

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
“THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION” PART 3
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Lord Jesus, it's with great humility and anticipation that we come to sit at Your feet this day. Have mercy upon us, the sinner. May You be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Don, you said you had a question you wanted to ask.

Participant: Yes, Bruce. Piggybacking from last week, you talked about the weapons of mass deception of Satan, and, of course, Bishop Rodgers did a very good job of covering those. I just wondered about your view of how serious those are. I mean, is it fatal error, so that it could send you to hell, or is it an intramural debate among Christians, like the mode and recipients of baptism, or somewhere in between? And then, related to that, you said last week that we need to keep our salvation a mystery, and I certainly agree with that. But also, the whole thing of logic,--I mean, Paul reasoned with the Jews. Peter said that we are to have a reason for the hope that is within us. Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 presents a very logical and reasoned argument about the resurrection. So, I'm just wondering how you balance those. So that's my two-pronged question.

Participant: Easy one. (Laughter.)

Participant: Next? (Laughter.)

Bruce: Okay, you're dismissed. (Laughter.) I would say that the answer to the question is yes. (Laughter.)

Participant: Bruce, would you repeat? It's very hard to hear.

Bruce: Yes. Don's questions were that we talked last week, and I made the statement about the fact that, in America today, Satan has many weapons of mass deception. I use that description to play off of spiritual warfare. Satan has many weapons of mass deception, and many of those are in the church, in the pulpits, because we're hearing what I would call a false gospel, and that's why I asked Bishop Rodgers to go through the historical battle that has been going on in the church. It's no different from anything that has been going on for the last couple hundred years, and so we're still battling with that. And that basically has to do with your concept of sin. Your view of sin determines your view of your salvation. And that's where logic comes in. So there's nothing wrong with being logical, but you have to start with the premise of truth, and then you make it logical. But you don't start with a falsehood or deception and make it logical.

Let me just give you a logical illustration. If you hold the position that man is sick, then logic says this. You follow that all the way to the end, and man can have a choice, because he still can do something. That's logic! And they're absolutely correct. If you hold that position, that man is sick in his sins, then you can throw the life jacket to the dying person, and in his very last breath he can reach out and do something, because he is sick, and he has still got enough energy to do something. That's logic!

The other thing is also logic, the message of Paul and of the Scripture. If you hold the position that Scripture has taught us, that we're dead in our trespasses and sins, then logic says that that dead person can do what? Nothing! That's logic! That's what Paul does. So we need to be very logical, but you have to start with your premise. What is my view of sin, because that will determine everything about your view of salvation logically.

And so I would have to say, (now understand what I'm saying in the context of this conversation), those who hold the position that man is sick are correct in their logic, by saying that man can do something to earn his salvation or choose it. He has some ability to do something. They're correct in that logic. Now I refute that as being accurate. I say that is a weapon of mass deception, because the Scripture says you are dead in your trespasses and sins. You have to deal with that. If you are dead in your trespasses and sins, then regeneration is a mystery, because God does something supernatural. And so logic plays a wonderful part in it, but you have to start with the point that Bishop Rodgers made last week, and it's your view of sin that determines the logic of how you are going to communicate the gospel of Christ. Don, is that helpful?

Participant: How serious is that?

Bruce: Very serious, because it is the truth that sets people free. Now, I am not in a position to say that people are going to hell because they've heard that. God will take any amount of truth that He wants to use in a person's life, because of the wonderful, compassionate doctrine of election. He will bring him to saving faith. That's why the Lord Jesus has not returned. He has not returned because all the elect have not come to saving faith. When that happens, Jesus will fulfill His statement where He says, "I have not lost any of them that You gave me." Now we are love gifts that God gives to the Son, and He will not let any of those whom God gave to Him as love gifts perish before He returns. And so we don't wait for the tsunamis to occur to give us the indication of the Lord's return. We understand that this is when all the elect come to saving faith. When that occurs, the Lord Jesus returns. So it is a fatal error, but I cannot say that people are doomed to hell because they are listening to something in their pulpits. All I would say is, I think we have to be very, very careful and ask ourselves, What am I saying, and what am I listening to? You have to take it upon yourself. What am I listening to, and what am I saying, not what somebody else does. It is not my role to be a scrutinizer of every sermon I hear. That is not my role. My role is to make sure I'm communicating the truth, and what it is that I believe. And that's where we have to take the position.

