anything today that is contrary to your truth, to your glory, to your nature or your attributes or your character, that you'd be pleased to remove that from us, and only those things that are consistent with the sufficiency of Scripture would be the things that we remember. [UNCLEAR] to remind those that are based upon the theological understanding of who you are. For Jesus' sake we pray and may it be so. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!