

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: July 1, 2011

Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arms have wrapped their restless waves of our lives. Father, we thank you that you are our Eternal Father, that you are our Eternal King, and that you are our Eternal Master. You are our King because you're the only one who can pardon our sin, you're our Father because you are the only one who can provide our daily needs, and you are our Master because you are the only one who can ward off the fiery darts of the evil one. So Father, we pray that our minds would be uplifted to you this day and that you would be pleased, once again, to have your Holy Spirit guide us into all truth. And to that end, we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have your lesson 3, hopefully we'll finish that today. We're outlining the Formation and Function of the Church. Basically look at Ephesians 1:4-6. In so doing, we've examined so far the formation of the church. Remember the word "church" is the word "ecclesia," which literally means gathering or assembly. The church is not, as we're defining it right now, the church is not a building, a place or a program. It is really a gathering of people. When the church gathers it is the gathering of the people that come, not the church that gathers. It's the gathering.

We've seen so far in Ephesians 1:4-6 that the method God used to form the church really is doctrine of election; God having written our names in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. The method by which God assembles his chosen people has historically been since creation the doctrine of election, where God chooses his people; a doctrine that is great comfort because that's the one that we could not do for ourselves because of our sinful total depravity.

We begin to see that the object of God's election you'll notice is us. As we look at these verses (4-6), "4;just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5predestined 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."

The method that God used to assemble us, his church, has been the doctrine of election. The object of God's election is us. Now that means that you and I are one of the us if you have saving faith in Christ. Remember the Apostle Paul uses the words "in Christ" to describe a person who has a saving relationship with God the Father through God the Son. He doesn't use the word "Christian." That word is used Scripturally to describe a group of people, not necessarily an individual single person. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ."

You'll notice that he chose us "in Him." That's the phrase that Paul uses. He uses that 129 times in the New Testament to describe someone who has a saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son. It's much more definitive than saying, "Are you a Christian?" A lot of people say, "Well I'm a Christian because I was born in the U.S.," or "I'm a Christian because I did this or because I did that." Paul is much more clear when he says "he chose us in him." That phrase, "in him" means that something happened in Christ that you and I are the beneficiary of. We need to realize that you and I are never the reason that God does anything. God is the reason, and we receive the overflow of what God is pleased to do. We see that here in the formation of the assembly. The formation of the church is that the object of God's election was us; those of us who are in Christ.

The time of the formation of the church was before the foundation of the world. The church really did not begin at Pentecost. It was manifested or demonstrated at Pentecost, but it was really formed in the heart of God, in the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, when they came into

an eternal covenant relationship, that that whole thing was planned. That's hard for us to understand because we can't think in timeframes like that. But really, the church was God's idea before the foundation of the world. It became obvious that the church was first demonstrated in the book of Acts at Pentecost.

So the object of God's election is us. The time of the election, or the formation of the body, was before the foundation of the world. The purpose of the formation of the body, the church, is to be holy and blameless before him. As we saw that last week, that's the description of having fellowship. In other words, you and I cannot have fellowship with God unless we are holy and blameless.

As we've been understanding over the recent years, do you have to be perfect to get to heaven? The answer is? Yes. Absolutely. God does not grade on a curve, yet you and I have to be holy and blameless. Is that possible for us to be holy and blameless? That means we would need to meet the standard of God's excellence, which is sinless perfection and perfect obedience. That's what it requires. Sinless perfection and perfect obedience. Have you ever sinned? Yes. Then you don't qualify to have fellowship with God because you don't meet those standards. The whole purpose of the gathering of God's people, the "us," before the foundation of the world, is so that we can have a relationship with him.

Let me show you a couple of illustrations of what I mean. We touched on this recently. Go to Isaiah 48:9, "'For the sake of My name I delay My wrath, And for My praise I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off.'" That little phrase at the end of verse 9, "so as not to cut you off," is a Hebrews poetic idiom that basically says to have a relationship with you. In other words, we would call that fellowship. Notice what God does, so that the end result will be fellowship. There's a cause and effect relationship. God is the cause and fellowship is the result; the relationship is the result, "For the sake of my name I delay My wrath, And for my praise I restrain it from you, In order not to cut you off." In other words, God has to do something for us for himself first, which we receive the overflow in order for us to have relationship with him. That means he has to hold back his wrath, which is God's just righteous legal compensation for our sin. He holds that back because if he did not do that, there would be no relationship. In other words, you and I would not have any fellowship.

