

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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...to you now with hearts of gratitude. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

Audience Members: For his steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods. Give thanks to the Lord of lords. To him who alone does great wonders, to him who understanding made the heavens, to him who spread out the earth above the waters, to him who made the great light, the sun to rule over the day, the moon and stars to rule over the night, to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt and brought Israel out of among them.

Audience Members: For his steadfast love endures forever.

To him who divided the Red Sea in two and made Israel pass through the midst of it, but overthrew Pharaoh and the host of the Red Sea. To him who lead his people through the wilderness.

Audience Members: For his steadfast love endures forever.

To him who struck down great kings and killed mighty kings.

Audience Members: For his steadfast love endures forever.

Gave their land as a heritage; a heritage for Israel his servant. It is he who remembered us in our lowest state.

Audience Members: For his steadfast love endures forever.

And rescued us from our foes.

Audience Member: For his steadfast love endures forever.

Father, we just offer this as a testimony of gratitude and thanks for your mercy to us. As we ponder your mercy, we think how gracious and compassionate it is. It's beyond our comprehension. But when we recognize our need for your mercy, it's beyond our own description. So Father, let us stand on the promises of God, that you are a loving and kind God who house redeemed us from the lowness of our own lives. The end of this, Father, we just pray that you'd be glorified by our study, by our application and by our growing nearer to you. We just pray now, Lord, that your Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth, and that you will open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

We're continuing our study on the theme of the formation and function of the church. We've been looking at the last of the three essentials of a strong, healthy church; those three elements being expository preaching, biblical theology and now a biblical gospel. If you'd be kind enough turn now to your comparative handout that you have, that we've looking at the last couple of weeks. We've been comparing a modern day evangelistic message of the Gospel compared with a more biblical traditional reformed view as described by the Puritans, so we're looking at these different items of comparison.

We're down to about number 14. Modern evangelism basically says that man can choose the time, can choose God at any time. As we saw last week, God causes man to choose at his timing. We looked at some verses last week. We saw that in Acts 13:48 and 16:14. We saw that God is the one who has an

appointed time for us to repent and believe.

Modern evangelism basically says that's a choice that we can make at about any time we want, so the position it puts the pastor in, or the preacher, is one of being of one who will fight the will of the audience. In other words, if I can combat their will long enough, then I might win the day, put them in a position to choose.

Now part of that is because of their low view of God and a high view of man. Let me show you just a contrast here of some of the thoughts about modern evangelism versus historic evangelism and their view of man. Basically modern evangelism says that man is fallen with an ability to choose because they believe that he's sick, whereas biblical evangelism would say they're fallen with no ability to choose because they're dead. The real issue such verses as Ephesians 2, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Does the word "dead" mean dead? Or does the word "dead" mean sick? Now let's be logical. If the word "dead" means sick, then it's logical that you could do something. You could choose. You could do the last breath you have might be an act of works that you could do something if you're sick, because the sick person can respond.

But if you take the understanding of the Scripture and its sufficiency that a dead person is dead in their trespasses and sins, then they can't respond apart from, as what Jesus told Nicodemus, something supernatural must happen in your life so that you can even see the Kingdom of God. When you understand that much of modern evangelism has a higher view of man and a lower view of God, then you begin to understand why they would say that a person can choose because they're really just sick.

Another contrast would be this—that everybody seeks God. Now historic evangelism would say that no one seeks God because they can't because a dead man can't seek. But yet they have the responsibility to put themselves in the position of being wrapped in the doctrines of grace; in other words, where is grace being proclaimed. That is a human responsibility. That's why we invite people to church. The question is what type of churches are we inviting them to? Do they come to a church where they hear the grace of God? Because if we really love our neighbors and love those who are lost, then we would want to put them into the avenue where they can be wrapped in the robes of God's righteousness by hearing his grace.

Now, we have to understand they can't seek, but it might be that God might do a work of grace in their heart at that particular time when they're exposed to the doctrines of grace, that the Lord might soften their heart and call them to himself so that they could respond. Much of this really has the view of the really high view of the doctrine of man.

