

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

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Heavenly Father, there are times in all of our lives where we just wish that we could walk in the garden with you, that we'd be alone in the garden and that we would recognize your majesty, your glory, your friendship, your concern. Father, we just pray that in those moments of our lives when we feel alone that we would remember that we are never alone because you are omniscient and omnipresent and always with us. So now, Father, we lift up the concerns of those we've prayed for today, the other concerns that have not been spoken. We just give them to you, lay them at the throne of grace and trust that you'd be pleased to honor yourself by responding as you deem appropriate for the glory of your kingdom. And now, Father, we pray that you'd be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from your Word, and may this be so for Jesus' sake, and may it be. Amen.

We're continuing our study on the theme, the major theme we've been looking at for several months has been the formation and function of the church. We've been looking at some of the essentials of a healthy church, the word "healthy" meaning a church that's growing in God's grace. Not one that's perfect, but one that is growing, maturing. We've looked at some of the essential ingredients of a healthy church. We explored expository preaching, what that means, that we expose people to the Scripture because of its sufficiency. Based upon the sufficiency of Scripture, what we teach is Christ and Him crucified.

Then we looked at biblical theology. Expository preaching deals with what we are taught and biblical theology deals with how we are learning it and what we are taught. Expository preaching deals with how we are taught. Then we looked at a biblical gospel. We spent the last several months talking about a biblical gospel using the comparison between neo-Finneyism and Puritan evangelism, which comes out of my study on the book *Light and Heat: The Puritan View of the Pulpit*. You have that under lesson 9.

We've looked at some implications of a biblical gospel. When you have a biblical gospel understanding, the doctrines of grace, then you'll have a biblical understanding of conversion. That's very important for a church to understand what is true conversion versus what we would call a spurious or a false conversion.

It's very important that we have... a biblical view of conversion will manifest itself in certain areas in the church, and we've looked at those. Then we needed to have an exploration of a little bit of the biblical view of evangelism. Now all of that was really covered in that section 9 in the contrast between neo-Finneyism; the word "neo" meaning new. You recall Charles Finney was a theologian in the mid-1800's who created what we now really use as our evangelistic message. It was essentially what was known as the anxious seat, or having altar calls. It was really a means where he basically developed a theology that said that evangelism or revival is not a function of God; it's a performance of man.

You can go to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, and you will see a plaque on the wall that says, "Revival is not an act of God, it's a function of man," and if you do these seven things, you will have revival. Well that's essentially what we've adopted the last 150 to 200 years in our culture as it relates to evangelism. So we spent some time looking at the difference between modern evangelism, which I call neo-Finneyism, which is essentially old Finneyism with some new twists to it and some more marketing to it compared to Puritan evangelism or what I would refer to as biblical evangelism.

What I want us to do today before we move on to lesson 10, I want to do a review for us to help us understand all the things we've been learning about evangelism, revival and the biblical gospel. I want to do a comparison today just at the macro level between the covenant of works and the covenant of

grace because essentially that's the issue.

The word "covenant" means arrangement. Are we existing in an arrangement of works covenant or are we existing in an arrangement of grace, the covenant of grace? Two major covenants we see theologically in the Scripture—one is the covenant of works and the one is the covenant of grace. Now let me say this at the outset. Both of them have the same standard. Both of them require perfection. Now the issue is how do you attain that perfection? Under the covenant of works, it's something that you achieve. I've got to achieve the perfection that is the standard that is necessary for eternal life. Is that something I really can do? Can I achieve that?

In the doctrine of grace, it's something that you receive. The difference is the attainment of the standard of excellence that both the covenants require. They both require absolute perfection. Do you have to be perfect to get to heaven? The answer is absolutely yes because God is a holy God. He demands perfection. He doesn't grade on a curve.

When you look at the two arrangements, neo-Finneyism, the covenant of works versus biblical evangelism, the covenant of grace, you have to look at the issue how do I attain what is required? Do I achieve it or do I receive it?

Now I want to walk you through some understanding of the difference between the two because it's critical that we understand this as we look at the implications of a healthy church. I think when you compare these two, you have to recognize, first of all, the unspeakable joy and mercy and goodness of God in making us in our particular time living under a covenant of grace, as opposed to a covenant of works.