We don't have fellowship with God just because we were born. We have fellowship with God because we are born again. Because God redeems us. He regenerates us. He gives us a desire to have this fellowship. But the point I'm trying to stress here is, you see, God takes the initiative in calling us to himself so that he can have this relationship with us. He does that in order not to cut you off; In other words, not to prevent you from having a relationship with him.

Go to Isaiah 43:25. You'll see something very similar. I want you to notice God is the cause for both of these. In 48:9 we saw, "I do this for My name's sake." Remember the word "name" as we've discussed before means characteristics, attributes or nature of the person whose name you're evoking. In other words, God holds back his wrath for his name's sake—for his character, for his nature and for his attributes. He does that so that his attributes will be put on display. One of the things that God does for us, which we cannot do for ourselves, is he does something to glorify his own name and that he holds back his wrath; does not give us just due.

We need to understand a couple of things. We need to understand justice, mercy and grace. Justice is getting what you deserve. Justice is getting what you deserve. The standard is the same in the Old Testament versus the New. The Old Testament says, "The soul that sins shall die." That's the standard. The New Testament says the same thing, "The wages of sin is death." That's his standard. Now that's justice—getting what you deserve.

The first time you took a breath, which was an act of sin, did you die? No because you didn't get all that

you deserved. That's mercy. Mercy is the next stage—not getting all that you deserve. Everybody whose ever been born has experienced God's mercy. They just don't know it yet, until we communicate the Gospel of Christ. Everybody has experienced God's mercy, because if the standard is the soul that sins shall die, the moment they take their first breath, and that's an act of sin, because it's in an unregenerate spirit and an unregenerate nature, then why is that he lets them have life? It's because of mercy. Do you see, all of us have experienced God's mercy. It's just that people don't know that. Because we think we have a right to things. The only thing, honestly, we have a right to is God's wrath. That's the only thing we have a right to. But God, in his mercy, doesn't give us all that we deserve.

The next thing is grace. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Now when God gives us his grace, we now enter into a saving relationship with him. You'll notice in verse 6 of Ephesians 1 it says, "To the praise of the glory of his grace." Grace is not getting what you deserve; it's getting what you don't deserve. We go from justice (getting what you deserve), mercy (not getting all that you deserve), and grace (getting what we don't deserve).

You'll see the same here in Isaiah 43:25, and notice the reason, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions," because you're a good guy. It doesn't say that. It says, "I wipe out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins." So why is it that God redeems us? Why is it God regenerates us? Why is it God removes our sin from us and remembers our sin no more? It's so we can have a relationship with him. That's what we see in Ephesians when it says, "The purpose of the formation of the church for us to become holy and blameless, so that we can have an eternal relationship with him." God is calling us to have a relationship with him, and he does all the qualifying for us. God is the one who qualifies us to have a relationship with him. We don't do that. We don't earn that. God does that for his name sake to the praise of the glory of his grace, and as a result of that, we now can enter into a saving relationship to him.

We see the purpose of the formation was for us to be holy and blameless before him. The only we can become that is for God to have done what we just discussed in Isaiah—hold back his wrath, remove our transgressions from us and remember our sin no more. That means that we now get credit for his standard, which is the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. That is what we call justification. Justification is a forensic term; it's a legal term, that God is making a declaration about how he views you and me—the us—how he views the church anymore. He now views us differently than he did before he held back his wrath.

He now views us as being sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient; hence we have fellowship with him. As a result of that, you and I are justified by faith. You get credit for someone else's righteousness. It's the righteousness of Christ that you and I get credit for. It's what we would call an alien righteousness. Alien meaning outside of yourself.

You get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. As a result of that, you see, you and I now have a saving relationship. Justification is something that God says about you. He says something different about you than when you were in your sin. He's removed the wrath. He's taken away our transgressions. Remembers our sin no more. And how he has a different view of who you and I are, and that is what we call justification. Justification by faith alone. It's something that you and I accept when we hear the Gospel of Christ because the Gospel is made up of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ. The person means his sinless perfection and his work is his perfect obedience. That's part of the Gospel.

We need to hear that God's standard is sinless perfection and perfect obedience and that the only way you can get that is that you get credit for what Christ has done.

