

Goal: The hearers would conform their lives to the plumb line of God's Word.

I'm not a contractor, that's for sure. There are stories of the projects that I have attempted, and how naive I'd been. Then, how friends had come to my rescue to help fix what I had done. Case and point, 12 years ago we moved into a brand-new house and I needed an area to fence in our dogs. I figured that a 60-foot chain-link fence and gate would keep them in an area large enough to run. So, I went to Home Depot, purchased the supplies, borrowed a post hole digger from a friend, and within a couple of hours dug 14 holes. I mixed and poured the Quikcrete, and I was checking the level of each pole at its base, adjusting each pole again and again. What didn't occur to me was that a level base could still result in a crooked post. When I stood back and surveyed my work, I realized that all of the posts were leaning, each in a different direction. I quickly called my friend who loaned me his posthole digger. He came over, looked at what I had done, laughed and said, *"That's why we use strings and a plumb line."*

How many of you know what a plumb line is? It's a string with a weight that's used to establish straight vertical lines. Without a plumb line, walls in a house or fenceposts may appear level at the base, but as you move upward, the error becomes more and more apparent. It's a hard fact I learned after I dug up all of the cemented posts. A plumb line is essential for building, and a plumb line is vital for God's people.

It was 750BC, and God's people were very comfortable. Life was good. They were militarily strong, they were financially secure, and their religious life was comfortable. They had no complaints! From their perspective, everything was good, but from God's perspective they were so crooked that they were no longer looked like the righteous people He had made them to be. God noticed that their worship had become routine and empty and that they had become complacent with His Word, ignoring His commandments justifying their idolatry, adultery, and greed. Doesn't sound a whole lot different than today does it?

So, God sends Amos, a fig farmer and shepherd, to tell Israel just how skewed they had moved from God's truth, Now, God will have to tear out their sanctuaries, take away their land, and start over again. (***"Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."***) (Amos 7: 8 – 9) Sounds harsh doesn't it? I wouldn't want to be Amos, but truth is the truth. Although they thought that they were doing pretty good, they had drifted so far off of God's standard that the image they were reflecting wasn't God's will but theirs. Just like I had to rip out those cemented fence posts and start over, so did God.

And notice the reaction of Amaziah the priest. He didn't agree with the message, so he told Amos to go away. *"Go speak judgment against someone else. We're happy how we are!"* (***"And Amaziah (the priest of Bethel) said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is***

the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” (Amos 7: 12 – 13) Isn't that how so many are today? *“Well that's what you say, but everyone has their own interpretation.”* Like last week's, *“you have your opinion and I have mine”* is a cop out that stifles conversation and tries to hide the truth. But God's truth cannot be ignored. It's a plumb line. God's people had drifted to the ways of the world. They needed to repent, and we need to repent because our perspective gets out of sync with God's standard too, and the results can be devastating.

For example, our Epistle states, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1: 3 – 6)*** Pretty clear right? God chose us, He predestined us, and blessed us with every spiritual blessing, through our adoption into Jesus Christ so we should be holy to Him. However, today's popular Christianity has slanted away from this truth, making the choosing something we do, making it our decision and not by God's grace in Christ. You hear comments like, *“when did you choose to commit your life to Christ”* or *“did you accept Jesus”*? Do you see how we have slanted from the plumb line of God's truth?

A number of years ago, Jim spoke with me about his family joining our church and he becoming our music leader. We were really connecting and it seemed like a good fit. He told me about his faith life and I shared mine. But, then he became confused. *“Wait, so if your father was a pastor, and you grew up in the church? When were you saved?”* I told him I was saved 2000 years ago, when Jesus died on the cross for me. *“Yeah, yeah. But when were you saved? When did you choose Jesus for yourself?”* I said, when I was 6 weeks old, God adopted me in baptism, and He chose me and blessed me to be His. Suddenly, what felt like a chasm appeared between us. Jim now looked at me suspiciously. In his mind, if I didn't have a profound experience that led me to choose God, then I must not be a real Christian. Sadly, Jim and I went our separate ways, but a few months later I was teaching a high school Biology class, where his daughter was one of my students. One morning, before class I noticed she was crying. When I asked why, she said her family had joined a new church where her father preaches, but he wouldn't let her be baptized because he doesn't feel she is mature enough to make that choice yet. Jim needed to have his point of view reset back to the plumb line of God's word.

This might sound like a tiny nuance, but I can't tell you how much time I spend with individuals who are struggling with guilt and grief and stress and various crisis, that they think are God's judgment. The truth is that He chose them even before He created the world. He chose them, and us, in spite of our sin and wickedness so that He would bless us with every spiritual

blessing. Do you see how one's perspective can get out of sync with God's and do damage?

Then there was Todd. Todd grew up in the Lutheran church, but because he was in the military, he and his family changed churches several times, settling on what was close to their home or what they thought offered the best youth group. Each church was different, but he thought that they all teach God's love in Jesus, so what was the big deal. Then after a difficult deployment, he struggled with severe PTSD. I watched as he struggled with fear and doubt, feeling that he had committed the unforgivable sin and was unforgivable. He repeatedly said, "*I love the Lord, but He can't accept me after what I've done!*" He would come to me in agony, feeling condemned and rejected. I would repeatedly point him to the cross of His Savior and would assure Him of God's forgiveness in Christ. But he continued to hear too many other pastors and his guilt overwhelmed him. He could only see his actions and choices, not God's.

I echoed God's truth again and again, that God chose him, before God had even created the world. That God adopted him by sending His Son, Jesus, to cleanse him of every sin he would ever commit. God already knew everything about Todd and in spite of all of that, by His grace, He would continue to bless him with every spiritual blessing. Day after day, I patiently tried to correct Todd's understanding bringing him back in line with the plumb line of God's Word and God's grace. (***"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."*** *(Ephesians 1: 11 – 14)*)

It's that same truth that I want to remind you of today as well. You have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and God has adopted you, making you holy and blameless before Him so that you might live today and every day, not by what the world says, or what others can reason, or by what you desire, but to the praise of His glory.

God's Word is clear, it's all about His grace for you in Jesus Christ. Therefore, no matter what you do, or how old you were when you were baptized, or how well you have kept God's commandments, or haven't kept them, your Heavenly Father showers you with His amazing grace and love all because of the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. He has made you His adopted child and has prepared your place in heaven. That is the plumb line that God sets before you today and He wants each of us to repent of all of our various perspectives and believe, hold fast to the true hope and comfort that only our Almighty can give. In Jesus name. Amen.