

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
"A NEW CREATION" - PART 2
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Bruce Bickel: "Before we get started, I just got a nice note from Tin yesterday, an email. Sig is going to put it on the Web page, a very nice note thanking us for the contribution of Bibles and hymnals. He sent us a wonderful picture of he and his wife, holding the Bibles and the hymnals with the new pastor, and the three of them standing in front of the church in Viet Nam. So Sig is going to put that on the Web page. Take a look at it and read it. He just sends his gratitude and love to all of us for the involvement we have in their lives, and it's a wonderful expression of gratitude for your participation with him. So be sure and check that out. Let's go quietly before the Lord and know that He is God.

Lord, we ask that You would be pleased to have Your Holy Spirit descend upon us with unusual measure this morning, as we talk about this wonderful, unusual understanding of what it means to have the Holy Spirit regenerate us for the glory of God. Father, guide our thoughts, guide our minds, guide our understanding, and guide our speech, and may it be for Your glory, what we all say. In Jesus' name. Amen and Amen.

We're talking about a summary statement that the apostle Paul has written in 2 Corinthians 5:17, our passage that we're examining today. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Now we're going to spend some time on that, and the reason I want to do that is because we need to realize this, brothers: that verse is a mystery. When you're talking about the whole theme of salvation, salvation is a mystery, and we need to let it be a mystery. We have tried to bring it down to our level to the point of saying, 'We can figure it all out.' But there is a wonderful mystery behind the whole issue of regeneration, conversion, and translation to the glory of God. It's a mystery. It's unique, and we need to let it remain that way.

Unfortunately, in much of our evangelism for the last 150 years, we have been preaching for decisions. We just want to batter their wills and make an appeal to their emotions with the right kind of music, the right kind of illustrations, the right people on the stage, whatever it is. We're really praying and preaching for a decision on the part of that person. How do we evaluate our evangelism? We say, 'the number of people who have decided to accept Christ.' You see how we use that language? We have been preaching for decision making rather than preaching for repentance and regeneration.

Now the reason that I want to spend some time on that is because this verse is a summary of all the things that Paul has been teaching us about life in the triumphant living of Christ. 'And thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ, and spreads everywhere the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him.' This is a summary verse. And Paul is saying this: 'If a person is a Christian, he's a brand new

person. The old is past; He has become a new creature. The old is gone; the new has come.' Now we need to examine that.

Now we need to examine that. One of the things about our evangelism that we've done poorly in the last 150 years, in my judgment, is that we've missed the big picture. We talk about people making a decision, but what's the cause of that decision? You see, we never talk about the cause. We just talk about the consequence. Would you like to invite Christ into your life? Have you decided for Christ? You see, we evaluate everything on the consequence of what we're supposing is a person's decision to invite Christ into his life. Now it's not for me to say that those aren't legitimate conversions; I can't say that. All I'm saying is, we don't understand the cause of that person who made the decision. That decision may be very legitimate. It may be very real. But do we really understand the cause that brought that person to the point in his life to the process where he made the decision to accept Christ? What was the cause behind that?

Let me give you the big picture. This is a mystery, brothers, and we need to let it be a mystery. Regeneration is a mysterious act of the grace of God. It's a royal work. Regeneration is a unique thing; it's a royal work only God can do. And we're going to spend some more time on that today.

But let me give you just the big picture. When somebody, as we in our vernacular in evangelism says, 'they decided for Christ,'—I'm going to use their terminology—'I invited Christ into my life'—what was the cause for their decision? There are four causes.

The first one is the originating cause. What was the originating cause in that person to make that decision at this time in his life? The answer to that is, the originating cause is the eternal purpose of God, found in His electing grace. The originating cause of that decision in time and space was the eternal purpose of God in His electing grace. That's where it started. There's a cause behind this decision that the person made.

The next thing we need to understand is the meritorious cause, and that is the meritorious work of Christ fulfilling the law. That's the meritorious cause for this decision. It's something that Christ did way back before this person ever decided to accept Christ.

So you have the originating cause, which is the eternal purpose of God, the meritorious cause, which is the work of Christ in fulfilling the law, and then you have the effectual cause. What caused that to happen? That is the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit works in us what Christ purchased for us. That's the cause for this decision. We never talk about the causes. We just talk about the consequences.

And lastly, the final cause is what we would call the instrumental cause, what the person does. And the instrumental causes are these: faith, obedience and perseverance. Now you can't be saved by them, but you can't be saved without them. So when we talk about evangelism, when we talk about a person deciding for Christ, we never spend time teaching him the cause behind that decision that he's making at this point. That's what Paul is reviewing for us. Yes, please?"

