

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: June 24, 2011

Dear Heavenly Father, we are overwhelmed with a sense of indebtedness as we consider that your grace is greater than all of our sins. We just pause, Father, in a moment of silence to reflect upon that very, very truth. [MOMENT OF SILENCE] Grace, grace, God's grace. Grace that is greater than all of my sin. How thankful, Father, we are that you loved us enough to send your Son to be the propitiation and the appeasement of your wrath against our sin. Father, we just pray that today that you would remove all those things that are a hindrance to your expressing your glory through us and that you might do that for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Guys, we should never take for granted the significant input that Don has with us week after week, just in the way that he plays for us and gives us that time of fellowship. I don't mean to embarrass him in any way, but let's just express our gratitude. [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

Let's turn in your bibles please as we're looking at our theme for our study these months is the formation and function of the church, both the invisible and the visible church. We're looking now at a passage of Ephesians 1-6. We're looking at the formation of the church. Remember the word "church" is the word "ecclesia," which means gathering or called out ones. It is not a location. It is not a place. It is not a building. It is not an activity. It is the gathering of God's people. That's what we're looking at right now to see how God has, in eternity past, ordained a means by which he would gather his own to form the body of Christ worldwide. We're just beginning to see where we fit into all of that wonderful, sovereign providence of God.

We pick this up in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, the theme of which is the church. If you want to read a book in the Bible that really has to do most of all with the centrality of the issue of the church, it's the book of Ephesians. This is what our dear brother writes, "¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." Notice to whom he's writing. He's not writing to every person who's ever been born. He's not writing to any mass of people. He's writing to that ecclesia, to that group, to that gathering, to those who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

This is what he says, "²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Notice those blessings are where? They are in Christ. They are not external, they are internal. They are a result of our being in Christ, and when you are in Christ by saving faith through the regeneration work of the Holy Spirit, that's where you participate in those blessings. The blessings are not something that's external, necessarily, but they are a result of the relationship that you have because you and I are in Christ. That's a definition that he has of a saint. A saint is someone who in Christ. A saint is someone who is faithful in Christ.

Notice the number of times he says that. You'll notice if you were to count this in all of his epistles, he'll use the phrase "in Christ" 129 times to describe a person to whom he's writing who has a saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son. That's his definition of a "Christian." He doesn't use the word Christian; he uses the phrase "in Christ." It's much more definitive and much more clearly defined when you understand what that means.

"⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from his

Word.

If you look at lesson 3, we began already, just a matter of review, we saw that the formation of the church is in the verses we just read. We saw that the method that God used to build the church was election. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. His methodology of gathering the ecclesia, gathering, his gathering, or gathering his people would be through his sovereign, gracious, compassionate, merciful doctrine of election, chose us.

Now notice, the object of God's election, or the object of God's choosing was whom? It is us. It's not everyone. It's us. Do we understand all of this? Not necessarily. We may not even understand it, but we have to recognize that this is what the Scripture teaches, that God chose in him. The question is am I one of the us? Only you can answer that. I can't answer that for you. It's not our responsibility to go around looking for people, "Are you one of the us?" What our role is, as the church, is to what? To preach the Gospel unto all creatures. That's what we do because the means by which God does his choosing, the methodology, is, and we'll see in a moment how he does that, is he does that through the proclamation of the Gospel.

The method God used to form the church was election. The object of God's choosing, or the object of God's election, was us. The time of the formation of the body was before the foundation of the world. The purpose of the formation of the body was to be holy and blameless before him.

Let's pick it up right there as we left off last week. We're looking at this insight which says that the purpose of the formation of the body is so that we would be holy and blameless before him in his presence. In other words, that's a concept that's saying to have fellowship. The purpose of the ecclesia, the purpose of the gathering of God's people, is to have fellowship with him. That's an expression that he uses by defining the qualifications. In order to have fellowship, you must be holy and blameless because the Scripture says that God is too pure to look upon sin. Sin cannot be in his presence, so by logic, if you're going to be in fellowship in relationship to God the Father, you're going to have to meet his requirements, and they are this—holy and blameless. Can you do that? Is that something you can achieve? Is that something you can earn? Or is it something that you receive? You see, it's something we receive. That is what we call justification by faith alone. When we are justified, God declares us holy and blameless because you get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ.

