

“THE HOLINESS OF GOD” Part 1 *CONTINUED*

HOLINESS
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Bruce: Well, I think that we just need to celebrate the Lord’s grace and mercy, and how He works in spite of us. It’s wonderful to know that He has all the amount of truth that is necessary to bring people to Himself, and so I just rejoice in the results, and trust that God is glorified in all of the activities in our city with the Festival of Hope. So Don, do you want to play something dealing with grace, if you will for a moment, because we need to celebrate His grace. “Grace, grace, greater than all our sin.” (*Music.*)

Gracious and merciful Lord, we just thank You for amazing grace, the grace that is greater than all our sin. Father, we thank You that it is not something that we achieve, but that we receive, in the salvation and work of Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, this morning, that You would be pleased to open our eyes once again, that we might behold You more clearly, for Jesus’ sake. And may it be so for His glory. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: The passage for your consideration this morning that we’re examining is the one we began last week in 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 16. “Since it is written: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”,”

We began last week and introduced the definition of holiness, and we saw that holiness is defined by God, not by us. The reason we will be holy is, as the Scripture says, because God is holy. Holiness is not something we do. Holiness is something that God is.

Now we can divide it in two different ways. Personal holiness would be God’s description of His self-hood, and practical holiness would be our response. And practical holiness I define as the visible expression of what God is doing in your life. The Scripture says, “Be holy, for I am holy.” God demonstrates His holiness through us because He is the definition of holiness; we are not. Practical holiness, how we express that, is the visible expression of what God is doing in our lives.

Brothers, one of the most important questions we can ever ask every day is, “What is it that You are doing in my life?” You’ve heard me say this numerous times. In John 5 and John 8, Jesus says, “I do nothing on My own initiative. I only do those things that I see the Father doing.” Probably the most important question we as men could ask every day would be, “Lord, help us have the vision, the discernment, and the wisdom and the understanding to see what You are doing around us,” because if I see what You’re doing around us, that is what I want to join. I want to be an aggressive responder to what I see You doing, because when I join something that You have already initiated, that I have not initiated, then I know that activity will be blessed, because it came from You and not from me.

The danger is, oftentimes, in our culture, that we think we need to initiate everything, and therefore ask God to bless it. How many times have we started something, and said, “Lord, would You bless it?” All I’m suggesting is this, that a far more appropriate

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attitude to our understanding of the holiness of God, regarding practical holiness, is that practical holiness is the visible expression of what God is working in your life. And if we don't know what that is, there will never be a visible expression of it. So that's what we're examining today, the visible expression of what God is doing in our lives, and we're calling that *practical holiness*. Holiness is not something we do, but it is something that God is.

We looked last week at the whole issue of how God relates to us. God relates to us through His holiness. Because He is holy, we are to be holy. And the relationship of holiness to God is based upon several things—His relationship to ourselves, to our sin, to our suffering, and to our service. That's what we're looking at.

Last week we looked at God's relationship to us and His holiness in terms of ourselves, and that is because of the creation element. Now last week we also talked a little bit about this issue of our being holy because God is holy. Remember this. Why is it that you and I are holy? It is because God chose us. You see, whatever God does is holy. We are told many and numerous times that we are a holy priesthood. Look at 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 9 and 10. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Why is it that you and I are holy? The first reason is because God chose us. Whatever God does is holy. So, if God chooses something, it is going to be a holy choice. The object of His choice is going to be holy.

That's why you and I need to understand that practical holiness is the visible expression of what God is doing in your life. And I think that the most important question we can ask is this, “Lord, what are you doing around me, so that I can join and become an aggressive responder to what I see you doing?” That way, I know that whatever I do will be blessed.

Today we want to take a second look at this issue, and that is, how does God relate to us according to our sin? To do that, we need to understand that our dignity is inseparably linked to our origin and to our existence. Our dignity and our value is inseparably linked to our origin and to our destiny. And that's the danger of humanism, which is so devastating, because it says that you are a cosmic accident, or a grown-up germ of some sort. That's basically what humanism is saying. You see, your worth and your value are really based upon the inseparable link between your origin, your creation, and your destiny.