Participant: “Yes. There are a couple things. It’s interesting, since you talked about regeneration being a mystery, Christ said that to Nicodemus, didn’t he?”

Bruce: “Oh, absolutely!”

Participant: “The wind blows where it will, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it goes. And then, not only faith and obedience, but repentance too. I like what the Westminster Confession says. Although repentance is not the ground for salvation, (the ground for salvation is the work of Christ), yet a person can’t be saved without it.

Bruce: “Absolutely. You see, we preach for decision making; we don’t preach for regeneration and repentance. Yes, Tom?”

Participant: “Also, currently, we tend to underrate God, because we think it’s automatic. If you walk forward, or if you x a card, you’re saved, you’re in, and that’s all we have to do.”

Bruce: “That’s correct. It’s not for me to say that those are not legitimate conversions; I can’t say that. All I’m saying is, look at the results. If you look at the results of true regeneration, Paul says this: There’s a radical change that goes on in a person’s life. It is so radical that you call it a brand new creation. It is really a radical work, and it’s so radical that it can only be described as something that is brand new. Now all I’m saying is that, in our modern evangelism, when we talk about easy beliefism, and easy decision making, what’s the evidence? Are they brand new creatures? Do you see the evidence? You’re not going to see that at the end of the meeting! It’s going to take some time! It’s the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit producing sanctification in that person’s life. You’re going to have to see the evidence. That’s why the book of 1 John is so important—the seven tests and seven traits of a true believer. You see, there has got to be evidence, and we say that the evidence is their decisions. Now it may be legitimate; understand what I’m not saying. I’m not saying that that might not be a legitimate conversion. But all I’m saying is that we’ve never taught what is behind the cause of that decision in that person’s history. Yes, Bill?”

Participant: “Well, that certain 150-year period that you’re talking about, as the unregenerate, is a situation we now have to respond to. There are a number of people who have made decisions, but haven’t manifested fruit. And to explain that, they developed a concept alien to Scripture, called the “carnal Christian.”

Bruce: “Sure.”

Participant: “There is no carnal Christian in Scripture, but it’s now developed in our lexicons, to try to explain what’s going on here.”

Bruce: “The carnal Christian theory is this. She accepted Christ as her Savior, but didn’t make Him her Lord. That’s the carnal Christian, and so therefore she’s carnal. She’s got one foot in heaven, and one foot in the earth, but she just hasn’t made Christ Lord. Let me tell you what, folks, according to the Scripture, God already beat you to the point. (Laughter.) He already made Him Lord; you and I don’t make Him anything. We accept Him on His terms; He is Savior and Lord. But carnal Christianity is basically an excuse for poor evangelism, which basically says, “She invited Christ into her life when she was a teenager. There has been no evidence; she’s just carnal, and one of these days she’ll choose to make Him Lord, and things will change.” Now that’s an exact contrast to what Paul is saying. Paul is saying, “Look! If you’re in Christ, you are a brand new creature.” It’s a radical change that occurred in your life, and there is going to be evidence, and the evidence is this: the old stuff in your life is gone!”

Men: “Amen”

Bruce: “And the new stuff is here! Now we don’t preach that! We just say, ‘Decide for Christ. Would you like to invite Christ into your life?’ You see, we’ve missed the point of the three issues that Paul is dealing with. He’s dealing with condition. Our condition is that we are in Christ. That’s his favorite expression to describe a person who is a believer, a true follower of Christ. 129 times he uses the expression ‘in Christ,’ or ‘with Christ.’ He never calls us ‘Christians,’ he says, we’re ‘in Christ.’ Yes, Matt?”

Participant: “This is just a question to clarify what you say are those four points. (Unclear.) Let’s just pretend that we’re all sinners. (Laughter.) For our sake, how would you present that in the gospel presentation?”

Bruce: “I would start with the holiness of God. That’s where you start.”

Participant: “Would you include these points?”

Bruce: “Not necessarily. Now as Spurgeon said, ‘You don’t take people to the university of election and regeneration till you’ve talked about repentance and faith.’ See, we’re talking about repentance and faith. So I would start with the holiness of God. Then I would talk about the sinfulness of man. Then I would talk about the person and work of Christ, and I’d talk about repentance and faith. You cover all four of those when you cover the content of the gospel with that nomenclature—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. In describing the gospel that way, you are covering the four causes. You’re covering the originating cause, the meritorious cause, the effectual cause, and then the instrumental cause. You’re covering all four when you have the right Biblical gospel. All I’m saying is, in much of modern evangelism, we have eluded that; we don’t do that.”

Participant: “So then we point those out to them, that if Christ has transformed their hearts, that they’re going to see this evidence.”

