

Barriers to Belief. Are there barriers in your life that are preventing you from coming to Christ?

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 00] I assume you've looked in the bulletin. The title of the message this morning is Barriers to Belief or Conditions Creating Confusion.

I'd like you to turn in the Bible to Acts chapter 17. And this morning we'll be reading Acts chapter 17 verses 24 through 31.

The God who made the world and all things in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.

[1 : 40] That they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

For in him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, for we also are his children.

Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.

Because he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.

[3 : 01] This passage, in my estimation, really emphasizes an obligation that God has placed upon man when it comes to the question and the issue of belief.

Because God has given each of us a volition, that is, the power to choose, to make decisions, to make choices. We are held accountable to him for those choices that we make.

And sometimes I think that this is lost sight of in evangelistic endeavors, where salvation and belief and faith in Christ is presented as a kind of option.

It is an optional. Well, I guess technically you could say that it is an option because men can believe or not believe, but it is not a good option.

It is not an acceptable option. As I pointed out in our last session together, it is a serious business to be a human being made in the likeness and image of God.

[4 : 14] We are not put here for nothing. We are here for something. And it is not to serve ourselves. We are not an end in and of ourselves.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states it rather well when it says the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Hard to improve upon that.

That means this is a responsibility incumbent upon us as human beings. And that faith or belief is something that is not only an opportunity for us, it is a responsibility.

And this passage, as well as others that we will be consulting, really brings this out. You'll note in the passage just read in Acts 17 and verse 27, Paul said that they should seek God.

Really? We should seek God? And Hebrews tells us that without faith it is impossible to please him because he who would come to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

[5 : 40] Seeking after God. Yuri Gagarin, the Russian cosmonaut who garnered the distinction of being the first man in space, said, I went X number of miles out into outer space and looked carefully everywhere I went.

And I didn't see God anywhere. Of course, the Russian evolutionist, atheistic standard point of view is there is no God.

That's one of the central tenets of communism, that there is no God. And because he was there in outer space where God is supposed to dwell.

Isn't he out there in the heavens someplace? And I searched all around and didn't see him. And so, as if to say that satisfies the argument. Well, we know, of course, it doesn't.

I have a number of propositions that I would like to run by you before we go to our message in particular. And these are the areas that we're going to be striving to elucidate as we move on through the message.

[6 : 51] Believing God is of such great importance that the principle of believing God is highlighted all throughout Scripture.

Great emphasis is placed upon the importance of believing God. Father of the faithful is referred to as Abraham.

And we know in the first book in the Bible, chapter 15 and verse 6, Abraham believed God. And it, his belief, was counted to him or accepted by God on Abraham's behalf as righteousness.

In other words, human faith is accepted by God in place of righteousness, which we do not have.

And God, in his graciousness and in his mercy, is saying, I know you do not have the righteousness that I require.

[7 : 54] Because all your righteousness is as filthy rags. It is a flawed righteousness. So, I'll tell you what I'll do. In lieu of the righteousness that I require, I will accept your belief, your faith, your trust as a substitute.

That is salvation by grace. That is believing God on the basis of what he has revealed. And God counts that or figures that or accepts that in place of the righteousness that he requires.

It's an amazing thing. Because when we exercise that faith, we do so in the person of Christ. And we receive from him a righteousness that he imputes to us.

And that's what makes us accepted. But it is only on the basis of belief. And next, belief in what God has revealed is such that in doing so, not only brings one into compliance with what God demands, it also brings one into alignment with reality.

Because whether they know it or not, those who continue to dwell in unbelief are living in unreality. In unbelief, one does not see himself or the world as they really are.

[9 : 29] They can't. Their flawed perspective is the only one they have. The only way they can change their flawed perspective and come into a perspective that is real and true is through the belief process.

Because when you believe, you receive from God his truth, his enlightenment, his perception, his assessment, and it corresponds with what is real.

And you line yourself up with that. Then you get a taste of life, yourself, the world, as it really is. All who are in unbelief, whether they realize it or not, are dwelling in unreality.

It is God's perspective, not man's, that reflects reality as it truly is. We spoke of the Isaiah 55 passage, where the Lord, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, said, My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord.