You see, in the covenant of works, there is no sign of mercy, there is no opportunity for repentance, there's no opportunity for contrition, because the issue is this. In the covenant of works, you have to attain perfection. Remember this, if you miss once, and you violate once of the law of God, you're gone. In other words, you've got to be absolutely perfect. Can you be absolutely perfect? No. Then you're lost. You're doomed. You see, there's no mercy in that. There's no repentance in that. There's no goodness in that. There's no hope in that. Because you're bound by the fact that if I make one single error, if I blow it once in my life, then I've violated the standard of perfection which is required, and I'm doomed.

Now guys, there's no hope in that. That's not merciful. That's absolutely restrictive. What we have in our culture today is an evangelistic mindset that says do this and live. That's the old covenant. Do this and live. The new covenant is this—believe and live. Believe and live. There's a difference. One says do this and live, and the other one says believe and live.

The word "believe" as you've heard me say over the years means to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in the person and work of Christ. We're not talking about easy believeism. I'm not talking about giving mental assent to something. I'm really talking about something much more significant than that, and that's the whole issue of believing and living versus achieving and living.

I want to take you to a Scripture in Acts 16:30-31. I just want you to see how the apostles dealt with this issue. This is just one single verse. There are many others we could look at. But if you'll go to Acts 16...you may be familiar with this incident in the apostle's life. It's the historical event of the Philippian jailer being converted, and Paul and Silas were in jail and here's what we read beginning at verse 25 of Acts 16, <sup>25</sup> "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

<sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill

himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup>But Paul cried with a loud voice, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’ <sup>29</sup>And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup>Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ <sup>31</sup>And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”

Now there’s a difference between the covenant of works which says do this and live, versus believe and live. Now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is what the apostle said. That means rest upon Christ for your salvation. Rest upon his merits, not your own merits. It means rest and trust in his blood, not your own. And it means and trust in his own righteousness and not you are own. It means to DART. It means to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in. That’s what it means to believe. One says achieve, the other says believe.

Now believe is a very active, aggressive, powerful passionate word. It is not something that you sit back on your haunches and contemplate your bellybutton and go through naval operations and just meditate. We’re not talking about that. We’re talking about something that’s very, very aggressive. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is a very, very active, passionate word/concept. It means to depend upon. That’s what Paul and Silas were saying, “Depend upon the righteousness of Christ; his merits, not your own achievement, and you will live.”

What a great benefit and privilege we have has God’s children to live in the covenant of grace. For although we cannot be saved by what we do, ourselves, we are saved by what one has done for us. You see, you cannot be saved by all you’re doing, but you can be saved by all your believing. Believing meaning depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting in. Belief doesn’t save anybody; grace saves you. The activity of that grace in your work is the act of believing. When I say you’re going to be saved by believing, understand what I mean. You’re saved by grace through faith. Belief is the activity of acquiring and applying the grace of God that he’s sovereignly planted in your life. So you and I cannot be saved by our own doing, but we are saved by our own believing, meaning you are the agent who is responsible to believe, by resting on, relying upon the person and work of Christ, not achieving through your own merits, expecting salvation by what he has done and suffered for us in our place. That’s what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, we live under a covenant of grace, where it is something that we receive. If we were under a covenant of works, then it would be this. Do this, do it perfectly, and never, ever fail, because once you have failed in one portion of the law of God, you fail in all of it. Once you’ve done that, you’re doomed. Now guys, there’s no hope in that. There’s no hope in that.

The condition of the covenant of works is that we should give an exact and perfect righteousness unto God for every aspect of our life permanently and perfectly all the time. The sentence of absolution shall be pronounced only if found without blemish, without spot, without failure or without disobedience. In other words, you’ve got to be completely righteous all the time. What a burden. What a burden that is, to walk through life and just walk on thin ice and say, “Have I? Have I not? Did I do it? Did I do it wrong? Did I do it right?” Do you see what that does to us? It just restricts us so much. But the sentence of condemnation will be pronounced if you are found righteous, if you’re found unrighteous in the least of these. In other words, if you fail once, you failed it all.

Now it’s totally different in the covenant of grace.