Bruce: “Correct. And the evidence will be this. The old stuff in your life is what? Gone! The new stuff is here! Now you’ll see that over time. There has got to be evidence if this is a true conversion. What we’ve done is we’ve created a means of justifying our poor evangelism by saying, ‘they’re carnal.’ They’ve accepted Christ as Savior, but they’ve not made Him Lord yet. Well, we don’t make Christ anything. God beat us to the punch; He is Lord! We need to teach that. Now my point is, this should be taught from the pulpit. Ministry starts in the pulpit. We ought to hear this week after week after week. That’s why I’m spending so many weeks on this one verse, so that you and I will understand this. You see, we don’t understand the cause behind a person’s decision. We just preach easy believe-ism, which basically says, ‘You can decide for Christ any time you want.’ No, you can’t! You can’t! Ted?”

Participant: “There was a study that was done by the fellow who is the head of evangelism at Fuller Theological Seminary a number of years ago, and he did a survey. He would gather information on those who’d come forward in Billy Graham crusades and Luis Palau, and all of that kind of a crusade circuit, and he found that, within a year after going forward, only 5 to 15 per cent of those people were in church.”

Bruce: “You see, where is the evidence? Is that new, or is that old? When I was doing my doctoral work, I did an examination with people, because my doctoral thesis was on the Puritan view of the pulpit. It was basically ‘Light and Heat: The Puritan View of the Pulpit: The Focus of the Gospel in Puritan Preaching.’ And so I interviewed someone from Campus Crusade, who was the senior leader. And he basically said this, ‘Of twelve converts, we expect ten to fall away.’”

Men: “Whoa!”

Bruce: “Of twelve converts, we expect ten to fall away, because they’ve never made Him Lord yet. That was his answer. Now, no wonder the church is so powerless, because we have powerless preaching of the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Yes, Bill?”

Participant: “I hear this, but I also think we need to be mindful that we don’t necessarily know the people who we encounter. I think we need to be prepared to give an account of the faith, of the work, of the gospel presentation to all, and trust that the Holy Spirit will be quickening those He chooses to quicken, to seek repentance. I understand the objections to these crusades, whose responses aren’t regenerative, because all the various works aren’t manifest. I don’t believe we should stop, either.”

Bruce: “Stop what?”

Participant: “Stop making the pronouncement in regard to the gospel message to people, just because there’s such a poor response.

Bruce: “Well, nobody is going to be saved without the gospel. So you can’t stop.”

Participant: “I understand when you say numbers such as 2 out of 12 “stick.” My point is, we never know who those people are, so we need to be prepared to give a testimony to all that we encounter, and not be discouraged if we don’t see all come to faith, because it’s not us.”

Bruce: “You can’t be somebody’s Holy Spirit, so get over it! (Laughter.) You’re not going to be somebody’s Holy Spirit. You don’t know what’s going to happen. You’re either going to plant the seed, sow the seed, or harvest the seed; you don’t know that. Yes, Matt?”

Participant: “When I hear that, Bruce, I think of the four soils. There isn’t just one soil, there are four—good soil, hard hearts, rocky soil and thorny soil. Some of them are going to look like Christians for a while, but time will tell.”

Bruce: “That’s right. And we cannot say that it was a legitimate conversion or not. You don’t even know that about myself. You don’t know if I’m truly saved or not. You have to look at the evidence. Just because I’ve said something that happened to me when I was in ninth grade doesn’t mean it’s legitimate. You have to look at that and take an evaluation of my life, just as anybody else. It’s not our position to judge. Everything has been pre-judged anyway. Look at the originating cause. You’re not the cause of conversion. God’s electing grace is. Yes, Bill?”

Participant: “You’ve got to remember, we’re talking about two different gospels, a man-centered gospel versus a Biblical gospel.”

Bruce: “Right. Yes, Bishop?”

Participant: “When you get to repentance and faith, is that the point where you would also describe repentance and faith as a work of the Holy Spirit?”

Bruce: “Absolutely. That’s when you introduce the fact that the cause for your response is the originating work of the Holy Spirit. Then you begin to bring that in, absolutely. The reason I’m trying to go through these four causes is to help you understand, when you’re communicating the gospel and the opportunity is there, you can help them realize that this is a royal work that is so radical that only God can do it. It’s not a matter of your will.”

Participant: “So you’re left actually asking them to pray that God would so move upon them.”