Another contrast would be this—modern evangelism would say that we need to discover God's plan for our life—his love, his help, his friendship and so forth. Now those are true statements. But really, biblical evangelism would say you need to possess God's heart. It's not to seek his plan for your life. You need to discover God's heart. That's through regeneration. So we begin to see that regeneration is something that God does when he takes that heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh, and now the person is able to respond to those things of God. The real issue is not finding his plan, as it is possessing his heart.

Another contrast would be man is neutral in his condition before God, and the biblical evangelism would say that man is responsible for his position before God. The difference is neutrality versus responsibility. We are all responsible, yet modern evangelism says they're neutral because they have the ability to change.

***Audience Member:** Can you expand on that a little bit, Bruce?*

When it says that man is neutral, they're basically saying that he's not been persuaded one way or the other. He has no responsibility, and that what happens is it's the responsibility of the preacher or the teacher or the person sharing the Gospel to deal with that person's will strong enough to convince them that they need to make a decision. When you're in a neutral position, then the it is preacher's responsibility to draw them to position of dealing with their will.

***Audience Member:** Because people will say, people will object, and if we're responsible, how can I be responsible if I had no say so in the matter being born dead in trespasses and sin and only God can change me, then how can I be responsible if I can't do anything?*

That's the great question. The answer is God alone knows that. You just have to let...God alone knows that answer. Yes, we are responsible and God is sovereign. You have to teach both of those. You have to teach that man is responsible. I've given you that illustration numerous times, of Spurgeon walking across the bridge, and he said, "You must repent," and she said, "I can't." He went back and forth and back and forth and finally she said, "God help me." He said, "You did."

Now there is the issue of human responsibility in divine sovereignty. You have to teach both. Modern evangelism says that those two things cannot be resolved, humanly, in our finite mind. Those cannot be resolved; therefore, the only way to resolve them is to say that man is neutral; he has no responsibility. That way, we can resolve the fact that God is sovereign, as long as we say that man is not responsible. Not that's the way that they rationalize that, rather than realizing that the only one that can really resolved that issue is God himself. So we have to trust that.

We just have to trust that yes, God is sovereign, and man is responsible. But one of the reasons that the church is in such lousy shape today is because we have let the church become irresponsible. We have not held people responsible to their actions. Basically, modern evangelism takes the position, the way to resolve the dilemma of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, is to say that man is neutral, and so therefore you only have one track, and that's the sovereignty of God, and you can preach that, but you're also saying there's no responsibility on man's part because he's neutral because he has no responsibility in that. It's a dilemma, but the church has really bought into the latter, which is saying that there is no responsibility on man's part because he's neutral.

Another contrast of the view of man, which is a very high view of man in modern evangelism, is that the unbeliever can decide in his mind to be saved. Modern evangelism basically takes the position that because man is neutral, he then can decide, in his mind, to be saved. Whereas biblical evangelism would say that man needs to be pierced in the heart in order to be saved. In other words, there's a situation where biblical evangelism would say something has to happen supernaturally. That's John 3 when Jesus had the conversation with Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, unless something supernatural happens, you can't even see the Kingdom of God." That's the piercing of the heart. It's Ezekiel 36, where God takes that heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh and removes that heart of stone. You see, there's a difference between regeneration and decision making. The contrast is, if man is neutral, he can decide in his mind. That's decisionism. If man is responsible and he's dead in his trespasses and sin, then it's regeneration. It's something that's supernatural. We should never forget the supernatural of our conversion, because it is something that God has chosen to do in his mercy and in his grace.

We need to understand the three words, which we've talked about before—justice, mercy and grace. Justice is getting what you deserve. The New Testament and the Old Testament are quite compatible on this. The Old Testament says the soul that sins shall die—die spiritually. Also die physically, as a result of sin. The New Testament says the wages of sin is death. They're basically saying the same thing. The soul that sins shall die; the wages of sin is death. It's in the midst of all of that, that we have to realize

that God regenerates people because he does not violate his own standard. So justice is getting what you deserve. Have you ever sinned?