My ways are not your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts than your thoughts, and my ways than your ways. Believing God and what he has revealed is referred to as faith or trust or reliance or dependence upon God and his revelation.

[10 : 47] And we've quoted the passage in Hebrews. It talks about without faith, it is impossible to please him. And in connection with all of this, although this is a different mini-series that we will be treating for the next two or three sessions, it does tie in with what we've been covering over the past few weeks.

When we spoke about the three areas of confusion regarding Christianity, despite the fact that it's been around 2,000 years, we noted that it is contrary to man's thinking, that man operates on the basis of the performance system, and God operates on the basis of grace.

So right away, we've got man and God at loggerheads, and these two simply do not correspond. They are radically different. And if you want to know how God views things, you look at his word that he has revealed, and we see that God operates on the basis of grace.

Man always operates on the basis of a performance mode. It applies to every aspect of life. So, it is only quite natural that people think, if you want to become a Christian, if you want to go to heaven, if you want to live eternally with God and other believers, you've got to work at this thing called Christianity.

You've got to try harder. You've got to do more. You've got to be good. And then God will reward you. He will reward your performance with heaven. And that seems very logical, because as I said, that's the way everything else works in life.

[12 : 18] But salvation doesn't work that way. It is solely on the basis of grace. And when you come to the realization that you aren't good enough, that there is nothing you can do to be good enough, that it is a lost cause.

Give it up. You'll never make it. No one ever could. Then you're in a position to do business on the basis of grace. But we have to come to the end of ourselves.

And we noted that the church is sometimes mistaken for its message. Sometimes the church, the religious institution, it may be Jewish, may be Catholic, may be Protestant, may be non-denominational.

But it can communicate the message in such a way that it becomes a message. And that people's alignment and association with that religious institution becomes their ticket to heaven.

And that's all wrong. A church, a religious ecclesiastical organization, can instill that kind of thinking in people.

[13 : 21] Even unintentionally. And some do it intentionally. Because at the base of it is a quest for power, influence, control over people, dominate people, manipulate people.

It goes on. It is particularly detestable when it is done in the name of God. And I have told you over the past 35 plus years that the pulpit is a ready-made opportunity for manipulating people.

And there are a great many pulpits used that way. The possibility of doing that here scares me to death. I was at a pastor's conference one time.

And I don't have this little sign here, but it wouldn't be a bad one to put here. This pastor said every time he got up to preach, opened his Bible right there in the pulpit that the people couldn't see.

But he could see it just like what I'm looking at right here. It was a statement. Just what is it you're trying to do with these people?

[14 : 41] It's a good question for every preacher to keep in mind when he comes to the pulpit. What is it you're trying to accomplish with these people? When people become convinced that their eternal destiny is vested in an individual or an organization, and they have these hoops to jump through and these commands to obey and these orders to carry out, because it could make the difference between heaven and hell for them, that's manipulation.

And it goes on. No denomination or religious organization, not Christianity, not Islam, not Judaism, none of them are exempt from that.

All of them have a ready-made platform to take advantage of people. And many of them are unable to resist the temptation.

And you know what? They can cover it all under the guise of, we're doing it in the name of the Lord. And if you want to know what God thinks about that, read the first couple chapters of Isaiah, and he will tell you how sick to death he is of the sacrifices and the offerings and the religious ritual and all the rest of it, because it was all so much faulty roll.

Their heart wasn't in it, and all it was was a tool to manipulate people. And then we saw that Christians send mixed signals with their inconsistent behavior.

[16 : 18] Sometimes Christians behave very unchristianly. And people expect better from those who name the name of Christ.

Sometimes we can do things and take positions that are completely contrary to Christian principles. And the reason we do it is because we want our own way.

We're walking in the flesh, and we want to do our own thing. And all doesn't affect your eternal destiny, but it certainly does affect your testimony and the way people look at Christianity.

Because someone has said, you as a believer, you may be the only Bible people ever read. And what you do, speak so loud that the world can't hear what you say.

And if we know we are living a life that is not consistent with Christian principles, it tends to silence us, because we know it could be an embarrassment to speak out on the things of Christ when we know we're not living after that fashion.