Bruce: “They have to fall before the Lord in all of His grace and beg for mercy. And basically, the response is this: “Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner.” That’s where you would like to get the person, to that point. Did you ever notice in the Scripture how often Jesus offers repentance just as much as He does eternal life? Repentance is something that Christ offers. It’s not something that man can do on his own. There’s an originating cause for one’s repentance. All I’m saying is that the content of the gospel message that is going to be the means by which all those causes come into effect, and causes somebody to have a response, is a royal work that is so radical that Paul says they are a brand new creature. Yes?”

Participant: “Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:25 that we’re to pray that God would *grant* them repentance.”

Bruce: “Absolutely. Repentance is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It’s something God does in a person; it’s not something we choose to do. And what is the originating cause of that? It’s a Biblically oriented gospel message that the Holy Spirit uses to penetrate the soul of a person. What is regeneration? It is a dynamic, sudden and instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of the person. That comes through Biblical preaching. Paul says this, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power unto salvation for all who believe.” The real issue is, what is the Biblical message we’re giving? Is it one that breeds carnality, or is it one that breeds regeneration? Now it’s not our role to make that happen. You can’t be somebody’s Holy Spirit, so get over that. All you can do is be a communicator of the truth. It is the truth that will set people free. All I’m trying to do, brothers, is help you to understand the truth of this verse.

There are three issues we need to take a look at in this verse. First of all, the condition, then the character, and then the changes.

The conditions are three possibilities. You can be without Christ. That means you’re in the wrath of God. Without Christ, you’re in the wrath of God. You can be in Christ, and you’re in the grace of God. And you can be with Christ, and you’re in the presence of God. Three conditions: without Christ, in Christ, and with Christ. Without Christ means this: you’re in the wrath of God, in your sin. Without Christ, you’re in His wrath, in Christ, you’re in His grace, and with Christ, you’re in His presence. Now you can’t have His presence without being in Christ. You cannot be with Christ later unless you’re in Christ now. You see, that’s the whole content of the gospel. Paul is saying that there are conditions for people, and the person who is in Christ is in a brand new condition that is so radical that the only way you can describe it is that they are a new creation. And then that creation is so radical, because it’s a royal work, that can be described by only saying this: the changes are so radical that the old stuff in that person’s life is gone, and it’s a whole new lifestyle. The new things are here. We need to examine those three

conditions: the condition, the character, and the changes that Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Yes, please?”

Participant: “You talk about a new creation, and being radically different. Instead of talking about other people, the Campus Crusades and the Billy Grahams, I look at the church that we go to, and whenever we walk in the door, are we that radically different? Are people looking at us as being that radically loving? You know, my heart has been broken these last few months. I don’t think I’m radically loving, and doing the things where people would say, ‘My gosh, he’s so absolutely different!’ One thing that I heard you say that gives me a little hope is that this new creation doesn’t have to happen like that. It can be the sanctification process. Still, my fear is people walking in the church and saying, ‘It’s like the world.’”

Bruce: “Well, that’s a true statement. You’re absolutely right. Now, give me time to go through this. I mean, this is not going to be complete in the next twenty minutes. We’re just touching the surface on this, so bear with me a little bit. Give me a chance. (Laughter.) All I’m trying to do, guys, is to help you understand the significance of what we are about. This is a royal radical work that’s going on in a person’s life. It is not the message we’re communicating from our pulpits. Yes, please?”

Participant: “And sadly, many churches today are, as previously mentioned, making an intentional effort to look like the world. A lot of churches, it seems, want to give off that vibe of ‘we’re no different!’”

Bruce: “You’re right. Now, let’s remember one thing, brothers. Let’s not talk about what the church isn’t. We need to talk about what the church should be. We’re for something; we’re not against something. I’m not against Campus Crusade. I’m not against evangelism. I’m for something. I’m for a biblical gospel that’s going to produce repentance and regeneration. That’s what I’m for. And the real issue is, we’re not against other people. We shouldn’t be saying, ‘them,’ ‘they,’ ‘those other people.’ We need to say, ‘what’s happening to me? What’s going on in my life? Am I a radically changed, new person? Is the evidence there that there is new in me and that the old is gone? What about me?’ So, Brian, I would ask you, what are you going to do about what you just said?”

Participant: “That’s what I’m praying about.”

Bruce: “There you go! Get on your knees, and say, ‘Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner. I pray that You would give me repentance.’ Beg God to do that. He doesn’t ever reject those who seek Him. And remember, He’s the cause for your seeking! He’s changed your desire! You see, that’s what we don’t preach. We just say, ‘You can do it on your own, whenever you want.’ You see, He’s the cause. That’s why I want you to see the four causes, because the originating cause is this: the eternal purpose of God in

His electing grace. That's where it all starts. And then you have the meritorious work of Christ. Then you have the effectual work of the Holy Spirit. Then you have the instrumental cause of faith, obedience and perseverance. You see, there's a cause behind our conversion. And so, let's not be against other people

Understand what I'm not saying. I'm not saying we should stop having evangelistic crusades. I'm not saying that! All I'm saying is, I am for something that goes on in evangelistic crusades, and that is the biblical message that will produce repentance and regeneration. That's what I'm for, and we need to be for that, not against other stuff. Yes, Don?"