So it is a very fatal error, because there are a lot of people who are deceived. It's what you would call, Scripturally, a spurious conversion. That means false. There are a lot of people who have had a false conversion. They think they have been converted, because they've done something. But is there evidence in their lives? That's why it is so important that you understand the seven tests of 1 John, the seven tests of a person who has been born of God, and the seven tests of true saving faith. If somebody is questioning that, you take them to the book of 1 John. The book of 1 John says, "I write you these things so that you may know that you have eternal life." One of those things is the seven tests of true saving faith. And so it's important that you take people back to the Scripture to let the Scripture evaluate their conversion, not their experience to evaluate

their conversion. Somebody says, I was converted because of such and such. Well that may be true. I don't know that. But all I would say is, take that up against what the Scripture says is a true conversion, and where do you shape up compared to what the Scripture says? We always have to go back to the Scripture. So, Don, I do believe that it is very, very deceptive; it's very, very dangerous, because I think many churches in America today have been deceived into thinking that they may have saving faith, and they may or may not. And that's an error that can be damning, because they are believing in a false conversion, and it may not have been the mystery of regeneration that we've been talking about. Yes?

Participant: Bruce, if you're with someone, and the argument might be about the elect, okay, and someone will say, Well, what's the harm if the pulpit preaching needs corrected, because those people are the elect anyway, so it's not going to influence or impact it. How do you deal with that, because that would be an argument to go back, if somebody negates your stance, let's say? Does that make sense?

Bruce: Yes, it does. You guys are making it tough on me this morning. (Laughter.) That eliminates the responsibility of man. There is the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, and they go together. You cannot eliminate one without the other. Now, can I resolve that? The answer is no. Do I preach it? The answer is yes, because the One who can resolve that is God Himself. So you have to be careful not to eliminate the responsibility of man and saying, I'm just going to do nothing; God's going to do His thing. We would then be disobedient, because we would not go into the world to preach the gospel to all creatures. Those are our marching orders for the church. So you have to balance the sovereignty of God in election with the responsibility of man in what we have. And if you do that which you're suggesting, then that would be eliminating the responsibility of man. You don't want to get into an argument about that. You want to take people back to the truth, and let the Holy Spirit do His work. That is His ministry, to guide people into all truth. We just need to make sure that we're communicating the Biblical gospel, not an Americanized version. Yes, Ted?

Participant: The only thing I was going to say is that we're obliged to always do the right thing. And if you say, I'm not going to follow the Spirit of truth, then you're saying I'm satisfied with a second-rate product. You always want to pursue that is truth.

Bruce: See, our passage we're going to continue to look at, brothers, I think will help us in just a moment. Yes?

Participant: Peter and Paul had a bit of a theological debate. Do you think Peter had a spurious conversion because he was—

Bruce: I'll ask him when I see him. (Laughter.) We need to be careful, brothers, that we don't read things into the Scripture. If you don't know, just say, I don't know. I do know that the Scripture preserves their debate for reasons that we need to understand. But it's not for me to figure out what position either of those people are in. So I really can't say that. So we've got to be careful not to develop our preconceptions of what we think the situation was. Bishop Rodgers, do you want to rescue me anyway? (Laughter.)

Participant: I want to thank you for doing us a great favor, because what you're offering in these studies to Bible believing Christians is of global importance in terms of

presenting, delivering, believing the gospel and helping people. So thank you, Dr. Bickel.

Bruce: Well, let's pray again and ask the Lord to go before us, because we want to continue looking at our passage. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter five. Father, just guide us into all truth. May Your Holy Spirit be the One who will direct us and be our teacher this morning, for Your sake, for Jesus. Amen.

I want to read this again, because it's going to be in the context of the questions you've asked. Now we need to always keep things in context. So look at 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning at verse 16, down through 21. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer." In other words, he's saying, something happened to me that my view of Christ changed. How I view Christ changed. Now therefore, as a result of my different view of Christ, I see Him differently. I used to view Him from a human standard. Now I see Him in a Divinity standard, a Divine standard; I see Him differently.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." In other words, when your view of Christ changes, you change, because Christ changes you. And the old stuff of your life—the inclinations, the mindset—those are all changed and refined, to be replaced with new ones. You have a new desire. There is a whole new desire that you didn't have beforehand, when you viewed Christ improperly.

"All this is from God." It's a wonderful summary statement. What is from God? All this! Your view of Christ has changed; it's of God. The fact that the old has gone and the new has come is all of God

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Now this shows us what God did to us. He reconciled us to Himself, and what does He do through us? He gives us the message of reconciliation. In other words, we are to give away to other people what He did to us. We just explain to them how we were reconciled to God. That's the message that I have. Let me tell you my story about how God reconciled me to Himself. And we'll get into the content of that in a moment.

"That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." Now there is a description of our ministry. And we'll talk about that this morning.

Therefore, as a result of our being entrusted with the message, here's how you need to view yourself. "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us." Not manipulating, but making an appeal. An appeal means you've got to have the right facts. You've got to have the right truth. The appeal is made because you're proclaiming the truth which you know, because you've experienced it because of your own personal reconciliation.

"God making His appeal through us. We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." That's the ministry of the message of the gospel: be reconciled! It's not about eternal life! It's about the removal of the alienation of a relationship to a holy

God because of our personal sin. That's the message of the gospel. That is not a message of mass deception. That is the message of mass description. It's the message of the gospel.