Now, if you believe in humanism, and you're a cosmic accident or a grown-up germ, then we somehow have to assign dignity between one's origin and one's destiny, and that means you've got to achieve it. Now we're not talking about achieving our origin or our value or our worth, but we're talking about receiving it because of the inseparable link of your origin and your destiny. But we need to understand this. Man is created in dignity, in the image of God. And, chosen by God, your destiny is God. So you have been chosen by God. Your destiny is God, because He chose you. He is holy. That means this: that your value and your worth is inseparably linked to your origin, the creation element, and your destiny, which is God Himself.

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Humanism defeats both of those. Humanism basically says that man is the goal of creation. That's what humanism says, that man is the goal of creation. The gospel says that God is the goal of creation. So your value and your worth is inseparably linked to your origin. Understand that your origin is being created by God, and to be chosen by Him, and that is your destiny. So, when you play around with theistic evolution, you destroy the dignity of man, because you put us in a position of having to achieve it, rather than having to receive it.

Now, if you are in Christ, you are wrapped in the robes of Christ. If you have Christ, your origin is God and your destiny is God. And we have to understand this before we understand how the holiness of God relates to our sin. If you are not in Christ, your origin is God, but your destiny is eternal damnation. And remember this: your value and your worth are inseparably linked to two things, your origin and your destiny. If you're in Christ, your origin is God, and your destiny is God. Humanism defeats both of those. That's why we have to be so careful about what we call “theistic evolution.”

Now how does God relate to us in our sin? We've seen how He relates to us in ourselves. That's in our origin and our destiny, because we were created in the image of God.

Now the reason sin is so grave is because man is so significant. The reason sin is so grave, and so heinous, is because man is so significant, because of the dignity of God, and man's origin. Now, if you play around with theistic evolution, you destroy everything I just said. If you have no dignity, you have no worth and no value, and the reason God takes sin so seriously is because of the significance of who you are in God's creation. You see, it goes back to your origin. You were created in God's image. And the reason God takes sin so seriously is because of your significance in His creation.

And so that is a critical element for us to understand. Animals don't have that created value and dignity. Only mankind does. Here is how one Puritan writer writes this. “Holiness also manifests itself in His attitudes of sin. God's holiness denotes not merely His separation from sin, and the perfection of His own being, but His abhorrence of it, and hostility to it. As it is written: “a God of faithfulness, and without iniquity.”,” Deuteronomy 32:4. Scripture says, “He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon wrong.”,” Habakkuk 1:13. His concern for His holy name, which He cannot allow to be profaned. Ezekiel 36. He vindicates his own holiness by sharing His hatred of sin, and cleansing His people from it.”

Now there is a critical component. God shows his abhorrence and hatred of sin by sharing His hatred of it and cleansing His people from it. And the reason that He cleanses us from it (Ezekiel 36) is because of the significance of your creation and your origin. You see, God takes sin so seriously, brothers, because you are so significant! Do you understand that? Humanism defeats that. Theistic evolution removes that. The reason for your significance is because of your origin and your destiny. “He vindicates His own holiness by sharing His hatred of sin, and cleansing His people from it.”

Now let's turn there. Let me show you what I mean. We've done this several times, but go back to Ezekiel chapter 36. This is one of the hallmark verses, beginning with verse 22. Now again, here is a statement I want to show you that comes from the

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Scripture, that God’s abhors sin, and cleanses His people from it. It is because of God’s holiness that man becomes aware of His sin. You see, if we don’t understand God’s holiness, we will never understand our sin.

Let’s take a look at what God does. His abhorrence of sin is because you and I are so significant in His creation. Beginning at verse 22. “So therefore, say to the house of Israel, “Thus says the LORD God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name.”,” Now notice here, right away, that you and I are never the reason that God does anything. Now that is very comforting, because if I were the reason for God to do something today, nothing of eternal consequence would ever happen. Notice this. God does it because of His holy name. You and I receive the benefit of what God chooses to do. We receive the overflow of His heart, but you and I are not the reason. “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the LORD God, when through you, I vindicate My holiness before their eyes.”

