

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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Gracious Father, we come here today to adore you, to recognize that you are Christ the Lord. Father, we pray during this Christmas season that our mind would be focused upon the fact that you chose to reveal yourself in the most complete fashion possible, and that was through the incarnation of your Son. Father, we just pray now as we continue to study the Formation and Function of the Church that your Holy Spirit will fulfill his job description and guide us into all truth, and that we might be salt and light in a perverse and dark generation, and may God bind our hearts in humble allegiance to the cross and render us more radiant for the benefit of a dark and perishing world to the praise of the glory of his grace. Amen.

If you'd be kind enough to open up your lesson number 9, we are studying the Formation and Function of the Church. We've examined some of the essentials of the church organization. We looked at the history of how the church was formed in eternity past in the heart of God. We've looked at the three essential ingredients or indicators of a healthy church—the word healthy meaning a church that is growing in grace as opposed to one that is perfect. We know that there is no perfect church, but there are a lot of churches that are not healthy. They are organized, they are functioning, but they are not healthy, because they are not growing in grace.

We saw the primary need was expository preaching. Secondly, we looked at biblical theology as another ingredient. Then we looked at a biblical gospel. We've been examining a comparison between neo-Finneyism, or the modern day Gospel, versus a biblical gospel as taught by the Puritans back in the 1600-1700's. You have that sheet. You might want to refer to that just very briefly, because as we've looked at a biblical gospel, we've looked at that comparison.

There are certain other issues and marks that will indicate a healthy church. There are several times it's important for us to read some of the confessions, historical confessions, of the church to give is a grounded understanding of biblical theology. I would call your attention to a couple of those listed under item B, and that would be the First London Confession of Faith (1646 Edition). Then there's the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in 1646. Another good one would be the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1863). The last one I would suggest, which we've discussed before, would be the 39 Articles of Faith, and that would be the Bishop John Rogers Edition written in 2011. We're glad to have that book available to you. That's a wonderful resource for basic biblical truth for any believer. When you're wanting a good foundation of the tenants of the Christian faith, those are some resources. I would especially direct your attention to the 39 Articles by Bishop John. That is a very, very practical applicational work of the doctrines of grace that you'll see, very much in tune with our understanding of today's culture. Those are just some resources that I would encourage you to have in your library that you can refer back to.

There are several other marks of a healthy church besides expository preaching, biblical theology and knowledge of a biblical gospel, and that would be a biblical understanding of conversion. Now that flows out of our understanding of a biblical doctrine of the Gospel. You can see the handout, the focus of the gospel, that you have comparing neo-Finneyism, modern evangelism, with biblical evangelism, and you'll see the difference.

Then another one would be a biblical view of conversion will manifest itself in some of the following issues in the life of the church. If we have a correct biblical view of conversion, it's going to affect the way that we preach in the pulpit, because we've got to realize that you're always preaching to the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares. You don't know who they are. Every sermon is really evangelical

in some sense or another because you just don't know who's in the congregation. To assume that everybody is a believer and a follower of Christ would be a presumption. You have to realize, if you really understand conversion—that's why I'm going back to saying one of the healthy marks of a church is a biblical understanding of conversion. Is it by grace or is it by works? Is it something I do or something I achieve? Or is it something I receive? If you have a clear understanding of that, that will impact the content and the quality of the sermons that you preach on the Lord's day, because you've got to realize there are some people there who really believe that they can earn their salvation. You've got to preach to them. There are some people who know they can't earn their salvation; they have been changed by grace, and you're preaching to them. So one, you're really drawing them into the presence of Christ, and the other is you're affirming the presence of Christ. You just don't know that.

It's very, very critical to understand that all preaching is really evangelical in the sense that you're appealing to two kinds of people, and you just don't know who they are. That comes from a clear understanding of a biblical view of conversion, which you will see in that comparison sheet that we've been studying the last couple of weeks.

Another thing that's going to impact when you have a biblical view of conversion is your understanding of baptism. Now I'm not going to get into talking about the mode. That's not what I'm talking about. All I'm saying is that when you have a biblical understanding of conversion, you take baptism seriously. You don't do it just flippantly or randomly. You don't do it hastily. You help people understand the significance of what it is and what it symbolizes and what it means historically and in the future. You take baptism very seriously.