Participant: "Yes, Bruce. It's interesting that the same apostle Paul who says here that 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away and all things have become new' also wrote Romans 7."

Bruce: "Absolutely."

Participant: "He talked about the struggle he had till the end of his life against sin. 'What I don't want to do I do, and what I ought to do I don't do.' So we ought to keep that in mind too."

Bruce: "Absolutely. Remember the three things about the instrumental cause? Faith, obedience and ... (Pause.) Perseverance. We've got to persevere in our efforts to be Christlike. Remember, the cause of the gospel is to restore the glory of man to reflect the glory of God. That's a process. It doesn't happen overnight. But all I'm saying is that we've preached a gospel that basically says that I'm the reason I made my choice. Do we understand that there is a sovereign God who is working behind it from eternity past. To cause it to happen? Yes, Thomas."

Participant: "I think the other thing we need to ask is, what are we willing to do? What am I willing to do as an individual? St. Clement had a great little essay on "Can the Rich Man Be Saved?" And in it, he says, "As you present the gospel to an individual, you must be willing to be his friend before you can expect him to respond to it."

Bruce: "Absolutely. Excellent! Guys, I'm not talking about being Bible bashers. Do you understand that? I'm not talking about that. If you're going to bash the bible over somebody's head, who's head are you going to bash it over? Your own! But you don't do it with other people. All I'm saying is, guys, there's a magnificent mystery behind regeneration. It's a royal work that is so radical that the only way you can describe it is a new creature. All I'm saying is, be for that! Don't be against other things. Let's be for something that can really change people's lives. Yes, Matt?"

Participant: "I had somebody say to me that we can't judge the root, because we don't know people's hearts, but we can inspect the fruit."

Bruce: “Yes, we can do that. Remember this: the reason Scripture says ‘Do not judge, lest ye be judged’—do you know the reason it says that? It’s because everything has already been pre-judged! It has already been pre-judged by Scripture! Everything has been pre-judged; there is nothing for us to do. We have not been given the ministry of judgment by the Holy Spirit. That’s His alone. So everything has already been pre-judged. The Scripture has done that. There is no role for us to judge. Notice what Paul says in the next verses. ‘We have the ministry of reconciliation.’ If you don’t understand 5:17—(go to 2 Corinthians 5)—look at 17. ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is past; behold, the new has come.’ Now this: ‘All this is from—“

Men: “God!”

Bruce: “‘From God!’ All of that is from God. the condition, the character, and the changes are from God. Paul’s summary statement is this: ‘All this is from God.’ And notice the result of that. ‘who through God reconciled us to Himself,’ then notice, ‘gave us the ministry of’ decision making. (Laughter.) What does it say? ‘The ministry of reconciliation.’ If you have not been reconciled yourself to God, there is no way you’ll be involved with reconciliation of other people. Do you understand that? ‘All this is from God,’ he is saying. And as a result, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation, and that comes through the preaching of a biblical gospel, not a man-centered, man-oriented gospel. Do you understand that? You’ve got to look at its context.

Now notice, as we read the rest, that is, the ministry of reconciliation. He defines it. ‘In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of’ decision making? ‘The message of reconciliation.’ Guys, that does not happen unless you understand 2 Corinthians 5:17, that as a Christian you are a brand new person. You’re a grand new creation; the old is gone, the new has come. When you understand that about yourself, and you have the assurance of your own personal salvation, because all of this is from God, now you’re in the position of being involved in the ministry of ... (Pause.) reconciliation, because God, in Christ, is reconciling the world to himself, and how does He do that? He does that through the preaching of the Biblical gospel—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. You see, it all fits together. Yes, Jay?”

Participant: “In regard to judging, I was just thinking that we are to judge the behavior, but God judges the heart, in that in judging, if there is a righteous kind of judgment, we are supposed to exercise it with careful discernment. I just wanted to say that, because a lot of times, even in regard to sin, if we go and we talk to someone about sin, that word comes out, ‘Who are we to judge?’ But God’s word says that we are to carefully do that.”