Remember years ago there was a fad like we have in the church often about every 10 years, a new fad comes down the pike, that people get all excited about. One of those was wearing the wristband that said “What would Jesus do?” (WWJD) That was the big thing. I saw it on license plates and bumper stickers and people were wearing it on t-shirts. I have no idea what Jesus would do. But I can tell you I know what Jesus has done. I think the real phrase should be WHJD. What has Jesus done? I can tell you what he has done. I don’t know what he will do, but I can tell you what he has done. He died for my sin. He paid the cost of my moral decay. He met God’s standard of righteous, just law, and he removed God’s wrath from my sinfulness. You see, that’s what Jesus has done.

We need to focus far more on what Jesus has done than what we think Jesus would do. I really don’t know what Jesus would do. I’m going to base my life on the fact that I know this. I now have a desire to want to do that because I understand what Jesus has done.

As we look at WHJD, what has Jesus done, that’s what motivates us for gratitude. Our motivation now becomes a desire to express our gratitude, and that’s the formation of obedience. Jesus tells us in John 14, “If you love me, you’ll be obedient.” You see, obedience is defined by love, and love is defined by obedience. Love is not defined by tolerance, as in our culture. It’s defined by obedience. What’s the motivation for that? It’s the desire that God instills in us through regeneration to want to express our gratitude for the fact that we realize what Jesus has done. That’s the motivation for us. God gives you that desire.

One of the greatest things that happens to us is God implants within us a desire to want to do that. Now that doesn’t mean that you and I live it out perfectly. We know that from 1 John, “If you say you’ve not sinned, you’re a liar, and there’s no truth in you.” So we’re not talking about sinless perfection; living a life of sinless perfection. You get credit for Christ’s sinless perfection, but that does not mean that we are sinlessly perfect. The beauty of what Jesus has done is that he has covered your sin, your past, present and your future sin, because of what he accomplished at the cross. That all goes into this concept of the church, the ecclesia, being gathered together to become holy and blameless before him.

Last week, we saw the motivation. What was God’s motivation for the formation of his church? Of his ecclesia? Of his gathering? Of is called out ones? It was love. In love he predestined us according to the counsel of his own will. His motivation was love. His reason wasn’t love. His reason was that you and I and would have fellowship with him, but his motivation for that was because, in love, he predestined us to enter into this relationship.

Then we begin to see today the result of the formation of the body, and that is adoption as sons, as we saw back in Ephesians 1 again, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself.” The critical phrase there is “to himself.” Adopted us to himself. “According to the kind intention of his will.” Now there’s a wonderful expression there that is really far beyond our comprehension. In other words, when you and I begin to ask the question why, one of the best answers you have is “according to the kind intention of his will.” That’s sort of a catchall phrase to help us understand that we don’t understand all the things that God did or does or will do, but we do know this. It’s according to the kind intention of his will, not ours. Kind intention of his will.

Let’s look at this idea of what does it mean to be adopted as sons to himself according to the kind intention of his will. The result of the formation of the body is that we are adopted. The word adoption means he has made us his children. Go to Hebrews 2:11. The authors describes a wonderful concept of the ecclesia, the gathering of church and the purpose of it in Hebrews 2:11, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” In other words, Jesus refers to you and I as brothers. Now just think about that emotionally for a moment. Here the Lord Jesus, the sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient one, who has paid for

your sins so that God's wrath would be removed from your sinful choices, now calls you brother. That means this; that when Jesus was on the cross, when you put all this together, when Jesus was on the cross, you, by name, were on his mind. That means that you and I, individually, are a love gift of the Father to the Son. In John 10 and 17, we see that, "I will not lose any of the ones you gave me." Who are the ones that were given? That would be the "us." That would be the ecclesia. That would be the gathering. That would be the church.

When Jesus was on the cross, brothers, you were on his mind. Now, in 2011, when Jesus thinks about you, do you know what he refers to you as? Brother. You're a brother. You and I know what that means at the earthly level to have a brother. Well just magnify that a million times over in eternity, that the Creator God of the universe now has the freedom to refer to you as a brother. That means that the person you're sitting beside, if he is in Christ today, that means he's your what? Your brother. Your brother. You see, that's the unifying element of the holy and blameless before him. That's how he brings us together. You see, that's how you and I need to look at each other.

Radically speaking, we ought to treat each other radically different than anybody else in the world because we have the same Heavenly Father. That's the tying fact. The unifying fact is that you and I have the same Heavenly Father.