And then he describes it in summary, which we'll look at next week. "For our sake, He made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

Now when you take a look at that passage, brothers, we can break it down into two major themes. First of all, the preparation for ministry. God prepares us to do what He wants us to do. He always prepares us. God never requires of us something He doesn't prepare us to do beforehand. So He prepares us by reconciling us to Himself. That's the preparation for ministry. You've been reconciled to God by the gospel of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit. When that has happened, you are now prepared to be the presentation of ministry. So the second phase of this particular ministry would be, after we look at the preparation for ministry, we come to the presentation of ministry.

Now when we looked at the preparation, we looked at three critical words, and they were words that we looked at. And I'm not saying that you need to use these words in your verbalization when you share your faith. Those three words are propitiation, reconciliation and expiation. Now I'm not saying that you need to use those words per se, but you need to teach the concepts behind them. You need to teach the truth behind them.

Basically, it's this. Propitiation, because of the sacrifice of Christ, means that God has been appeased. His holy law has been appeased, and He has been satisfied because of the work of Christ. You need to talk about that. You don't necessarily need to use the word propitiation; I'm not suggesting that. As Charles Spurgeon said, and many times you've heard me say it, "You don't take people to the university of predestination and election till they've gone to the college of repentance and faith." In other words, you don't start talking about propitiation. "Let me talk to you about propitiation." They're going to say, "What in the world are you talking about?" But you can talk about the concept, about the fact that God's wrath against me has been alleviated. He has been appeased because of the sacrifice of Christ.

The second word we need to talk about is reconciliation. That means the strain of the relationship has been removed. Alienation has been removed because of the sacrifice of Christ, because God has been propitiated by Christ's sacrifice. This is extremely logical.

And the third thing is expiation. Because of the sacrifice of Christ, He paid for our sin. We are forgiven, and our sins can be removed. So those are the three words theologically that we need to have in our presentation of the message.

Now you've been prepared to give that message because of what? You've been reconciled to God! He's done that to you! He has prepared you to go talk about what has happened to you! That's how you give your testimony! Your testimony is not about your experience per se. It's what's behind the experience of your being reconciled. Let me tell you about what God has done in my life! And then you talk about propitiation. You talk about reconciliation. You talk about expiation. Now I'm not saying you need to use those words. Here's a logical way of doing it, and Don's question was absolutely correct.

The gospel is very, very logical, and we need to be able to take the truth of the Scripture, and communicate that logically.

Here's a very, very simple way of doing it. When you look at the content of the gospel, it includes about six features which include the three words propitiation, reconciliation and expiation. First of all, the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. You start with the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. That will deal with the two issues of propitiation and reconciliation. You need to help people understand. Why is God not appeased in your present condition? It was like my dad, when I asked him when I was twelve years old, from Romans 5:10. "Am I God's enemy?" The Scripture says, While we were God's enemies, He reconciled us to Himself. You see, I asked my dad. I said, "Dad, am I God's enemy?" I was twelve or thirteen at the time. But I'll never forget, and I'll always appreciate my dad's courage and mercy and strength in saying, "Yes, you are." And I said, "I don't want to be." He said, "Read the rest of the verse." And we talked about what? Reconciliation! He then walked me through how I could be reconciled to God, not God reconciled to me. He didn't use the word propitiation. He didn't use the word reconciliation. He didn't use the word expiation. But he taught me the concept behind it, logically. He took me to the fact that God needs to be appeased, because of my sin. And he took me down to my pastor who explained all this to me.

So, when you start with the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, you're going to cover all those thoughts. You're going to talk about why is it that God needs to be appeased? It's because you are dead in your trespasses and sins. Now, if you hold the position that you're sick, that changes the way that you're logically going to come to a conclusion. The conclusion is: Yes, I can reach up and grab that life saver, or I can take the medicine at the hospital. I can do something. But if you understand the position of the Scripture, that says you are dead in your trespasses and sins, something supernatural and mysterious must happen. And that's what the gospel of Christ does. That's why Paul says in Romans 1, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power." What is the it? It's the content of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.

And then we talk about the Person and work of Christ. How is it that God is appeased? How is it that our sins can be forgiven? You talk about the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ, and His sacrifice at the cross. You're talking about all three of those words when you begin to talk about the Person and work of Christ. You see, it's really not about you! It's really not about me! It's about Christ and His glory!

And so when you start with the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, and then go logically to the Person and work of Christ, you're following that wonderful progression that we see right here in the Scripture, that God does something to you to prepare you to go and proclaim the message. And then you talk about repentance and faith. It's the most logical way that you can present the gospel in my mind. Start with the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of man. Then you talk about the Person and work of Christ, His sinless perfection and perfect obedience, which appeased God because of the sacrifice on the cross. You see, you're covering everything. You're covering those three words without mentioning them. And down the road, hopefully they'll understand. When they go to a church that's teaching the Scripture, they'll explain what those three words mean.