As we've asked before, do you have to be perfect to get to heaven? The answer yes. God demands perfection. He doesn't grade on a curve. His standard is always the same, and that is to be holy and blameless. Can you do that? The answer is? No I cannot either. Therefore, you and I need a Savior. We need a Savior because we cannot meet those standards. The beauty of the Gospel of Christ and grace is this—grace is greater than all of our sin. Grace is greater than all of our sin. That's the means by which God has chosen us to have fellowship with him. The purpose of his gathering, the purpose of his election, us, before the foundation of the world, is to qualify us to have a life of eternal relationship with him, which we call fellowship. We need to take fellowship more seriously.

Sometimes we just think fellowship is gathering around and having cookies and red punch. That may be one of the things you may do as you're having fellowship, but guys, you've got to realize this—God has done the one thing that you and I cannot do for ourselves, and that is to give us credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ so that he will now view you as being holy and blameless. That's the reason he chose you before the foundation of the world. That's the reason he wrote your name in the Lamb's Book of Life, so that you would be in an eternal relationship with him, which we call fellowship.

When you and I come together on Fridays, we are here because of the divine election of God before the

foundation of the world and the purpose is that when you and I get together we are going to have a fellowship with him that lasts for eternity. This is just an expression of it.

Brothers, we need to take the concept of fellowship a bit more seriously. Remember this—it cost God the life of his son in order to create an environment in which you and I can receive his sinless perfection and perfect obedience and therefore be qualified, if you would, to have fellowship with him for eternity.

That's the purpose. You see, the purpose of the formation of the body is so that we would have fellowship with him. Let's take a look at how extensive this fellowship is. Look at John 14:3. This fellowship that we have, Jesus expresses it this way, "If I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself that there where I am, there you may be also." That's fellowship.

This fellowship is just not something that happens on a Friday, or it doesn't happen when we get together in small groups. This is a fellowship that is going to be eternal. It's one because our Savior, who has accomplished the means by which you and I can have fellowship, will come and take us back to himself because his great desire is what? His desire is that you and I will be where he is. That's a wonderful thought about fellowship. Do you realize that?

The Lord Jesus says, "I want my gathering. I want the people whose name was on my mind when I was on the cross." When Jesus was on the cross, you were on his mind, and he says this, "That fellowship is so intimate, it is so deep, it is so personal, that I want them to be with me, and so I'm going to come back, and when I come back in all of my glory, I'm coming back for," and one of the reasons is this, certainly, that God will receive all the glory, but one of the sidebars of that is this, "that they, the ecclesia, the gathering, the elect, the chosen, before the foundation of the world, they're going to understand the full significance of the purpose of my having chosen them, and that is to be with me where I am. Guys, that's fellowship. Do you understand the significance of that? It's a concept that we just treat so lightly. We need to take it more seriously and realize the absolute benefit of the joy that we have when we're here on a Friday. Yes, the Holy Spirit is guiding us into all truth and fulfilling his job description, but there's a bigger reason than that, and that's that you and I are beginning to taste what it's going to be like to have fellowship with the Lord in his presence. This is just a touch of the iceberg, guys. This is just something that we're just beginning to probe the depths of something that's far beyond our comprehension, and that is that we're going to be in his presence because he will come and gather his elect.

That's why when the gentleman who said the Lord's going to return, the Rapture, is going to return on May 21st, or whatever that date was, you and I know exactly that that's erroneous and false and wrong. The Scripture says that only the Father knows. But the reason. There's a bigger reason. It's not that you and I don't know the date. The bigger reason is this, that not all of God's elect have come to saving faith yet. You see, that's the reason he hasn't returned. When will he return? It's when God's elect will have come to saving faith, so that he can say, "I want to have them," who, those who he chose before the foundation of the world, "they can be with me for eternity. That's when the Lord Jesus is going to return.