I told you the illustration of my Vietnamese pastor friend when we first met. The thing that bonded us was not because he was Vietnamese and I was an American and we could speak the language. That had nothing to do with it. We couldn't speak the same language. The one thing that was the formation of our friendship, and the formation of the way that we treated each other was realized in that moment in Vietnam, by the Perfume River at the city of Hué after the Tet Offensive, that I had just come in contact with a brother who had the same Heavenly Father that I do. That radically changed everything.

We need to take [UNCLEAR] at the church. How do we look at each other? Often times we look at each other competitively in saying, "Well I want to do that," and "How come he gets to do it," "How come I can't do it?" You see, we ought to rejoice when we see he gets to do it because I'm glad that my brother gets to do it. We ought to remove this competitiveness that we have inside the church to be able to do our ministry thing.

You see, it has to do with the one another commands in the Scripture. It all starts with our reception of each other is based upon the realization that Jesus calls you and me brother because he has adopted us to himself, not adopted us to each other, but adopted us to himself. He's adopted you and he's adopted you and he's adopted you and he's adopted me, in him. That's when we come together and say, "You know, we are all brothers in Christ and there's something significant about that."

That really forms the way that we ought to choose to make our relationships with each other. What grieves me so much is when you see inner fighting inside the church over minute little issues. You see, the world...go to work and you're going to get that. Go to PNC. Come to PNC, and I'll introduce you to all that stuff. {LAUGHTER} Go to Mellon, you're going to get the same thing. Go to UPMC; You'll get the same stuff. You shouldn't get that in the church. Because we understand this, that he's predestined us as adoption, as brothers.

The realization is that Jesus refers to you as a brother, and he's not ashamed. Notice, "I'm not ashamed to call you, sinful Bruce, my brother." Why is that? Because when he was on the cross, I was on his mind. I was on his mind. And now he's not ashamed to look at me in all of my sinfulness and my natural tendencies or the choices that I make that are still offensive to God. He's not ashamed to call me a brother. And he's not ashamed to call you brother.

Sometimes, in our earthly life, if we have a brother who doesn't match up to all the expectations that we think that he should have, there's a degree of embarrassment, there's a degree of shame, because, "Well, he really didn't turn out as well as we had hoped he would." So we have this mindset that says, "Yeah, he's a blood brother, but I'm a little bit ashamed of him because he didn't match up to everything."

Notice what the Scripture says in Hebrews 2:11, "He is not ashamed to call them brothers." Guys, that ought to radically change the way that we look at our relationship to him, but also to each other.

Sig: I heard a quote, and I can't remember the man who first came up with it, but he said that we tend to not like other Christians that sin differently than we do. I thought that was beautiful because I related to it immediately. We don't like the guy who writes because they're different and they're different. But we're all sinners.

Absolutely. I think we need to realize we're all sinners, but we're all sinners who are brothers. And he's not ashamed of us. If Jesus is not ashamed to call you, Sig, a brother, how can you be ashamed to call me brother? You see, that's how it works. It goes back to Jesus is not ashamed to call me a brother, so how I can come across and be ashamed to talk to you and treat you that I'm ashamed that you're a brother? You see, it's radically changed. That's part of the concept of the church. That's what the church, the gathering, offers the world. You're not going to get this relationship like that in the world. You're only going to get that inside the church, inside the gathering, inside the fellowship.

Let's go to Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." That's one of the great promises of God's covenant relationship to his called out ones. This is one of the great verses of the doctrine of the assurance of salvation. Sometimes you know that you're in Christ because you know that you're in Christ because you know you're in Christ. In other words, the Holy Spirit testifies with your spirit, and the only defense you might have is "I know because I know. I just know." What is that just knowing? That's the Holy Spirit testifying to your spirit that you know that you are a what? You are a child of God.

Notice it goes beyond that. Romans 8:17, "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." Now here we are not only called a brother in Hebrews 2:11, but now we're also called a joint heir. You see, this brotherhood relationship that we have with the Lord Jesus goes far beyond just our having a fellowship with him. You and I are now joint heirs with him. All the things that God has given the Son, he is now giving us. We will obtain all of those things when God returns in all of his glory at his second coming. We become joint heirs and co-regents and we will rule with him. You see, that's part of our inheritance.