Audience Members: Yes.

Then what do you deserve?

Audience Members: Death.

Death. Now why are you not dead?

Audience Members: Mercy.

Mercy. That takes us to the next thing. Justice and mercy. Mercy is not getting all that you deserve. You will get it one day just because sin has its final death when we are liberated from our body, our unredeemed body, the flesh in our members, and then we are glorified when we take up our residency with the Father, we'll go through glorification. But in the meantime, God is very merciful. You see, God has been merciful to every creature who's ever been born, because at their first breath, which is an act of sin, why didn't he take their life? That's mercy. So we need to understand justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is not getting all that you deserve.

Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Getting what you don't deserve. That's why we are saved by grace, according to Ephesians 2. But if you take the position that man can decide in his mind to be saved, then you're basically saying that he has the ability to choose what he wants, and you eliminate the whole issue of justice and the whole issue of mercy. Now you remove it from being merciful to a sinner; it now means that I've chosen to be a believer. You go from mercy, you go to decisionism. So that's why we have, in modern evangelism, what we call easy believeism. That's all, I just have to choose is to believe and I will be saved. It all comes from a very high view of man as opposed to understanding the depravity of man.

Another contrast would be this—modern evangelism would say that we need forgiveness to avoid our mistakes. We need forgiveness to avoid our mistakes. Biblical evangelism would say you need reconciliation to avoid judgment. You need reconciliation to avoid judgment. So there you understand the balance of justice, mercy and grace.

Modern evangelism would say that salvation voids the consequences of sin, which would be such things as unhappiness, loneliness, hell and so forth. Biblical evangelism would say salvation destroys the power of guilt and sin. It destroys the power of it, rather than just violating the, removing the consequences of it.

Remember our chart going from left right? Justification—sanctification—glorification. Justification is freedom from the penalty of sin. Sanctification is freedom from the power of sin. Glorification is freedom from the presence of sin. That's the life of the believer. Every one of us will go through that pilgrimage. Justification—sanctification—glorification. Modern evangelism basically says that salvation just wipes out the consequences of your evil choices; whereas biblical evangelism teaches this greater principle that's this—that actually salvation destroys the power of sin. That's what sanctification is. God accomplishes your sanctification by destroying the power of sin in your life in guilt, and so you're no longer a slave to the power of sin because you now have the resources of a holy God in the form of the Holy Spirit who now gives you that power to overcome that. So sanctification is God accomplishing something in your life by giving you his Holy Spirit to deal with the power of sin and guilt in your life. Then you and I have the obedience factor that we need to apply that in our life in our sanctification.

Modern evangelism is going to teach us that salvation just removes the consequences of our loneliness, our evil, our hell and all those other things as opposed to dealing with the real issue, which is the power of sin in your life. You see, we have the greatest resource in all of the universe, and that is God's Holy Spirit has really dealt with the power of sin in your life. That's why you and I can plead for his mercy and plead for him as a sinner did in Luke 6, "Woe is me, for I am a sinful man," as opposed to the Pharisee who is saying, "Father, I don't want to be like that. I'm a tither. I worship you. I don't want to be like that man." When you understand the difference, modern evangelism is going to have you compare yourself to other people. Biblical evangelism is going to have you compare yourself to God's holiness.

Don: What you just said there about modern evangelism talking about delivering, being delivered from the consequences is a little bit scary. Let's say a person, for example, has engaged in illicit sexual activity or something, or drug use and has AIDS, if you're telling them, "Well, just, God will deliver you from the consequences," I mean, you might have, you might [UNCLEAR] as a believer.

That's correct.

Don: That's very scary. If a person is told that and he [UNCLEAR] and says, "Well wait a minute, I thought that I was going to be delivered from that."