[17 : 29] So we are silenced, and that's too bad. And in keeping with this, I want to address the subject of barriers to belief, because there are a number of them.

And I do not have any allusions to having all of them. There are several that I haven't even thought of. But I have, for your consideration, what I think are the principal barriers.

Call them, if you will, reasons not to believe. And some might label them excuses. And I suppose in some cases that's what they are, just smoke screen or cop outs.

But in the minds of those who hold them, they're very real. And the first one that I would like you to consider, and a barrier to belief or an obstacle that would keep one from coming to faith, and I think this is probably number one for a lot of people, the demand to maintain personal autonomy.

We like to think that we are in charge of our life, that we are the captain of our fate, the master of our destiny.

[18 : 48] And we want to make the decisions, we want to call the shots, and we rationalize it on this basis. After all, it's my life. I ought to be able to live it as I please.

I ought to be able to do as I please. I will do as I please. And when you talk to someone about surrendering their life, about handing over themselves, if you will, to Jesus Christ as the one who purchased them and paid for them, the thought is very unsettling and often very unacceptable.

If I do that, that means I'm yielding the reins of my life to someone else. And really the only one I can trust with that kind of control is me!

more even than the God who made me. That is just typical human arrogant thinking.

And you know arrogance is nothing but ignorance with an attitude. Arrogance is always predicated upon ignorance.

[20 : 12] And people who think that way are coming from a position of ignorance. That's why we preach the gospel.

It is information. It is designed to dispel ignorance. It is designed to penetrate and overcome ignorance and allow people to see the truth of the issue.

Besides, if you do make a personal decision and you do receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you're not surrendering your autonomy.

You're not forfeiting your volition. You still have a will. You still have the ability to make decisions. You have a different basis for making them.

You have a different point of reference from which to make them. But you aren't surrendering your ability to make decisions. You're just gaining a new basis for making better decisions.

[21 : 15] It is not a negative thing at all. Reminds me, I think I might have told you this, but this was about a young man who came in, had an appointment for counseling, came in, plopped himself down in the chair.

And I said, well, what brings you here today? And he said, Pastor, my life is a mess. And I said, oh, things can't be that bad.

Oh, he said, it's bad. It's a mess. It's a mess. I said, well, what's going on? What can I do? How can I help? And he went through this whole gamut.

And you know what? He was right. It really was a mess. And when he got finished, it was almost as if now, okay, I've told you my story, and I know you're a preacher and I know what you're supposed to do.

You got something from the Bible for me, right? Almost like I have a verse that's like a magic pill. You know, you just take it. There go your problems right out the windows.

[22 : 24] Just watch them fly away. And I said, well, young man, I said, first thing you need to do before anything else is you need to get your spiritual house in order so you'll have a real basis of operation.

And he said, and by that you mean? And I said, you need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and start your life anew. Oh, I can't do that.

I can't do that. And I'll never forget what he said. And I said, well, why not? And he said, that'd mess up my whole life. And I said, but you just told me.

And he said, oh, well, yeah. Yeah, I guess I did, didn't I? And you know what? He wanted help. But he wanted it on his terms.

It is amazing how many people are desperate for help. I'll take all the help you give me, but only on my terms. I get to call the shots.

[23 : 30] If you're going to get serious and do business with God, God says, no, you're not. You want to call the shots, you go right ahead and call them.

But if you're going to do business with me, I call the shots. This is my world. I'm in charge of it. I was here first.

God doesn't make deals. God doesn't bargain. Don't come to God with, oh, God, if you'll do this, I'll go to church for every Sunday the rest of my life.

You think God in heaven is walking around saying, oh, I'm just so glad to hear that. I'm just so thrilled. You really made my day. He is not impressed at all. God doesn't make deals.

God doesn't bargain. He holds all the cards. And he knows how to play them. So, a demand for personal autonomy does keep people from receiving Christ as their Savior.

[24 : 35] Then there is an inadequate understanding. An inadequate understanding. And I'm satisfied that this is a very, very big item.

I have had the pleasure over the years of explaining the gospel to a number of people. Francis Schaeffer made the point. This was back in the 70s when he said, the time, the time has passed when we can begin sharing the gospel with people of our generation and of our culture.

By starting with John 3.16 or Ephesians 2.8 and 9. You can't start there with them. They don't have a reference point to absorb that.

If you're going to share the gospel with people today, you have to start with Genesis. Because that's how lacking they are.

75 years ago in this country, people had a general, a general comprehension and background of the Bible.

[25 : 47] They knew most of the stories, even if they weren't in church every Sunday. They knew most of the Sunday school stories. The Old Testament. They knew about the Good Samaritan.

They knew about the Prodigal Son. They knew all about those things. They were common knowledge. But they're not today. They're not today. So, you've got to start.

And with people today, you've got to begin at the beginning and bring them all the way up to where we are now. And I've had numerous occasions to do that. And very often the response of people is, even if they don't make a decision and receive Christ as their Savior, very often they say something like this.

Well, I've never heard it put that way before. You see, most people in our culture don't really get the gospel.

They get snatches, bits and pieces, a little bit here, a little bit there. But they're not able to put it together. They don't get the connection.

[26 : 57] And they don't get the application. They don't see how it actually impacts and affects them. They don't connect the dots. And this, in and of itself, prevents a number of people from making an intelligent decision for Jesus Christ.

They simply don't understand what it's all about. They just don't get it. And that, again, is the whole purpose of the preaching of the gospel. And then, another reason is the negative influence from significant others.

Negative influence from significant others. It may be a mate. It may be a parent. It may be a favorite uncle who says things like when his little nephew, seven or eight years old, comes up to him and says, I'm going to Sunday school tomorrow with my next-door neighbor, Billy.

And we go to such and such a church and we go to Sunday school. Do you ever go to Sunday school, Uncle Sam? No, no, no. I don't get into any of that stuff.

I see all that religious bunk as just so much hogwash. I don't, you know, I've never seen God. Have you ever seen God?

[28 : 13] And this little boy, eight, nine years old, whatever, said, no, I've never seen God. Well, how do you know he exists? And on and on. And this is a respected uncle, a significant other, negatively impacting this young mind.

Happens all the time. Sometimes it's a university professor who mocks and makes fun of Christians, of the Bible, of the Christian faith. And he is a tenured, well-respected Ph.D., multiple degrees from leading institutions, very, very smart.

And he sees the whole religious, biblical scheme as just one major scam. Just nothing to it.

It's all faith. If you can muster up enough belief to believe all that bunk, more power to you. I don't have that kind of, I'm more interested in science and facts and reality, not just religious mumbo-jumbo stuff.

You think that does not affect young minds? Think that does not impact them? Of course it does. And it prevents many of them from making serious inquiry into what Christianity is really all about.

[29 : 31] Happens all the time. Overheard people one time saying, talking about a Billy Graham crusade. Yeah, you know, they have a great big place like Yankee Stadium and then thousands of people there.

And they pass these big buckets, you know, big buckets around. And all the suckers cram their money into those buckets. And then when the meeting is over, Billy and his team all go back there in the office and they divvy it all up.

Now, never mind that that is as far removed from the truth as it can be. And that the Billy Graham organization has one of the highest standards for accountability and financial responsibility of any organization in all the world.

People hear things like that and they believe it. It sounds convincing. This person sounds like they know what you're talking about. And some actually buy into that.

And it becomes an obstacle to belief. You wouldn't want to be a part of that, would you? Of course not. And then this is another big one.

[30 : 48] I don't want to put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ because I know me. I know me.

And I'm afraid I just wouldn't be able to live that kind of a life. I know how weak I am. And I know how subject I am to temptations and how I can't resist.

And I would make a mess of it because I'm not strong enough. I know that. So better to stay the way I am than to buy into this thing and be a colossal failure and just look like a hypocrite.

I just don't think I could hold out. I don't think I could live the life. It would make me look weak and needy, too.

Well, you are weak and needy. Again, that's part of the denial of reality. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ and receive him as your personal savior, you will not be able to look back on your former life as anything but weak and needy.

[32 : 13] You may not feel that way prior to accepting Christ, but that's because you're not dealing with reality. You're dealing with denial.

We are weak and needy. We all are. And insofar as you not being able to hold out or live the life if you come to faith in Christ, you're right.

You're right. Someone has said, living the Christian life is not difficult. It's impossible.

And I think that's true. This is what the apostle meant when he said that I am crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[33 : 17] So, when one becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, along with that forgiveness and freedom and acceptance, you receive automatically an input of divine ability that was not yours before.

The Spirit of God comes in and dwells in you. And He does not dwell in you so that you'll never be able to say anything, do anything, or think anything wrong again.

That's not His purpose for being there. But He is there as a comforter, as a teacher, as an enabler. And greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. God does not make demands from you that you cannot fulfill.

He is not an unreasonable taskmaster. All God's expectations are provided with God's provision. And all we need to do is utilize what He has provided.

In the flesh, of course, you cannot please Him, and you will not live a life that is pleasing to Him, but God has provided all the dynamic that is needed for living the life that He wants you to live.

[34 : 34] It is supernatural. Of course, you can't do it, but you don't have to. He makes provision for you. It is Christ in you. So, that too can be set aside.

Then there is the fear of the response of others. Ridicule, etc. How, reminds me about this fellow who was a lumberjack, worked in a logging cab.

We were in the logging trade and stayed in a cabin there in the woods with fellow loggers. And if you know anything about these loggers out in the Northwest, they are a tough bunch of cookies.

I mean, swear like sailors and just live a life of real debauchery, some of them, you know.

And he's drunk every Friday night and gambling and all the rest of it. And this fellow was reached by somebody with the gospel.

[35 : 33] And he came to faith and the fellow who led him to the Lord was telling him, Now, when you go back with the logging crew that you're working with, they're going to give you a hard time.

They're going to make fun of you. They're going to ridicule you. They're going to do all kinds of things they can to sabotage you, to convince themselves that what you've done is not real.

And don't you let them get to you. You just pray and you ask the Lord for strength and wisdom and he'll give it to you. The guy said, OK. So he said, and I'll see you in about a month.

About a month later, this fellow who led him to the Lord made contact with him. And he said, well, tell me. He said, did the guys make it rough on you? He said, no. Did they make fun of you or ridicule you?

No. They didn't threaten you or anything? No. He said, boy, that's strange. I thought just as soon as they found out that you'd made a decision for Christ to become a Christian, they'd really make it rough on you.

[36 : 43] He said, oh, I didn't tell them. I didn't tell them. Why didn't he tell them? Because of what he feared. He knew they'd make it rough on him.

He knew that they would throw their jabs at him and play jokes on him and try to derail him in any way that he could. So he just dummied up and made sure that he didn't say anything.

That's not the way to go about it. The best way to go about it is when someone makes a decision like that, and you go into the office or the workplace, let it be known.

But it's important how you let it be known. You can give a testimony that is not a bragamony. And it can begin with something like this. Guys, you will never guess what happened to me over the weekend.

What? What? You mean you've got religion?

[37 : 58] Would you join a church? Did you get baptism? Something like that, you know? This is the way they think. And this is all that they can think about, you know? And then, of course, they want to. But the point is, and why this is so important is right up front, you declare what you've done in your faith.

And you know what? That helps hold you in check. Because you've made a commitment. You're out there with it now. And I remember hearing about a workplace where a fellow pretty much did that.

And, of course, they had their jobs. You know, guys will be guys. And they took their swings at him. And they tried to sabotage him.

And they said all kinds of things about him. Oh, he used to be a nice guy. But now he's a holy Joe. And he went and got religion and all this. And they would sneak over and take his lunchbox, open his lunchbox, and slip in a pornographic magazine.

And then close it up. And then everybody sits around. Come lunchtime, and they all have their lunch. And everybody knows what's going on. And they just wait for him to open his lunchbox so they can all have a good laugh, you know?

[39 : 17] Hey, this is guy stuff. Guys can be brutal that way. Now, girls wouldn't think of doing anything like that. But with guys, and then when he opens the lunchbox, and, of course, they all have a good laugh.