We experience part of that inheritance right now in its temporary phase in our present life, but there will be a fulfillment, a manifestation, a culmination of that in all of glory when we return and become co-heirs. But the point here is this goes beyond just being adopted into a family. You now have all the full rights and responsibilities of that family relationship because you are not only a brother to the one who accomplished your salvation, but you're also a joint heir with him in receiving all the benefits of being in that family. So you see, the purpose of the gathering, the purpose of the assembly, is that we will made adoption as to his children.

In the Roman society, in time of which Paul was writing, and the author of Hebrews was writing, an adopted child was freed of all crimes that they had committed, and they were freed of all debt that they incurred, and they had a brand new life. Often times, the father who would adopt this son into his family, or daughter into his family, would give them some family mark that would say that all of your debt had been paid because I have adopted you. All of your sins have been covered because I have adopted you, and here is proof. Sometimes it might have been a family ring, it might have been a family

wristband, or something of that order. We have that same identification in God giving us the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. That is the beginning of our inheritance, and that is the affirmation that we belong to God the Father because the Holy Spirit's been given to us as a forerunner of the total relationship we're going to have. So we have a mark of the family, and that is the Holy Spirit. You'll see that in verse 16. That's why the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. Sometimes, and you're looking at assurance of your salvation, the only defense you have I know because I know. That's the Holy Spirit.

The two other evidences in Scripture would be increased righteousness, promises of God and the Holy Spirit testifying to your spirit. You see, that's the evidence of the assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation is not sticking a stick in the ground and saying in 1924 I went back and did this, that's how I know I'm a Christian. No, you know you're a Christian today, you know that you're in Christ today, because you see in your life a desire for increased righteousness. It doesn't mean that it's sinlessly perfect. But you know you have this desire to live a more holy life, a desire to live out the fact that you've been called to be holy and blameless, you have this intense desire that God gives you. That's an evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in your spirit because the law is something that is spiritual. It is not something that is natural. If you did not have this desire then that would be an evidence that perhaps the Holy Spirit has not regenerated you.

One of the evidences of the assurance of salvation would be the Holy Spirit testifies with you that you just know because you know. That doesn't mean you take license with that. That ought to be fueling the desire to want to be obedient and live according to his standards.

The whole point of our understanding the adoption is our sins have been covered and all the debt that we ever incurred. When somebody, you know, we often say this in our evangelistic campaigns, "If you were to go to heaven and St. Peter were to say why should I permit you into God's heaven," the real answer is this, "You shouldn't. There's no reason that you should let me into your heaven. But because of your promises and your compassion as revealed in the Scripture, I am going to depend upon the blood of Christ to pay for my moral sin. I'm going to depend upon the blood of Christ to meet the high standard of your holy righteousness law, and I'm depending upon the blood of Christ to remove your wrath from my sinful choices. That's the reason. It's because of your promises and your compassion. But when you look at me, solely by myself, there's no reason you should let me into your heaven, save the blood of Christ." You see, that's what it means, brothers, to be adopted. Now you can stand up and say, "I'm coming in as a member of the family, because you have paid for my sin, you have paid for my debt, you have set me free from all those things that have been the deterrents in my life, because I now am a joint heir with your Son who is my brother." You see, we don't give enough thought to what it means to be adopted.

Let me give you an illustration. Go to John 14 with me please. You men, better than anybody else, know the whole history of the relationship with the orphanage in Vietnam with the Tin Lanh Church and how important you've been in all of that we our brother Tin. Back in 1968-69 when we were building the orphanage, we had 41 children that we found on the streets of the city of Hué after the Tet Offensive. It was during that time that I was teaching these young children to read English. They wanted to learn English. When I wasn't flying missions as a Forward Air Controller, I'd go up and teach these 41 children English. The only book that I used was the Bible because I wrote back to my folks' home church and they sent me 50 bibles, English bibles. The very first words that these 41 Vietnamese children learned in proper English, I mean, they could swear like the rest of us, because they learned that from the soldiers—from the Army not the Navy; they learned this from the Army. {LAUGHTER}

Sig: Or the Marines. {LAUGHTER}

They knew the slang terms. But to teach them proper English, I mean, sentence structure and vocabulary. Do you know what the first words they ever learned in English? The most important words that I could ever teach them? The most important verse in the whole Bible, “In the beginning God (Genesis 1:1).” That’s the most important verse in the whole Bible. Guys, if you don’t understand that, then everything else we’re talking about doesn’t make any sense. John 3:16 is absurd if you don’t understand Genesis 1:1. It all starts with that, “In the beginning God.”

We used the Bible as our textbook. One week, we would be reading the Old Testament, and I would just walk them through passages. We started in Genesis. Then the next week, we would start in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and just read through the New Testament. I would teach them English using the Bible.

There was one little boy. You know the story about [Hei], who was an orphan. They were all orphans. He was about nine years old. We found him living in a garbage can. Probably, in my mind, was the rottenest human being I’d ever met. You’ve got to understand him. He had no living relative anywhere in the country of South Vietnam that we could find. We later learned that his father had been executed by the Viet Cong. He’d lost both of his brothers, and his mother was taken captive and nobody knew where she was. That happened when he was six.

There was a period from six to nine, before we found him; there was a three-year period that he was only surviving. He would just as soon slit your throat as look at you, because the only thing he knew was you had what I need to survive. He learned that at six. He’s one of these orphans that we’re teaching English. He was one of the older children, at nine now. I began to see that the Lord was softening his heart just because I could see the language that came out of his mouth was different.

I really wasn’t sure what was going on other than the fact that I began to realize that out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. Something was going on in his young heart. I just had to say, “Lord, I don’t know how to do anything with him other than just to expose him to the truth of your Word. I’m going to have the let the Holy Spirit fulfill his job description because I don’t know what mine is. His role is this—to guide him into all truth.” So all I can do is put him in an environment where he will be exposed to what? Truth. Truth. That’s the best...that was my job description. That’s why I used the Bible as a textbook.

One day we reading the verses in John 14:16-17, “¹⁶I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;” now that’s the Holy Spirit. “¹⁷that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” The word “abide” there means to pitch your tent with and to stay, remain. It means to pitch your tent and feel comfortable with. Notice, “but you know him because he,” the Holy Spirit, “abides,” has pitched his tent inside of you, “and will be with you,” and will be in you.

Now notice the next verse, “¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also” (John 14-18-19). Now there are two things that psychologists say that people need to have a stable relationship in life, and that is a place and a relationship. A place and a relationship. Notice the Scripture says here, “We will come and make our abode with you; we will abide with you.” That’s the place. Where is the place that God resides in his Spirit? The location is where? In us. You are the location. It’s not the South Hills or the North Hills. It’s you. “And I will put my spirit and He will abide in you.” Notice that in verse 17, “But you know him because he abides with you and will be in you.” There’s your place. The place is you. That means wherever you go, you have that location. The second thing is “I’ll neither leave you as an orphan. I’ll come to you and make our abode with you.”

When we were reading that passage, the same little boy looked up at me in his broken English language that he was learning, said to me, “Does that mean that I can have a father?” I said, “That’s exactly what it means. And it also means this—that your Father is the same as my Father,” and he says, “That means that you and I are brothers.” I said, “Yes!”

At that moment, he prayed—the first time I ever heard him pray—and do you know what the first word came out of his mouth? He said this, “Father. Father. I now have a Father.” And then he also said this, “And I also have a brother.” Nine years old. I could not theologically convince him of that. But what does the Scripture say? Guide him into all truth.

You see, brothers, the best thing we can do to people is not to try to figure out how to manipulate them to get a response. It’s to trust the holiness of a sovereign God, who will use his greatest weapon, which is the proclamation of biblical truth, “That I will guide them into all truth.”¹⁹ After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” (John 14:19-20)

After that event in that young boy’s life, he became one of the mentors for the other children. He was one of the older ones at nine years old. I was with him for the next 18 months. You’ve heard me tell the story of the little boy who gave his blood to save the life of his friend. That was him. That was the little boy who said, “Father.” Such a radical change. All he ever wanted to do beforehand was to take someone’s life in order to survive. And now, because of a change in his heart, through the grace and mercy of a sovereign God who had written his name in the foundation of the world, in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world, made that a reality in that young boy’s life. All of a sudden, rather than wanting to take somebody’s life, he was willing to give his life. Why? It’s because he understood this. He had been adopted. He had been adopted.

Brothers, that’s what the Scripture teaches us about the body of Christ. We’ve been adopted into God’s family. That means that you and I have a responsibility to live according to our family standards. It isn’t my family anymore. It’s just not the Bickel lineage that I need to represent and the heritage of my father and my grandfather. It’s also the heritage of my Heavenly Father that you and I need to live, to live and demonstrate that in a way that manifests his glory.