**Audience Member:** Could we go back to your Scripture reading where you said, I’ll paraphrase it, you and your household. Can you explain when you say “household”...

I was hoping you wouldn’t ask that. {LAUGHTER} I almost didn’t read it. {LAUGHTER} That’s a

whole different issue. Now you then get into the whole issue of federal headship and all those things of what that means. Many, many interpretations of that. The bottom line is, in the new covenant, God works individually. Just because I'm saved by God's grace, does not necessarily mean that my wife and kids are going to be automatically saved by me, because there's a federal head. If that means that's the case, then they don't have to believe; I believe for them. You've got to be careful of that. It doesn't mean that. And it would mean that my grandchildren would not have to believe; I believe for them because of I and my whole household. There are a lot of implications to that. To the best of our understanding of what it means is when I am saved, hopefully I will take the opportunity to be sharing Christ with the rest of my household. They will then be brought into the covenant grace because they're exposed to the Gospel of Christ and it will be helpful to them that they will come to saving faith.

***Audience Member:** I think what's important to point out is that in verse 32, "then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house, so it was a proclamation of [UNCLEAR]...*

It's a proclamation of the Gospel. In other words, when one person is saved, that opens the door for the proclamation to all the household members. But it does not mean that they're automatically saved just because the head of the house is saved. You see the difference?

***Don:** Since other people have entered the fray, I will, too. {LAUGHTER} I believe the covenant of grace started in Eden.*

Yes it did.

***Don:** I don't believe that the old covenant is a covenant of works and the new covenant is a covenant of grace. That's not what Westminster teaches, certainly. I believe that the covenant of works was with Adam and Eve. They failed to keep it, and God knew, in his sovereignty all along, that'd be the case. So the covenant of grace was instituted in Eden when he clothed them and announced the promise of a Redeemer, and the old covenant as well as the new covenant are both an expression of the covenant of [UNCLEAR].*

Honestly speaking, Don is absolutely right. There's only one covenant. It's the covenant of grace. Really. Because grace started in Genesis 1. So he's absolutely correct. We need to understand that the introduction of grace is in the Genesis story, not in the Matthew, Mark, Luke and John story. It started back in Genesis. What you see is an aberration of that in the covenant of works. There's only really one covenant because God deals with grace all the time. So Don is absolutely correct on that. Now what I'm trying to say is that modern evangelism has gone back into resurrecting what I'm suggesting is the highlighting of the covenant works by saying this is what you must do to be saved. That's the thing I'm trying to make an understanding for.

***Ted:** I will change the subject. {LAUGHTER}*

Thank you.

***Ted:** I just wanted to say, he commented, you are the agent who is responsible for believing, but even your believing is the work of the Holy Spirit.*

Absolutely. No question.

***Ted:** What we have often is people who think of believing as another work.*

Correct.

*Ted: That it comes out of their own human efforts and flesh. I cannot even begin to believe or even see the Kingdom of God unless the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of Jesus makes that possible.*

Absolutely correct. Now remember this. Ephesians 2 says, “you’re dead in your trespasses and sins.” Do you believe the word dead means dead?

*Ted: No, just sick.*

Or does it mean sick? If it means sick, then you can choose to believe. But if it means dead, then what can a dead man do? Nothing. Something supernatural must happen. That’s John 3:3. That’s regeneration. That’s being born again. Go to 1 John 5:1. We’ve done this before. Then I want to continue on helping us understand the difference of the great benefit and joy and privilege we have of being under God’s grace. 1 John 5:1—now this is one of the seven tests of true saving faith—“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”

Now here’s what this phrase is—I don’t to say this to confuse you, but I want to help you understand the accuracy because we lose a little bit in the English translation. The phrase in the original text is [εταο tao d’genetai], which is the Greek, and it means this. Having been born of God, in the past, the present result is that you believe. That’s what it means. In other words there’s a past event in your life that occurred that now gives you the responsibility and the ability to believe. That’s very consistent with your dead in your trespasses and sins.