Yeah, that's true. What happens is people have a false expectation of what God's going to do because God never removes the consequences; he removes the guilt. He removes the condemnation. Romans 8 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." It doesn't say anything about the consequences.

The reason that people suffer is because people act irresponsibly. When we act irresponsibly, people are going to needlessly suffer. We need to understand that the Gospel deals with the power of sin, not to continue to do that anymore. That's what sanctification does. It accomplishes that so that you have the power not to choose to do that anymore; whereas before, if you're only dealing with the consequences, you're likely going to say, "Oh, God owes me this, because somebody told me that if I came to saving faith in Christ, the consequences would be removed." God never removes the consequences. He removes the guilt. He removes the condemnation. That's what sanctification does through the power of the Holy Spirit when we are regenerated.

Don's got a great point. You see, there are a lot of people who have false expectations of what God should be doing for them. What that does, that puts people back into a position of living an old covenant lifestyle. Remember the old covenant was this, essentially. The word "covenant" means arrangement. It was the arrangement that God had with his nation, the nation of Israel, when he dealt with the world nationalistically and corporately through an entity known as Israel. The means was to show the fact that he's holy.

Now in the new covenant, through the accomplishments of the person and work of Christ at the cross, he now has the same purpose, to show that he's holy, but he does that now individually, through a group of guys who meet on a Friday called the Brave Men, he now begins to work in us individually, and that's the body of Christ. That's why we are studying the formation and function of the church, to understand that. But the new covenant is this...the old covenant was this—if you obey, I will be your God. Now there was a cause and effect relationship. The cause was this—if you obey. The consequence was—I will be your God. The whole nation of Israel lived that way. If I do this, then God does that.

Often times, in modern evangelism, when we give them a false sense of their assurance in the

consequences being removed, they're likely to go back into the old covenant and say, "Well I believe, therefore you owe me this." It's the old covenant says, "I did this, now what are you going to do?" So most people, in their relationships that go sour, don't get mad at the person, they get mad at who? God. Because he didn't live up to his end of the bargain, "Because I did this. I believed. I became a believer. I trusted you. Now you haven't held up your end of the bargain." You see, a false sense of evangelism is going to teach a false sense of that assurance, and it's going to take people back into the old covenant as opposed to the new relationship through the person and work of Christ is this—I will be your God and you will be my people. You see, God takes the responsibility in the new covenant, "I will be your God and you will be my people." There's a difference.

There was a young lady who used to come to the Bible study at the bank about 15 years ago, and she quit coming. I ran into her on street several years ago and we had a nice conversation. She said, "You know, I haven't been coming back to your Bible study." I said, "Well it's been 12 years. I've noticed." {LAUGHTER} She said, "Here's the reason I'm not coming back," and I said, "I'd be interested to know. Was it something I said that offended you?" She said, "Oh no. It's just God didn't live up to his end of the bargain." I said, "Really? Tell me about that." She said, "Well, I was dating this guy and I'm sure he was going to ask me to marry him and I did everything right and it didn't happen, so God didn't hold up his end of the bargain because I did this and he was supposed to do that." Now that's tragic. You see, because what is that? That's old covenant. That's going back into making bargains with God, and God becomes a heavenly go-for. I did this and God's going to go for that.

We need to be careful. You see, the roots of that really are right here in evangelistic proclamations of the Gospel because it has a too high a view of who man is. When you put man in a neutral position and say that he has a decision to will, to will to make that decision, then you begin to realize that people are likely going to say, "Oh, then God owes me this because I did that."

***Brian:** I was going to ask, I just heard, about two weeks ago, this thing called corporate election, where they're saying that people are saved through the church, that there isn't any, that God doesn't work individually anymore, but it goes through the church, which is...*

That's Romanism. That's Roman Catholicism. They say that's why you go to the priest to have your sins absolved. Grace is administered through the church. That's what they say. That's the only place that its ministered is through the church. That's Romanism.