What is you and I do beforehand? Sit on our butts and do nothing? Absolutely not! The role of the church is to what? Preach the Gospel unto all creatures. We need to be aggressive. We need to be active. We need to be proactive. We need to be proclaiming Christ and him crucified from our pulpits week after week after week. If you want the second coming of Christ to be enhanced and come sooner, then preach the Gospel, because he will not come until everyone of the elect have come to saving faith, because he tells us in John 10, "I will not lose, I'll not lose any of those who the Father gave me."

You see, dearly beloved, each one of you, if you're in Christ today, you're a love gift of God the Father

to God the Son because you were chosen before the foundation of the world to have fellowship and be with him. If you and I want the second coming of Christ to come sooner...it's not going to come through political change and getting a new president or getting a new Congress or redeeming the budget. Those things we need to work on, certainly, but that's not going to enhance the Kingdom of God. What's going to enhance the Kingdom of God is the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. That's the means by which God will bring his elect.

Let me show you. Go Romans 10:13-17. When you understand this fellowship and what it means, and what it means, the Lord will return when all of his elect come to saving faith. We need to understand this—the means by which that's going to happen is this, “¹³for ‘whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ¹⁴How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’ ¹⁶However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of...,” dancing in the aisles by art and by music. {LAUGHTER} It doesn't say that. It says faith comes by what? By hearing. What is it you hear? You hear the Gospel of Christ. It's Christ and him crucified. That's the message of the church.

You see, often times, the message that we preach as a Gospel today is this—the abundant life, joy, happiness, peace, complacency, good relationships. That's not the Gospel. That's the consequence of the Gospel. It's the result of the Gospel. But that is not the Gospel. That is not what you preach. You don't preach about having peace. You don't preach about having a good life. You don't preach about abundant life. You preach the Gospel and the consequence of that is when somebody has believed because of God's regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, those are the results of the consequences of having believed. And how is it you're going to believe? You can't believe until you hear. Where do you hear it? You hear it from the pulpit.

You see, the number one thing in the ministry of the church is the pulpit. What do you hear from your pulpits? Do you hear nice, fluffy sermons about Reader's Digest and stories and the latest movie review? Or do you hear the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith? Notice what he says. That's the means by which God brings people into his fellowship. It is through the preached Word.

Now that's one of my concerns about contemporary music today. It can be healthy. It can be helpful. It can stimulate a response. I'm not putting that down. What I'm saying is often times people say, “We're going to sing the Gospel,” and what do they do? They sing a song about the consequence of the Gospel, but not the Gospel itself. There's a difference. We sing about the consequences of the Gospel under the guise of, “We're giving the Gospel.”

There's no evidence in Scripture—and we'll get into this when we talk about music—music is not used as an evangelistic technique. It is never used in the Scripture as an evangelistic technique. It's used as an expression of praise, but not evangelism. Evangelism is confined to one methodology, and that is what? The mouth. You speak because you're appealing to people's minds and to their wills.

The music will appeal to their heart. But what appeals to a person's mind and to their will is the spoken Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to realize, guys, the means by which, the means now, by which God draws people into fellowship with himself is the preached Word.

Tom: *When you talk about fellowship, don't we often forget about Philippians 3:10 and how that really directs us to fellowship?*

Read it for us please. The answer is yes, but please read it.

Tom: *“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”*

Amen. You see, there are three words that describe the ecclesia; three words from Genesis to Revelation that describe the gathering. When use the word “church,” I’m not talking about a denomination, I’m not talking about a place, I’m not talking about a program, I’m not talking about an activity; I’m talking about a gathering of people. That gathering of people known as the church is described by three major concepts, or three major words from Genesis to Revelation, and Tom just touched on one of them.