We look at it this way. Everyone who believes is saved. We put the belief before the saving. Actually, the accuracy of this passage is there’s a past event in your life, called regeneration, where the Holy Spirit works in your life through the presentation of the Gospel. He responds in your life, he generates something in your life called regeneration. He removes that heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh. And all of a sudden now, there’s a past event in your life called regeneration that manifests itself in the present day activity of your believing. That’s why believing is the first evidence of your salvation, not the cause of it. You see that? It is not the cause of your salvation; it’s the expression, it’s the evidence of the fact that there’s been a supernatural work of grace done in your life by the activity of the Holy Spirit who’s removed your heart of stone and given you a heart of flesh, and all of a sudden, you start believing.

Now that’s why, you see, you have to understand that the church must have a clear understanding of the biblical doctrine of conversion. Often times, we have told somebody just believe and you live. That is true, but we do it in such a way that we communicate the idea that your belief is an action that you do to achieve belief. It’s an expression of the fact that God has regenerated you. There’s a huge difference because often times, as Ted has suggested, we communicate the Gospel that believing is an activity that I can do; I’m the free agent that must do it, I’m responsible to do it, therefore I’m going to work and I do it and I’m saved.

Now you see, that’s where we have such what I would call spurious or false conversion. People have really said, “Well I believe. I did this.” What’s the cause of your belief? Is it the Holy Spirit regenerating you that now gives evidence of the fact that you now are in Christ because you’re believing? Or is it something that you chose to do on your own just because of whatever circumstance, there you did it. I don’t know that.

I’ve told you the story many times, and it’s very disheartening for me. Often times I’m involved in what are known as ordination councils, where a young man is brought up in front of a group of pastors, theologians, and you query him on his understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture so as to see has he

been qualified to be one who has gone into the church to be a gift of Christ to the body of Christ, to be a pastor/teacher. I think I've been involved in four or five of these. I only ask one or two questions.

Most of the time questions are asked about methodology. My question is really about theology. It's not about methodology. How do you plan to evangelize your neighborhood? Or what kind of a youth program are you going to have? Well those are nice, but the real issue is this. The question I ask is this. Which comes first? Faith or life. Now I've asked that question four times. Three times the answer has been faith. Now that tells me that that man does not understand the biblical Gospel. Does not understand conversion. Basically it's the understanding that says this. If I can just convince people to believe, they're going to be saved. My job is to go convince them. Rather than my job is to go proclaim Christ and let the Holy Spirit do his work. It's very disheartening when I get that answer.

The other question I ask is this. Is the cross the only means by which God excuses sin? Is the cross the only means by which God excuses sin? Four times the answer has been yes. The answer is God never excuses sin. God redeems it. He never excuses it. But you see, the subtleties, we've got people coming out of seminary so oriented toward the methodology, rather than a biblical theology and a biblical gospel, and an understanding of conversion. Do you wonder why the church is so weak? It's because we do not have a biblical theology being expressed expositively from the pulpit. That's why I'm saying these are some of the critical ingredients of a healthy church.

Our understanding of this doctrine and covenant of grace compared to modern evangelism which lends itself toward the covenant of works, which basically says all you have to do is believe and you'll be saved rather than realizing I can't do that.

***Audience Member:** So when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about you must be born again, he wasn't really giving Nicodemus a command that you must do this, it was something that must take place in order for him to see the kingdom of heaven.*

That's correct. Basically he was saying this. Historically, Nicodemus was a Pharisee, which meant he was oriented to perfection in his conduct. Now when you study the life historically of the Pharisees, they are impeccable in their outward expression of their conduct. You don't see such things as corruption. You don't see such things as divorce. You don't see such things as child molestation. All those things that go on in our culture. These Pharisees were impeccable in their outward, physical and emotional conduct.

Now to that man, Jesus said this, "Nicodemus, you've got a lot of your theology right. You understand about rewards. You understand about obedience. You understand a lot of things. But you've made one fatal flaw, Nicodemus, and that's this. You have externalized religion, meaning you have made it your own righteousness that is a means of appeasing and pleasing God. You've made that your fatal flaw is because you've externalized, realizing that your faith is something that's internal. Nicodemus, here's what has to happen to you. If you want to see the Kingdom of God, then something supernatural is going to have to happen. That is when God supernaturally takes a life that has its origin in heaven and plants it in your life. Not a life that has its origin in this world, Nicodemus, but a life that has its origin in heaven and he regenerates you. The Holy Spirit will give you a new life, because Nicodemus, until that happens, until you're born again, born from above, you can't even see the kingdom, let alone enter the kingdom, or let alone enjoy the benefits of a kingdom citizen. Nicodemus, something supernatural has got to happen to you, a Pharisee, who's impeccable in your conduct, your works oriented."

You see, brothers, we should never lose sight of the fact that conversion is something that is supernatural. It is not manmade and manipulated. It is solely an act of God's grace, solely an act of God's work of the Holy Spirit. It is solely an act of regeneration. It is something that God does to us, and

now we begin to believe through us. [Ectao tao d'genetai], having been born of God in the past, there is the present day result that I give evidence of that regeneration because of the fact I now believe. Belief is not the reason; it's the conclusion, it's the cause, of the regenerative act of work.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, can you touch on the aspect of death as the apostle says in Romans about dying to sin as part of this...*

Dying to sin means to mortify. It means to manage severely. It means to control it. You've got to die to it. In other words...well, let me show you something here. Let's see, go to James 1:12-13. You guys are all over the place today. It's all good though, I trust. James 1. Pick it up at verse 12 of chapter 1. We're going to talk about dying to sin. It means to mortify. In other words, it means you've got to kill it. You've got to stop it at its inception. That's what it means. Now notice, <sup>12</sup>"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."

There's a difference between a test, a trial and a temptation. Temptations come from us. Trials come from God. Tests come from God. They are designed to help us understand our maturity. In other words, why is it you take an exam after you've studied a course in college? It's to see where you are comparative to the knowledge that you should be gaining. That's what a test or a trial in the person's life, the uniquely sovereignly imposed by God to the individual person to help us discover our maturity, where we are in the pilgrimage toward our Christian life.

Everyone is uniquely designed. Be careful that you don't compare your trial to somebody else's. It's specifically designed for you to reveal your lack of or your high degree of maturity, so don't say, "I'm being tempted," because God doesn't tempt.

Read on. James 1:14-15, <sup>14</sup>"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup>Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." Now you can four stages there where you and I need to learn how to mortify, or begin to deal with our sin and let it die.

The first thing is this, is enticement. Stage number one is you're going to be enticed some way. Visually, through your eyes. Why is it that Job says, "I made a covenant with my eyes"? Because he realized that, "If I look at certain things, I'm going to be enticed in the system of this world." It's the lust of the flesh, the pride of life. The eyes. You see, where does that enticement come? The enticement comes through the senses of the physical body. What I see, what I hear, what I listen to, what I taste, what I touch, what I feel. Those are the ways in which we are enticed.

Now how many of you have teenage daughters? Let me ask you for your help. We need help, men, on how our teenage daughters dress. Now if you and I, as old guys, are enticed by flesh and skin, just think what a 16-year old or a 15-year old boy is going through trying to figure out who he is. Help us. Help out the generation of which they exist by watching how your daughters dress. Go to the mall. You see more skin there than you do at the place downtown. Here's your guideline Scripturally. Dress is to call attention to your countenance, not your hips, your legs, your boobs or your butt. Clothing is designed to call attention to your countenance, which is the inner expression of your life as come through your face.

So here are the guidelines, guys, for your daughters. Too much, too tight, too little. Don't let them wear too much. Gaudiness. It's going to entice young guys, or entice old guys. So too much. Be cautious. Too little. Be cautious. And too tight. Be cautious.

You see, the first stage of sin is the enticement factor. Yes, you and I have freedom in Christ to go to any movie you want, but some movies are going to entice you in directions you should not go more than others. You have to know yourself well enough to know that yes, I've got the freedom in Christ to go to that movie, but I'm not going to go because I know this—it's going to entice me to begin to think differently.

Notice the second stage. After the enticement comes the desire. Your eyes see it. Your ears hear it. Then all of a sudden, you've got a desire for it. Stage number three is conceiving of it. It goes from enticement to desire to conceding. Now here what can I do to get it? I see it. I want it. Now I can get it. And then you do it.

Stage number four is commitment. You commit the sin. It all starts right there. To die to your sin means I've got to stop at the point of enticement, and I've got to realize that I know myself well enough to know that certain things in this world system are going to entice me in the wrong direction, and I'm going to have to die to that. So no, I'm not going to go to that type of a movie. I'm not going to go to the mall anymore and look at that stuff. You've got to manage yourself. That's what it means to die to your sin. You've got to realize that sin doesn't happen like that. It goes through stages. It starts with enticement, then desire, then conceiving, and then commitment.

The way to die to your sin is cut it off at the enticement phase. You've got to know yourself well enough to know what stimulates you in the wrong way. That's what it means when he says you die to your sin. Now guys that is an aggressive, powerful, difficult thing to do. You can't do that on your own. Remember if you're under a covenant of works, the first time you have the evil thought, you're doomed. You're doomed, because you thought it. You see, you've violated the law because you thought it. There's no hope in that. There's no hope in that. So we have that responsibility to die to our sin, but you've got to start it and understand how sin is evolved in our lives. It goes through that four-stage process.

I want to read you something here from Christopher Love, one of my favorite Puritans. It's teaching us something, guys, about the difference between works versus grace. Just listen to this. He says it far better than I can. "But the freedom you now have in Christ, this is your condition. You're in Christ. Whatever you do, though there are never so many imperfections," meaning failures, "in it. If God can spy out the best good thing in you, he will take notice of that and cast away all the evil."

You see what that says? He's saying if I take a look at you because you're in Christ, you've been regenerated. If I see one good thing in you, I'm going to pull that out and look at you that way, and I'm going to get rid of all the rest. And why has he gotten rid of all the rest? Because it's been paid for at the cross. It was paid for. How often times you and I resurrect all that rotten stuff of our lives rather than saying, "Lord, thank you that you redeemed it. Thank you that you paid for it. Thank you that you set me free, and you're going to look at me in my now new condition. Yes, I've got a lot of imperfections, but when you see one good thing in me, you're going to pull that out and you're going to forget all the rest because you've already paid for it." That's grace. That's grace.

"If God sees anything of his own spirit in you—regeneration—if God sees anything of his own spirit in you, he will make sure to take notice of it. If there is just one dust of gold, though it is mixed with an abundance of dross, God will not lose it, but will find it. God is not strict to mark what is done amiss by his children, but he is strict to mark what is done well by them by the spirit. Indeed, the law tells us, a mortal man will tell us, that to make an action good all circumstances must concur, but the liberty of the Gospel tells us that where there is any good, any grace in action, God observes and takes notice of that in his children.'

Now it gives an illustration, “To give an illustration of this, in 1 Peter 1:3-6, the apostle propounds Sarah as a pattern for good women. Even if Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. She never called him Lord except when she did it unbelievably. But God takes notice of that word and never mentions her unbelief.”

Now Sarah was a born again free women. And if this is the gracious thing of God dealing with us as his children. If you are a child of God’s grace, this is your privilege, that God will take notice of every good action that you have, for he has already paid for the actions that are failures. Do you understand that, guys?

“A bruised shall not he break, and the smoking flax shall not but quenched. So if there is at least a desire of good in you, it will be accepted. Suppose you cannot do anything. If there is even a will, a desire in you—now get this—God accepts the will for the deed. God accepts the will for the deed. Now many carnal hearts—non-believers—please themselves with this by saying it’s my excuse, I can get away with it. But this is not the case of those that are set free in Christ. Perhaps you cannot pray enough, but present yourself before God and you shall be accepted of that because you get credit for the will before the deed. Know this, that if there is any good excuse to be made for you, Christ will find it and take it before God to tell him who you are.”

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR] sit here quietly, but the reason why we need our Lord Jesus Christ, even a woman that is properly dressed in nice clothes, as a man [UNCLEAR]...*

No question. That’s enticement. But guys, did you understand what I just read? When you really want to do something and you can’t pull it off perfectly, because of grace, you get credit for the deed, even though it wasn’t done perfectly, because the imperfection of that action has already been dealt with. It was dealt with at the cross. Now that’s the difference between a works-oriented salvation and a salvation of grace.