There is a description of our practical holiness. It’s the visible expression of what God is doing in your life. And the reason that you and I are called to be practically holy in the decisions we make is because God is in the process of vindicating His holiness, and letting the world know that He is the Lord, because of our practical holiness. We are the visible expression of what God is doing in our lives.

Now there is a process by which He does this. Remember, He shows His hatred of sin because of our origin, because of our significance, and He cleanses us from it in order for us to fulfill His demands in our lives, which is to be practically holy. “Be holy, because I am holy.”

And so we read on. “And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the LORD God, when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes.”

Here is the process. “I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land.” He calls us to Himself. The first thing He does is to call us to Himself. “I will call you from the nations.”

Secondly, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.” The second thing He does is that He cleanses us from ourselves. He calls us to Himself, and He cleanses us from ourselves. If you and I are going to be the practical expressions of God’s holiness, He’ll have to do what? Clean us up. If we are going to be the practical expression of God’s holiness, in what He is doing in our lives, He is going to have to clean us up. And the first way He does that is that He calls us to Himself to have a saving relationship with us. Therefore, you are holy because He chose you, because whatever God does is holy, and His choosing is holy, and the object of His choice is always holy. So the second thing He does is to cleanse us from all of our impurities. “I will sprinkle clean water on

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you,” (verse 25), “and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.” (verse 26.)

And, in verse 26, “I will give you a new heart.” He creates a new life within us. He calls us to Himself, cleanses us from ourselves, and creates a new life within us. “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.” So God calls us to Himself, He cleanses us from ourselves, He creates a new life within us, He completes us with a new Source of power, the Holy Spirit. That is regeneration. He takes the heart of stone, which is insensitive to spiritual things, and He replaces it with a heart of flesh which is now alive to spiritual things, and that is because of the value and significance of your origin, because He is equipping you to be holy. It will be the visible expression of what God is doing in your life, practical holiness. He calls us to Himself, cleanses us from ourselves, creates a new life within us, completes us with the Holy Spirit, and lastly causes us to be obedient.

Notice the last verse. “And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.” How is it that you and I demonstrate practical holiness? It’s by being

Participant: Obedient.

Bruce: Obedient. That’s what he’s talking about. I will cause you to be obedient. Now notice the process. The end result is our practical holiness. The end result is (*paraphrase*) “I will cause you to be obedient.” It’s because of your significance that God takes your sin so absolutely seriously, because of your origin and your destiny, because the process is this: (*paraphrase*): “I have called you to me to have a saving relationship. I’ve cleansed you from your sin. I’ve created a new life within you. I’ve given you regeneration, changed your heart, your attitude. I’ve completed you with the power of the Holy Spirit.” And the end result of that is that you are going to want to be obedient. That doesn’t say that you’re going to live sinlessly perfect. But your motives have changed; your desire has changed. There is a different desire in your life, and your desire now is to be practically holy, and that is this: to be the visible expression of what God is doing in your life. That’s practical holiness And we are the means by which God will demonstrate that He is the Lord God and holy, because He does that through who? Through us, the Scripture says. He does it through us.

You talk about worth and value. You have your worth and your value. You have dignity and you are of worth because of God’s choosing you to be the means by which He is going to demonstrate His holiness, and we live that out practically. Yes, Don?

Don: I was talking to a neighbor, who is an atheist, and she said, you know, that when you’re dead, you’re dead, and that we just came from evolution, and all that kind of thing. And I told her, “Well, if that’s true, you’re always complaining about the situation in the world, and how terrible people are, but what difference does it make in the end? We’re all dead, we’re just like animals. There’s no judgment, there’s no accountability, etc. So what difference does it make? That is what is so devastating about humanism, as you pointed out.

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Bruce: Absolutely. It just removes all the dignity, worth and value of us. What’s the point of it? Yes, please?

Participant: The other argument I’ve heard from people is that they don’t distinguish what you said from being created in the image of God. So they say, “Well, if we’re all created in God’s image, then I am good.” They’ll deny total depravity, and they’ll say about what you just said about those whom God chose, “Well, He has chosen everybody, because we’re all created in His image.” Is there something we need to distinguish there?