The first one is this—the church, the gathering, is described as a remnant. It’s not everyone. It’s the “us.” It’s remnant. Secondly, it’s persecution. All those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will...have an abundant life. Will suffer persecution. Tom just read that. Did he suffer everything that was possible? No. Christ has a body that is still what? Suffering. We are the body. We are suffering. To fulfill, as Paul says, the sufferings of Christ. It’s in that that we have that fellowship with him. Part of the fellowship that we have may be the fellowship of suffering, as we just read in Philippians 3. The second word that describes the gathering of god’s people is the idea that that gathering, because we are in the kingdom of this world, the prince of the power of the air, we are going to potentially suffer as part of our fellowship experience of being with Christ.

The third word is this—warfare. We are involved, as the chosen, as the ecclesia, as the gathering of God’s people, we are involved in spiritual warfare. We are involved in spiritual warfare. When we say, “Thy kingdom come, they will be done,” we’re basically saying this, “Lord, we desire that you would build your kingdom and destroy the other one.” That phrase, “Thy kingdom come,” is an expression of battle. It’s a warfare terminology.

When you and I say, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come,” the first petition in the Lord’s Prayer is, “hallowed be Thy Name.” We want your name to be glorified. We want your name to be demonstrated as holy. The primary means by which that’s going to happen is the second petition, which is, “Thy kingdom come.” That means we want you to be hallowed, we want your glory to be on display through the advancement of your kingdom. That means as your kingdom advances, the other kingdom is destroyed. When you are saying, “Thy kingdom come,” you’re saying, “build your kingdom and in warfare destroy the other one.” You’re saying, “build my kingdom, your kingdom, and destroy Satan’s” That’s a term of battle, guys. That’s a term of warfare.

Audience Member: *If anybody watched the U.S. open last weekend, and NBC opened up with the Pledge of Allegiance, and they left out the part of “under God,” and so it’s...you talk about warfare.*

That’s it. That’s America today, folks. That’s where we are.

Coop: *To your point, the popular culture is like kumbaya, [UNCLEAR] as opposed to frankly the point, is that we need to call up the PGA or whoever and say, “Excuse me. I just cancelled my membership. Excuse me. I no longer support your organization because of that editorial.” But the culture says be nice...*

Be tolerant.

Coop: *Be tolerant.*

Coop brought up a good point. Culture says love is defined by tolerance. Love isn't defined by tolerance. Love is defined by obedience. Jesus tells us, "If you love me, you're going to be tolerant." It doesn't say that. It says, "If you love me, you'll obey my commands."

Don: *Getting back to what you were saying before about preaching and the importance of preaching. I think that the reason that so many people, for example, think that music proclaims the Gospel or whatever and who want more fuzzies, it's probably an overreaction to what some people call dead orthodoxy. We've got to guard against that; however, I think that we probably, in many cases, swung to the opposite extreme, that we want warm fuzzies, it's kind of what the guy was saying before, kumbaya mentality. We have to remember that we are to appeal to the [UNCLEAR], we're to love the Lord with our whole soul, heart, mind and strength. That's what preaching is aimed for is the mind, and so I think that you've brought up a real good point. It takes work, it takes discipline, to study the Word and it's a discipline like any other discipline. When people say, "Well, I don't know what justification is and why do you have to use these big words." We can do Scriptural words and any [UNCLEAR] study has terminology that we need to know. So I think you brought up a real good point there.*

Thank you. It's not mine. It's just plagiarism. {LAUGHTER} Good preaching is plagiarism. You take a message that's already been given and you just figure out to re-give it. You see that's what it is. We need to understand that the whole...