***Don:** I’ve said this before, but what you said was reinforcement [UNCLEAR] Westminster Confession when a chapter of good works says that even though our works cannot withstand the severity of the [UNCLEAR] yet, having been done in and through God’s Son, he is pleased to reward that which is sincere, although [UNCLEAR] many imperfections.*

Yes. Absolutely. The issue is the sincerity of the heart, “Lord, I really want to do this, but I just can’t do it perfectly,” and what happens is, he says, “Son, you get credit for that imperfection activity that you’ve done that doesn’t meet the standard. You get credit for it because you have the sincere desire to do it, even though you can’t do it perfectly.”

***Bill:** How do you reconcile that with Paul says in me, it was in my flesh [UNCLEAR]...*

I don’t. I just believe it and preach it. There’s nothing to reconcile. It’s a true statement. He’s not making an argument; he’s making a fact. There’s nothing good in me. It’s true. He’s talking about his sinful nature. But that nature has been redeemed. It’s because of the new nature...the whole issue is, remember, as we’ve been saying, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one that generates the works in us and the desire to do this. So Paul is not saying that I can’t do anything well, he’s just saying I’ve got to realize that there’s sin in my members. And then he says, “I don’t want the in my members to lead me unto righteousness. I want the sin in my members to lead me to righteousness.” He’s talking about mortifying his sin. So there’s nothing to contradict there. It’s very consistent with what we’re just saying. It’s because it’s the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now that means this. You don’t get any merit from your works. There’s no merit in the works. What

they are, they're an expression of gratitude for grace. You don't achieve merit by your good works. God looks in the midst of our imperfect lives and says, "Yes, the standard of my grace is absolute perfection, and I'm going to give you the credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of my son, and in those times when you don't do it to meet the standard of perfection, I'm going to apply the standard of perfection of my sinless son on your behalf, and you're going to be justified by faith." You're going to get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. Now guys, that's the message the church needs to hear to be healthy. Is that the message we're hearing in our churches? Unfortunately I don't know because I'm not in every church. But many of the churches I go to, you don't hear that. It's basically what you hear is this, "Do this and you'll have the abundant life." That's what you hear.

It's so important, brothers, that we help our churches understand the true of understanding of conversion based upon the differences between works salvation and salvation by grace.

***Audience Member:** Wouldn't you say, Bruce, they kind of tack on, because they usually say give your heart to Christ, and it's kind of your grace plus your efforts [UNCLEAR], don't you think?*

Yeah, it's a both/and. It's a grace plus.

***Audience Member:** It's confusing.*

They throw enough theology in there to make it sound good, but then they put the works on top of it. The important thing to realize is this guys. Our good works do not achieve any merit. The merit that you've got is because of the person and work of Christ. That's why, in your condition as a believer, he can this, "You will get credit for the will even though the deed isn't there," because it's Christ's perfection that you get credit for, not your own. See the difference?

May God give us grace to live a life of gratitude.

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR] ...I go to get tires put on my car, and by the time I get done [UNCLEAR] come back and I have brand new brake pads, brand new rotors and tires as well, and the person didn't take time to talk to me to say what's going on with my car, I mean, I just want know. I brought it in for tires, the next thing I know, I get all this extra [UNCLEAR] I really don't want. I just want to know [UNCLEAR] telling me what's going on [UNCLEAR]. I have trouble dealing with it. It seems like the world's busy working and no communication.*

Amen to that. Who has to be the communicator? We need to go to them and say, "Don't put breaks on my car. Just put tires. That's it." Tell them what you want. If they don't do it, don't pay for it. We have to take responsibility. We can't control what other people do. We can only control what we do. So let's make sure that we are the ones who communicate the standard of what we want to do.

Guys, bring lesson 10; we're going to start talking next week about, based upon this, what we've learned today, the critical ingredient is the qualifications for church leadership. Next to the proclamation of the Gospel, the most important thing a pastor can be doing is building church leaders. We're going to talk about that next week.

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR] ...*

May God give us the grace to live a life of gratitude. Live a life of gratitude. Gratitude is our motivation. Let's pray. Father, it's a joy to be back in your presence with my dear brothers and friends. Father, we pray that you once again would open our eyes that we might behold the truths of your word, the sufficiency of your Scripture. Father, make us salt and light in the churches where we go. We're not

studying these doctrines to make accusations of our churches. We're doing this so that we might understand what the church could and should be and how we can be an asset to making that happen wherever we worship. So let us be salt and light in the midst of that for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.