Bruce: Yes. Let me see if we can touch on that for a moment. Stephen Charnok says this. Now I’m going to walk on this very gingerly, because I want to confront something that our culture has manifested, which I don’t think is Biblically correct.

In describing man’s violation of the very essence of God’s holiness, Stephen Charnok, the Puritan, writes this. “How is it conceivable that God should hate the sin and cherish the sinner?” How is that conceivable? “With all his filth in his bosom, that He should eternally detest the crime and eternally hold the sinner in His arms?” You see, what we’ve created is the idea that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. Now, is that possible?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: We have to understand this. Psalm 5 says this. “God hates all who do iniquity.” The Scripture makes it very clear that God hates the sin and hates the sinner.

Now we have to understand this, brothers. Because God is holy, it’s a holy hatred. That is different from our vengeful hatred. I can’t define my hatred, or compare it to God’s holy hatred. Remember, God’s holiness is His primary nature and attribute. So whatever God does is holy. If He has a love, it’s a holy love. If He has justice, it’s a holy justice. If it’s mercy, it’s a holy mercy. The same thing here. If God has a hatred, it’s a holy hatred. Can we define that? No. We just have to accept that, and realize that the Scripture says that God “hates all who do iniquity.” We have to be very careful not to rationalize, and say, “Well, what that means is that God hates the sin but loves the sinner.” That’s inconceivable when you understand the holiness of God. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. I would say, to qualify that, that the Puritans made a distinction between two kinds of love of God.

Bruce: Correct.

Don: You’ve said this before, and we’ve talked about this—the love of benevolence, or common grace,—

Bruce: Common grace. Exactly.

Don: And the love of complacency, not meaning complacency in the way we mean it, as in nonchalant, but the special elective love for the sinner. So I would say that “God hates the sin and loves the sinner” is a half truth. I would say that God hates the sin and loves the elect sinner savingly.

Bruce: Good way of saying it. You can say this. God loves everybody, but He loves them differently.

Don: Right.

Bruce: Now that’s because of His holiness. Now we’re probing something here, men, that we really can’t understand. So don’t get hung up on the inability of us to

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understand this. When I’m saying that God hates all who do iniquity, I also have to say this, that God does so with a holy hatred. Now I can’t define what that means. But I do have to recognize that God takes sin seriously in me. You have to say that. God takes sin seriously, because it’s an offense to Him and His glory. Tom?

Tom: It’s also important to keep in mind that we are helpless, and we are slaves to sin until we are released from that bondage. And Paul keeps telling us, (*paraphrase*), “Don’t let your members be slaves to sin, but renew yourselves.” Keep your mind on God.

Bruce: Remember, holiness for us is the visible expression of what God is doing in our lives. And that’s a process.

So here is where we get ourselves into a little bit of trouble in our culture, in my judgment, by saying that God hates the sin, but loves the sinner. That’s an impossibility, if you understand Biblical holiness, as defined by God. It’s an impossibility, if you understand God’s holiness. You have to understand this now. God’s hatred is a holy hatred, that is different from ours. Please understand that. Do you understand that? You have to say that it’s a holy hatred. Now how that is defined we’ll never know until eternity.

We have a tendency to judge the Old Testament law with New Testament mercy. It needs to be judged according to creation, not according to our opinions. My opinion might be such and such, but what does creation say? Your worth and your value is wrapped up in your origin and your destiny. The creation law says this: “The soul that sins shall die.” That’s the creation law. “The soul that sins shall die.” There is one punishment, and that is capital punishment. That was given, because the moment a person is disobedient, he loses the privilege of being the image bearer of God. That’s why practical holiness is so important for us. The moment we choose to be disobedient we’re losing the practical image of the holiness of God, because it’s the expression of what God is doing in our lives. That is why obedience is something that God causes us to do, by calling us to Himself, cleansing us from our sins, creating new life within us, completing us with the Holy Spirit, and the end result is causing you to be practically holy, to obey His law, and to obey the Scripture.

So we have to be very careful when we take the Old Testament law, and encapsulate it with New Testament mercy. We have to be careful not to confuse those two.