There are three keys to the kingdom. When Christ gave the keys to the kingdom, he gave us three things. First of all, it would be the preaching of the Gospel, the doctrines of grace, a biblical gospel. Secondly, it would be the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism. The third one would be church discipline. Those are the three keys to the kingdom. When you have a biblical view of conversion, you will preach all three of those. You'll understand what the Gospel is. You'll understand what baptism and the Lord's Supper signifies and what they teach and why they're so important. So that all flows out of having a correct view of conversion and that will manifest itself in other dynamics of the church life.

A third one is the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper really flows out of a correct understanding of a biblical view of conversion. Who participates in the Lord's Supper? What does it signify? What's going on when it happens? Really, in reality brothers, the Lord's Supper is the most intimate expression that the body of Christ can ever honor and participate in, in one particular event. The Lord's Supper.

We take the Lord's Supper too flippantly. It is the most intimate experience that we could ever have. Perhaps we may want to do that ourselves, have the Lord's Supper here, and Bishop John and I will talk about that. I think that might be something that we might want to do ourselves sometime, and just do that and have that intimate expression of fellowship. You see, there's nothing more intimate that goes on in the fellowship life of the believing church who understands biblical conversion than to celebrate and participate in the Lord's Supper. It's a significant, magnificent, glorious fellowship, intimate experience. That flows out of having the correct view of a biblical understanding of conversion. What does that mean and what does this signify? What goes on when we have the Lord's Supper? You take that seriously, but if you don't have the right view of conversion, you're to have the right view of the Lord's Supper or the other ordinances.

Fourthly, membership. We need to understand the significance of a healthy church understanding its doctrine and understanding of membership. Membership is essentially saying, somebody saying, would you hold me accountable to my spiritual sanctification. Will you hold me accountable to that? That's what membership is. Unfortunately, we have membership now taking the position of just joining a social

club, often times, too much. What is the significance of church membership? What does it mean to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry? Is somebody saying would you come in? I want you to come in and join your church because want to be equipped to do the work of the ministry. Is that what people understand when they talk about membership? You see, those are indications of a healthy church. We're going to go into more detail on all of these down the road, but all I'm saying is that all of these things really flow out of a correct view of a biblical understanding of conversion.

Lastly, church discipline. It's one of the keys of the kingdom. The first church where I was asked to serve as the Senior Pastor, one of the church leaders said, "I could never be involved in a church that exercises church discipline." I said, "Then you're not involved in the church." He said, "No, I could never be involved in a church that exercises church discipline." Church discipline, brothers, is not something you do to a person; it's something that God works in a person. That's the difference. You don't do something to somebody. It's something that God does in the heart of a person.

When you look at that verse that says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, I will be with you," what's the context of that verse? Church discipline, not golf. It's not golf. It's church discipline. Jesus says, "Look, when you exercise this key to the kingdom, when you exercise loving godly directed church discipline, and the Holy Spirit begins to work in a person's life, I'm going to be with you, because you can't do that alone. I need to be there with you to guide you and to mentor you and to show you how to do it, to have it with the right spirit. You see, the context of that verse is, where two or three are exercising loving church discipline, one of the keys to the kingdom, I'm going to be with you because that's one of the keys to the kingdom operation, and you can't do that by yourself, because if you do it, you'll do it in your humanness, and you'll violate the whole spirit of the kingdom operation."

So guys, be careful when you flippantly say, "Where two or three are gathered together." I've had people say that when you go play football, "Oh, where two or three of us are gathered together, we'll go be Tebowing," or whatever. Now I'm not knocking Tebow; please understand. All I'm saying is be careful. You've got to understand that context of that verse. It's talking about loving church discipline. Jesus says, "I'm going to guide you through that."

So often times, churches avoid that because it's not tolerant. Well it's not designed to be tolerant. Church discipline is not tolerant. It's loving. It's the most loving thing you can do.

In the two churches where I had the privilege of serving as Pastor/Teacher, we had to exercise church discipline. One of the most difficult things we had to do, but one of the most impacting things that we ever accomplished...let me give you a quick scenario. We had to exercise this in a church in Chicago. In order to do that, when you look at Galatians 6:1, it says that, "you examine yourself before you go do something to anybody else." Before we could exercise church discipline against one of our deacons, we had to do that. After a lot of prayer with the elders, we realized we needed to do this for the sake of the congregation and for the glory of God. We needed to implement church discipline, lovingly.

There were 400 people in the church. It took us four weeks to examine ourselves before we could examine and exercise church discipline, because the Scripture says you gotta look at yourself. I had to preach a whole series of sermons on self-examination before we could exercise loving church discipline. It took me four weeks to do that. There were 400 people in the church. The beauty of church discipline was thus—399 people changed. It was the purity of the church is the issue of church discipline. It's not doing something to someone; it's the purity of the church. All of a sudden, we began to see among the body who we were not going exercise church discipline upon. They began to reconcile right relationships among themselves because they began to look at themselves and say, "Before we can do this collectively, as the body of Christ, we need to examine ourselves individually to see what's amiss

between us.” That took us four weeks.

After that, we realized then, now we are prepared as the flock to go exercise Matthew 18, loving church discipline. We did that to the gentleman. Fortunately, 18 months later, he came back. He repented of his sins and came back 18 months later. Now, I also had to teach the people how to respond to him when he came up to them afterwards. Basically, he’d say, “Let’s go have lunch,” and so we had to instruct the whole flock to say, “I’d love to have lunch with you. We’ll talk about your repentance.” “No, I just want to get together.” “I’d be glad to get together with you, but we’ll talk about your repentance.” That’s the one thing, I said, “Everybody’s got to say the same thing.” He went to 392 people and asked for lunch, and they all said the same thing. That’s what drove him back to us. Eighteen months later, he came to me and said, “I can’t take it anymore.” I said, “What is it you can’t take?” He said, “I can’t take being shunned out of the fellowship. I want the fellowship.” I said, “Let’s talk about your repentance.” He said, “Okay.” And we did.

You see, it was power of the body of Christ that brought him to repentance. It wasn’t the fact that just one person exercised church discipline. It was the whole concept of loving church discipline. You see, it’s one of the keys. If you don’t have the right understanding of biblical conversion, you’re not going to have the right understanding or the right application of the loving key to the kingdom known as church discipline. It flows right out of our understanding of the Gospel. It flows right out of our understanding of the biblical doctrine of conversion. So church discipline is another issue that flows out of a healthy church.

***Audience Member:** I’m sorry. It’s just me. I’m a little uneasy [UNCLEAR] talk church discipline [UNCLEAR] concept here.*

Okay, let’s turn to Matthew 18 please. I’ll go into this in more detail in the next couple of weeks, but we’ll just take a quick look at this. I want you to see that many of the issues of the healthy church life flow out of our understanding of the Gospel and conversion. Matthew 18:15, ¹⁵“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

What’s the context of that last verse, “where two or three are gathered together”? It’s in the midst of the exercising of loving church discipline. What that means is excommunication. You deny them. You remove from them the possibility of enjoying the fellowship of the church.

Now, the one thing that we cannot do is we cannot prevent them from coming to church. That’s the role of the Holy Spirit. We can’t be somebody else’s Holy Spirit. You’ve got to be careful. You cannot be their Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit’s drawing them to church, you have to let them come. You can’t exclude them and say, “No you can’t come.” The one thing we can do is exclude them from the Lord’s table. That’s a fellowship issue. You see, that’s why you have to understand the significance of the Lord’s table.

In this particular case, what caused this brother to want to come back, the thing that got him was he missed the fellowship of the church because everybody said, “Would love to get together with you. We’ll talk about your repentance. We’re not going to talk about the Chicago Bears and the New Orleans

Saints. We're going to talk about your repentance." You see, he kept avoiding that, and that's what he kept hearing from the church because we had examined ourselves before we exercised church discipline.

That all flows, guys, out of an understanding of the Gospel. It flows out of the understanding of a biblical view of conversion. Those are the things that the church must begin to deal with. But if you don't have the right theological understanding and you don't have the right biblical theology, you're not going to have the right application.

***Audience Member:** Maybe you can speak on verse 18 as well, "18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" because that's really misused a lot, too. Can you tie that in to how that relates to...?*

Well, whatever you are doing here on earth in the exercise of loving church discipline, God is agreeing with that in heaven because it has heavenly implications, it has earthly implications and heavenly implications, and that's why Jesus says, "I'm not going to let you do it by yourself. I'm going to be with you." Bishop Rogers, you want to add something to that?

***Bishop Rogers:** No. {LAUGHTER}*

It's always good to have him here as my checkmate. Basically it's saying if you agree upon earth that you're going to exercise this, and do it for the cause of the kingdom, it's going to be agreed upon in heaven. That's why Jesus says, "That's why I need to be with you when you do it. You're not doing this alone. That's why where two or three of you gather together and exercise this, we're agreeing upon this and my agreement is I'm going to be with you when you do it. I'm going to be with you when you do it."

***Audience Member:** That has to do with the sand man syndrome right? Don't look for the sand, or the speck in one guy's eye when you've got a log in your own.*

Yeah, that's correct. That's why Galatians 6 is important in the process. You examine yourself before you go. Now in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "If you're going to the table and you recognize that your brother has something against you," what do you do? Leave and go be reconciled to your brother. Basically here's a quick summary in relationships in the church. If you know you go. If you know you go. If I know that Brian has something against me, I'm obligated to go to him. Brian knows if he has something against me, he's obligated to come to me. If you know, you go. It never is who's right or wrong. It's never the issue of who's right or wrong, "I'm right. I'm not going to go because Brian's wrong." The issue never is who is right or wrong. The issue is this—I know that there's a strain between us. The issue is not right or wrong. I'm going to go to him. He knows there's something amiss between us. He's coming to me, and ideally, in the church, you've got two people running to each other because they know this. If you know, you go.

Often times we'll say, "Well, I'm not going to go because I'm right." The issue is never right or wrong. The issue is this. If you know, you go. That's why it's so important to understand the one another commands, because you reconcile. Be reconciled to your brother before you go to the Lord's Table. It really heightens the value of relationships in the body of Christ. It also describes the intimacy of the fellowship table of the Lord's Supper. There's something so intimate that if you're amiss with a brother, don't do it, because you're disrupting the fellowship of the church because you're destroying the intimacy of what the Lord's Table signifies and what it implies.

***Audience Member:** Where would you find and what would be kind of an example of some of the things that church discipline would be involved with?*

We'll get into that down the road. May I delay that? Because we'll spend more time. There are very few things, but there are a few things that we do need to deal with.

We also need to realize this. There are a lot of respectable sins that we never deal with. Those respectable sins need to be dealt with. Now I'm not saying that we have a litany of things, the do's and don'ts that exercise church discipline. All I'm saying is as we're preaching from the pulpit, we need to deal with those respectable sins, such as greed, pride, anger. You see, the sins of the spirit in Scripture are far more heinous to God than the sins of the flesh. We only deal with the external sins of the flesh and we have all these respectable sins that we let people get away with. You see, we need to deal with those.

When was the last time you heard any pastor talk about hoarding? What about hoarding? What about pride? What about ego? What about this unadulterated desire for attention? You see, those are respectable sins, and we don't deal with those. Now I'm not saying that we have a list. All I'm saying is if you really understand what we're talking about a healthy church, the pastor in the pulpit's going to be dealing with those things when they're observed. You deal with that for the sake of the glory of Christ and the well-being of the body. We'll get into that in a little bit more detail if we may do that later.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, question [UNCLEAR] talk about church discipline with your brother, etc. Now is that also with your wife? I mean, or is that considered you are one? No, I mean...*

No. No. Absolutely.

***Audience Member:** I mean, we're considered one, so does that mean we still bring our offering to the table if you have a dispute with your wife? Or are you one and that...?*

Okay, now I can't be your Holy Spirit, so don't ask me that question. I can't be your Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit tells us this—if you know, you go. You have to decide what's the application of that. I can't tell you what to do there. I know as I gave you the example a couple of weeks ago where I offended someone through my mouth. My first response was I grieved over that because it exposed me more than it did them. What came out of my mouth was a reflection of my heart, and that scared me to death, because how quickly I said that. I went, "Whoa!! This is really revealing. Not about them. It's about me." It's about the condition of my heart because look how quickly I responded. My choice was to say that. That's really revealing to me. Immediately I went to them and asked for forgiveness. If I know, I go. If you know, you go. And so it applies in the body of Christ.

Just think, guys, you're not going to get that at work. Where is the only place you're going to see that? It's when people are taught a biblical gospel and they understand the implications of the doctrines of grace, and they begin to see how the Holy Spirit begins to work and remold and refine their lives, and it's part of their sanctification that is achieved by the Holy Spirit. You apply that, and you go ask for forgiveness. That's the only place you're going to see it, that's in the church. The overriding rule in relationships in the body of Christ is this—if you know, you go. If you know, you go, to whomever that is.