And so they'll say, Oh yes! That's what I understand, because it happened to me! I was reconciled to God.

So God prepares us to do something. And so, very logically, we can proclaim the gospel of Christ by starting with the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and then repentance and faith. Repentance and faith is our responsibility to believe. Jesus' first message in the book of Mark was "repent and believe." It's a command. Do you realize that repentance is a command, not an option?

Now if you hold the position, logically, that man is sick, then it becomes an option. It's like the drill sergeant at Paris Island in South Carolina, who said to the Marine recruit, "Right face!" And he said, "Check with me later." You see, if you hold the position that man is sick, you can say, "Well, check with me later." But if you hold the position that man is dead, there is nothing you can do, apart from saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Yes, Don?

Participant: Okay, Bruce, I'm going to put a fly in the ointment. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick." How do you deal with that?

Bruce: Sick is defined by being dead. Next? (Laughter.) You have to understand the context of that and then define it. Sick means dead, because you confirm that with the Scripture.

So do you see what I'm saying, guys? You're being prepared for something, and that is to be the proclaimers of a message that occurred to you, because you have been reconciled to God. Now that's how God prepares us. God never requires of us something He doesn't equip us to do beforehand. You've been equipped to be the presenter of a message. And what is that message? You give the message of what God did to you in His mercy and His grace, by talking about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith.

Now let's talk about our responsibility that we have as the messengers. So this is the presentation of the message. You look at that in verses 19-21. Now God has prepared us by giving us the ministry of reconciliation. Now we see the terms of this ministry of reconciliation. Our ministry is the ministry of proclamation, not manipulation. We are proclaimers, not manipulators. "And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation." Not the power; He is the power. We are not the power. He has given us the message of reconciliation.

The idea of "committed to" is this. It's a concept of placing inside, or making a deposit. God has made a deposit. He has placed something inside you about the message which you and I are to communicate. That's the result of your being prepared to be a messenger. And that is the announcement to the world of what God in His royal grace has done by bringing a radical change by reconciling myself to Himself. That's the message that has been deposited into you. And you can talk from your very personal experience. Let me tell you what has happened to me, as a result of the grace of God.

We talked last week about the three great features of this message of reconciliation. We've already touched on that. First of all, it's a message about God. It's a message

about man. And it's a message about Christ. The holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith.

But notice. We've been commissioned as what? We have been commissioned as messengers. And we're ambassadors. We've been given a message to give to God's enemies. That is what an ambassador does. He speaks to God's enemies. That's what an ambassador for a country does. He goes into those lands, and he speaks the message of the authority he represents

The Greek word for ambassador is the word *presbutes*. It has two uses historically. It corresponds to the Latin word, of which it is a translation, *legatis*. Now let me give you history, to understand the significance of why Paul is using this word. You are an ambassador for Christ.

Roman provinces were divided into two types. One was under the direct control of the senate, and the other was under the direct control of the emperor, two different types of provinces. And the distinction was made on this basis. Provinces which were peaceful, and had no troops in them, were known as senatorial provinces. They were under the rule of the senate. But those provinces which were turbulent, and had troops stationed in them, were imperial provinces, and they were under the direct control of the emperor.

Now when the Roman senate decided that an area should become a province, they sent into it ten *legati/presbuti*, or ten ambassadors. They sent into that province ten ambassadors, along with the victorious general. Here's what they did. They set up boundaries. They made treaties. They would write a constitution. And they would train the captured people to become Roman citizens. Now the people who did that were the ten legal ambassadors, who were sent by the senate, to go in and make this area become a province of Rome.

Now notice, the victory had already been won in this area of geographical description. It had already been won. But the people were still hostile, and they needed to have somebody go and communicate something to train them to become Roman citizens. That's what the ten ambassadors did.

The world is like an imperial province, in which we operate. The victory has already been won by Christ, but the people in it are still hostile. They are hostile to the gospel. You see, that's why the gospel is so offensive to people, because people are hostile to it. They like the good things that He offers, but they don't like the content of the gospel. You see, the reason that people in Jesus' time rejected Him was not because He said, "Come unto Me." They rejected Him because He said He was holy. You see, that's why they rejected Him. And that's why people are going to reject the gospel of Christ, because they are hostile to what? God's holiness.

Look at a couple examples. When you talk about holiness in the Scripture, it always refers to the otherness of God. Here are a couple of examples. When Jesus calmed the storm. And the sailors—these were erudite; they were very, very well seasoned sailors, and the storm came up, and they woke Jesus up, who was sleeping, and they said, Master, aren't you afraid of the storm? And He said, "Peace; be still!" And what was their response when nature immediately responded to Christ? They didn't say, "Thank you!"