So we begin to see the goal of the formation is to the praise of the glory of his grace. You see, the result of the formation of the body is that we’re adopted as sons.

Back to Ephesians 1.

Ted: Bruce, I’m just thinking...the irony of that story is that who [UNCLEAR] that young man took to your brotherhood, God’s Fatherhood and the family of God literally [UNCLEAR] we tend to make it symbolic.

Yes. Good point, Ted.

Ted: [UNCLEAR] just was struck by it was indeed absolutely true.

Yes. Good point. We take it symbolically. He took it literally. Ted’s point is exactly right. We need to take this literally. You’re sitting beside someone whose one of the “us.” By God’s grace, not out of performance, not out of anything that person has done, but because of God’s mercy and God’s grace. All of this whole concept that we’ve been looking at over the last three weeks really finds its culmination in this phrase, “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” You see, that’s the goal of the formation is to bring to praise to the glory of God’s grace.

Now you know, every army that has ever fought has always had a battle cry. In the efforts in Texas, it was “Remember the Alamo!” In World War II, it was “Remember Pearl Harbor!” When you look throughout history, every significant war, there has been some standard that as a rallying cry for the troops to come around a battle cry. Now we as the family of God, have one. It’s found in the disciple’s prayer when we say this phrase, “Thy Kingdom come!” That’s our battle cry. “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come.” That’s the cry that you and I rally around.

When you say that, there are two phrases of what that phrase means. There’s the Kingdom of grace and there’s the Kingdom of glory. The Kingdom of grace is that which is operable right now. When we say, “Thy Kingdom come,” we are saying that we want the Kingdom of grace to be flourished in our churches. That means that we need to pray for the men in our pulpits who are proclaiming an expositional, theological, biblical-based message, not something out of Reader’s Digest. When you say, “Thy Kingdom come,” that’s your battle cry, and you know this. The only way that’s going to happen is if my pastor preaches the Scripture with its sufficiency from the pulpit. When you say, “Thy Kingdom come,” you’re saying that’s what I want to happen in my church. When you say, “Thy Kingdom come,” you’re saying, “I want the glory, the Kingdom of grace to flourish in my church.” You can’t get to the Kingdom of glory except going through the Kingdom of grace.

The present day reality of God’s Kingdom is the Kingdom of grace. The future culmination and manifestation of God’s Kingdom will be the Kingdom of glory. Those two things cannot be separated.

A lot of people want the Kingdom of glory, but they bypass the Kingdom of grace. You see, that’s what he’s saying. The whole reason for the formation of this body of believers, who are the gathering, who I have fellowship with, whom I have adopted, who I paid the price for their sin, the whole reason for that is to the praise of the glory of his grace.

We need to understand, conceptually, that when we adore God and we worship him, we’re lifting ourselves upward. That’s adoration is up. Affection for one another is outward. Adoration is upward. Affection is outward. Do you know what grace is? Grace is downward. Grace is downward. It’s something that God does for us. He comes down to us through his grace; therefore, we adore him by going up. We have a relationship with one another by affection, and that’s outward. So we’re covered in all three ways, but the real one that really turns the whole table around is this. Grace means God comes down. Gives us what we don’t deserve. The whole reason, guys, that you and I are here on a Friday as an expression of the Kingdom of grace in anticipation of the Kingdom of glory which will come when the Lord returns in all of his glory and power and majesty—that’s the Kingdom of glory. There’s a future manifestation of the Kingdom. But there’s a Kingdom going on right now. It is the Kingdom of grace. You and I are involved in that.

The reason that we gather together on a Friday is not just to learn. We do it because of this—to the praise of the glory of his grace. Because you know this—you would have the desire to even want to sit here and listen to some guy use a bunch of oxygen, unless you had experienced the Kingdom of grace. That’s why you’re here. That’s why I’m here. That’s why we’re together. It is for one common goal—to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Let’s pray. Father, you have taught us so much in these three verses. Father, thank you that we’ve been adopted, and as Ted said, help us understand what that means literally and act that out responsibly, as opposed to just thinking of it symbolically. Symbolism produces nothing. It’s the desire for us to take that literally that produces a changed conduct. Father, may we, in the future days ahead, assemble here together for one purpose at all, and that is this—to the praise of the glory of your grace. Together all the Brave Men said...Amen and amen!!