***Audience Member:** So, Bruce, when you say that if you know, you go, if like someone else offended me, and I know that...*

You go.

***Audience Member:** I go.*

Correct.

Audience Member: Regardless of me being right or wrong.

Correct. The issue is never right or wrong. You know that you've been offended or you have offended. Either way, you go. Either way, you go. It's never right or wrong.

Audience Member: Otherwise I'm holding this pride...

Sure it is. It's a sinful pride that says, "My ego's been damaged. I'm going to wait till he comes." You see, if you know, you go. If you know you have offended or have been offended, both of you are running to each other, ideally. Both of you are running to each other. That's how we resolve and reconcile relationships in the church.

Notice this, let me say this...

Audience Member: So we're like a prodigal son? The father coming out to run to him.

That's certainly one example. There are many examples. I think the best one is this. Notice this—biblically speaking, reconciliation is the responsibility of the offended party, not the offender. Forgiveness is the responsibility of the offending party, but reconciliation is the responsibility of the offended.

Let's just say, Sig, that you have offended me. I'm the offended party. Reconciliation is my responsibility to break down the barrier of that wall so that forgiveness can occur. That's exactly what God did when he rent the temple, when he tore down the wall, a partition, so that there could be reconciliation occurred. Who was the offended party? God was the offended party. He's the one who made reconciliation possible. He didn't wait for us to come and say, "Will you forgive me?" He tore down that wall so that reconciliation could occur. Then, when we come through the doctrines of grace and understanding the work of the Holy Spirit, we come and ask for forgiveness. Therefore, reconciliation can occur. It is the offended party's responsibility to make reconciliation possible, by breaking down that barrier of pride and saying, "I'm going to destroy that so that there can be forgiveness and the relationship can be restored."

We've reversed it. We think that reconciliation is restitution. We'll make restitution to the offended party and then they'll say we're okay. How many times have you heard that? "Well, when you pay me back, we'll have reconciliation." No! A thousand times no. It's the offended party who says, "Look, yes, I'm offended, but I'm going to remove all the barriers of what's happened historically. I'm going to remove those, so that we can have a relationship now." That's where we ask for forgiveness. You see, we've got it backwards. We've got it backwards.

You look at the biblical model. It is the offended party. God was the offended party, guys. Do you realize that? Our life was an offense to God, and he said, "To make reconciliation possible, I'm not going to hold it against you. I'm not going to treat you as your sins deserve. I'm going to break down that barrier so that when you recognize there's an open door to me, through the sacrifice of my Son, we can have a relationship." You see, that's why we need to understand that the Gospel is just much more than eternal life. It's a sinful man. There's a process by which a sinful person can have a reconciled relationship to a holy God. You see, that's a biblical understanding.

Audience Member: Yeah, just a question to clarify [UNCLEAR] new thought. So you're saying that it's

the responsibility of the offended to initiate and to let the offender know that they've been offended.

If you know, you go.

Audience Member: *But then is it, is it not the offender's responsibility...let's say you do that and the offender continues to offend and doesn't take ownership with that. Is it not his responsibility to actually, to ultimately restore the relationship, but they continue to offend, can you have a relationship with [UNCLEAR]...?*

You probably can't, until the other side responds. You can't. But the issue is what's my responsibility, not what's his. Don't worry about their responsibility. What's mine? Mine is I've been offended and I'm going to destroy the possibility and break down the barrier so that when the Holy Spirit works in him or her and they come to me, we can have a relationship. You've got to work on your responsibility, and not worry about somebody else's. That's why if you know, you go.

Audience Member: *So you can't be reconciled, because reconciliation is where [UNCLEAR]...*

That's correct, but you're making reconciliation possible. The other person has to respond. That's correct. But your responsibility is to break down the barrier so that when it does occur, it can happen. It may not happen. But that doesn't change your responsibility.

Audience Member: *Is that why God says for us to love our enemies and do good to those who spitefully use us?*

Well, that's certainly one of the applications of that, would be that, to love those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Love those who hate you. Pray for those who wound you. Forgive those who hurt you. And jump for joy when you're persecuted. Notice, look in the Beatitudes, the [UNCLEAR] version of the Beatitudes. Jump for joy when you're persecuted. Joy versus persecution. Bless those who curse you. Blessing versus cursing. Love those who hate you. Love versus hate. Pray for those who wound you; forgive those who hurt you. Now look at the two different categories. On one hand you've got this—persecution, hatred, cursing, mistreatment. What's that describe? The system of the world. What does this describe? Joy, blessing, forgiveness, prayer and love. What's that describe? The Kingdom of God.