There is a very popular book out by a very popular author right now, who is saying that we have erred by not being too gracious in the communication of truth. Now, as you’ve heard us say, in all these years together, there is a balance of grace and truth.

Participant: By not being too gracious, or by being too gracious?

Bruce: By not being gracious enough. He’s saying that we emphasize truth too much, at the expense of grace. Now that’s a slippery slope, when you make a statement like that. When you say that we have emphasized truth too much, at the expense of grace, you’re saying that we need to be more gracious and back off the truth just a little bit, because people won’t accept it.

Now see, that’s a very slippery slope. You see, the balance of Scripture is that it is grace and truth. We have to communicate the truth with grace. And I trust that that is what we’re doing this morning, communicating the truth with grace. It is grace and truth.

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It's not one or the other; it's both and. And grace is unmerited favor. And so, when God speaks the truth of the Scripture, you have to adhere to the Scripture, but do it in a gracious spirit.

That's why I have to say that, when I quoted Psalm 5⁵, that “God hates all who do iniquity,” I have to say this graciously, because that's a holy hatred. And I have to let that be, because God defines what that is. I don't define it, and have my own opinion of what that is. The Scripture says that's what it is. I have to somehow just submit to that, and say that, whatever that means, that it's a holy hatred of iniquity, and the person who does it.

Participant: God so loved the world.

Bruce: Yes, Jay?

Jay: I've come across something recently, just in regard to the Old Testament law, that I think is just beautiful and accurate. The Old Testament law is holy. And so, in that, whenever you were just even trying to separate the law and the New Testament grace, but speaking even about grace in the Old Testament, I want to say that that's a statement that the Old Testament law is holy.

Bruce: Absolutely it is. And the New Testament is full of mercy and grace. But you have to have grace and truth. Yes, please?

Participant: Sorry. Could you clarify something here? I apologize if I'm taking this down to a too simplistic level, but I'd like to understand this, because it seems fundamentally different from my past understanding. We've been talking about election, in a number of circumstances. We've also been talking about the concepts of humanism and evolution, and how we understand them, and I know that there is a disagreement between whether there was evolution in the creation of man. But that's fine. There seem to be two themes that overlap, and bother me a little bit, and I'd like your thoughts on this. It's tied, essentially. The idea that man was created in the image of God. We struggle with the idea (*unclear*.) We know that there are different concepts of time, and from different areas of space you can actually see time linearly, and you can see all of it. It's a bizarre concept; it's hard for humans to understand. What I struggle with with the concept of election, and this is where I take this to the finer point, is that we were talking about earlier, in the introduction, people finding God in that event, and we just had that nice, wonderful summary and the loud music. They found God at a point in their lives. That was a point in time. So they didn't, and then they did, and then they committed themselves to God. Election is what I'm confused on. And I may be using this in an improper term, and this is what I would like to clarify. Are we saying that God has elected those people as His people, even though, to that point in their lives, again, with this goofy concept of time versus reality, and the human concept of it, that, up until that point, even though they hadn't dedicated their lives, they were already elected by God?

Bruce: Yes. Are you a lawyer?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: That's what I figured. (*Laughter*.) That's a compliment. The way you're thinking, you have a lawyer mentality. Let me answer your question. The answer to your question is yes. So we've got to understand this. There are three Persons involved in our

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salvation. You have a Trinitarian salvation. What God the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies. That deals with time. In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, as the Scripture says, “you were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.” When did you become a Christian? When God chose you before the foundation of the world. That’s what the Father ordained. Now it hadn’t come to fruition yet, but it’s what the Father ordained. It’s a matter of time. The Scripture says that the time was before creation, before the foundation of the world. I have to accept that.

Secondly, when was my salvation achieved? It was when Christ died on the cross and paid for my sins. What He did was, He accomplished what the Father ordained. That’s a matter of time. My salvation was secured, accomplished for me, at the cross, in a matter of historical time.

And thirdly, when the Holy Spirit applied what God had accomplished through the Son at the cross, when He applied it, that’s a matter of time. That may have occurred at the Festival of Hope, when somebody came forward to receive Christ. The Holy Spirit drew them. Jesus says this, “No one comes to the Father but by Me.”