They said this. Who is this man? “What manner of man is this?” In other words, they saw the otherliness of God. You see, when you talk about the holiness of God, you’re talking about this otherness side of Him that we don’t understand.

Another example would be Peter, who was walking on the water. He began to sink, and Jesus pulled him out and saved him. What did Peter say? He didn’t say, “Thank you for saving me.” He said, I’m a man of sinful nature, because he saw himself compared to the holiness of God.

So when we talk about the holiness of God, that’s what is offensive to people. It’s God’s holiness that offends people, because they’re hostile. That is what you and I are to communicate. We’re to communicate the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man to a hostile group of people, where the victory has already been won. This is like an imperial province, and you and I are some of those ten ambassadors sent to communicate a message. That’s what we do.

The world is like an imperial province. The victory has already been won by Christ, but the people in it are still hostile. Paul says that we are the messengers sent by God, through whom the message of reconciliation will be communicated—notice!—to set treaties between God and man, and set the boundaries of life. We do the same thing with the gospel message that those ten legal ambassadors did to the Roman Empire. We bring to the enemies of God the conditions on which people become citizens of the kingdom of God, and members of His family. That’s what we communicate. We do that through the gospel of Christ.

Now three things about ambassadors will help us understand our responsibility. First of all, notice! Ambassadors live in a foreign land. You and I live in a foreign land. We live in this world, but we’re citizens of heaven. We live in a foreign land. We need to recognize that. And yet we are communicating a message that has already been won to people who are hostile in the land in which we live. But we are foreigners in this land; we are the original ET’s. We are, in that sense, extraterrestrials, because our citizenship is in heaven, but our lives are in this earth.

It’s the illustration I’ve given several times. A ship performs most effectively when it’s in the water. So you want the ship in the water, but you don’t want any water in the ship. You see, we’re in the world. But we don’t want the world in us.

That goes back to our holiness. “Be holy, because I am holy.” That means this. Essentially, the word holiness, when you take it and look at it with the character of God, it means that you’re identified with something that is uncommon. In other words, to be holy means you’re not identified with that which is common. In our holiness, we are not to be identified with that which is common in the world. This is the description of weapons of mass deception. What is our theory of ministry? We need to look like the world.

One of my friends yesterday at the study downtown was telling me about a bulletin at a church somewhere in Moon Township that says this: “Our pastor wears jeans; you can, too.” That’s what it says on the church. Now to be holy, it says that you’re not identified with that which is common. If we’re to be holy in the church, we are not to be identified with things that are common in this world, because we’re messengers of an uncommon

standard. We're messengers of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. We are not to be identified with that which is common! And yet we take the whole ministry mindset that says this: We're going to use the means of man to reconcile people to God. God never used the means of man. He'll use man as the means, but he'll never use man's means. Do you understand the difference? He'll never use the means of man (wearing blue jeans to church.)

Now what's the real issue there? Well, you'll have to ask yourself that question. This is not a diatribe on what you wear to church. All I'm saying is, if we're going to be holy, and we're to be representatives of a whole different system known as the kingdom of God, we're living in a foreign land where things are different. And we are to be radically different because of who we represent. We are to be identified as something that is uncommon. Ideally, people would walk into our churches and say, "What manner of people are these?" rather than saying, "Oh, this is just like my MTV show." You see, in my judgment again, I think a person who walks into a Biblically based church should have two responses. One of them should be this: they really feel uncomfortable. They've got to feel uncomfortable, because they've got to say, I've never seen anything like this! There's something different about this! And the other thing they need to experience is to feel absolutely welcome. That's the balance we need to achieve, the need to feel absolutely uncomfortable because you're experiencing something so different from what is common in the world. A worship service should not be like an MTV show! You can go watch that on TV. You shouldn't get that at church. You see, that's what's common in this world. We've adopted the style of the world, thinking that it's going to attract people.

I was involved in a situation recently with a church that was changing its name. And I sat there and listened to people who said, We need to change the name so it appeals to young people. It's not going to be the name that draws people to the church. Who is going to draw people to the church? You will! I will! They'll come to church because I invited them, not because the name is a nice, catchy, little marketing name. And so they threw out all these wonderful names that had marketing theories behind them. Never once was the name or the message of Christ mentioned.

So all I'm saying is, guys, you need to understand that we represent the holiness of God. And that means that we need to be identified with that which is uncommon, and not be identified with that which is common. Yes?

Participant: It seems to me that it's all just an effort to avoid the work that we're called to do, which is evangelism, thinking that if we look cool enough, they'll come to us, and we won't have to go out to them.