Now guys, how you respond is going to determine which kingdom you serve. How you respond is going to determine which kingdom you serve. When somebody cusses me out, what do I do? Do I cuss them back? You're saying the system of the world is your Lord. That's the system you're following. Or do you say, "Bless those who curse you"?

I told you about that illustration I had when I was the Vice President of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I had to make a decision once that was very, very difficult because I had to cancel a conference because during the gas crisis of the 1970's, we would have lost our shirt if we'd have had this conference. Somebody had to make the decision, and I made the decision to cancel the conference because I would not let the ministry go into debt. Debt was not a means of our management process. I would not let the ministry go into debt, so I made the decision to cancel it.

Well, I got all kinds of blasts from that. I came into my office one day and my secretary said, "Bruce, there's a coach on the telephone who's really irate at the fact that you canceled the conference in California." I got on the phone and I said, "Hi Coach, this is Bruce Bickel. Can I help you?" He said, "Are you the blankety-blank blank blankety blank blank who made that decision to cancel the conference?"

Now let me tell you my response. It wasn't the best in the world. {LAUGHTER} I mean, for 10 to 15 seconds, this guy's cussing me out, attacking my character. He said, "Who do you think you are? Little Napoleon? Just because you're a Naval Academy graduate, you think you've got a right to make decisions, to change and alter people's lives?" I mean, he just tore into me, with a lot of profanity.

Now here's my response. I notice that my knuckles were white. {LAUGHTER} And I felt this flush that started in my knees and went all the way up through my stomach. By the time it got to my neck, my old jugular vein was going bum-bum-bum-bum. But the best part was this; I thought this in a microsecond, "Wait till he's done." {LAUGHTER} And then the second thought was this, "He can't do that to me. He can't do that to me."

By God's grace, I happened to have a 3x5 card on my desk that listed those five contrasts—the Kingdom of God of versus the kingdom of this world. My eyes went down to bless those who curse you. My first thought was this, really very theological, I said, "That's for a different dispensation." {LAUGHTER} You see, God is always impressed when you use theological terms. {LAUGHTER} Then I thought, "Because this is for a different dispensation, I'm not bound by that." The next thing I did, which is really more impressive, is I took the Scripture and I covered it up. {LAUGHTER} Now you see, another thing that impresses God is when you use Scripture to cover up your responsibilities. That's really impressive.

Then by a sheer act of God's grace, through the wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit, I realized this, "No, that's for you, right now, at this time, and your response is going to identify which system controls you. The system of this world. Bless those who curse you or your response that indicates you're a Kingdom citizen and a follower of Christ."

So as he continued on, I just kind of said, "Lord, I have no idea what to do. I know what I'm supposed to do, but I don't know how to do it. When he takes a breath, will you give me something to say? I don't know what to do. But I trust you." So he breathed, and that was my moment, so I said, "Well coach, I just want you to know how much I really appreciate the great skill you have of expressing your concerns and letting me understand what your situation is." {LAUGHTER} I said, "I appreciate your honesty, and you have an excellent way of communicating what you really want to say." {LAUGHTER} So he paused and said, "Thank you."

Then I said, "Would it be helpful to you, coach, if I explained to you the rationale behind the decision that we had to make and that I made." He said, "Yeah, give it a shot, big boy." {LAUGHTER} So I explained it to him. Then he was silent for a minute and he said, "That must have been a difficult decision." I said, "Yeah, coach, it really was. I agonized over it. It was really difficult. But I had to make it because it was the right one." He said, "Now that I understand what you told me, I can see where that's the right decision." I said, "Coach, why don't you and I talk about how we can resolve this issue with your student athletes because we're prepared to help you go to another conference. Let's talk about how we can do that." So we spent the next 20 minutes talking about how we could tie his kids and his student athletes to another group who was going to another conference in Colorado, and we worked out the details. After about 25 minutes, he said, "Hey, I really enjoyed this conversation." {LAUGHTER} Well, sweat's just rolling off of me. Then I hung up the phone and I just sat there and I looked and I said, "You know, there really is power in the Word of God in my life. It is really powerful, and I just need to learn to submit to it and get over this ego thinking, thinking that he can't do something to me."

You see, guys, the real issue is this. How do you respond? Are you going to respond according to the system of the world? Or are you going to respond to the Kingdom of God? That's not easy. It is not easy to do what I'm asking you to do and what the Scripture tells us to do, but know this—that's the role of the Holy Spirit, is to guide us into all truth so that we will apply the things that God changes our heart.

You now have a heart to do spiritual things. You can't do that on your own. That's why you've got to trust Christ. If you don't have the right understanding of the biblical view of conversion, what I'm talking about is nonsensical.

***Don:** On a larger scale, and this may seem like a bizarre question, but you were talking about jumping for joy when you're persecuted, which our Lord we're to do, many churches, mine included, are praying for the persecuted church around the world. How should we pray, you know, if indeed we are to rejoice when we're persecuted? Should we pray that God would stop the persecution or should we pray that they would endure it, endure and be faithful in the midst of it? What should we pray exactly in light of the Lord's command?*

Historically, we have seen, in the growth of the church, comes through persecution. We have to realize that fact. When I was in China teaching Christ and the Old Testament at the Reformed Seminary in China, there was a group of Chinese church leaders who were underground in houses. I said, "What's the one thing you're praying for America?" He said, "That you'll go through persecution because that's the best thing that ever happened to our country." He said this, "The best thing that ever happened to China was Communism, because that's what separated the sheep and the goats, and the church began to flourish in the midst of that because it was persecuted by the Communist regime. Now we understand that there's a body of believers over here who are really the true church, and who are operating, and the church has really flourished in that environment.

Now it's in the context, I would say, Don, we need to pray that God will do whatever is necessary to glorify himself. If that means that he uses persecution of America to do that, then we need to allow that to happen, and that we need to have the right response that says, "Lord, give us the grace to endure, to persevere, to be strong, to be courageous when that comes, that we will make choices that are reflective of the Kingdom of God." So it's a both/and. Sometimes I think we do need to pray for persecution of the church, in the fact that it will separate us from the world's system. If that occurs and God is pleased to use that as a methodology of bringing glory to himself, then our response needs to be, "No should you do that, Lord," we now need to pray for perseverance, we need to pray for the right character, for courage, for boldness, for patience and for trust, that we will have the right response in the midst of that because you are separating the sheep from the goats and separating the world from the system of the Kingdom, and so would you give us the right response to do that. So I think it's a both/and, Don.

***Audience Member:** My answer to that, with anything, is take it to God and pray thy will be done.*

Yes. That's our battle cry, they will be done. My chapter in the book on Let Us Pray talks about the battle cry is thy will be done. When you say that prayer, thy will be done, in the Lord's Prayer, the disciple's prayer, you're basically saying, "Lord, we want you to destroy Satan and his kingdom, and I'm asking you to do that when I say thy Kingdom come. I'm asking you to do that, and will you do that?" Now that means we need to have the right response should that occur, as it does occur. That's our battle cry. That's our cry for going into spiritual warfare. We're saying, "We want you to engage the evil of this world and destroy it and we're going to go along with you and we're going to respond and we jump for joy when that happens." It's a very complicated issue, but it's one that we must deal with.

Number 9, another healthy review of the church in addition to a biblical view of conversion is a biblical view of evangelism. You can see that on your handout, The Focus of the Gospel. The question we have to ask is modern evangelism synthetic or is it authentic. Now if you look at that comparison, my conclusion is that it is rather synthetic. It's very surface-y.

Evangelism is really speaking words about Christ about his death and about his resurrection, and that God has secured a way for a holy God to be reconciled to a sinful man. That's evangelism.

Now it is different from sharing your testimony, or presenting a logical defense of your faith. It's different than that. It should not be confused with the results of evangelism, as if the goal is conversion. You see, often times, we get confused looking at the results of evangelism saying it's evangelistic, and we emphasize you have eternal life. Certainly that's one of the results of evangelism, but it is not the goal of evangelism. Conversion is not the goal of evangelism. The goal of evangelism is to proclaim truth about the reconciled process of the person and work of Christ, his sinless perfection and perfect obedience. It's about holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. Now it is setting forth the truth plainly. That's what evangelism is. It is representing the good news freely and trusting God to convert people. Salvation comes from the Lord as we read in the book of Jonah. We can go into this more later when we get back together.

You've got to understand that evangelism is not just sharing your testimony. It's specifically dealing about the fact that a holy God has a means by which he can reconcile a sinful person to himself. It's about the ministry of reconciliation, and that's why you have to talk about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, I hope I can get this. There was once, I wrote a love letter that basically described that I'd like to see within the very attributes that you explained, we would need the church to have, but what if we are the offended and we don't see that, where we need to go to make peace. Are we going to go in there and just condemn a mess or do we need to wait till we feel, really, I mean, you'd have to be lead to walk into that situation [UNCLEAR].*

Absolutely. No, you don't do this in your human decision making process. You do it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus says, "If two or three are gathered in my name, I'll be with you." Yes, you have to wait for the leading of the Holy Spirit to do that, because if you don't do that, you'll blow the situation because it'll come out of our humanness rather than out of our spiritual life and the life of Christ. So you've got to be very, very sensitive to that and trust the Holy Spirit. But you still have that responsibility if you know, you go.

***Audience Member:** How long can you be sensitive [UNCLEAR]?*

Ask the Holy Spirit that. I can't be your Holy Spirit. I don't know. That's an individual thing that the Holy Spirit will work in your life that may not...he may have you wait longer than me or have me wait longer than you. I can't give you a flat answer to that because I am not your Holy Spirit. You've got to be careful, guys. You can't be somebody else's Holy Spirit. Direct them to the Scripture and let the Holy Spirit guide them into the truth plainly.

***Dick:** Guys, what we have done is, the end of the year, we certainly have appreciation for Bruce throughout the year in terms of his teaching and the objective of maturing us up as men God, and he certainly does that throughout the year, and each of us is not only that and appreciate your commitment to that, Bruce, and we also recognize there are a couple of hours you probably put in, in preparation {LAUGHTER} at least [UNCLEAR]. Knowing that and knowing Becky, his wife, there is a tremendous investment that Bruce puts in to developing the plan for teaching each week. We want to say, at the end of the year, thank you, and a Christmas card, Christmas letter, with the signatures of the Brave Men of Christ Church and of God here, a Christmas prayer, "Dear Bruce, we thank God for you and pray His richest blessings upon you, Becky and your children this Christmas and New Year. The Brave Men of Friday Morning Bible Study." It's in the all sufficiency of Christ. It's the M8 and many of the things that you have taught us Scripturally and some of the acronyms that you have used throughout the year that are recorded on this. Guys, I have this, so if any of you would like a copy of this. My wife was badgered {LAUGHTER} no, my wife...you think I'd been asking you this for three yes and you haven't given this*

[UNCLEAR]. I'll get it to you this afternoon [UNCLEAR]. But it is great reminder to us of a lot of things that we've studied over the years. We have gathered the generosity of these men of a number of gifts that will allow you and Becky to spend some time together and make up for all those idle hours that she sits alone while you're studying. {LAUGHTER} Guys, could we pray for Bruce. Come on up here and we'll lay hands on him and send him off [UNCLEAR] this year but acknowledging we look forward to 2012. [UNCLEAR—very noisy with everyone moving around] Lord God, we are so thankful and blessed that you would send to us our brother in Christ, our teacher, a spiritual leader, a man of God that is committed to you and to maturing us and the men of God as well. We are so appreciative of Bruce's commitment to us and the diligence in studying the Word and sharing that with us, grounding us and building those foundations in each of our lives that we truly might be Christ-like presidents, Christ-like fathers, Christ-like grandfathers and just Christ-like men of God so we can do great things.

Audience Member: *Father God, you truly are an awesome God, and it is your plan [UNCLEAR]. We thank you for this day and we thank you for this morning with all the Brave Men every Friday morning. We thank you for Bruce. Hear our prayers. Guide us through your [UNCLEAR]. We pray this all in our Lord and Savior's Name, Jesus Christ.*

Audience Member: *Father God, we just take this time to thank you. This world comes crashing in on us, but you promise us a citadel, Father God, when you send a servant called Bruce to broadcast your Word to us to teach us, to lift us up as we each take our place on the wall. We just thank you for that because in a little bit when we leave here, we will take this [UNCLEAR]...*

Bruce: *Father, I thank you for these dear mean and dear brothers. [UNCLEAR, background noise.]*