So it’s all a matter of time. But you’ve got to look at three elements of time. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies. There are three different time elements in a person’s regeneration/conversion. You have a Trinitarian salvation. You can’t just say, “Oh, I decided to become a Christian at the Festival of Hope, and that’s when I did it.” That was when the Holy Spirit applied it, but it had gone on in time past. What the Father ordains, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies. Those are all elements of time.

Participant: So God chose you; you didn’t choose God.

Bruce: That’s correct. The reason you chose God is why?

Men: He chose us.

Bruce: God chose us! Now your argument, folks, is with the Scripture, not with me. All I’m saying is, look at the number of times the Word says “chosen.” And the reason you have value, guys, and you’ve got to understand this, is because God is holy. And whatever God chooses is holy! And the object of His choice is holy! That’s why He says, “Be holy, because I am holy.” And when God chose us, in the majesty of His glory and grace, He began to put you into a position of being the visible expression of His practical holiness. Yes, Bill?

Bill: I think that part of the struggle we’re having here is the concept of something drags us, coming forward. We need to reframe our thought process, and maybe go back to the experience of Spurgeon. What we’re dealing with here is the college of repentance versus the university of election.

Bruce: Yes.

Bill: A person coming before, let’s say, the weekend event, isn’t necessarily understanding what is going on behind the scenes.

Bruce: Correct. Absolutely.

Bill: And that’s probably part of our struggle, when we look at that. It’s true that we don’t necessarily ask Jesus into our hearts. In a way we do, but in reality, it’s the Holy

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Spirit who has already been praying, and has made us whole. You go back to the Ezekiel text. It's clear once again that when the “order of salvation” is laid out there very succinctly and clearly, it's God who is doing it. It's just that, for all intents and purposes, it's God eclipsing man, and that is what is happening, and we don't quite understand the steps behind it. So I think, you know, that when we hear these things we struggle with them, and we're trying to figure out what exactly is going on. It's almost like a euphemistic expression, instead of taking them to the university of election, trying to figure out His infinite mind with our finite minds.

Bruce: Absolutely. Yes, Bob?

Bob: I was just going to comment, Bruce, that we really have to be careful here, because, again, back to the event, when we hear of people coming forward, I guess, in my mind, I question whether that's something done by the Holy Spirit, or whether that's done by the motivation of the speaker, and the loud noise, the music and entertainment.

Bruce: You have to question that.

Bob: There's something there that we have to think about and understand, because it's not that clear.

Bruce: What's the proof of the validity of the conversion? Practical holiness, the visible expression of what God is doing. That's why it's so difficult in our modern evangelism. We have a tendency to trivialize the assurance of salvation, because we basically say, “Did you invite Jesus into your heart?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Where is Jesus?”

“He's living in my heart.”

“You're a Christian.”

That takes about ten seconds. Now there has got to be practical evidence of that conversion over time. Now I'm not saying that you have to be perfect all the way. All I'm going to say is that there is going to be a different desire in the attitude you have in your heart because of the Holy Spirit's work. It's going to manifest itself in expressions of practical holiness. It's going to manifest itself in expressions of what God is doing in your life, and that is going to take some time.

I've given this example many times. The Puritans, in their evangelism, would go into a city and proclaim the gospel. Somebody would say, “Did you have a revival? What happened?”

They said, “We don't know. We'll come back in three to four years. We'll come back in three to four years, and we'll look at evidences of practical holiness.” Was there increased righteousness? Was there a decrease in crime? Was there an increase in church attendance? If we see those things, then down the road we'll see whether there was legitimate conversion and regeneration. Some of it might have just been an emotional response.

Now how many times have you heard somebody say, “The Holy Spirit was really there.” Well, based upon what? Well, look at the emotionalism. You can get that at a Steeler pep rally. Does that mean the Holy Spirit was there? I don't know. We're not talking about emotionalism. We're talking about visible evidence of practical holiness

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over time. It is generated because of the work of the Holy Spirit. That’s why the evidence is-- Yes?

Participant: There are two main questions that have to be asked, I would say, about election. The first question, I would say, is that God said “it was very good.” You say this was said before the Fall.

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Participant: When God had the foreknowledge, wouldn’t He know that man would fall?

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: That’s the question. All of India is about 80 per cent Hindus. Did God create all of these Hindus, about a billion of them, to go to hell? It is like God made two assembly lines. One He has elected, and the other He has not elected. So God knows that these people are going to hell. And that means that He is doing the work of the devil.

Men: No.

Participant: And that is not compatible with the nature of God.

Bruce: Now, now, we have to remember that it’s a holy hatred. That’s all I can say. It’s a holy hatred. So don’t try to put in your humanistic understanding of holiness. That is something that is relegated to God Himself. It’s a holy hatred. And we should not try to figure these things out. We have to walk by faith, folks. We’re not going to understand all of this until we’re in eternity. We’re not going to understand all of this.

Participant: (*Unclear.*) That’s the problem I have with this election thing. And I don’t know what else there is to know, so it’s a futile effort. (*Laughter.*) (*Unclear.*)

Bruce: That’s correct. You’re right.

Participant: We’re going to have to start with Genesis, and see.

Bruce: That’s right.

Participant: God was so pleased with His creation. And God had the foreknowledge. He had to know that man would fall. Obviously He knew that we would fall, and He made the provision for that.

Bruce: He made the provision through the Person and work of Christ. Yes, Jay?

Jay: I was just thinking, even in regard to—who is it, Taj?

Taj: Yes.

Jay: Yes. One is that election to salvation brings rejoicing to the Lord, and the other one which you’re talking about, election to reprobation, where people are predestined to hell, and the sin always falls on man, but that brings sorrow to God. So, the thing about that is that God is not pleased that people are going to hell. But it does show that His attribute of wrath is being displayed in the doctrine of reprobation.

Bruce: Now guys, we need to understand that we’re not going to figure all of this out. Don’t try to do it. You’re not going to get all the answers. The moment you figure all this out, you become what?

Men: God.

Bruce: God. And that’s an offense to Him. That’s a cosmic treason against His holiness. You and I are not going to figure this out, so what do we have to do? We have to walk by faith, not by sight. Well, I don’t understand all the things that I’m teaching,

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but I have to teach it because it's truth. You teach it because it's truthful. I just trust that I'm doing it with graciousness. I don't have all the answers. Don't look to me to be your answer person. You're not going to find all of this out. There is a degree, folks, where you're going to have to let God be God. Let the unknown be the unknown. That's where we live by faith. I don't have all the answers. I don't try to find out all the answers. I just want to see God behind the words of the Scripture. So don't try to think that you can figure all this out. That's not what we're going to do

. Spurgeon said it well, and it's what Bill referred to, and it's this. Spurgeon said that, in your preaching, you take people to the college of repentance and faith before you do predestination and election. You've got to help people understand what it means to come to saving faith. What is salvation? How is it that God loves you? You've got to understand that. That's repentance and faith. That's what produces that. As you grow in grace and understanding, the other theological things become more open to you. But you don't start off with that. You start off with, Do you understand the Person and work of Christ? Have you trusted Him as your Savior? Have you doted? Are you depending upon, adhering to, relying upon, trusting in the Person and work of Christ? You talk about repentance and faith. The other stuff will come afterwards.

How long have we been meeting here, guys? Eighteen years! And we're just now talking about it. (*Laughter.*) It took us eighteen years to get here. (*Laughter.*) Because we didn't start with this. You see, I would not be teaching this to a group of people who did not know Christ at all. I wouldn't be touching on this subject, because it would just overwhelm them. It would just turn them off, because they would have no understanding. Something has to happen in their hearts, and that is regeneration, first. They have to be regenerate. God has to change the desire of their hearts to want to learn. And see, you don't start off with these great theological issues. You start out with the basics. That's where the gospel is—

Participant: God so loved the world. What about that?

Bruce: What's that?

Participant: God so loved the world.

Bruce: Isn't that wonderful!