Bruce: Well, there are all sorts of reasons. Certainly that's one of them. But what we're talking about is evangelism. This passage is talking about evangelism. You go give away what God has prepared you to do, and that is to communicate a message. That's the message that has been deeply implanted within you. That is evangelism. Every sermon ought to be evangelistic in its content, because you never know to whom you're preaching—the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares. All preaching is evangelistic, because you're communicating a message about Christ. The message is the

invitation. The invitation is not what you put at the end of the message. The invitation is the content of what you're teaching. That is the invitation, because the Holy Spirit works.

So the first thing we need to realize is that an ambassador lives in a foreign land. Secondly, ambassadors speak for their country. It is the message and policy of the country they represent that the ambassadors convey. It is the message and policy of the country we represent that we communicate. We're talking about the kingdom of God and the policy of reconciliation. We speak for Christ, and say just what He would say. That's what an ambassador does. An ambassador doesn't speak his or her own mind; he speaks what his authority would say. That is our message that has been given to us.

And thirdly, the honor of the country one represents is in the hands of the ambassador. Do you realize that the honor of the kingdom of God is in your and my hands, because we have been prepared to be one of the ten *presbuti/legati*?—one of the ten ambassadors to go into a foreign land? The reputation and honor and glory of the country, the kingdom of God that we represent, is in our hands by what we live and what we say. The people who are hostile judge our country by our words and our actions. That's what they do with an ambassador. He is judged by his words and deeds.

Bishop Lightfoot, the bishop of Durham, makes this wonderful statement about an ambassador. Just listen to this. "The ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of his sovereign. The ambassador's duty is not only to deliver a definitive message, to carry out a definitive policy, but he is obligated to watch for opportunities to study character, to cast about for expedience, so that he may place the message before his hearers in it's most powerful form. That is evangelism. It is the great responsibility of the ambassador to commend his country to the men among whom he is sent. Here is the Christian's proud privilege, and most terrifying responsibility. The honor of Christ and the church are in His hands. The honor of Christ and of His church are in the ambassador's hands, our hands. By his every word and action, he can make men think more or less of the church of which he is a member, and the Master whom he represents."

Men, you and I have been given a message, and the message is this. We are to represent the honor of Christ and His church. And the degree to which we do that Biblically will be the degree to which God will receive the honor. And the honor and glory of His church is in your and my hands. That's what we've been commissioned as a messenger. We're not commissioned as manipulators, to come up with some slick program, to make sure we get a response. But we are to represent the content of the message of the kingdom of whom we represent, the policies of the kingdom that we represent, and we go into a foreign land and we speak those messages that He would say Himself. We don't go and make up our own message; we give the one that He would say Himself. That's what ambassadors do. Excuse me?

Participant: In all it's fullness, not just part of the message he has given us.

Bruce: Correct.

Participant: We do not recreate it, but—

Bruce: We don't need to recreate it; we give what has been given to us.

Participant: Exactly.

Bruce: And that's the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. Ministry is prepared for you, as a consequence to your having been reconciled to God through the grace of God. God has prepared you and I as ambassadors by placing within us the message that He wants conveyed. Now do I understand what that message is? Is the message designed to manipulate somebody to get a response? Or do I have confidence in the fact that when I proclaim Biblical truth that the Holy Spirit will do what He wants to do? You see, you've got to realize this. You and I cannot be somebody's Holy Spirit. And yet, much of modern evangelism is trained to say, Get a response by giving an invitation. Brothers, the message you communicate is the invitation. That is the invitation, that you are to be reconciled to God. And if we're not communicating that, then we're not giving the right message. But the invitation is not something you tack on after the sermon or after the rally, and say, Would you like to have a response? But it is the message that generates the response because of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit communicating Biblical truth. Do you see that?

Now that's why you and I have to be so careful about weapons of mass deception in Don's question. You see, there is a lot of deception, because people are led to say, I did this. And that's because you start with the premise that they're sick in their sins, rather than dead in their trespasses and sins. Yes, Don?

Participant: Bruce, I would say that two hundred years ago, a hundred years ago, even fifty years ago, there were certain basic assumptions that people had. They had a general regard for the Bible. They may not have regarded it as the inerrant, infallible word of God, but they had a general regard and respect for it, that there is one God, and Jesus is—you know, they may not have believed that He was the Son of God, but that He was respectable. In our culture now, I see that kind of disintegrating. So do you feel that before we give the message of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the Person and work of Christ, do you think that there needs to be pre-evangelism, like apologetics? Why do we believe the Bible, etc.? Or do you think that when we present the message that you've said, that those things will take care of themselves?

Bruce: Yes. (Laughter.) It's all of the above. Yes, we need to deal with apologetics for those who want to deal with that. But you don't deal with apologetics to somebody who might be your neighbor, while you're helping him rake leaves during the fall. You see, pre-evangelism is relationships. Why is it that somebody is going to come to your church? It's not because you change the name to be nice and catchy. It's not because the pastor wears blue jeans. It's because you, being a good neighbor, invite them to church. That's why they're going to come. That's pre-evangelism.

Let me give you an illustration. I gave you this years ago. In my church in Kansas, it was a farming community. It had an older man, who was one of our elders, and he came to me and said, "Pastor, would you come over and share the gospel with my neighbor?" I said, "Tell me about your history with your neighbor." So he described about a 25-year litany of when the storms came and wiped out his corn crop. He gave him some of his own seed to help him build his corn crop back up, or when his bull died, he gave him his

own bull to breed his cattle. He had a wonderful 25 years of litany with him. And now, his barn burned down. And his friend went over to help him rebuild the barn. And now he says, “You know, I’ve been working with this man for 25 years. Would you come and give the gospel to my friend?” And I said, “No.”

He said, “Isn’t that what you do?”

I said, “No, that’s what you do. You have a relationship with this man that has prepped him that I don’t even have. If I walk in and just give him some rote memory thing about the gospel—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man,—I have no way of knowing what he is going to do. You’ve got a relationship with him that gives you the authority, the ability, and the privilege of communicating what happened to you, and why you’re doing the things you’re doing.” So I said, “What I’m going to do is, I’m going to help you go and communicate the message of reconciliation. But you’re going to go do it’ I’m not.”

So we spent about six or seven days just rehearsing that, just very naturally. So he went over and began to talk to his friend as he was helping him build the barn. And I said, “I’ll just be praying for you the night you go over there. We’ll work on his barn, and when something comes up, you start talking about it.” And he shared the gospel of Christ—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the Person and work of Christ in a very natural relationship position. And do you know what the man’s response was? “So that’s what you’ve been doing with me for the last 25 years!” (Laughter.)

You see, that was preparation. It was in that relationship. It was far more effective for him to go and do that than me. My role is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, not to do the ministry. He had been prepared to do that. He was the ambassador. He was in that foreign land of the farm land. I wasn’t. I just helped him go and communicate that. He became the head of our evangelism committee, because it’s all about relationships. That’s the pre- that we do.

Now God has built inside of us a message of reconciliation. You are better qualified to give that message of reconciliation, because, by experience, you know what sin is like. You’ve been there. You’re better qualified than angels, by experience, because you know what to be dead in your trespasses and sins is like, and to be reconciled.

A person who has been filled with the grace of God cannot help but overflow with grace towards others. Brothers, when you’ve been filled with the grace of God, there is nothing that can prevent you from just overflowing and giving the grace to other people. Ministry is a two-winged airplane. It’s dependent upon God, and the eternal perspective of seeing God behind the message of reconciliation that you communicate.

In Acts chapter 1, verse 8, we read, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” And here’s a paraphrase. When you men of the Friday Brave Men study receive the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes upon you, you will be my witnesses in the North Hills, in Wexford, in Pittsburgh, in the South Hills, in Allegheny County, in Butler County, in Pennsylvania, in America, and to the ends of the earth. Now notice, this is not an obligation. It is not an option. It’s a consequence of God committing to you a message of reconciliation. God never requires of us something

He doesn't do beforehand. He has equipped us to be the communicators of the powerful message that changes lives. We just need to make sure that we're communicating truth. Truth will take care of itself, because the Holy Spirit's job is to what? To guide us into all truth. We just need to make sure we're communicating the truth.

I've got a couple of minutes for some questions. I've got a meeting at nine o'clock. Yes, sir?

Participant: I'm still stuck on the pastor wearing jeans. I just want to make sure I understand what you said. I'm in ministry in the Hood a fair amount, and I like to blend in with the Hood, so the Hood is comfortable with me, so I can show the Holy Spirit. I pastor wearing jeans. I'm not in agreement with how the people in the church dress, but our church is full of sinners, like yours. So we might not be dressed according to code, but I believe that in our pastor, they see Christ—not through clothing, through word, actions, the Holy Spirit. So I'm a great fan of sitting in a bar and having a beer and blending right in, but not doing and saying what they're doing, not because of what I'm doing, but because of what the Holy Spirit has done in me. That always gives me more opportunity.

Bruce: Amen!

Participant: I'm a little mixed up, you know?

Bruce: Good! So am I! There's a point of balance here.

Participant: I guess.

Bruce: There is a point of balance. I cannot answer that for you; only you can do that by your trusting the Holy Spirit, seeing the long term implications of God's sovereignty. I can't answer that. I can't tell you, and give you a rote script of how you should dress or what you should do. All I'm saying, brothers, there is a point of balance. You and I are ambassadors that represent something that is contrary to the system of this world. We need to be depending strictly upon God's grace to give us the wisdom to know what we need to do, and where we do it, and how we do it. I can't give you a prescription for that. All I can say is, you just have to trust the Holy Spirit, and depend upon Him. So all I'm saying is that, whatever you're doing, make sure that when the time comes, that you give the right message. Yes, sir?

Participant: Do you think there's a difference between using that as a billboard, like if you went into this neighborhood and said, "I'm wearing jeans, so I can talk to you."

Bruce: It's all about relationships. Ministry is about relationships. How the Lord leads you in that relationship, logically, we want to bring them to the point of understanding God's reconciliation. So the critical thing is relationships. I can't give you a rote answer to all of these questions, men. All I can say is, you've got to be on your knees, trusting the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom. Get counsel from the wisdom of many brothers, and seek the opinions of people who can help you to achieve that balance. But when it comes time to speak, we need to speak the same thing. Yes, Jay?

Participant: I think, even with the schemes of the enemy, he wants our focus to be jeans, where our focus needs to be the gospel, because it's just so easy to have our focus on jeans, and there is no eternal value in jeans.

Bruce: Okay, good. Yes, sir?

Participant: I think the jeans is not the focus point. The focus point is motivation. If you're using the jeans to motivate or manipulate the situation, there's where the problem is, that of manipulation.

Bruce: Yes, we're not manipulators; we're communicators. All I can say, in summary, ministry is about relationships. It's about how you get along with people. We need to represent something that is not common to this world in how we relate to people. Yes, please, Jim?

Participant: I was going to say that we don't know the motivation of the pastor.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: And if his motivation is to manipulate people, that's one thing. And I think you can almost assume that that's often the case, because the theology behind that is a theology of, well, people are seeking for God, and we'll just do this.

Bruce: Excellent point.

Participant: On the other hand, there is the principle of Paul, who says, "I do all things, that I might by all means win some," and so that's the right motivation, if you're doing that so that he can win a hearing to speak the truth. That's a different issue.

Bruce: That's well said. There's a point of balance here, brothers, and this is a mystery for us, even. So just realize it's all about truth, and how the Holy Spirit is going to lead you to that. What's your motivation behind it? What's your intent? Now you can do the right thing with the wrong motivation and you don't get any credit for it.

Participant: If you're motivating to build attendance, that's one thing. That's manipulating.

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: If you're motivated to spread the gospel and the truth, that's the other thing.

Bruce: And you have to check yourselves, men. It's not our role to evaluate the pastor who wears jeans. Forgive me if I've insinuated that. That is not my point. My point was basically to say that you've got to examine your own heart, and your own life. Why am I doing the things that I'm doing, and what is the outcome of those? Is it really because I'm an ambassador? Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

Participant: I was just thinking that the crisis will come when you're in a group, and you're just trying to love the people there to be an ambassador. And then, suddenly, something which you believe is true for how a Christian should behave is at odds with the group. That's when the crisis comes.

Bruce: That's when the crisis comes.

Participant: You can't fudge that. You have to go ahead and be different.

Bruce: You have to be different. Just let me give you a crass illustration. At my first evaluation as the vice president of PNC 26 years ago, my boss called me in, who is now deceased. The man who hired me to create the Charitable Trust Department called me in and said, "Bruce, I love what you're doing with the people we gave you. You've done a tremendous job of getting these people to be functioning and being very profitable. I've got one problem with you."

I said, "What's that, sir?"

And he said, “We’ve never heard you cuss.” (Laughter.)

And my response was, almost, “Well, no.” (Laughter.) But I didn’t say that.

Now, at that point, I was representing something that was uncommon. That’s holiness! Now, the question is, what was my response to that? My response was, “If I have to use curse language, vulgar language, to express my opinion in a situation, that says more about me than it does the situation in which I find myself.”

Participant: Amen!

Bruce: I couldn’t back away from that, because, at that moment, as an ambassador, I was representing something that was uncommon in the culture. And the commonality was they were swearing all the time to express their passion and their pathos. I never did that, because I was attempting to represent something uncommon. His observation was, What manner of man is this, that you don’t even cuss? What manner of man are you? At that point, you don’t back down. At that point, as Bishop Rodgers said, there is the conflict. That’s when you’re the ambassador! That’s when you say to somebody, Let me talk to you about propitiation. (Laughter.) I didn’t talk about that. All I did was describe who I am, and I said this: “If I have to use vulgar language to describe my passion and my intensity, that says more about me than it does the situation in which I find myself.”

That’s being an ambassador. You never know how the Lord is going to use that. May God give us the grace to be ambassadors for the royal kingdom of God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the majesty of Your grace. Father, You know, there are so many questions we have, because we’re so fallible in our thoughts. Would Your Holy Spirit just rectify that by guiding us into all truth? Father, help us to achieve the balance of being a *presbuti/legati*, a legal ambassador, set into the foreign land to represent the kingdom of God. And may we realize, as we walk out this day, that Your honor and glory of Christ and His church is in our hands by how we live. And may we live to an uncommon standard for Your glory. And all the brave men said, “Amen!”