

Presentation of the Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary

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Preacher: Sam Waldren

[0 : 00] We're privileged this morning to have, I'm not even sure what to call you, brother. Brother, pastor, friend, dean. He wears many hats.

I think hat number one would be disciple and lover of Jesus Christ. The second husband and wife of Char. And lover of the four children and 15 grandchildren now that the Lord has blessed them with.

The dean of Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary. I should have probably put a pastor of Grace Baptist Church first, if that's the order. And then dean of, so he's pastoring there along with Ben Carlson, who's preaching this morning in your absence, yes.

And then the dean of the Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary there in Owensboro, as well as the professor of systematic theologies. You can share the other hats that God might have given you.

But we're thankful that he's here with us today to give us just a brief word of personal testimony and then to introduce us and report upon the seminary. And then to preach to us this morning and tonight.

[1 : 13] Pastor Sam. Pastor Sam. It's a delight to be with you today. And I want to thank particularly Pastor John for the invitation to come. I'm glad to think that we have a growing friendship over the last couple of years, particularly.

And I'm very thankful for his encouragement in the Lord. He's asked me to share a little bit of my testimony. And let me begin with what is a vast understatement.

I don't have a Damascus Road experience. In fact, if somebody asked me when I was converted, I usually have to tell them that I can nail it down to within 15 years.

I made my first decision for Christ, to use the terminology I was raised with, when I was three years old after evangelistic meetings at my dad's knee.

But I struggled with the assurance of salvation. Did not have what I would call a prevailing assurance of salvation until I was about 18 years old and in Bible college.

[2 : 15] Even though I'd been president of my youth group and went to Bible college and never, I can't say I ever went into the world in terms of the way a lot of young people do during their teenage years.

I still struggled and was still praying for a measure of prevailing assurance of salvation through my high school years, the summer before I went to Bible college.

And it wasn't until I was in Bible college when I was 18 or 19 that God brought me into the doctrines of grace and into Reformed theology.

And it was under the influence of those doctrines which straightened out my mind from the kind of easy believism and Arminianism I was taught in First Baptist Church of Stanton, Michigan, that I came to a prevailing assurance of salvation in my first or second year of college under the influence of the doctrines of grace and Reformed theology.

And that was a significant experience because I had really no thought of going into the ministry when I went to Bible college.

[3 : 24] Some of you will appreciate this. My dad was a Baptist deacon. Which meant that in some respects I wasn't raised at home with a high regard for the Christian ministry or for pastors.

But, and yet God used the influence of the truth coming into the doctrines of grace and Reformed theology to do a kind of revolution in my mind.

And I realized other people need to know this stuff too. And it became a growing burning desire that led me to begin to aspire to the ministry. And brought me into the ministry eventually after a number of years.

In 1977 I was ordained one of the four pastors of the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids. I remained a pastor there for 24 years until God made it clear that he wanted us to go to Kentucky.

Where I was a Ph.D. student at Southern Seminary for four years and eventually one of the pastors at Heritage Baptist Church. And now one of the three pastors of Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Owensboro, Kentucky.

[4 : 35] The only thing I can say that's a little bit unique is that God has always kept one of my pastoral feet in what most people would think of as the normal pastoral ministry.

And another one of my pastoral feet in the whole area of theological education until today. As John said, I'm the president of Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary, the professor of systematic theology, the academic dean, and a few other things.

You might think that sounds like a lot of jobs, but our administrator has like 12 hats that he wears. We're trying to reduce it because we've just hired an assistant administrator trying to get rid of three or four of those hats that rest on our dear administrator, Rex Semrod.

So that's a little bit of my life story. And I want to spend the bulk of my time in this hour speaking to you about Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary and what we do here.

What we do at Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary and how we do it. And I want to start out by telling you why we do it.

[5 : 41] And that brings me to the subject of theological education as the work of the church. The key passage we'll be looking at today is 2 Timothy 1 and 2.

And we'll basically be covering two headings today. That's theological foundation and its practical implementation.

Theological foundation, practical implementation. And so, first of all, theological foundation, which I think is found in the pivotal passage, 2 Timothy 2, verses 1 and 2, where Paul tells his son Timothy, You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

I believe that this is the most pivotal and enlightening text in Scripture which addresses the subject of what we call theological education.

[6 : 51] And there are four things I want you to notice about it before we come to our second major point this morning by way of laying a theological foundation for what we do at CBTS.

First, I want you to notice the spiritual commodity, the spiritual commodity which this passage specifies. And it's in the key word grace, which I believe here refers as used in a more doctrinal kind of way and refers to what we might genuinely call the doctrines of grace.

Why do I think that? Well, I think that that grace here refers to the doctrine of grace that Paul preached for a number of reasons. The main reason is the context.

Context, in case your pastor hasn't told you this 50 times, context is king in the interpretation of the Bible. There are a lot of cults that believe the Bible, they say, but they take it out of context.

Well, let's look at the immediate context. Here's the immediate context. Paul says immediately after that statement about being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, here's the next words he says, The things which you have heard from me, the things which you have heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men.

[8 : 28] Well, he thinks of grace, and then he thinks of the things which Timothy has learned from him about the gospel of grace. That's an indication of Paul's thinking here when he speaks of grace, of the doctrine of grace.

But then the near and surrounding context confirmed that impression, I think. Let me just point to a number of things here briefly. In 1.9, you have one of the strongest statements of the doctrines of grace, of the doctrine of grace anyplace in the New Testament.

You see it there, 2 Timothy 1.9, Join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. And there Paul says, This is one of the greatest and clearest statements of the essentials of the doctrines of grace you'll find anyplace in the New Testament.

It's these doctrines of grace that Paul is thinking of in this context. In 1.12, Paul uses a phrase that has been interpreted in various ways.

He talks about my deposit. My deposit. What has been entrusted to me, perhaps, or other translations say what has been entrusted by me.

[10 : 13] Let's see what the NIV says in verses 12 and 13. 12. That is why I am suffering as I am, yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Now, there are a couple of different ways of interpreting this whole idea of the deposit, but one of the major preferences of biblical interpreters is to think of it as the deposit of truth which had been given to Paul to preserve and to preach to others.

And if that's true, it's another confirmation of his emphasis on doctrines of grace in this context. 1.13 certainly states that, where he says, Retain the standard of sound words.

It's, again, an important statement in this context that focuses on proper Christian doctrine. And then, in 2.8 and 9, following our text, he also focuses on Christian doctrine.

If you notice what it says there, in 2.8 and 9, Remember Jesus Christ. And then he talks about different things we must believe about Jesus Christ.

[11 : 27] Raised from the dead, descended from David, This is my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

So, in this whole context, Paul's emphasis is on proper Christian doctrine. This is a good reason to think. When he tells Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, he's telling him to be strong in the retention and practice and preaching and passing on of the doctrine of grace that Paul preached.

The spiritual commodity, then, that the passage specifies is the doctrine of grace which Paul preached. This was the heart of Paul's message. It was for this grace and in this grace that Timothy was to be strong.

And furthermore, he was to be strong in this grace specifically, notice the context again, specifically by communicating this grace to other men.

To other, notice, faithful men who will be able to teach others also. And so, the way in which Timothy was to be strong at least included that the things which he had heard from Paul he would pass on to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

[13 : 02] Now, that brings me to a second thing I want you to see about 2 Timothy 1 and 2, 1 and 2. And that is the spiritual genealogy which they envision.

Are you into genealogies? Trying to go back and figure out who your great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandparents were? Paul speaks of a genealogy here. He might not have noticed it but it's there very clearly.

Notice the spiritual genealogy which you have in this passage. Paul speaks in this passage of four generations of truth. See how he does it.

He says, from me in the presence of many witnesses the things which you have heard entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

You see the genealogy? Me, you, faithful men, others also. Four generations, right? So Paul is taking concern here.

[14 : 10] Let's see. It would be for his spiritual great-grandchildren. I don't have any great-grandchildren yet. I'm thankful for that since my oldest grandchild is only 13.

But I expect with 15 grandchildren I will have great-grandchildren sometime before I die, God willing. And Paul is talking here about his spiritual great-grandchildren.

You have Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others also. Right? Four generations, that means his spiritual great-grandchildren.

Well, four generations of truth then. There are practical lessons from this spiritual genealogy that I want us to just think briefly about before we pass on from it.

First of all, see the importance of this for the apostle. You know what 2 Timothy is, right? It's the dying wishes of the apostle Paul. He's going to talk about that in 2 Timothy 4 1 to 8, right?

[15 : 23] Where he talks about having fought the good fight, finished the course, and looking forward to the heavenly crown which God is going to give him. This is, you could call it, his last will and testament.

He's talking to Timothy about the things that are on his heart as he's about to face what will be, no doubt, the negative and death verdict of the emperor in his next appearance before him.

What is on Paul's heart when that is about to happen? Well, Timothy's welfare, yes, he gives Timothy instructions throughout this letter that bear the impress and imprint of this dire situation in which he finds himself, right?

But, what is also on his heart are his spiritual great-grandchildren. What's on his heart is the absolutely preeminent, the spiritual priority of passing on the deposit of truth, passing on the doctrines of grace to the generations of Christian teachers.

So you see the importance of this for the apostle. These are literally, here in 2 Timothy 2, 1 and 2, these are literally his dying wishes. But, see that this work also is not restricted to the extraordinary early days of the Christian church.

[17 : 06] I'm a cessationist. I think there are some things in the New Testament that are intended for apostles and not for us. I do. And I think that's an important distinction that we have to make. Right?

But you can't say that this stuff is only for the early church and for the apostolic period, because in speaking and thinking of his spiritual great-grandchildren, Paul looks out at a period after the apostles have died.

Right? This surely takes us out to a period of church history that was not characterized by the extraordinary gifts and miracles of the apostolic period.

And therefore this tells us that this work is not restricted to the extraordinary early days of the Christian church. It belongs to the church today. Right?

Well, so, and that all, that is something we may deduce quite straightforwardly from the fact that Paul speaks of four generations of truth here. people who are not people are not in the world.

[18 : 11] But there's a third application. See the special company, which are the focus of Paul's concern. It's those called to the ministry of the word of God.

He speaks here, not of all Christians. I want to say more about that. He speaks of faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Remember the qualifications for elders. He makes this one of the special qualifications for elders. They have to be what? Apt to teach. Not all Christians are apt to teach. But you have to be apt to teach to be an elder.

And Paul is talking about those faithful men, those men of sterling and consistent Christian character that have the gift to teach.

So that's the special company which is the focus of Paul's concern here. But then notice thirdly then, the spiritual specialty which these words require.

[19 : 17] The instruction required is not the instruction which is to be given to all disciples. All disciples are to be taught. All things that Christ commanded, commanded, that's the third great aspect of the Great Commission, isn't it, in Matthew 28, verses 18 to 20.

Make disciples, baptize them, teach them to observe all that I commanded. So yes, all pastors are charged to teach all Christians everything that Christ commanded.

That's a great and highly important aspect of the Christian ministry which is too much neglected in our day. But that is not what Paul is talking about here.

It is instruction to be given to faithful men who will be able to teach others also that Paul is concerned about here. That's something different.

That's something more special that he's concerned about. Those to be taught are the next generation Christian pastors and teachers.

[20 : 29] That's his focus in this passage. Since a special kind of instruction is in view, a special set of instructors may also be in view.

Let me put it to you this way. If every pastor is called to fulfill the great commission's demand to teach to disciples, and each of us are, but as Christians have different gifts, so also Christian pastors may have different gifts.

The work of theological education may fall on some pastors more than others. That make sense to you? It makes sense to me. But that brings us to the fourth thing.

The spiritual entity which these verses assume. Paul does not tell Timothy to found Ephesus Bible Seminary independent of the church.

You know what I'm saying here, don't you? The church is, as Paul has told Timothy, taught him in 1 Timothy 3, 14, and 15, the church is and remains the house of God, the church of the living God, and the pillar and support of the truth.

[21 : 41] So this passing on of the great deposit of the truth of grace to a faithful man who will be able to teach others also, this is the work of the church, not of somebody independent of the church.

Theological education ought to take place under the authority of the churches of Christ and not as an independent operation of something that has no sense of accountability to the local church or to local churches.

Theological education ought to take place under the authority of the churches of Christ and not as an independent operation. church So, that's why we do what we do.

Because we believe there is a scriptural mandate and calling to pass on the great deposit of the truth of grace to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

That's why we believe so strongly in what we're doing because we think that what we're doing is what the Bible commands the church to do. This is not optional stuff.

[22 : 59] The Christian ministry is to be trained and the Bible commands that it be trained in this way. Now, all of that brings me to the well, for me, it's the less exciting part of my report because it's not talking about scripture, but how we implement this.

But there are things I'm encouraged to tell you this morning about Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary. And I think I have nine points under this second head that we'll run through really briefly.

What is our stated vision? Our vision is to see the church of the Lord Jesus Christ strengthened and expanded worldwide to end that Christ would be known, loved, and exalted.

Well, that's pretty straightforward, isn't it? What is our specified mission? Our mission, therefore, is to prepare men to undertake the full range of pastoral responsibilities they will face in serving Christ and his kingdom and also to equip Christians for effective service in the church.

We do this work by providing rigorous academic training and by facilitating extensive pastoral mentoring. Pastoral mentoring is an important part of our pastoral track programs.

[24 : 17] As this says, we have programs that are intended for people that don't necessarily aspire to the ministry and therefore, we even allow both men and women to take some of our programs, but the pastoral track courses involve pastoral mentoring and they're only for men that feel some sense of calling to the ministry.

What is our confessional foundation? Theological instruction. instruction. Since it sounds like I'm quoting from something, I am. Theological instruction must be Bible-saturated, gospel-centered, confessionally grounded, and led by godly, experienced Reformed pastors and scholars.

We are committed to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith as the best and most wholesome summary of the truth of God's word. Our commitment to our students is that they'll never hear anything in any of their classes that will contradict the confession of faith.

formal administration. Here's how we're organized. We are governed by a board of directors representing 1689 churches.

That's one of the requirements for being on our board. And a man not only has to hold the 1689 personally, he must be a member of such a church, and he must, and we are also hosted by a local 1689 church, so all of our offices and facilities are donated to us by, in this present hour, Grace Reformed Baptist Church of Owensboro, Kentucky.

[25 : 50] Now, we offer varied education. If you think, well, distance education, that's what you do, that means recorded online courses. No, it doesn't necessarily just mean that at all.

We offer both residential and distance education through a variety of mechanisms. We have live semester-length classes in Owensboro to some local students there.

We also have live concentrated modular courses in Owensboro, in which we teach two and three credit hour courses over three or as much to five days, three times a year we have those courses.

We just finished one with Dr. Tom Nettles, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of last week, or the week before, actually. And then we have courses coming up in Memorial Day weekend and week and also Labor Day weekend.

So we offer live modular courses in which we invite students to come in and hear those courses. We're thankful that those have been well attended in recent years. We also, all of our live courses that are taught in Owensboro are live streamed, and they can be taken through the software platform zoom.com live.

[27 : 07] And in fact, we teach all of our language curriculum that way. And then, of course, we do have the correspondence, I want to say, are recorded online courses. They're video recorded.

They can be taken online. These courses are not taught on a semester basis. They can be taken, begun at any time. Through the mechanism which we call CBTS Pathway, which is a way of simply presenting those courses in a step-by-step way.

Here's what I'm really humbled and thankful to be able to tell you. In June, I reported to our board at our annual face-to-face meeting that we had 122 active students.

That was up 40 from the previous year. I can also tell you that in 2019, we had 101 new applications to the seminary.

We're very thankful for what God has done. Our active student population in the spring of 2020 will probably be about 170. We only count students that are actively taking classes.

[28 : 16] And our administrator has told me that he expects that to be someplace between 160 and 180 this spring. We also are involved in international instruction through what we call the Master of Arts and Reformed Theology.

We're involved in helping to administer and organize affiliate seminaries in South America and Latin America primarily.

So, all that I've said doesn't count what I'm about to tell you. We administer theological education with affiliates in Ecuador.

We're affiliated with the Confessional Baptist Seminary of Ecuador, also known as CBTS Ecuador. In Bogota, Colombia, we are associated with the Theologica Bautista Facultad, the faculty of Baptist theology there.

We are associated with the Confessional Baptist Seminary of Cuba. Both of those places are known as CBTS Bogota or CBTS Cuba. In the next two months, we're starting another extension in Cartagena, Colombia, the faculty of Baptist theology there.

[29 : 41] It's associated with the work in Bogota, but we'll be meeting separately for courses. We hope to begin, have plans to begin, have approved Trinidad and are about to approve Brazil in 2020.

And together, these affiliates will have probably, I expect, by the end of this year, we'll have had two to three hundred students in South America.

We're also thankful to say that we've completed the accreditation process with the Association of Reformed Theological Schools, and we were accredited by them in October of 2019.

That's a big step for us and involved a ton of work. And then, developing provision. We're thankful for the way that God has provided for the seminary.

We're supported by interested individuals, partnering churches. We hope to have, in the next few months, 50 churches that are partnered with us to help us with this work.

[30 : 49] And, of course, student fees, which in no seminary in the world support the work of a seminary. You know the great truth about a theological education? The people that need it the most can afford it the least.

That's the great truth. So, no seminary in the world supported on student fees. The fees would become just excessive and unworkable if you did that. Well, look at that.

It's 10-15, Pastor John. And I am done. So, I'm going to get this back to you. Maybe just people that have questions. Are there any questions that you have?

Oh, sure. Yeah. Outside of Cartagena, Colombia, there's a missionary work led by an American missionary from Oregon.

He's a good man. We actually met him because he started taking classes in CBTS Bogota. And he is associated, he's like the education representative for an association of about 100 Baptist churches on the northern coast of Colombia.

[32 : 06] And those churches actually hold a form of the 1689 Baptist Confession. I think they hold the abstract of principles. They don't know that, but Michael has been trying to introduce them to the doctrines of grace.

And because of the distance it is, it's 500 miles. You say, well, that's not bad. Yeah. But in Colombia, traveling 500 miles by road means like a 24-hour drive.

Right? I drove like 500 miles to get here yesterday. Well, not quite, probably. But, so I said, so they have had several men flying down to Bogota to take the modules.

But we got to know Michael. I went and preached for him a couple years ago. Our church took him on as a missionary with particular reference to the orphanage ministry there. But they have a growing church.

The name of the church is Nido de Gracia. Anybody here know Spanish enough to know what Nido de Gracia is? I jokingly have called it Bird's Nest Baptist Church.

[33 : 12] Actually, it means nest of grace. And the reason they called their church Nest of Grace is because they bought an old farm when they began the work there.

An old chicken farm. And they actually first met in the chicken coop. So, Nest of Grace Baptist Church. Well, his heart is to begin an extension of CBTS there just outside of Cartagena for the men he's ministering to.

And so they're building both a place for the classes to be taught and several small dormitories there. Our church will be supporting, started to support them a year ago.

And we think it's a wonderful and worthy work that's going on there. The Riffle family's been in our home. He and his five children. And they're delightful folks. And we think God is going to do great things through that.

So we hope to begin our first classes in Cartagena, Turbana, actually just outside Cartagena, in April or early May. OK?

[34 : 20] Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena, Thank you, Pritagena,