And you know what they're waiting for? They're waiting for his reaction, too. Is he going to be angry? Is he going to fight them? Or is he just going to, hey, guys, take it and toss it aside and go on, you know?

They're bigger than they are about it. They're watching. And sometimes we know what the response will be if we do something like that.

So the crowd that we hang with becomes an obstacle to coming to faith. Fear of the response of others. Fear of giving in to a significant other.

Fear of the response of others. The wife is a believer. The husband is not. Sometimes it's the other way around.

[40 : 22] But usually it isn't. Usually it is the wife who is a believer and the husband who is not. And because she loves her husband, has the best of intentions toward him, desperately wants him to be in heaven with her and the Savior, she cannot resist opportunities to leave a little gospel tract under his dinner plate.

Real subtle things like that. And she may even, only for his own good, nag him.

Why don't you go to church with me? Why don't you read the Bible? Why don't you read the books that I get? And you know what this does? Because, depending on the temperaments and the personalities involved, very often it results in a guy digging his heels in.

And his motto becomes, I shall not be moved. And what takes place is a veritable power struggle between the husband and wife and the gospel is in the middle.

And the husband looks at it this way. I'm not going to do what she asks. I'm not going to read the Bible. I'm not going to read those books she gives me. I'm not going to go to church with her.

[42 : 01] Because if I do, if I give in, she wins. It's a power struggle. And what is at stake is the gospel and his eternal life.

But he doesn't look at it that way. He just sees it as she wins. And I'm not going to let her win. I'm not going to let her wear the pants in this family. I'm going to do this my way.

I'm going to. And that's, you know, that's the way a lot of marriages operate. It's a perpetual power struggle. Each one is vying for ascendancy.

Each one wants their own way. And this one's pulling this way. And this one's pulling this way. And as I've often said, so say I now again. Anytime there is a power struggle in a marriage and the husband wins, they both lose.

Anytime there is a power struggle in the marriage and the wife wins, they both lose. Because the only acceptable thing is to be pulling together, not to be pulling apart.

[43 : 09] And they both win. But that's an obstacle. Fear of giving in to a significant other can be some passive aggressive behavior there.

These are all present and formidable barriers to belief. One or more of them can be fatal. And these are, as I said, these are formidable barriers to belief.

They can be so powerful and so commanding that there is only one thing that can penetrate them or overcome them. And that is a repeated hearing of the gospel.

For it is the power of God through faith unto salvation. If you are struggling with a decision today, maybe one of these things pertains to you.

Maybe more than one. Or maybe none of them pertain to you. Maybe I am speaking this morning to a 100% Christian audience. I do not know that. And I cannot assume that.

[44 : 13] If you can identify any of these barriers as playing a role in your decision or in your thinking process, I would really urge you to give it serious thought and to see if it really is valid.

I suspect that it is not. At the conclusion of our message last week, the issue of forgiveness came up.

I said I would address it today and I'll do so at least in brief. Because it is a very, very important concept. I do not believe that there is anything that any human being on the planet needs more desperately than forgiveness.

To enjoy God's forgiveness means to be brought into a right relationship with Him. And the whole reason, the whole rationale for Jesus Christ being on that cross was in order to enable God to dispense forgiveness without sacrificing His holiness or without setting aside His justice.

God is both just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus Christ. And the reason He is able to forgive, and I have had occasion to talk to a number of people about this over the years, and the issue of sin comes up.

[45 : 45] And very often people get very, very uncomfortable when you talk about their sin because they're not really convinced they belong in that category.

And they'll come back with something like this. Now, don't get me wrong. I don't claim to be perfect. Well, good grief. What an admission.

But they are very uncomfortable talking about sin. And if you get them to the place of where they will actually admit that, Well, yes, I guess, according to that definition, I am a sinner.

We all are. And then I say something like this. Well, what do you plan to do about your sin?

What do you think God plans to do about it? Well, God forgives. He's in the business, isn't he? Isn't that what God is known for?

[46 : 48] Being a forgiving God? Yes, indeed. But let me ask you. What is it that makes it possible for God to forgive?