Audience Member: *You make a case that if you're not being persecuted that you're not as faithful...?*

The question from our brother is, "Can you make the case that if you're not being persecuted you may not be as faithful as you should be?" I don't know. That's a possibility. The danger of that is thinking that, "Oh I'm not being persecuted, I'd better go do something so that I get persecuted, therefore, I'm going to feel better." You've got to be careful. I don't know. There is the possibility. Only you can answer that. I think you have to look at yourself at the end of the day and look at yourself in the mirror and say this, "Did I finish what you gave me to do?" That's the only you can... that's what Jesus says in John 17. One of the great leadership principles is this, "I brought you glory on earth by finishing what you gave me to do." Can you at the end of the day look yourself in the mirror and say, "Lord, to the best of my ability, I think I finished everything you gave me to do." When you and I ask that question, we are then going to see that the consequences of that type of a style of life, which would be more kingdom focused and socially focused, will produce responses of people either pro or con for us that may lead to persecution. So I don't know. I think we have to be careful not to think I'm not doing enough, therefore, I'd better go do something, because that then would produce, potentially, pride by saying, "Oh look at me. I'm suffering." You've just got to be careful with that. All I can really say is you've just to examine yourself and say, "Lord, have I done today, have I really finished what I think you gave me to do? And tomorrow I want to do the same thing."

Tom: *I think Job gives us a good example of one that is. Personally, I went up for a project that would have made my business, from a national standpoint, and I lost it. Didn't get. So I thought, "I'm being persecuted. That's part of my Christian walk." Two months after that, I lost my whole business, lost my house, lost everything and had to move. So it's not up to us. It's all in God's time when it happens, how it happens. We just need to take one day at a time.*

I think the real issue here, brothers, is this. What's our response to it when it does happen? That's the real issue. How do I respond to that should the Lord be pleased to allow me to fulfill the sufferings of Christ and to have my fellowship as part of the suffering for the body of Christ, as part of the gathering? What's my response going to be? Rather than asking the question why am I going through this, ask the question, "What are you teaching me through this, and how should I respond?" Ask the question what and how not why. If you ask the question why, it's one of those secret things, according to Deuteronomy

29:29, that you and I will never figure out. Let the secret things be secret. The real issue is what is it I need to learn and how do you want me to respond as member of the ecclesia, as a member of the gathering? Because you see, I'm now experiencing a different dimension of fellowship because you have made me, declared me, holy and blameless before you in Christ; therefore, I'm now in an eternal fellowship relationship with you because of what I have received and what you've given me because grace is greater than all of my sin.

Take a look at John 17:24, another expression of this fellowship. "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me," now that's the "us," that's the ecclesia, that's the body of Christ, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." That's fellowship. That's the consummation, it's the ultimate expression of the fellowship that you and I now are having on Friday morning with the Lord. It's a culmination of the fellowship that you have every day because you're constantly in his presence. It's part of the fellowship that's going to have its consummation in this particular expression where Jesus says, "I want those whom you gave me. I want them to be with me. And the reason, Father, is this. I want them to see my glory that you gave me before the foundation of the world when you providentially chose and formed the body of Christ. I want my body to see me in all of my glory, because in seeing me, they're going to see you, and they're going to see the purpose behind everything that's ever happened to their life, because before the foundation of the world, you chose them to be part of what I am, and that is to fulfill my body. They are my body and I want them to see that."

Do you see the ultimate consummation of our fellowship expression? And that's the purpose behind the formation of the body. The formation is this—so that they will be holy and blameless in Christ so that we have this eternal fellowship with him that just has great culmination when Christ returns in all of his glory. The end result will be this—we're going to see the majestic glory of God that was designed before the foundation of the world. Come Lord Jesus. Come Lord Jesus. I just wish that would happen tomorrow. I've got a couple of things to do, but I wouldn't mind.... {LAUGHTER}.

Do you see? What I'm trying to heighten guys is our understanding of fellowship and the depth and magnitude of it. You see, we are redeemed in Christ and given Christ's righteousness. Look at Ephesians 5:25-27, a great admonition to us as men, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church." The word "church" means what? Gathering. He loved the gathering. What did he do? Gave himself up for it. There's our model. Impossible to do without being in Christ. "So that," here's the consequence, cause and effect relationship, "so that he might sanctify her," the church, that means set apart to be holy, "having cleansed her by the washing of water and the word so that he might present to himself the church," the church is the gathering, "in all of her glory." You and I are part of the glory of Christ. Do you realize that? You're an expression, guys, because God has chosen you before the foundation of the world. You're one of the expressions of the glory of Christ. "Having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, the she might be holy and blameless."