Participant: Whosoever.

Bruce: Whosoever. It's like this. Here's what it is. When you go to heaven, you're going to see this. “Whosoever will,” on one side of the door. On the other side of the door, it's going to say, “chosen from before the foundation of the world.” Those two things are in perfect balance. That's what you're going to see. Yes, Tom?

Tom: I think that many times we read too much into these statistics, like I was giving out that morning. It's not unusual to take a person who has walked forward or made an X on a card or something, that when you get him in a Bible study, and start to lead him, they say, “Wow! I didn't realize. I had never really committed my life to Christ. I accept Christ now.”

I said, “Well, I thought you had done that four weeks ago.” They don't understand a lot of times. But they're being led by the Spirit. We just need to be sensitive to the Spirit, and not read too much into what we see and hear.

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Bruce: Yes, Don?

Don: I’m really glad you’re covering these things, Bruce, because I think it’s interesting that while we don’t want to bring people that don’t know Christ, or new believers, to the university of election, yet Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, starts off with that—

Bruce: Yes, he does.

Don: As a foundation. So do the framers of the Westminster Confession. The early chapters deal with that. Why? Because it’s foundational, what the work of God is, and I think it’s very interesting.

Bruce: Here is the work of God, and you’ve got to remember this. Salvation is not something we choose; it is something we receive. There’s a difference between regeneration and conversion. In your regeneration, you are passive. In your conversion, you are active. You need to understand that. Regeneration is something the Holy Spirit works. We have lost the understanding of what it means to be regenerate. We don’t teach regeneration; we teach conversion. It’s a both/and, not an either/or. We need to understand that regeneration is something that God did in eternity past, on the cross, and in present day time. That’s what God does in us, and our conversion is a response to that.

Now unfortunately, in our gospel evangelism, we have emphasized the responsibility of man, not the design of God. There has got to be both. There has got to be regeneration and conversion, and we’ve got to understand both.

Now my point in all of this is this. The reason God takes sin so seriously, men, is because you are so significant. Do you understand that? You are so significant because God created you in His image. And therefore He has to take things that are an offense in His creation seriously. That’s His holiness. And the reason He does that, and that for His abhorrence of sin, is that He claims us, so that we can become the visible expression of what God is doing. That’s our practical holiness. That’s the result of God’s mercy to us, in drawing us to Himself. We become the visible expression by which God demonstrates the fact that He is holy. And He does that through who? Through us! The Scripture says that through you, I will demonstrate the fact that I’m holy. That’s our destiny! And it starts because of our origin.

Brothers, your dignity and your value are inseparably linked to your origin, being created in God’s image, and your destiny, eternal life. You’ll never understand your sin until you understand how you are confronted with God’s holiness. That’s the beauty of it. The more you see God’s holiness, the more you’re going to see your sin. And the beauty of salvation is that He cleansed you from all that stuff that’s an offense to Him.

One theologian says this. “Sin is cosmic treason against God’s created order.” And the reason God deals with that is because He abhors sin. But He loves us, and cleanses us from all of our sins, to make us the visible expression of His practical holiness. Sometimes, brothers, we just have to accept what the Scripture says, even though we can’t understand it all.

May God be pleased to help us to understand those things that are true, not the things that are our own opinions. We’ve got to be very, very careful, men, not to turn to the god

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of our human imagination, but to the God of Biblical revelation. May that be so for God’s grace. May it be always grace and truth.

Let us pray. Father, we’re probing the depths of Your soul, Your being and Your heart. Forgive us for our efforts to try to think that we can figure that out. Lord, we need to let You be God, and let us be men. Let us be responsive to You. Father, we pray that if we said things that are inconsistent with who You are in all of Your glory, or Your majesty, or Your grace, that You would be gracious to remove those things from us, and that only those things that are consistent with Your revealed revelation in the Scripture would be the things that we would embrace. Help us in our understanding and in our unbelief. As Paul said, “Help me in my unbelief.” Father, just be gracious to us in our inability to understand all the magnificence of who You are. Help us to understand this, that you define holiness. Holiness is something that You are, not something that we achieve. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” (*Applause.*)