Bruce: “Well, there is a difference between judging somebody’s salvation and judgment against sin in this world. We need to be angry, but we need to be angry about the right things at the right time in the right way. Are you angry about sin in the church? We ought to be; that’s righteous anger. We ought to be righteously angry about that. Jesus was righteously angry at the temple when He upset the tables. You see, we need to be angry about the right things. That is not a judgment issue. The Scripture has already pre-judged that. We need to be angry about the right things, at the right time, in the right manner. That’s the righteous judgment that we have. That’s another responsibility we have as the body of Christ. Yes?”

Participant: “It’s a matter of judging the conduct of believers in the church, like you’re saying, but not unbelievers. What the world is doing, that’s their business. Paul says, ‘What have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?’”

Bruce: “Who do you judge, guys? You judge who? Yourselves! Start there, and quitting doing it with anybody else! Spend the rest of your life judging yourselves. You don’t need to worry about other people. You can’t be their Holy Spirit.”

Participant: “I think that what Paul is getting at, though, is that if we do see serious misconduct within the church, there should be church discipline. It shouldn’t just be—“

Bruce: “That’s a function of church leadership, absolutely. There needs to be church discipline. The keys to the kingdom are three, three keys to the kingdom.”

Participant: “There should be church leadership first.”

Bruce: “Absolutely! One is the role of the senior pastor to produce church leaders for the next generation. That’s the primary role. I was talking with a pastor recently who said, ‘I’ve got 32 elders in the church. Our document for church administration calls us to have 32 elders. We have a tough time finding them.’

I said, ‘Really? Have you looked at the 24 qualifications of an elder?’ But he said, ‘If I did that, we wouldn’t have any.’ I said, ‘You’ve just outlined your job position for the next ten years.’ (Laughter.) Now that’s your job description, the next ten years, to produce people who will meet those 24 standards. That’s what your job description is as a senior pastor when you preach in the pulpit.’ Yes, Don?”

Participant: “Bruce, we’re all familiar with the scenario though that people today, especially in this country because of the easy believe-ism you were just talking about, that there are all kinds of people who say they are Christians, but there is no fruit.”

Bruce: “Right.”

Participant: “So what do we do? Do we just say, ‘That’s okay!’ I’m not saying we have to judge necessarily, but we have to have some kind of thing where we can say there is discernment, whether it’s the seven tests of 1 John, or whatever. What do we do with people who profess to be Christians, but who live carnal lifestyles, don’t have any interest in the things of God, etc. What do we do?”

Bruce: “Preach from the pulpit what the Scripture teaches.”

Participant: “But they don’t go to church.”

Bruce: “Somebody else might take it to them, might bring them. What is church expansion? It’s when you as a friend invite somebody else to come. That’s church expansion. Preaching is not going to draw people to the church. It’s when you invite your neighbor to the church to come and hear the preaching. That’s church expansion. That’s when you develop membership. Preaching is not going to draw anybody. The world is not going to be drawn to good biblical preaching. The reason they’re going to come is because you understand 2 Corinthians 5:17, you are a new creature, and you have a ministry of reconciliation with somebody that you’ve invited to church, and you’ve said, “would you come with me, because it means a lot to me.” Invite them to church, so they can hear biblical preaching. But Biblical preaching is not going to draw anybody, because the world is not interested in that. They’re going to come because you invite them, because you’ve gone through a radical change in your life, and they’ve seen it. Yes, sir?”

Participant: “Aren’t we as believers to confront the sin in the world?”

Bruce: “Absolutely! You do it in the pulpit. The pastor stands up and says, ‘Stop it!’”

Participant: “No, I’m talking about in the workplace.”

Bruce: “Oh, absolutely. Yes, go ahead.”

Participant: “I was going to say, the conversation sounds a lot about me as an individual judging others, and my theological bent is to say, “That’s the church’s job, and that of the leaders.” That’s really the job of the church, and not of individuals.”

Bruce: “That’s correct. Who has the authority to execute church discipline? Church leaders. That’s a function of church leadership. God always works through a chain of command. What the Father ordained the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies. You never see the Holy Spirit trying to be Jesus. There is always a chain of command. He works through the chain of command in the church. That’s church leadership. The great role of the pastor in a church is to create church leaders, who will maintain the

purity, the dignity, the honor and the glory of the church to the glory of God. That's church leadership. Yes, please?"

Participant: "But if I'm just a lay member and the leadership of the church doesn't know about something that's going on in one of my brother's lives, I should still come to him quietly—."

Bruce: "Who?"

Participant: "For example, if I know of something going on in one of my brother's or sister's lives, another Christian, am I not supposed to come to them—."

Bruce: "I can't be your Holy spirit; I can't tell you what to do."

Participant: "I'm not saying judging them, but just letting—."