Now go back to Ephesians 1 and what do you do see? Qualification is holy and blameless. Do you see the beginning of it, of our fellowship, is that he qualifies you to be holy and blameless? The end result of our fellowship is we are holy and blameless. It's a wonderful cycle. We enter into that for eternity. That's the purpose of the formation of the body is this—fellowship.

Now I would be hopeful that when somebody were to walk in here on a Friday, they would not see cold orthodoxy. They will see orthodoxy. But they're going to see warmth, they're going to see spirit and truth. They're going to see truth with a sense of passion, a sense of warmth, and a sense of excitement. I would be hopeful, and as Sig and I talk together frequently and pray together, we really hope that we create an environment of spirit and truth, that there's a sense of warmth and a sense of fellowship that we enjoy each other and we can laugh with each other. That's why I kind of like some of the idiotic stuff

that Sig does. {LAUGHTER}

Sig: *What was that [UNCLEAR] tape? {LAUGHTER}*

I said it was some of the ideal stuff that you do. {LAUGHTER}

Sig: *Amen! Preach it!*

There you go. {LAUGHTER} Now you see, we can enjoy one another. But what is it that is the source of our enjoyment? It's Christ. It's truth. I would be hopeful that when somebody would come in here and they would see the balance, they would see that we are worshipping in spirit and in truth. We're doing it with a sense of guidance by the Holy Spirit who's guiding us into all truth, but there's a sense of passion, there's a sense of warmth, there's a sense of fellowship. We're not lowering the bar. We're raising us to the bar. We don't bring it down to our level. We take ourselves up to his level. That's because we understand the purpose of our gathering is to express the fellowship and the joy that we have because we recognize that grace is greater than all my sin and God now declares me as sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient and he now views me as holy and blameless and the reason for that is so that we can have fellowship together with him. Glory hallelujah to that guys!

There's something that's significant that goes on here ever Friday. It's not just a group of guys getting together. We're beginning to probe the depths of the formation and the function of the church, and that is to have an eternal fellowship, that you and I enjoy with each other. Get to know each other. Spend time getting to know each other. Go have coffee. Go out and play golf with each other. Call someone up and have lunch. Get to know each other. You see, that's the expression that we've been created to do, to have fellowship. As you do that, you and I are going to be distributing and demonstrating the glory of Christ because we are his body, that we are the means by which God's glory is put on display. So enjoy what we have on Fridays, but don't take it for granted. It's something that is really very, very significant.

Coop: *I wanted to share with you, back to persecution [UNCLEAR] fellowship. Both my son and daughter have been to China. There are more active, and some people say deeper, Christians in China in home churches of 10 or 12 people. He went there as a teacher and he was invited to these home churches. There's no auditorium. They're very, very, very [UNCLEAR] with the word [UNCLEAR] and more vibrant in that persecuted environment than what the 20-year old sees in our consumer world where there's not the persecution; it's all freedom, and those, Russia, too, the orthodox church, is suppressed into communism [UNCLEAR] war of faith. Guess who won? Our Lord. The home church is more vibrant than [UNCLEAR].*

When I was teaching in China, a group of pastors several years ago, at the end of our sessions together, we were all praying over lunch. They said, "Here's what you can pray for us." I said, "What is it you can pray for us in America?" You know what they said? Persecution. They said we're going to pray that the church, the ecclesia, the gathering, will suffer persecution because they said the best thing that ever happened to us in China was communism, because it drove us to really sift the wheat from the chaff, the goats, the sheep from the goats. They said, "You know, the best thing that ever happened to us, it was painful, but the best thing that ever happened to us was persecution." Now that's consistent with biblical theology. Remnant, persecution and spiritual warfare.