***Brian:** These people weren't actually Catholic.*

I know, but that has the semblance of historic Romanism. Now I'm using the word "Romanism" as opposed to Catholicism because the word "Catholic" means universal. But there basically is that strain of Romanism that basically says that grace can only be administered through those who are involved in the church. That's why, for years, the Roman Catholic Church never published a Bible because they did not want it to get into the hands of the people because they would begin to expose the grace individually, and they wanted to be able to say that the church is the only place that can administer grace. Now grace is administered through the church. No question about that. That is through preaching, it is through baptism, it is through church discipline—the keys to the kingdom. There are three keys to the kingdom, that is the proclamation of a biblical gospel, the observation of the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism, and church discipline. Those are the three keys to the kingdom. Now those are held for the church, and so in that sense, grace is administered through church, but it's administered individually just not collectively to the people all who are there.

***Brian:** Because their argument was nowhere does it say the elect individual, it's elect for, was their argument.*

Yeah, I've heard that.

Stanley: *For years, I heard an expression of fall from grace. Does anyone ever fall from grace? Do you fall from grace?*

That's a great question. Think about that. If grace is something that you don't deserve, and it comes from somebody else, not something you earn, how can it be removed? Who's the only person that can remove it?

Audience Member: *God.*

The person who gave it to you. Can we fall from grace? What they mean by that is you're less obedient than you should be. That's what it means. But can you honestly fall from grace? The answer to that is no. God is the author of grace; he's the one who establishes and administers the grace, therefore, he's the only one who can remove it.

That gets us into one of the other contrasts we're going to look at in a little bit, and that's the difference of the assurance of salvation that is proclaimed in the two comparative Gospels. The modern day Gospel says that the assurance of salvation is the activity of man. You can pronounce that on somebody as opposed to the biblical evangelism saying it's a work of the Holy Spirit.

Bill: *[UNCLEAR] a word for that. It's called backslid.*

Backsliding. That's what they mean fall from grace. But really, we shouldn't use that word "fall from grace" because it does imply the idea...

Audience Member: *That you can lose your salvation.*

...that you can lose it. That's when you have to understand, you know, John, look at John 10 where Jesus says, "No one is going to snatch them out of my hand because the Father is greater than I." No one's going to snatch you out of his hand. Literally, you can't fall from grace, but you can backslide. Backslide means you're less obedient than you should be. That's what it means.

Audience Member: *What about the unforgivable sin?*

Oh you guys are all over the place today. {LAUGHTER} Basically, the unpardonable sin is disbelief.

Audience Member: *Okay. I thought it was blaspheme the Holy Spirit.*

Isn't that disbelief? That's what it is. Basically the one unforgivable sin is unbelief, because in the passage of the Scripture, it's equating the miracles of Jesus to Beelzebub, which is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Now that's the height of unbelief is when you take that which Christ has done on the cross and you attribute that to Satan. Now basically, when you look through all of that, the basic unforgivable sin is unbelief. That's really what it is. Unbelief.

Audience Member: *I just read that passage the other day, and its right after Jesus and Matthew where Jesus was, the Pharisees were saying, "Well he casts out demons by the prince of demons," and then at the end, he says, about blaspheming the Holy Spirit. I didn't even put those two together until you just said it. It's in the same context.*

It is.

Don: *Is it impossible that somebody could say that and then have a twinge of conscience and say, “Oh! How could I possibly...,” [UNCLEAR]? Do you know what I mean?*

Yeah.

Don: *Is that person, is that still, is that person still beyond hope?*

Well, if you're part of the elect, the answer is no. That's all I can say.

Don: *If you say that, the sin against the Holy Spirit is the same as unbelief, well, we were all unbelievers before God [UNCLEAR].*

That's right.

Don: *But we have, obviously we haven't committed the unpardonable sin.*

Right.

Don: *What makes this unbelief unpardonable?*

Is that it never goes anything other than unbelief. It stays there. It always stays in unbelief. It never believes. [UNCLEAR] we're to believe now. Remember what the word “believe” means. It means more than just giving mental assent. Belief means this—to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in Christ. The person that is unforgiven is the person who never does that, who never depends upon, adheres to, relies upon or trusts in Christ, who always has unbelief. The person may have a twinge of conscience, but never have anything happen because they're still in that state of unbelief because they never get to the point of depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting in the person and work of Christ. It's continual.

Audience Member: *Going back to where we started a little bit. Could you tell us what you said to that young lady when she expressed that particular view as to why she didn't come back to the Bible study?*

Yeah. That's a good question. She said, “God didn't hold up his end of the bargain.” My response to her was, “Where did you get the idea the he owed you something?” She said, “Well, that's what I was told.” I said, “Did you hear that in our Bible study?” She said, “No, I didn't hear it in yours, and that's what confused me, because I heard from somebody else later on after I left your Bible study that God owed me that.” At that point, I said, “Well, why don't you come on back and we'll deal with that,” and she said, “No, I don't have any desire. I have no desire to do anything spiritual anymore.” That's where it went. But that's a situation where you really don't know what to say. The best thing to do in a situation like that is ask another question. That one question leads you to the next question, leads you to the next question. All I tried to do is ask her a question while I was trying to think and saying, “Alright, Lord, you'd better help me this one.” Just ask questions. That's how the conversation went.

Audience Member: *You probably covered this last week, but to go along with the person choosing, we all know that the act of regeneration happens like that, the Holy Spirit [UNCLEAR] in your life. The preceding up to that, is God working with us?*

He has to.

Stanley: *Let me share with you my experience with that. I was introduced to Jesus Christ just before my Bar Mitzvah. What happened, one of my Jewish friends came to me and said to me, “Stanley, I saw the image of Jesus in my bathroom mirror, and man, that shocked me.” That was my first introduction. Most Jews, the word Jesus is a dirty word. We don’t use that word. I was really shocked. But since I was 13, it was always troubling me, and throughout my history, I went into business and I fell into a business that dealt with religious institutions. I was involved with construction of religious institutions. I was in church or synagogues three, four, five times a week for 40 years. For 40 years, I’ve been hit with Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and I fought it, fought it, fought it, fought it. I had three messengers come to me. The first messenger came to me was, I had to raise some money, and a minister, a pastor, was part of this company that lent money, and he put his arm around me and invited me to his Bible study. I went to his Bible study. That was the first messenger. The second messenger—I hired a new office manager, and this young lady went from Hindu to Christian, and she was going to Reverend Wilkinson’s church in Manhattan. She invited me to church. I’d been in church so many times, I didn’t feel, you know, the Yiddish word is [UNCLEAR], a curse, because I’d been to church. So I went to church, and all of a sudden, I started participating. But my hands never went up. I really felt enchanted with the rhythms and the music and the worship service, but my hands never left my side. Never. It was that I felt like I was denying my own people. Then the third messenger came to me. I moved to Pittsburgh. After being here about two or three weeks, now here I’m in my late 50’s, and it started at 13. I say, “You know what; I’m missing something on Sunday.” I was missing going to church. So I got in my car and I started driving around churches. I drove up to one church; had a negative feeling. I went through the South Hills to every church you can think of. There was little sign on the road that said, “Jesus Fellowship Church.” I must have passed that sign a thousand times. I saw the sign. I made a right-hand turn. Drove up to the church. There’s this picturesque church on top of a hill, white, deer running around, wild turkey {LAUGHTER}. I said, “Man! What is this?” I go to pull in the church and the devil hits me. I could not get into the church. They were paving the black top. I couldn’t get into the church. I was stuck. I said, “No! That’s not going to stop me.” I went back that Sunday and I sat right up front. There was a young minister. This is now 17 years ago. A young minister starts preaching. He’s my third messenger. I went up to him at the end of the service, and told him who I was and my background. He invited me for breakfast the next day. He said, “I want to just talk to you.” What he did, he taught me what it was to be a Jew. I didn’t know what I was to be a Jew. He only taught me in the first testament. First he said, “Let me make you a Jew because Jews are the easiest to convert.” {LAUGHTER} Jews don’t [UNCLEAR]. The Jews will believe.” So he taught me how to be a Jew. Now, my son, who was a Jew, I’m the only believer in my family, my son never challenged me until last year. He said, “Dad, I don’t understand. Why did you give up your faith?” I said, “Brian, I didn’t give up my faith. Brian, I have,” my words were, “You know what, Brian, I had nothing to do about it. I just surrendered.” I fought it for 40 years. Now did I choose? He chose me from before the beginning of time. It took me 40 something years to make that journey.*

Amen. Amen. Brian, the answer to your question is yes. {LAUGHTER} Wonderful testimony. Thank you, Stanley. Thank you. Spurgeon says this, “When the elect get to heaven, you’re going see a door. You’re going to see a door. One side says this ‘Whosoever believes,’ and you’ll walk through that door and you’ll turn around and you’re going to see the other sign says, ‘Chosen before the foundation of the world.’” Now that’s the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Whosoever believes? Chosen before the foundation of the world. Stanley just gave you perfect illustration of his 40-year pilgrimage. Yes, God does.

Let me give you two illustrations in Scripture that we talked about. Here’s the whole point of bringing people into a position where they can hear the doctrines of grace, where grace can be administered to them, because they’re only going to come to saving father through the clear proclamation of biblical truth. Yes, God woos us. He woos people. It took him 40 years with Stanley. It might take somebody else two years. I don’t know that. The whole thing is God draws them to himself.

Let me give you a couple of illustrations. Go to Acts 16:14, the conversion of Lydia, “¹⁴One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.” Brian, she’s in the church. She’s not a believer, but she’s in the church. She’s in the environment where she’s hearing the message of the Gospel of grace. That’s what we saw here as we saw Paul was preaching and praying.

The next thing we see is this, “¹⁴The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” He’s wooing her. He’s drawing her. She was a worshiper in the church, much like Stanley was in the church, in the Jewish congregation. All of a sudden, God opened her heart. So yes, God does draw us. He does that individually. Not the same thing. We need to be careful not to have comparative conversions.

Often times, you know, when I was with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, after a while, I used to call it “top your testimony.” Let me give my testimony, then somebody tries to outdo you, and then somebody tries to outdo them. What you have is, you’ve got comparative conversion. One guy finally got up and said, “I didn’t see any angels bouncing off any walls. God just did something in my heart.” Now that was probably just the best testimony of the whole night. He was not comparing against. That’s one illustration.

Then I would take you to Acts 13:48. Paul and Barnabas were preaching boldly, we see in verse 46. And then in verse 48, you see this, “⁴⁸And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” How does God woo you? He does it through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Now in both of those situations, they were hearing something. That’s what Stanley heard. Stanley heard it through three different messengers. The Lord took three different people he used to Stanley, but it may be something else that may be quicker than that. We don’t know that. That’s why I’m going through this biblical gospel, which is so important. People need to be exposed to the truth. What is the role of the Holy Spirit? Not to deal with the person’s will per se, as it is to guide them into all truth. They began to see their sinful person and their position in Christ.

***Audience Member:** But in God’s sovereignty, he knew that it would take 40 years for...*

Oh yeah.

***Audience Member:** He knows the [UNCLEAR]...*

Absolutely. Absolutely. He deals with us individually, in the new covenant. That’s the reason the Lord has not returned yet. We talk a lot about Lord’s returning in all of his glory. When will he return? If you want an answer? We all know the answer. When all the elect come to saving faith. That’s when he will return. What is the day of that? I don’t know. But I know the timing of it is this. Very clear. He will come back when all the elect have come to saving faith. What is our responsibility in the meantime? Proclaiming a biblical gospel. That’s why we’re going through this week after week to help us understand the significance of the power we have as servants of God in proclaiming Christ from a biblical point of view. It is Christ and him crucified.

***Audience Member:** I read a book put together a couple of years ago by John Templeton, where it had a bunch of scientists put together their analysis of why they believed in God. It’s fascinating and incredibly hard to read because it’s very detailed. One of the things they deal with is the concept of time. It was very helpful to me to read this chapter about how time, as we view it, is totally different from*

where it might be viewed in a different area of the universe. As we see a 40-year conversion, in reality, it's like that, because it's just the way time is laid out before us. In me, I start to think about those things, time actually doesn't matter in certain spaces, especially perhaps from the view of God, so when we look at this duration of conversion, it's merely our view of it.

Yes, it's a matter of timing. Remember, we have to be very, very careful, guys, to try to look at these things from our finite mindset. We do not have an infallible mind or an infinity. We can't understand that. That's what faith is. Faith is, essentially, the ability to live our life, not on sight, but upon faith. The righteous person lives by faith, not by sight. Sometimes you have to just come back and say, "Lord, that is your issue. I have to trust you." That's belief. That's depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting in the person and work of Christ. That's why we are called to live by faith, not by sight. That's our calling, is to do that, as we walk through life, just trusting that. That's why it's so important that we understand the contrast between what a lot of people are hearing in the church, and the consequences of that, versus what a healthy church would be doing, and that is proclaiming a biblical gospel that talks about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. That's why we're going through this in such detail.

We'll probably have one more session on this next week, and then we'll move on to some things dealing with the other healthy indicators of a healthy church. Right now, we just want to finish up on the one dealing with a biblical gospel. I don't mean to be repetitious and going over this week after week after week, but I want you to understand the seriousness of the contrast between what is out there in the world versus what God has given us in his Scripture. Remember this—it is the Holy Spirit that will convict, it is the Holy Spirit that will convince, it is the Holy Spirit that will convert, and it is the Holy Spirit that will comfort us in our life in Christ. And may it be so that the churches we're involved in will be a healthy church, where there will be a biblical exposition of the Gospel preached. Christ and him crucified. May that be so for Jesus' sake. Let's pray.

Stanley: *I just want to end it, put a period to the end of it. When Jesus said, "When you follow me there will be a price to pay," let me tell you, there was a price to pay.*

You would know that.

Stanley: *Yes.*

You've done that.

Stanley: *Because what happened, now I am shackled to a non-believer. My wife. This helped bring about our separation. We separated. I moved from Florida to Pittsburgh. My daughter's now getting married. My youngest child. Marrying—Jewish girl, Jewish boy. My wife says, "Stanly, I would like you to be at the wedding, but you have to leave Jesus in Pittsburgh." {LAUGHTER} I said, "You know what, I cannot leave Jesus, because Jesus travels with me, and where I am, Jesus is." She says, "Well, you better be very quiet when you come to the wedding." {LAUGHTER} After the wedding, as God is my witness, I gave testimony to the Rabbi.*

Good for you. Amen. You're right. There is a cost. Remember, what is the definition of a disciple? Follower of Christ. A follower of Christ is this, "Deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me." Three characteristics of a follower of Christ. If want to disciple, the definition is this—self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. Self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-submission. Absolutely there's a cost. Stanley has paid that price just because of his background, and so we appreciate you being with us, brother. You're a great encouragement to all of us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we're just overwhelmed by your mercy and your grace. Father, give us a heart for the Lord. Give us a heart for Jesus. Don't put us in the position of thinking that we're something special just because we're here learning these things. May you soften our hearts so that we will learn to communicate a biblical gospel when you are pleased to put us in a position to do so. Help us realize, Father, that what you really want us to do is just give away to somebody else what you have been giving us. If we've said things that are inconsistent with who you are in all of your nature or your attributes, then remove those things, so that that which we give away will be directly related to that which your Holy Spirit has given us. And may it be so Jesus' sake. All the Brave Men said...Amen!