Bruce: "I can't tell you what to do. I'm not your Holy Spirit."

Participant: "Matthew 18."

Bruce: "Matthew 18 is the solution. You go by yourself. If that doesn't work, you get the other people involved. There are outlines of how to do this. My point is this: I can't tell you what to do when you see sin in the church. You have to go on your knees before the Lord, and say, 'Father, show me what to do. What is it I need to do. Give me Biblical instruction so I can do it correctly.' I can't tell you what to do. I can tell you what I would do, but I can't tell you what you should do. Make sure you're doing it biblically. Ted is right. The role of church discipline is the function of the church leaders. Church discipline is not something you do to a person, it's something that God works in a person."

Participant: "And that's the way it has to be."

Bruce: "It has to be that way. That's the function of the church. The three keys to the kingdom are these: a biblical gospel—preaching the gospel,—the administration of Baptism and Communion, and church discipline. Those are the three keys to the kingdom, and only the church can do that. It is not the individual's responsibility to do that; it is the church's role to do that, and that is the function of church leadership. Yes, please?"

Participant: "Wouldn't we be busy enough just exposing the sin in our own lives?"

Bruce: "Absolutely. That's what I said. Test your own fruit, guys! Don't worry about 'them.' Worry about 'me.' That's the issue. Quit worrying about other people."

God will take care of that, because He's the originating cause. Just evaluate your own life. Make sure that you are living a life of faith. Make sure that you are obedient, and make sure that you are persevering, as one of the evidences of your conversion and your regeneration. Worry about yourself. You'll be surprised what happens in the ministry of reconciliation that occurs as a result of that. Yes, please?"

Participant: "What I was going to say is, the purpose of all discipline, and the purpose of any kind of confrontation is the ministry of reconciliation.

Bruce: "Remember, the whole thing is a ministry of reconciliation. Yes, please?"

Participant: "I truly keep getting caught on a particular theme throughout here, and it seems to be timed. We should be asking ourselves, "Well, they converted after a Billy Graham crusade, but now they're not coming to church." Well, we don't know if in twenty years they will. We're looking at this in a mortal time frame, and I think we have to, maybe, I don't want to say relax a little bit, but maybe judge this on a broader perspective, other than, you know, when are they going to come, or when is this going to happen? We don't know when. The seed was planted, but we keep focusing on this time frame issue of when things are going to occur, and I think that kind of compresses our focus.

Bruce: We don't know that, because we're not the originating cause. All I'm saying is that we need to be sensitive to those people. We need to take them to the Scripture, encourage them, and instruct them as much as we can in the Biblical disciplines of the church, so the Holy Spirit will use the Scripture, because He is the One who guides them into all truth. All we can do is take people to the Scripture. You don't judge them; you take them to the Scripture, let the Holy Spirit do His work, and it may be in a matter of time that it was a legitimate conversion. It might have been a false one; we don't know that. The answer is this. When somebody asks me the question, 'Well, she went forward at a Crusade, or whatever, walked forward in an evangelism campaign at church, and I don't see any evidence. What do you think?' And I say, 'Well, I don't.' Here's my response. All you can say is this. There is not enough evidence to say that she is a believer, and there is not enough evidence to say that she is not. We just don't know. You don't know that. It is not our role to judge that. All we can do is take them to the Scripture. I would say, 'Go to 1 John.' Take them to the seven tests and seven traits of a true believer and say, 'examine yourself.' Let the Holy Spirit work in the instruction of the Scripture to examine that person. You and I don't examine them. There is nothing in the Scripture that says you and I are to examine a person's motives, or their methods. We are to take them to the Scripture and let the Holy Spirit work. I would take them to the book of 1 John, and let them see the seven tests of a true believer, and the seven traits of a person born of God, and let the Holy Spirit work. That will take care of all the time involved. Yes, Bill?"

Participant: “I think this goes back to what we were talking about before. We should be preaching the gospel, not decision making. If we’re preaching decision making, we’re flawed. Our call is to preach the gospel, and not to worry about these other things.”

Bruce: “My question is, what content are we saying is the gospel? That’s the issue for me. That’s what I’m for. That’s why churches don’t want me. There are people in the church who do, but the church at large doesn’t want me, because the message I’m going to give is not something that’s going to fit into the world system.”

Participant: “You’re holding up a mirror.”

Bruce: “That’s exactly right. You see, when you preach the gospel, you’re holding up the mirror in that person’s face. They’ve got to evaluate themselves in view of the response to the originating cause of God’s electing grace would be this: ‘Lord, have mercy on me, the sinner.’ And I plead for my salvation in the work of Christ. You see, that’s what biblical preaching does. That’s what I’m for, brothers. I’m not against other things, so please understand what I’m not saying. I’m not against evangelism. I’m really for evangelism, but in the right context, and the right message, because I know what powerful preaching can do. It can convert a person’s life through regeneration. It’s not going to be through easy believe-ism, and easy decision making. That’s my whole point. Anything else?”

