

## **THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH**

**Taught by Bruce Bickel**

**Session: December 2, 2011**

Gracious and merciful Father, because of your redeeming grace we can come into the throne of grace with our supplications and our prayers. Father, teach us to pray so we might be consistent with your will and for your glory, and we just thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

I might add one thing. On the address on the back of the book, if you would like to order some of those yourself, if anybody didn't get one, I'll see you afterward and give you a copy, but if you want to order them, you'll see the email address on the back of the book. If you order more than one or two, he'll give you a discount. I trust that if you want to use this book, if you think it might be beneficial to other people, you just get it on your own.

We want to continue our study of the formation and function of the church. We've been looking at the three essentials over the past several months; first of all, that being expository preaching, secondly, biblical theology and thirdly a biblical gospel. I would like to finish up today so that we can move on to some other themes of a functioning healthy church. But today we'd like to wrap up the idea of preaching a biblical gospel as opposed to a Gospel of human imagination. We've been talking about the Gospel of Biblical revelation.

On your handout that you have, contrasting the modern evangelism, which I'm calling neo-Finneyism, contrasted that with biblical evangelism, which I refer to as Puritan evangelism, you'll see the contrasts. Let's move down to number 16.

I want to talk about the assurance of salvation. Now in modern evangelism, you'll notice item number 15, assurance is a ministry assigned to man. In our evangelism training, basically, what we do is we tell somebody after you have given them the Gospel, here's what you do. You have them say a sinner's prayer, and then you ask him some question like this, "Where is Jesus?" "Well, Jesus is in my heart." "Would Jesus lie to you?" "No." "Then you're a Christian." "Yes, I'm a Christian." That takes about ten seconds. That's sort of modern evangelism because if you notice the other ingredients of modern evangelism, it is the role of the preacher or the teacher to battle their will, so that means I've got to get them to come to have a response, and the whole issue is get you to choose. Get you to respond. So I'm going to feel much better when I ask you the questions and say now you're a Christian.

Essentially, in modern evangelism, the assurance of salvation ministry has been assigned to man. In other words, we say, "You're a Christian because of what you just did. You walked forward. You signed the card. You raised your hand. You said the prayer." Now that may be the point of their conversion, and I don't know that, and neither do you. My point about the whole understanding of, in modern evangelism we've assigned the assurance of salvation, we've given that to mankind for us to tell somebody else that you're a believer.

Biblical evangelism would say that that is the sole ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that can confirm the fact that you're in Christ, have been redeemed, that you've been converted, and God has removed the heart of stone and given you a heart of flesh. You see, that's the role of the Holy Spirit. So you notice the contrast in number 15, assurance is a ministry assigned to man versus assurance is a ministry assigned to the Holy Spirit.

Notice the next one. Assurance is pronounced by man. You said the prayer. God won't lie. Where is Jesus? He's in your heart. Therefore you are a Christian. That's what we've been told. Many, many people will walk away from a meeting, from an opportunity where they've heard the Gospel preached or

somebody shared Christ with them, and they walk away saying, “John said that I’m a Christian.” Somebody ten years later says, “Are you a Christian?” “Yes, because I did this and John said I was.” That’s an extreme expression of it, but that’s the subtlety of it. The subtlety of it is that I have said that you are, and you have said that I am, when really it is relegated solely to the Holy Spirit.

You’ll notice number 17—the focus of assurance in modern evangelism is Scriptural promises—repent and believe. Did you do that? Yes? Then you’re a Christian. Five seconds. I’ve just assured you of your salvation. Notice 17, by the way, in biblical evangelism. The basis of assurance is Scriptural promises. Yes. Repent and believe. No question. The inner work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the only evidence you have of your salvation is this—I know that I know that I know because the Holy Spirit’s doing something in my life. I can’t explain it. I can’t justify it. All I know is this—I know that I am. Sometimes, guys, the only evidence you have, really, is the Holy Spirit identifying with your spirit that you have been redeemed, that you do have saving faith, and that’s the spirit’s work in your heart that you cannot argue with and you can’t even describe it or defend it. Sometimes the only evidence you have is I know because I know. Do you ever get like that?

There are times in my life when I’m on the doldrums, and I’m just saying, “Lord, how can I be? That thought I just had, I mean, that is so rotten. That is so contrary to your law. It is so contrary to everything in the Scriptures. How in the world can I be a believer? How can I be redeemed?” And yet, the Holy Spirit just says, “Son, you are.” Just you are.

Then there’s this work of the Holy Spirit that says, “Look, yes you are. You’re covered in the blood of Christ. He’s going to make up for your moral failure. It’s the blood of Christ that’s going to meet the holy standards of his holiness. It’s the blood of Christ that’s going to prevent the wrath of God from being showered upon you and your sin.” You see, that’s the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, guys, when somebody says, “How do you know you’re a Christian, Bruce?” sometimes the only defense I have is I just know that I am. It’s just the work of the spirit. It’s certainly not evidenced in my life right now, but the Holy Spirit is just working in your spirit.

You see, in modern evangelism, that is eliminated. It’s basically what have I done and what somebody has said. If I haven’t done the right thing, then somebody’s not going to say the right thing. Biblical evangelism, the ministry of assurance of salvation is the ministry of the Holy Spirit alone, and it’s based upon Scriptural promises. It’s based upon the work of the Holy Spirit in your spirit. And lastly, it’s on the conduct of the converted or increased righteousness. There’s got to be evidence of increased righteousness.

I want you to go to the book of 1 John. We studied this several years ago, but I want to review this, because I want you to see something. This is totally eliminated in modern evangelism in the ministry of the assurance of salvation. Go to 1 John 5:13. I’m reading from the New American Standard version. “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Now that’s a summary statement of all the verses that have come before it, so let’s go back to chapter 1. John has just said, “The reason I was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to write this letter to you is to give you indications of your increased righteousness so that you will know that you are a believer, so that you will know that you’re in Christ, so that you will know that your belief is authentic. It is not a spurious belief; it’s a belief that really is depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting in the person and work of Christ and his blood on the cross.” He’s basically saying, “Read all the stuff before that because here’s the summary of the whole book. The reason I wrote this is so that you would know that you have eternal life.”

The question is, are there traits or tests of true saving faith? Let me walk you through these. We made this study several years ago. Let me give you the seven tests of true saving faith. This is what modern

evangelism eliminates, because they basically say the ministry of the assurance of salvation is relegated to mankind to pronounce that to you. John is saying, "I'm writing a series of things to give you evidence of the increased righteousness in your life to confirm the fact that you do have saving belief and saving faith."

There's a difference between faith and saving faith. He's talking about saving faith. A faith that saves. Everybody has faith in something or someone. The real issue is, is that faith saving faith. Is it one that really gives evidence of your true salvation in Christ Jesus? That's the purpose of the book.

Let's look at these. Let's take a look at, first of all, the seven tests of true saving faith. I want you to all know they all start with what you say. Now here you've heard me say the summary of the book of 1 John is this. If you say you do and you do, you are. If you say you do and you don't, you're not. That's 1 John. If you say do and you do, you are a believer. If you say you do and you don't, you're not a believer. It's really quite simple.

Let's look at those seven tests. They all have that cause and effect relationship of saying something and doing something. First of all, here in 1 John 1:6, "The one who says he abides in him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked." Now here, again...I'm sorry, that was chapter 2. 1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." If you say you do and you do, you are. If you say you do and you don't, you're not. Now what's the evidence? If you say that you have been redeemed, if you say that you have fellowship with him, and yet the conduct externally of your life does not reflect that change in attitude and character, then there's something amiss. That's what John is saying. That doesn't mean sinless perfection. We know that. We're not talking about sinless perfection. There's only one who lived a sinlessly perfect life. You and I get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ, and that is justification by faith alone. But notice, that's the first one. If you say...

Now your next one is 1 John 1:8—you see the same thing—"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Guys, do you recognize your sin? Do you know there's a whole bunch of respectable sins around our culture now in the church? They're respectable. You can be greedy. That's okay. That's the American way of life. You can be proud. That's okay, because that shows you've got some self-esteem. You see, those are respectable sins.

The ones that aren't respectable would be adultery and abortion, homosexuality. You see, we just deal with the sins of the flesh. The sins of the spirit, biblically, are far more heinous to God than the sins of the flesh. We spend all of our time talking about abortion. We talk all of our time about homosexuality and adultery. What about greed? That's respectable. What about pride? That's respectable. What about anger? That's respectable.

You see, there's a whole bunch of respectable sins. So somebody would say, "I'm not sinful because I don't practice abortion. I'm not an adulterer. I'm not homosexual. I'm okay." John says, "Look, if you say you have no sin, you're a liar." My goodness.

I confess my sin of presumption every day because my greatest, most repetitious sin in presuming upon God's grace, and I say, "Lord, rid that from me because there I go again. That is a sin against you. It's an offense against your holiness. It's cosmic treason against your nature," and yet I do it again. I'm presuming. You see, that's sin. Guys, John is saying this, "If you're accepting your respectable sins, that's a red flag." There ought to be danger there when you just accept that. You've got to be careful, guys. Don't wipe off your respectable sins and say I'm okay because I'm practicing the sins of the flesh. What about the sins of the spirit?

*Don: I think, at least for me, we who have biblical knowledge royally have to guard against the sin of pride.*

Oh my goodness! Absolutely.

*Don: Or get some teaching or whatever.*

You see, humility...my definition of humility is this. Seeing that which is perfect and knowing you can't achieve it. Seeing that which is perfect and knowing that I can't achieve it. That's humility. What gives us the greatest confidence to live life according to the biblical standard? It's humility. It's not your experience. It's not your knowledge. It's not your gifts. It's not your calling. It's not your anything. It's the realization that I see what is perfect and I know that I can't achieve that. That's why you're driven to your knees to pray. That's why we wrote this book is to help us understand how to pray so that we can live a life that is honoring to God. It is our humility that gives you the great sense of confidence because you say, "Lord, I'm going into this meeting, which I have no idea what I'm going to do." That's your greatest sense of confidence, is the moment when you said, "Lord, I have no idea what I'm going to do." There's your confidence because it's a sense of humility of saying this—I know what's perfect, but I can't achieve it, and Lord, I'm dependent upon you. I'm going to have to walk with you and you're going to have to give me the words.

My career at PNC, you know I'm not a banker; I just get paid by one. {LAUGHTER} [UNCLEAR]

*Ted: I played one in a...I play one on TV.*

Pardon me?

*Ted: You play one on TV.*

It's a reality show. {LAUGHTER} I am constantly...I was in a meeting the other day. Somebody was whipping all this financial economic stuff on me. I have no idea what he's talking about. {LAUGHTER} He says, "What do you think, Bruce?" Well, you know, right then, I'm saying, "I have no idea. Lord, I've got to trust you here." So I, rather than talking about stocks and bonds and shorts and longs and all these other things, I said, "Let's talk about the relationship you have with that person." So we talked about respectful relationships. Didn't even talk about stocks and bonds and shorts and longs. We talked about how are you relating to this person, to your client? Let's talk about that. He walked away and said, "You know that was a fascinating time of discussion. Thanks." Now, I had no idea what I was talking about, but that's where your confidence is, is in realizing that you see that which is perfect, you know can't achieve it, and it forces you trust the grace of God.

Another respectful sin. Jesus says, "Out of the overflow of the mouth the heart speaks." It's respectable for me to get angry. Nobody's going to...I'm a good Christian, even though I just called you an SOB. It's okay. That's respectable. You see, the real issue is this. One of the greatest barometers of the maturity of our Christian faith is what comes out of your mouth, because it's a reflection of what? It's a reflection of your heart. Why do I choose to say the things that I say? Why do I use those colloquial expressions? Why do I say those words that are respectable in our culture but offensive to God? Do I just do it to fit in? You see, the primary formula for failure is trying to please everyone. That's your formula for failure, is trying to please everyone.

John says, "If you say you have no sin, you're a liar and there's no truth in you." How can you be a believer if you don't think you're not dealing with these respectable sins? The problem with the church is we don't teach enough about sin. We let people get away with it because we're afraid if we start

talking about greed, which is the great American cancer, they won't come back. If they don't come back, they won't give money, and if they don't give money, we can't pay off our debt, so we can't keep the church going can we? So we've got to make sure that, as Jeremiah Burrows said in 1647, 'When money becomes your priority, numbers become important and doctrine is watered down.' In 1647. That's exactly what's going on in 2011. When money's important, numbers become critical. And when numbers are critical, doctrine is watered down. We don't talk about respectable sin. Got to be careful about that, guys. John says something about that. That's a test of your true saving faith. How do you view your sins?

How about John 1:10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." See John is saying, "Look, guys, you say that you're a believer, you say that you're a follower of Christ. How are you dealing with your secret sins? How are you dealing with those respectable sins the culture says are okay? You say you don't have them? You're a liar, and the truth isn't in you. That means you're not a Christian." Again, guys, we're not talking about sinless perfection. We know that the only person who lived a sinlessly perfect life was the person and work of Christ. That's why we're trusting him. You get credit for his righteousness. It's an alien righteousness. It's a righteousness outside of yourself. God clothes you in the robes of righteousness. It's Christ's righteousness and he looks at you radically different and says, "Yes, you're a sinner, but you're saved by grace, and I give you credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. That's how I view you." And our motivation is gratitude for something that we could not achieve ourselves.

How about John 2:4, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." What do you think of the Ten Commandments? Nice poetry? Or are they the standard for excellence of a culture? What do you think of The Law? The Law of God. Do you have a love for it? If you say, he says. What do we think? The person says, "I've come to know him. I know Jesus," and does not keep his commandments, he's a liar, and notice this, "the truth is not in him." It means you're not a believer. Serious tests.

Modern evangelism says, "Did you pray the prayer? Yes, you're a Christian." You see, there are a bunch of people running around who may be believers. I don't know that they are or they are not. But somebody may have given them a false sense of security, and so they're never dealing with the issues of their own life because somebody said, "You're a Christian because of what you did."

John 2:9, "The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now." What kind of relationship do you have with people in the church you don't like? It's why we studied the 58 one another commands. The Greek word *allelon* means one another—58 commands for us on how to get along with each other. The last thing the world needs to see is Christians who are cutting each other's throats because of pride, ego and self-centeredness. How do you get along with people in the body of Christ? You know what mercy is? Mercy is the ministry of inconvenience. I don't like to be inconvenienced because I think my time is too valuable. First of all, that's sinful. Secondly, it's ego-centered. It's a respectable sin. Nobody knows it. Except me. I can live with it, because you don't see it. It's respectable. But yet, maybe I need to be inconvenienced for the sake of the body of Christ. How do we get along with each other?

You see, when you take those 58 one another commands and you put them under their major thematic themes, you've got four major themes in the 58 one another commands. The first one is this—our relation to one another. That's based upon the single fact that you and I have the same Heavenly Father, that radically differentiates me from how I treat anybody else in the world because I know this, that you and I have the same Heavenly Father, and my relationship and everything I'm going to do with you is predicated upon one single thought, and that is this. He has the same Heavenly Father that I do. That determines how I'm going to receive you.

The second series of one another commands talk about our reception of one another. How do I receive you? Six times we're told to give a holy kiss. That would be comparable to our cultural handshake. It basically means this—show a sense of honor and respect. What do we do to our visitors? We give them a piece of paper and say fill out a piece of paper and we'll call you later. When was the last time you saw a visitor raise his hand and you went over to them and said, "Can I take you to lunch? I'd like to get to know you. I want to tell you what our church is about." Show honor and respect. That's a holy kiss.

You see, we need to initiate when we see people coming into the church because we recognize this. We have the same Heavenly Father. We don't know if they do yet or not. Maybe they do. If they do, I want to find that out. If they don't, I want to find that out, because that's the role of the church.

I think I told you in my two churches where I was the senior pastor, as soon as I was there and called into that position, I started saying every Sunday when visitors would raise their hand, "We're such a wonderful, friendly congregation. Before you get outside the door, I'll betcha at least three families invite you to lunch." {LAUGHTER} Well the first six months, I was taking a lot of people to lunch. {LAUGHTER} But after a while, I would make that statement and I would see families, and people started saying, "We've never been to a church that treated us with such dignity, respect and honor." That's a holy kiss, guys. That's the spirit behind it. How do we treat each other in the body of Christ?

Our relation to one another, our reception of one another, and the third thing is our response to one another. How do we respond to each other? Do I respond under this umbrella? Out of the overflow of my heart, the mouth speaks? How do you speak to people in the church who have a different theological persuasion than you do? How do you speak to those, who in the church, may be believers, but ascribe to modern evangelism as opposed to what we're studying? How do you respond to them? You say you're wrong, I'm right? How do you respond to that? Or do you sit down with them and say, "Let's just study the Scripture and let's just see what the Scripture teaches both of us"? You see, how do you respond to somebody based up your reception of that person based upon your relation to that person?

Lastly, it's the restoration. Your instructions on how to restore the body. The first time I was playing football in college and got my shoulder separated, I'm very, very glad that the trainer and the orthopedic surgeon, when they took me on the sideline, didn't say amputation, they said restoration. {LAUGHTER} You see, because, basically they're going to say, "Bruce, this is going to hurt. We're going to put your shoulder back in because if we don't put it back in, the body will not function the way it was designed. So we're not going to amputate you, we're going to restore you back to what your body was designed to function." How do we restore people in the church? Do we amputate them? Now it may be, according to Matthew 18, we need to do that, because one of the keys to the kingdom is church discipline.

One of the great verses we take out of context is this, "Where two or three are gathered together, I will be with you." Oh that means when I go play golf, and I'm ready to tee off, God's going to be with me. Well he's omnipresent, so that's true, but that verse has to do with church discipline. The context of that verse is church discipline. It means this—when you and the elders are exercising biblical church discipline, I'm going to be with you, and you're not alone. The times that I had to do that in my pastorate, I knew this. The great confidence was, "Lord, just be with us as we do this because this is going to hurt us as much as it does them, but we've got to do it because it's the right thing to do, and Lord, you have said this, that where two of us agree upon that and we're going to exercise biblical church discipline, you tell us this, that you're right with us." That's your confidence. You see, be careful not to take verses out of context. We take that and just flip it anywhere, "I'm going to K-Mart to go shopping and I'm going to take my wife and the two of us agree upon this 50-inch TV—God's with us, because where two or three are agree, God's going to be there." {LAUGHTER}.

**Ted:** *That makes sense. {LAUGHTER}*

It's a nice, respectable sin.

**Don:** *[UNCLEAR]...you wouldn't believe the people who called the talk shows and said, "Well, God gave me this money," {LAUGHTER} "so it was from God, assigned from God," [UNCLEAR]...whatever happened to thou shall not steal? It's incredible.*

You know, one of the great founding principles of a democracy is a moral standard that forms the foundation of decision. When a democracy begins to move away from its moral standard, you move into socialism. That's exactly what's happening in our culture right now. We're slowly moving into a socialistic governmental supply system because we have removed the moral fiber foundation of democracy. Democracy was founded upon a moral standard of excellence that is the harbinger and the foundation of everything that we do. When that is eroded, you quietly move to socialism, because it really beholds this idea. You remove the standard of excellence and responsibility and you replace it with entitlement. I'm entitled to that new car, to a new house.

Now I don't know the motive behind all the Wall Street sit-in people. I don't know that. I've not spoken to any, so I need to be careful not to be judgmental. May I give you an observation?

**Audience Member:** *Go ahead. {LAUGHTER}*

From what I hear from some of those who have spoken to some of the Wall Street sit-in protestors, and I acknowledge their right to protest, is they're basically saying, "You have it. I don't. I want it. The reason I'm going to protest is you've got something that I think I should have." That's because God isn't fair. That's exactly what Satan deceived Adam and Eve when he said, "Did God really say this?" The first thing he did was plant the idea that God is unfair. Therefore we begin to say, "Oh, God gave it to me because it's mine and I'm entitled to it." You just gotta be careful about those things.

**Carl:** *Bruce, the moral decay that we see, is that not a direct reflection of the spiritual decay that [UNCLEAR]...*

Absolutely. It's the evidence of a lack of respect and spiritual decay. That's why it's so important that we take a look at what is biblical evangelism. Because you have a lot of people perhaps in our culture who have said, "I went forward. I did this. I did that." They may be in Christ, and I don't know that. They may be. All I'm saying is, in the assurance of one's salvation, there's got to be some biblical evidence of an increased flow of righteousness and a difference in the direction of your life.

As John will teach us, it's a life moving in the direction of holiness, interrupted by occasional sin, as opposed to a life of political correctness interrupted by occasional badness. You see, there's a difference. All I'm saying is, as we understand the doctrine of the assurance of salvation, there's got to be some evidence of what we're calling increased righteousness in the conduct of the person's life.

How about chapter 4 verse 20 of 1 John, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." You see, what the evidence in the church of those people who say that they have true saving faith? Does it reflect these tests of true saving faith? You see, when somebody wants to discuss the difference between what I'm calling biblical evangelism and neo-Finneyism or modern evangelism, I just take them to the book of 1 John and say, "Let's just take a look at that. Do you agree the Scripture is authoritative? So do I. Let's start with our point of agreement. Let's look at book of 1 John." Those are

the seven tests.

Let me show you to seven traits. John also gives us seven traits of a person who has true saving faith. What I just gave you were seven tests. Take the test. Paul says this, in Corinthians, “Test yourself to see whether or not you’re in the faith.” That’s what he says. Test yourself. What’s the test? Right here in 1 John. The test is this. If you say you do and you do, you are; if you say you do and you don’t, you’re not. You flunk. That’s when you’re on your knees and say, “God save me. Grant me saving faith. Have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Here are the seven traits.

*Ted: The idea of you say do and you don’t, when I find myself saying I do and I don’t often. You talk about perfection, but I mean, where do we, where’s the crossing line there. Uh oh. We’re not talking about perfection, so you don’t have to do it all right, but then, if you do it not enough, then you’re on the wrong, I mean, I get a little nervous when I hear that because I just don’t know in that continuum, from the perfection of Jesus Christ to where I am, is I often find I say I do, but I really don’t. I mean, all the time. I mean, I’ve been able to get rid of a lot of the obvious sins in my life, by the grace of God, but there’s so much internal stuff that is corrupt.*

That’s right. No question.

*Ted: I don’t find it very encouraging to hear if you say you do and you don’t then you are aren’t. Well, I guess I’m disqualified.*

Well, no we’re not talking about sinless perfection. That’s why I’ve said that three times. We’re not talking about...here’s the big picture. Look at it this way. You’re moving in the direction of holiness. You’re moving in that direction. Your life is changed. The character of your heart has been changed. God has removed the heart of stone and given you a heart of flesh. Now you want to pursue spiritual things because God has redeemed you, he’s given you a new heart, and you have a desire to be obedient, which you know you can never do. First of all, you’ve got to realize that obedience is not something you do, it’s something that God works in you. It’s a function of grace. Repentance is the function of grace, not something that you do. It’s the grace of God.

Essentially it’s this. Now you want to move in this direction of holiness—the pursuit of holiness. But you’re going to be interrupted by occasional sin. What do we do? 1 John 1:9 says, “If you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness.” Okay, now I’m back on the road again. So I’m back up this way. I continue. Then I fail again. Your life is in the direction of holiness interrupted by occasional sin, as opposed to the other thing, which is political correctness interrupted by occasional things that are bad. The idea is what’s the direction of your life? Life is going to be, until we are glorified and freed from the presence of sin, it’s going to be that struggle. That’s why Paul writes Romans 6 and 7 and says, “How do I do this? I don’t want to do that stuff? I want to do this, but I find myself doing that.” You’ve been covered in the blood of Christ. You’re covered by the blood of the Lamb. And he understands that. So Paul says, “I don’t want to do that, but I find the laws in my flesh are making me want to do that.” What it is, it’s a struggle.

One of the great affirmations of true saving faith is your struggle. It shows you you’re moving in the right direction. Somebody who likes to live in their sin, I really worry about, because it may be that their heart has been hardened, and I don’t know that.

All I’m saying is dealing with our sin in one of the healthiest things that we can do. As you move in one direction, you fail...I’m not worried about a Christian who fails. I’m worried about a believer who says

they're a Christian and they're content in their failure. I know I've failed. My greatest teacher has been my failure. It's not been my theology. It's been my failure. But you can't be content with your failure. The real test of your maturity is not whether or not you fail; it's how quickly you rebound when you do. That's the test of your maturity.

***Audience Member:** Maybe it should be changed, too, if you think, if you say you are and you think you are, you're not.*

You can phrase it any way you want. {LAUGHTER} It's up to you. I gave you my rendition, and you can modify it however you'd like.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, would you say it's the Holy Spirit that's prompting your conscience or your conscience is the Holy Spirit on how...*

Absolutely. The Holy Spirit does this. He convicts us of our sin. He convinces you of it. First of all, you've got to be convicted, "Man, that was a rotten thought I just had. No, it's okay. It's acceptable in America. I'm free. It's respectable." No, you're not. That's the Holy Spirit, indication of the Holy Spirit identifying with your spirit beginning to work, prick your mind, prick your heart, prick your soul, and say you've got to deal with that. That's the Holy Spirit. First of all, he convicts us of our sin.

Then he convinces us of it, "Yeah, you're right. That's a sinful thought. I need to deal with that respectable sin. Nobody else sees it, but I need to deal with it." Then he comforts us, converts us from that, and then he comforts us in our sin, in our redemption, removing us from our sin. There's a convict, convince, convert, and then comfort. We find the comfort of the Holy Spirit. It's a process, the Holy Spirit. That's his role, is to guide us into all truth. Notice the number of tests. The truth is not in you, John says several times. The Holy Spirit's role is—not to get you excited and jump up and down and put your hands in the air. That may happen. That's not his role. His role is to lead you into all truth, so that you'll say, "I'm not living according to the truth. Lord, forgive me. Give me the grace to move on." You see, that's the role of the Holy Spirit.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to call attention to the person and work of Christ, not himself. I think the Holy Spirit may be somewhat embarrassed by all the emphasis we put on him. That doesn't mean that we don't preach and teach the Holy Spirit. But his role is two-fold—call attention to the person and work of Christ and to guide you into all truth, not call attention to himself. Call attention to Christ. Call attention to Christ and him crucified.

***Bob:** One of the most difficult things for me, Bruce, is I have a conversation with a good friend. We get into a conversation and he asks the question, "Are you a Christian? Are you a believer? Do you have eternal life?" and the answer comes back, "I think I am. I think I do," and then you want to say, "No. No. No. You either do or you don't. You either are or you aren't." Well, then the answer comes back, "But you don't know and I don't know, and because of the way I live my life, I can't be totally sure." You get into that kind of conversation, it gets really difficult.*

It does. What do we do with that? Well first of all you pray. You're in over your head. You can't change that person's life. First of all, you've got to realize that I can't change the person. All I can do is expose the truth to them. So I would take them to the Scripture. You might take them to the book of 1 John and say, "Let's look at what the Scripture says. Here are the seven tests. Maybe this will help you. I found this to be very helpful in my life because it exposed the fallacy of my thinking," and you take him through these verses we just went through. You use that as much as anything. Or then, if they say, "Well, I've never heard that," then you can back up and say, "Let's talk about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, repentance and faith." Now you're talking about a

biblical gospel, which is what we've been talking about.

So you don't know. But first of all, you've got to realize this—it is not your job to convert or convince that person of anything. You can't do that. That is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. Your greatest weapon is truth. The greatest weapon is the sufficiency of Scripture. Take them to the Scripture. Do that graciously. Remember this—when you see the word “truth” in the Scripture, most often time, it is surrounded by the phrase “grace.” Grace and truth. We need to be proclaiming truth, but do it graciously, not vindictively or argumentatively or manipulatively. We need to do it with grace and truth.

I pray as much, when I'm having an individual conversation, that God would give me the grace, because I think I know what I'm going to say biblically, I just want to make sure that I do it graciously so that it'll be the truth that'll offend, not me. It may be that the truth will offend them. You just have to let that be. The first [UNCLEAR] is this—I can't change that person's mind. All I do is I have the privilege now of proclaiming truth in front of them. We do that with grace.

Let me give you the verses now for the, what I'm calling the traits of true saving faith. They all contain the phrase “is born of God.” Seven verses that have the phrase “is born of God.” I'll give them to you quickly. 1 John 2:29, “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.” Here again, that's moving in the direction of righteousness, not talking about sinless perfection. Then you go to the other verses that will help you see the same phrase “is born of God.” You'll see that in 1 John 3:9, 3:14, 4:7, 5:1, 5:4 and 5:18.

Let's just take a look at one of these. They all contain the phrase “is born of God.” Look at 1 John 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” We lose a lot in the English translation from the original text in the Greek. The original phrase of that is [ectau tao degenetai]. It's a verb tense that says this—there's a past event in your life that has the present result that you believe. It's basically saying something supernatural happened in your past that now puts you in the position of giving the present day evidence of the fact that you're believing in Christ. That means you're depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting in, and what is that? You're born of God. That's regeneration.

Which comes first? You've heard me say that every time I'm involved in an ordination service for a man going into preach the Gospel, I ask one or two questions. Here's one of them. Which comes first? Life or faith. I've done that six times, and four times, the people said faith. That basically tells me they have no understanding of a biblical gospel, because they're basically saying, “Belief is going to save me.” No, belief is the first evidence of your salvation. It's the evidence. It's the very first evidence that God has regenerated you. Because of what? [Ectau tao degenetai]—having been born of God in the past, now gives the present day evidence in present reality that I believe. That's true saving faith. That's a trait. All of those verses that I just gave you, the traits of true saving faith, have to do with the fact that they've been born of God. It gives present evidence of increased righteousness.

Biblical evangelism would say the assurance of salvation is based upon three things. Scripture promises, repent and believe. Did you do that? Yes. Upon the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, the Holy Spirit working with your spirit to convince you that you are. And thirdly, there's evidence in your life that you're no longer moving in this direction. Something supernatural happened, and now you're moving in this direction. Not perfectly. But the direction of your life is now in the pursuit of holiness interrupted by occasional sin. You see, that's increased righteousness. That's why the Puritans, after they would preach in a village, somebody would say, “Did you have a crusade there.” They'd say, “We don't know. We'll come back in five years and we'll look for three things. Decrease in crime, increased righteousness and increased church attendance. If we see those three things, then we'll say that God produced a revival.” You see, there's evidence. And yet what do we do in modern evangelism? Did you say the prayer? Where's Jesus? In your heart? You're a Christian. Let's go to the next person. You see, are there people

in our churches who have been deceived of their true saving faith?

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the power of your Word. We thank you that it is gracious and it is truthful. Father, we gather here on Fridays, not that we become experts, but first of all, Father, I pray that we will deal with our secret respectable sins; individually we'll deal with that. And that, Father, secondly, we'll corporately we'll look at how do we treat each other here on Fridays. Are we developing a sense of community among ourselves, because we realize this—that the man sitting in front of me or to my right or to my left or in back of me has the same Heavenly Father that I do. How do we treat each other? Father, may it be so that whoever comes in contact with the Brave Men of Friday Morning will not see us as event that we do every Friday, but they will see a group of men who are dealing with the reality of their own sinful lives and trying to come together to show a means of what I means to be in community with one another because we all have the same Heavenly Father. Father, may your grace lead us because we see what is perfect, but we know that we can't achieve it, and may your grace be sufficient, even for this day, that we will live a life that will call glory to you, to your name and honor the person and work of Christ. It's to that end that all the Brave Men said...Amen!