Unfortunately, in our culture today, and we'll get into this as one of the many things we're going to talk about in future months, evangelism is not marketing. We've designed evangelism to be marketing. Billboards, belt buckles, t-shirts, all sorts of things that we think that when we are marketing something like we are a salesperson, that we're proclaiming Christ. We just saw in Romans 10 the means by which it happens. That happens in the pulpit. Now that can also happen in somebody's pulpit when they open

their mouth and share [UNCLEAR], so that can happen otherwise. But we need to realize that, in our culture, evangelism is not something we do. Evangelism is a style of life. It's who we are. It's not marketing. It's not using technology. There's nothing wrong with technology. The question is do I have the right message.

Let me just give you an illustration. I think I gave you this before, but I only have so many, so I have to reuse them. {LAUGHTER} Years ago, I had the privilege of speaking at the Christian Music Association Convention. The music was glorious. They had different musicians come in, Christian musicians who sang. It was wonderful. I was having lunch with one of the more well-known Christian artists, whose name I won't mention because I've not asked his permission to go public. If I were to mention his name, I'm sure many of you would recognize it. We were just talking about music in general, and evangelism and worship. I just happened to ask him, "Who checks the theology of the lyrics of the songs that you write? Do you have a group of pastors, a group of theologians, who sit down with you and when the Holy Spirit gives you something to write, you write it down and you run it by somebody to make sure that it's biblically correct and theologically accurate? Who does that for you?" His response was this, "Oh, no, and I don't have time for that because I'm just an entertainer. I don't have time for that because I'm not a theologian; I'm an entertainer." That's the mindset, you see, that has crept into our society of thinking that evangelism in music marketing.

God will use music. I'm not saying that. We're going to get into the theology of music later on. You'll never see music used as an evangelistic tool. It's used as a praise tool, but never as an evangelistic tool. You see, we can sing wonderful things about the consequences of the Gospel—peace, love, joy, all those things. That is not the proclamation of the Gospel. That is the proclamation of the consequences of having a Gospel relationship with the person of Christ, and through God the Father through God the Son, but it is not the Gospel. Remember, the Gospel contains six elements—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. Holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. If you can put in all in one song, then you've got the Gospel. But what we do is we think we're singing the Gospel when we talk about love. There is love in the Gospel, but that's a consequence. It's not the Gospel message itself.

We've got to realize, guys, that in the formation of the body, God has his means by which he will draw people into the fellowship of the gathering of his body. The purpose of this formation of the body is that we will be holy and blameless before him. In other words, to have fellowship.

The next thing we see is the motive. What's the motive behind the formation of the body? You'll see that in the next verse, "In love he predestined us," (Ephesians 1:4b-5a) You see, the motive behind the formation of the body is love. We all deserved hell, but God loved us. Look at 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In other words, to be the appeasement, to be the satisfaction of. Grace, grace, grace is greater than all of my sin.

What was the motive behind God choosing us before the foundation of the world so that we would have fellowship with him because he's chosen us to be holy and blameless? It's love. Yes, love is in there. It's the motive behind it. Now it's not because you and I were so loveable. It's because he is the one who loved us. We understand love because he demonstrated his love to us because he gave himself to us. That's how we define love. We give ourselves to other people because he gave himself to us. Love is doing the right thing. It's doing that which is best for the person, at your own expense. That's what we see here in this word. It's sacrificial. So the motive behind creating this environment for us to have eternal fellowship is God loved us.

Let me just take you to a couple of other verses to help us understand this. Let's go to Romans 5,

perhaps that might be good. Romans 5:6, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” Now guys, do you really believe that you’re helpless? Or do you think that I can just do one more thing? You see, this is the same thing Paul says in Ephesians 2 when he says this, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Now do you really think that dead means dead, or does dead mean sick? If dead means sick, then works salvation is legitimate. It’s logical. Because it says this—I’m sick 99.9% of me is gone, but there’s one little breath that I can just reach over and grab this life jacket that somebody threw to me. You’ve heard that illustration. You’re a drowning seaman, and you’re getting ready to go under and somebody throws you this life ring, and in your last breath, you reach over and do this. That’s works. That means you’re sick, because you’ve got one little thing that you can do. He says you’re helpless. What does helpless mean? You can’t do anything. That’s the same thing as you’re dead in your trespasses and sins. If dead means dead, it means that you can’t do anything, and something supernatural has to happen to you, and that is called regeneration.

When something happens supernaturally, that God breathes his life into you through the proclamation of the Gospel, and God takes that dead heart and replaces it with a heart of stone, a dead man now comes alive. What’s the first indication of true saving faith? It’s life. It’s belief. A dead man can’t believe. Belief doesn’t save you. Belief is the evidence that you are regenerated. It’s the consequence of holy regeneration, the supernatural that Jesus talks with Nicodemus about in John 3, “Nicodemus, you got everything, but you made one tragic error. You’ve externalized religion because you think it’s something that you do. Let me warn you, Nicodemus, you can’t even see the kingdom unless something supernatural happens to you, where God takes a life that has its origin in heaven and places it in your life supernaturally. Then you can see the kingdom.” You see a dead man can’t believe. A dead man is helpless.

Notice, let’s read on, in Romans 5:6-8, “⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” What’s the motive for his dying for you? Love. Do you realize that? Your love. Has anybody told you they love you today? Well let me be the first. I love you in Christ because Christ loved me first, and Christ loved you first. We ought to tell every brother or sister we see, at least some time we see them, tell them at least somebody loves you today and remind them that it’s Christ. If they are in Christ, we need to be reminded of the fact that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

“⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.” (Romans 5:8-9) Justified means declared righteous. You get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. “Much more then, having now been declared righteous, by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him.”

One of the things that when we trust the blood of Christ is we are trusting that God will remove his wrath against our sin, and that’s because of the blood of Christ. We’re trusting that we will escape, we’ll be saved from the wrath to come.

And then next, and not only this, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Romans 5:10) Guys, did you think, when you go back, that prior to your coming to saving faith you were God’s enemy? You realize that?

Let me tell you my own personal experience with my father. You know from my history, I wanted to be the chairman of the joint chiefs when I was in first grade. I understood the concept in my own grade school mind of the enemy versus an ally. One day I’m reading Romans 5 verse 10 and it says, “If when

we were God's enemy," and I thought, "Now wait a minute. I'm a pretty good guy. My dad is chairman of the elder board. My mother is the choir director and the organist. I go to youth fellowship. Certainly I'm not an enemy. I'm a pretty good guy." I slept on that for a couple of days, and finally, once I went to my dad and I said, "Dad, am I God's enemy?" I will always respect my father's integrity and honesty when he said, "Yes, you are." I said, "But Dad..." He said, "There's no but. Yes, you are. In your unregenerate condition, you're an enemy of God." I said, "Dad, I don't want to be that." He said, "Then let's read the rest of the verse." "If you've been reconciled when you were his enemy, how much more are you going to be saved by his life." He took me down to the pastor of my church and he and my dad walked me through the Gospel. I said, "I don't want to be an enemy anymore." They said, "Then your response is to repent and believe." Repent and believe.

That was the means by which, guys, God was pleased to take me from death unto life. To take me from being helpless, now to having a paraclete who comes along and is my helper. I went from death to life, helpless to having a helper. You see that's because in love, he predestined us to adoption [UNCLEAR]. The motive behind everything that you've heard me say over the last four weeks has been this—God loved you in Christ before the foundation of the world, and when Jesus was on the cross, brothers, you personally, if you're in Christ today, you were on his mind, because he loves you.

Let's pray. Father, it's so overwhelming to see the magnificence of your providence and your sovereignty, and the realization that when I was your enemy, at just the right time, you opened the mind of my heart and the heart of my mind and allowed the Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth. Father, I will just rejoice in that and just in the midst of my struggles, just remind me with a heart of gratitude that grace, grace, God's grace, grace is greater than all of our sin. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!