Well, he just forgives because he wants to. He forgives because he loves to forgive, doesn't he? Isn't that part of his job description? God forgives.

It's a skewed perception of what it is. More likely, they pick that up in overhearing conversations from other people. What would you think of a judge here in Springfield?

Down in our court of common appeals or whatever. And somebody is on trial for a crime that they've committed.

And the judge says, how do you plead? I'm guilty, your honor. I'm guilty of the charges. But I want you to know that I'm sorry.

[48 : 05] And I'm asking you to forgive me. Can you temper this with mercy? And the judge says, you're sorry?

Do you want my forgiveness? Well, I do want to be known as a forgiving judge. I don't want to be known as a hanging judge. So, on the basis of your admission of guilt and your saying that you're sorry, and because I'd like to be known as a judge who is merciful and forgiving, so I'll forgive you.

Case dismissed. You're free to go. Now, how do you as a taxpayer feel about that? Are you going to boast and say, hey, I'll tell you, we've got one fine community here.

We've got a judge on the bench down there. He just forgives everybody for everything. Isn't that great? You're not going to feel that way. You're going to be disappointed.

You're going to be frustrated. What are you looking for? What's a judge supposed to do? A judge is supposed to dispense justice.

[49 : 20] He's supposed to do the right thing. He's supposed to make the punishment fit the crime. That's what we put him on the bench for. Now, let me ask you.

Do you expect less from God? Do you expect less from God?

The scriptures describe this God of ours as being holiness absolute, as being perfectly just.

So, on what basis, then, does God forgive anyone? It is on the basis of the offense being paid for.

That's why Jesus died. He died to square the books. Jesus Christ died so that justice could be served.

[50 : 31] The only person in all of the universe who was capable and eligible to take upon himself the sins of humanity, because he himself had done, was eligible as a substitutionary sacrifice.

And he was on that cross to satisfy the perfect justice of God. So, God can forgive us because Jesus died in our place.

That is an objective fact. Redemption is an accomplished fact. When Jesus Christ died, he died for the sins of the whole world.

That is an objective truth. And we make that a subjective reality when we appropriate that objective truth and exercise our personal volition by placing our faith and our trust in that work of Christ.

That personalizes it, particularizes it. That makes it subjective for me. And that's why we refer to receiving Christ as one's own personal Savior.

[51 : 48] Have you done that? That is a simple act of the will. When one person is married to another person, they say, I will.

It is an expression of their mind, of their intent, of their volition. And when we come to Jesus Christ and receive him as our Savior, we do it with our will.

Don't expect some flash out of heaven, some thunderbolt, some feeling, some sign, some omen. The ball was in your court.

The decision is yours. You have the ability to make one. God holds you accountable for doing so. Have you done that?

It may be that you don't know when you did that, but you know that you have done that. And that's all that matters. Many people cannot pinpoint the day or hour in which they came to Christ.

[52 : 51] That doesn't matter. What matters is that you know you did. And I'm going to have a word of prayer with you right now. If you've never made that decision and you want to make it, I would urge you to do so.

And you may do so right now. Let's pray. Father, we are enamored of this gospel. We always are.

Each time we hear it or each time we preach it, it is as old as Genesis and as new and as fresh as right now.

Every time I hear it. Every time I express it. We marvel at the grace extended to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We recognize this is what Bethlehem and the manger is all about. This is what the incarnation is all about.

[53 : 48] Christ came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. And our prayer today is that anyone here who has not personalized that by individually exercising their will to say, I want to take Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

I believe he died for my sin in my place. I want to deliver to him what he has paid for.

Here, O Lord, is my life, my heart, my will, my everything. I want them all to be yours because you own them, you paid for them.

And I want to thank you for providing such a wonderful Savior. Despite my sin, Christ died for my sin.

Thank you. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen. If you made that decision this morning, be sure to tell someone.

[54 : 56] Don't be like the lumberjack who didn't tell anyone. Tell someone or tell me. I have some literature that would be very helpful and get you off to a good start.

Now, we want to have a very brief business meeting. And if we may, I'll ask Mr. and Mrs. Benson. Thank you. Thank you.