Participant: “Again, I think it’s just a matter of staying with that person, keeping them in prayer, and keeping them in the Word.”

Bruce: “You know, one of my mentors in Scotland years ago, we talked about discipleship. He said, ‘You know, if you really look at it Biblically, you can probably only disciple about five or six people in your life, if you’re going to do it right. And part of that is, you’re in their hip pocket for life.’ You can’t do that with masses. You can only do that with a few people. You see, that’s what discipleship is about. It’s not mass discipleship, it’s personal, helping people understand what reconciliation is. And that takes time and effort, and sometimes you just can’t do that en masse. You can’t do that by having 12 steps of this and that, and now you’re a disciple. It’s your life; you’re bearing your life, you’re giving your life to somebody. That’s what a disciple is. And you can only do that with a few people.”

Participant: “I was thinking. Could it be, in the context of the parable of the sower, that Jesus was talking more to us in the church, saying, ‘In your enthusiasm or in your way, you’re just going to spread the seeds all over the place. And they’re not going to all take. Why don’t you focus on the good soil?’ He didn’t say it that way, but I’m just thinking, is it more of an indictment against us to just take the seed and spread the gospel everywhere, which isn’t a bad idea, but just to be aware that it’s not all going to take.

You have to look for good soil. Not many farmers go out and throw seeds on the walkways. You know, the parable is sort of confusing in some ways. Maybe it's an indictment against us, being so casual and throwing our seeds everywhere, as opposed to finding good soil."

Bruce: "Well, we need to balance that off with this. What is the commission to the church? Go into the world and preach the gospel to all creatures. Now we cannot be satisfied till what? All creatures have heard the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, repentance and faith. You and I cannot go to sleep, we cannot rest, until that occurs. That is the mission and the role of the church collectively, not you and I personally, but collectively. The great power is the church, and we need to do all the things we're talking about, and they need to be done in your local church, in my local church. Am I influencing my local church to be what we're talking about today? That's my responsibility, because I'm a member of the family of God in my local church. The power resides in the church, not as the administrator of grace, but as the collective body of Christ which then can be the message of reconciliation. So I'm not saying the church is the dispenser of grace; I'm not saying that. But I'm saying this: there is power in the church collectively. Look at the power we have in this room. We're a little church, aren't we? Look at the power that resides in this room, and the implications that can happen because of us. Our power resides not in one person standing up here teaching, but in the power of our receiving what the Holy Spirit teaches us. That's where our power is. It's like teamwork. Whatever I do well, I'm going to do it better when I do it with you. That's the vision of the church. Whatever I do well by myself, I'm going to do it better when I do it with people in the church. The question is, is the church going to accept that? We don't know that. We can't be that. Yes, please?"

Participant: "Was it Spurgeon who said, 'Preach the gospel constantly, and if need be, use the bible?' Your life, your walk with Christ, is the living word of God. I had a teaching at one time from a pastor who was teaching a class, and he said, 'You should live your life in such a way that, if somebody should say, 'What is it about you that I need?' I've had that happen to me more than once."

Bruce: "Well, ideally, that's what you want, because a radical change is so significant that they see the old is gone, the new has come. You see, when you and I have relationships, ministry is about relationships. It's not about regurgitation of biblical facts. It's about a relationship to persons, and how they begin to see your life as such a radical change.

Now this was all introduction; I haven't even gotten to the second paragraph. (Laughter.) But that's okay. Come next week and we'll continue. But my point is this, brothers. I'm not against things. I'm really for something. I'm really for biblical preaching that produces repentance and regeneration. That's what I try to figure out. How can I do that? It's very, very humbling to realize that God permits you to do something like that, because it's all of God. Remember the summary statement in verse

18: 'All this is from God.' Salvation, brothers, is a mystery. Now let it be a mystery, and don't try to make it human. Don't make it humanly effort oriented. Let it be a mystery, because the Holy Spirit works specifically in the hearts of individuals because of God's originating effectual call of the work of the Holy Spirit. Let's pray.

Well, Lord, we kind of went all over the place today. I just thank You for the leading of Your Holy Spirit. I trust that it was Spirit led. And Father, again, I would have to say, protect us. Protect us from ourselves, from thinking that we have all the answers, that we're the great spiritual gurus of this world. Father, have mercy upon me, the sinner. May it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen."