

## FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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Gracious Heavenly Father, we come to sit at your feet this day with a tremendous sense of awe. We pray, Lord, that you would develop within us a tremendous fear of who you are, not in a sense of being afraid, but the sense of having you in tremendous awe. Give us a respect for your dignity and your character and your attributes, and may we see you in everything in our lives. May we realize that you are the supplier of every one of our needs. You are our strengthener and may your Holy Spirit, this day, fulfill his job description, and that is to guide us into all truth. We pray, Lord, that you would open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

Before we get into our lesson today, brothers, just let me remind you about the Servant's Fund. I did bring some applications. The Servant's Fund is something unique. It is not a foundation that just awards grants. I've been getting some phone calls and some inquiries, "Can you send me on vacation? Can you help me buy my house?" I had one person say, "Can you get me some liposuction?" {LAUGHTER} I'm serious. I'm getting requests like that. It's not the purpose of the Servant's Fund. The Servant's Fund is a public charity where people can give a gift to the charity, and you can designate to whom you would want that gift to go to.

Remember 10% of any gift goes into a pool that meets the needs of other people. It's really designed to meet basic needs in people's lives. It's not to pay for vacations or liposuction or to buy airplanes or send kids to college. It's not that fund. We do have some applications over there. If somebody needs one, you can see me and I can send you one by email, but there are a couple over there. It's really designed as a very, very quiet, behind the scenes way of meeting the needs of people who might be in need. It's a way honoring the Lord. All gifts are done anonymously. If you give a gift of \$100 to somebody, and you say "I'd like it to go to Joe Smith," or whomever that may be, 90% of that will go to that designated person; 10% goes into a pool. That pool supplies other needs as we hear about it.

It's really designed to be something that just calls attention to God's mercy and God's grace. It's not something that's a huge public issue. I just kind of do it behind the scenes in a very quiet way. We do have some applications. If you have any questions, you can always see me about it.

Let's turn in your Bibles please to Ephesians 2. We're looking at our theme; this series is the Formation and Function of the Church. We examined Ephesians 1 where we saw that the means by which God built his church was through the doctrine of election. God was pleased to elect us into saving faith. We saw that in lessons 2 and 3. The formation of the church, the method God used to form the church was election. 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. That's the only way that we can have fellowship. God never requires of us anything that he doesn't equip us to do beforehand, and therefore, in order to have fellowship with us, to have a saving relationship, he needed to make us holy and blameless before him so that we could come into his presence.

The motive of the formation of the body was love. God loved us enough to create us and the means to having fellowship. The result of the formation of the body of Christ was we were adopted as sons, and the goal of the formation of the body is to be the praise to the glory of his grace. We saw that in lesson 3.

Lesson 4 we're now talking about entrance into the body. How is that we are entered into the ecclesia, the body, the gathering of Christ? It's through our salvation. It is through the redemptive work of Christ. Remember the theme of the Bible, if somebody ever asks you, "What is the theme of the Bible," it's

really one word. It's redemption. That word means rescued through the payment of a price. Rescued through the payment of a price. We began to talk about our salvation in Ephesians 2, that we are saved from our sin. Last week we talked about that, that man's condition is spiritually, not physically, but spiritually man is dead. That means there can be no response. Something has to happen supernaturally in that person's life before they can believe. They are dead, they're blind. We are lost and we're condemned. We are not a criminal waiting trial; we are the convicted waiting execution. That's what the Scripture teaches. There's a difference.

What happens is we saw that God loved us in eternity past, he sent Christ to die for us, and the spirit pursues us. That's what we talked about last week.

Today we want to talk about the second issue of our salvation, and that is this. We are saved because of love. Notice verse Ephesians 2:4. Let me read the first seven verses from the English Standard Version. "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." (Ephesians 2:1) Now guys, one of the things you have to wrestle with and come to your own conclusion is does the word dead mean dead, or does dead mean sick? If it means sick, then you can reach out for that life preserver that somebody threw when you were bobbing out in the ocean. Or you can take the pill that the doctor when he says this is your last breath. If you're sick, then you can do that because you've got one tenth of your life left. But if you're dead, you can't respond at all. You have to come to grips with does the Scripture say that a man is spiritually dead or is he spiritually sick? If he's spiritually sick, and you hold that position, then works is a logical conclusion. You can work your way to salvation, because that means I then have enough strength in my life because I'm still alive to some degree, I can reach out and grab that life preserver.

You've heard the illustration that somebody says, "You're life spiritually is like your drowning man and somebody throws you at your last breath a life preserver, and you in your very last act of humanity, reach out and grab it." That's a work. Now you can do that if you're sick. But if you're dead, what are you going to do when a life preserver comes? Absolutely nothing. You have to come to your own conclusion is the Scripture true? Does dead mean dead? Or does dead mean sick?

"You were dead in your transgressions and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." He just described for you a dead person, spiritually. Here are some of the characteristics. Follows the course of this world. Follows the prince of the power of the air. Follows the work of the sons of disobedience. Now notice this—he said this is "<sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh." Here are some more descriptions of a dead person spiritually. They're motivated by the passions of their flesh, "carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." (Ephesians 2:3b)

Now you come to this great little phrase. I think it's the most encouraging phrase in all of Scripture when you see that little phrase, "But God." What a great, great little thought. Whenever you see, "But God," just stop and rejoice in God's mercy. Look what he says now, "But God, being rich in mercy." (Ephesians 2:4) Who is he merciful to? The people he just described—us—in verse 1 through 3. That's who he's merciful to. That's me and you. Because you see, in our deadness, spiritually, we were once, verses 1 through 3. As Don taught us a couple of weeks ago, we need to understand who we were and who we are. Who we were was verses 1 to 3, and who we are begins at verse 4, "<sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."

The motive behind our salvation is God's love. Notice the dismal condition of man and the merciful love of God. The dismal condition of man is found in verses 1 to 3. That's where we were. Then you see the merciful condition of God. You see that in that little phrase, "but God." Now in the court of God's

justice, you see love and justice combined in that little phrase, “but God.” First of all, in verses 1 to 3, we see that you are guilty. Then you see verse 4, but he let you go. You’re guilty, but you go free. You see, Christ will pay the penalty for you.

The fact that he let you go free in the sense of you don’t pay for your own sinfulness, Christ does that for you. The fact that he let you go free is God’s love for you. The fact that Christ paid for it is God’s justice for you. A lot of times you hear people say, “Well that’s not fair. You talk about, Bruce, the doctrine of election. That’s not fair.” Well all I can say to that is I’m glad God is not fair. I’ll tell you what’s not fair, brothers. It’s not fair that in my dead spiritual condition, which was verses 1 through 3, that God let me go through the sacrifice of the person and work of Christ.

When I say “let you go,” what I mean is you don’t pay for the penalty of your own sin. Somebody does that. I’ll tell you what’s not fair. It’s not fair that Christ paid for my sin. It is not fair. It’s just because you see that in the court of God’s law, there’s a combination of the love of God and the justice of God. The justice of God is that Christ will pay for your sins at the cross. Bruce, when he was on the cross, you were on his mind. That’s both love and justice combined.

We need to realize that the means of our entrance into the body of Christ, our means of the entrance into the ecclesia, to the gathering of the body of Christ, is through the process of salvation and the motive for that is God’s love for you. At the same time, you see, God balances out his love for you by the expression of his justice for you in the penalty that Christ paid for your sin. So you see that in verse 4 in that little word, “for” you see the combination of God’s love and God’s justice. One never is without the other. God cannot love you without being just. When God is just, it’s because he loves you. So you see that wonderful balance of love and justice in that little phrase, “but God.”

Now notice, we need to understand the difference between justice, mercy and grace. Justice is getting what you deserve. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins shall die. That’s God’s standard. Have you ever sinned? Then why are you alive? That’s because of mercy. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Justice is getting what you deserve. The soul that sins shall die, and the wages of sin is death. Now that is justice. Mercy is this—but God, who is rich in mercy. Who’s rich in mercy. That’s why we have M8, a little expression is we are mission minded-members of a movement motivated by mercy, because we understand God’s been so merciful to me because of his love for me and for you.

Our motivation is mercy. It’s not guilt. One thing you can be sure of, brothers, is that if you ever think that you’re being motivated by guilt to do something spiritual, you know it’s not from God. God never uses guilt as a means for you to do anything spiritual. He uses gratitude. It’s gratitude. It’s because you understand he’s merciful. That’s what motivates you toward good works, as we’ll see in a moment.

If you ever think that you’re being motivated by guilt to make up for something, you know it’s not from God; it’s really from the evil one, who’s using guilt as a means of motivating you to do something spiritual for which you will get no credit. We don’t get credit for anything anyway, because all of our merit is found in the person and work of Christ.

What we see, guys is this wonderful motive for God’s saving us is his love for us. Justice is getting what you deserve, mercy not getting what you deserve, and grace is getting what you don’t deserve. Notice the rest of verse 4 and verse 8, “you’re saved by grace.” You get something you don’t deserve. Why is it that God is able to give us grace? It’s because of the combination of love and justice. That’s why we experience his grace is because he loved us, and God was just in having Christ pay for your sins, the penalty of your sins. That’s what justification is. It is freedom from the penalty of your sin. You get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. That’s justice. It’s not fair. It’s not fair that somebody should pay for my sin. when I am on the execution block because I’ve been charged with

guilt. I'm not the accused waiting trial; I'm a criminal waiting execution, and somebody says, "I will go to the gallows for you." That's justice, but it's also love. That's what you see in the combination.

Justice, mercy and grace need to be understood in the context of each other. The motive for God's saving us and bringing us into the body of Christ is his tremendous love for you that cost the life of his Son. You can read Romans 5 and see some wonderful expressions about God's love for you that when you were an enemy of God, God reconciled you to himself. We don't do that for enemies. God does that for you, who was once an enemy, because he loves you. If that doesn't motivate you to be oriented to want to give back to him just because of mercy, you see, then we need to understand more understanding God's love for us. The only way you're going to understand God's love for you is to understand his wrath. You never understand God's love till you understand his wrath, because his wrath is what you deserve. Remember, grace is not getting what you deserve. Something occurred to remove his wrath from you. That was the death of Christ. That's mercy.

The degree to which you understand what you deserve is his wrath will be the degree to which you will understand his love, what you don't deserve, which is grace.

The motive behind God bringing us into the body of Christ is his love for you. But God, who is rich in mercy. Notice verse 5, "we are saved unto life." We are saved unto life. Gives us a spiritual life in Christ. Notice verse 5, "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." You see, now your life in Christ. He loved in Christ; he now gives you life in Christ.

Look at John 14:6—his life is the way to the Father—Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Whose life takes you to the Father? It's Christ's life. Who are you born into? When you were reborn, you were born into his life. The reason you now are reconciled to the Father is because you were born into the life of Christ, and Christ has that relationship with the Father. You are now reconciled to the Father through the life of the Son. There's only one way to get to the Father, and that is through the life of Christ. It's not by giving mental assent; it's being born again into the life of Christ. You've got to realize that when God loved you enough to give you a new life, he gave you new life in Christ. You were made alive with Christ. That's why Paul uses the expression 129 times, "in Christ." For with Christ to describe a person who has the saving relationship to the Father through the Son. He doesn't refer to them as Christians. He says you are in Christ. He's reminding us of the tremendous love that God had for us, that removed his wrath from us, that justice permitted him to bring you into the body of Christ because of his love for you, and that love for you really then says I'm going to give you a whole new life, and your life now is in Christ. That's why you come to me. You don't come to me because of your goodness; you come to me because of the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of my Son, whose life now is yours. That's a critical phrase, "made us alive with Christ."

You see, when somebody says "Are you a Christian?" that's what it means. You're with Christ. You're in Christ. If you go down the streets of Pittsburgh and ask somebody, "Are you a Christian?" they'll say, "Yes," and you say, "Why?" you'll get as many answers to that question as you ask. I was born in America. I was baptized. I tithe. I do good work. Whatever. You're going to get a myriad of answers. But if you ask somebody this, "Are you in Christ?" that's a totally different question. They're either going to look at you like you're some sort of a zealot, or they're not going to understand what you're talking about. That is such a radically different concept in our culture today. We think if we're patriotic and we wave the flag, that means you're a Christian.

Patriotism is not...we've made it a false religion. There's nothing wrong with being patriotic. I'm very, very patriotic or I wouldn't have served my country the way I did. But understand this, that patriotism is not salvation. Patriotism is not a relationship with Christ. It's an expression of your gratitude for the fact

that we live in this country. It's appropriate to be patriotic, but it is not a religion. We've got to be careful not to make patriotism a religion and basically say because I'm a good patriot, therefore, I'm a Christian. The question is not are you a patriot, but are you in Christ? You see, that's the issue. Am I in Christ? This what Paul was saying. We've got to realize, guys, that when God loved you, because of his mercy, he gave you new life in Christ. Verse 5 is critical.

***Audience Member:** I was just thinking about the last Medal of Honor ceremony that they had in the White House, they had beginning and ending prayer. Both of those prayers, Christ was never mentioned.*

Now in the Chaplaincy in the U.S. Armed Forces, you can't mention the name of Christ in a prayer.

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR] be Christian.*

They won't let you do that. At funerals, for military funerals, you can't mention the word Christ. You can pray to God or to whomever, but the word Christ cannot be used. Now help me understand. I heard yesterday, and I don't know if this is true, maybe one of you might know. I heard yesterday that, somebody told me that Campus Crusade for Christ was removing the word Christ from their title. Is that correct? What are they removing?

***Audience Member:** The word crusade.*

So what is it now?

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR]...Cru I think it's called.*

Cru is what? What's it mean?

***Audience Member:** They just didn't like the word crusade because it [UNCLEAR]...*

So they got rid of the word crusade. Is the word Christ still in there?

***Audience Member:** I think so.*

Who knows what they're calling themselves?

***Audience Member:** The Vice President of Campus Crusade was on Fox News, and he said they eliminated the word Christ [UNCLEAR]...*

Well, that's what I heard, that they...

***Sam:** It's called Cru, it was kind of an internal abbreviation that the staff used. They've been calling each other if you were a part of the Campus Crusade for Christ, now they've just formally made it so it's just called Cru now.*

There is a removal of the expression "of Christ." Is that what it is?

***Audience Members:** [UNCLEAR]...*

Well, you know, we're getting what we want. You've got to realize, guys, in life, do you always get what you want? We're getting what we want. Our country is saying we don't want Jesus in our schools. So we'll remove him. So you can't pray. So what happens to our school system? We don't want Christ

in the military, so what happens to our military? We're getting exactly what we want. We shouldn't complain because we're saying this is what we want. We want Christ removed from our society, and I think God is enough of a gentleman that he's not going to impose himself upon us, except through the remnant, and he's not going to impose himself on us. He's going to give us what we want. So why are we complaining? We're getting what we want, as a country.

Now that's why it's important that we studying this biblical understanding of the formation of the church. Remember the three words that describe the church. We've been saying it from the beginning of this study. It's remnant, persecution and warfare. We are involved in warfare.

*Don: May I politely disagree with one thing you said?*

Sure, absolutely.

*Don: That God is a gentleman. I don't think of God as a gentleman. I think that he's judging us in his wrath, like Romans 1 says.*

*Audience Member: Amen.*

*Don: If we don't want God, well then, we won't have him. But it's not because God is...and I don't want to put words in your mouth, Bruce.*

No, I understand.

*Don: It's not because God is this sweet gentleman who just says, "Okay." No, no. It's his wrath.*

What I meant was, I was using that as a colloquial expression to basically say, to emphasize the fact that we're going to get what we want.

*Don: Well that's right.*

That's what I'm saying. Absolutely. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords. In that sense, you're right, Don, so thank you for refining that.

*Don: Also I wanted to say, too, I think in verses 5 and 6 you began to touch on it a little bit. The word "together" is so significant. In our culture and in the American church today, a lot of people, "It's just me and Jesus. I don't need the church. I can worship Jesus. I can worship really any way I want and do anything I want. It's Jesus and me." As Ted is so fond of saying, not, it's not me and Jesus. I'm sure you'll develop that theme more in verses 5 and 6, the word "together."*

Absolutely.

Go back and read that again. That's a great point. Please understand when I use the phrase "he's too much of a gentleman," I'm basically saying, culturally speaking, he's not going to impose that upon us, but he will judge us. His gentlemanship, if you want to use my word, is a means of his judgment. So you're absolutely correct.

Verse 5, "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together." That's a key phrase. First of all, you are saved to a new life, and that life is no longer yours apart from anybody else. It's you with somebody else, and that is you are now part of the remnant. That's why we're using the word ecclesia which helps us understand the gathering, the assembly of God's people. That's why the Scripture talks

about that group being a remnant. We are together. We're only going to be as strong as our weakest link. Brothers, we need to really come together and be strong together, because our life now is together; it is not alone. It is just not me and the Lord alone to do our thing. I mean, you take a look at the Lord's Prayer. It doesn't say give me this day our daily bread. What's it say? Give us. Why is that? That means this—that every time you are praying, “Give us our daily bread,” you're asking the Lord to give everybody else who's in the remnant, in the gathering, their daily bread also. It is a family prayer. Notice the word “our.” It doesn't say “my” Father in heaven. It's our Father. It's a reminder that this is a family prayer. Brothers, when you and I are saved into life, we're saved into a life with Christ, but that means you're come into a family.

Why is that you and I treat each other radically different than we treat anybody else in the world, in the remnant? It's because you have the same Heavenly Father that I do. That's the one basis on which you and I radically treat the brothers of Christ because the word “together” means this. I have the same Heavenly Father you do and it has nothing to do with your ethnic background, the color of your skin, your nationality or your education or your position in life.

*Carl: Bruce, I think we need to also recognize a couple [UNCLEAR], first and foremost. I think when I heard you [UNCLEAR]..he said in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” which means that we've got to invite him into our heart, and we've got to let him [UNCLEAR] we've got to open the door for him to come in. But once he comes in, he sets up as [UNCLEAR] inside of us, and he starts it within us and we're in him. Now that we're in him, what we have to recognize as a body is that we're all part of one body in which Christ is the head. We're heading in the wrong direction here in the United States.*

Yes, no question. You see, our independence is one of our best assets, but it's also our greatest liability. We have translated the independence of the America culture into the independence of the Christian life.

*Audience Member: We're no longer an independent...we get our money from China, our...*

You could explore that however you want. Look at the broad sense. Independence is what formed America. Right? That's what I'm talking about. That was the hallmark of our culture. It's also the hallmark of our destruction. So it's the same thing.

*Audience Member: I like what Jesus said at the Last supper to disciples, “Behold, I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” We kind of if ignore that.*

Yeah, we've lost the sense of community. That word “together” is so important for us, in Ephesians 5, that Don has pointed out. You know, that's one of the reasons I started the Servant's Fund. It's a means of reestablishing community within the body of Christ. It's not a free for all. It's a means by which we can begin to come together in community and support one another just quietly in the name of Christ for the glory of God. So we've lost this tremendous sense of community.

Notice what Jesus said in John 13:34, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.” That was not a new commandment. You can read about that in Old Testament—you were to love one another. The new commandment was, “as I have loved you.” There's a new qualifier. That's how you love. This was something they understood. He gave them an old commandment with a new twist. The new twist was, “You love one another as I have loved you.” That's why you've heard me say that ministry is giving away to someone else what God has given you. If you don't understand the magnificence of God's love for you, you have no love to give away, and the degree to which you understand God's love for you, in verse 4, “but God, who is rich in mercy.” That's when you have the

ability the give love away to somebody else. That's what ministry is. Ministry is giving away to someone else what God has given you.

**Sig:** *Wouldn't you distinguish the U.S. Military as separate from the church, and if the Chaplains don't use the name of Christ, well they're not the church. The Chaplain, at one time, maybe we thought represented Christ and the church, but if he's working in the military, he's really not...I don't know, I guess I [UNCLEAR] for Campus Crusade to drop the name Christ [UNCLEAR] part of the body of Christ. But the U.S. Military, what would be, like you said, we get what we ask for. I can't imagine any U.S. government body singular being Christian as opposed to Unitarian or Jewish or Muslim or whatever.*

Well I think you'd have to ask each individual Chaplain how they respond to that. The question, for me, is not the Military, per se; it's the person who is proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Is that person really true to his or her calling? That's the issue. It's not the Military. It's the calling of that person who is called to preach the Gospel of Christ. Is he doing that in the Military? It's no different than my doing it at PNC. PNC might tell me, "You can't name the word of Christ." Then I have a problem. The question is not PNC. The question is what is my response? That's the issue.

**Don:** *That's what I was going to say, Bruce. That Chaplain, if he is a Christian, represents Christ, and how dare he not say the name of Christ. How dare he deny his Lord.*

Yeah, that's the real issue. And that's the battleground, and that's going to be part of the environmental persecution.

**Coop:** *To your point about the Chaplaincy. It is a separate corps, it is not part of the Army. It's a corps that serves. Each minister has the freedom of speech in private. If you were among Christians, and Tyler is facing this very issue, he wants to be a Chaplain. The command structure says you can't preach about Christ. Well, the answer is he preaches in private, but he respects other faiths and doesn't project on it in a public sense. But then Chaplains take people aside, just as we are in a private group here, and discuss Christ or discuss whatever faith group it is. But it is true, he's more of a technician, and his mission is understanding Islam, Catholic faith, Protestant. But in private, he's still, and the Chaplains that he has discussed this with, take people like this and speak to them about Christian values.*

Well it's interesting, in Navy regulations, the commanding officer of a ship has the responsibility for the spiritual development of his men. That's written in Navy regs—has the responsibility for the welfare, training of and spiritual development of men under your command. That was not written in 2011. That was written back in 1776, when it was started. But that is a responsibility of the commanding officer of a Naval vessel. What they're basically saying is we're going to remove that. That's what's happening. They're removing it. They're removing it.

**Audience Member:** *It was the Navy Chaplain that was actually ousted from his position five or six years ago. This didn't crop up yesterday [UNCLEAR] military.*

No. No.

**Audience Member:** *We go on for about ten years. When we read end-time prophecies, Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, you begin to read those and tie it in with all the other prophecies, you can see exactly where we're going, the apostasy, the falling away, the chipping away of the our rights as Christians, who gave this precious land through God's ordaining hand, and gave all these freedoms, and now they're just flipping them over [UNCLEAR]...we were the top, we're now the bottom of the fire. It comes down to that precious word that you used, remnant. When you read all through the Bible, you see when*



*God eliminated those who weren't following him. I've been preaching through the Old Testament, the exodus, and we're in Deuteronomy now. It wasn't the original two point something or other million people that left Egypt that went into Canaan. Those who decided not to follow God, he said, "Okay, you got what you wanted. You're not going into the Promised Land." They died in the wilderness. He took the remnant, and he built that remnant. We, sitting here at Christ Church this morning, are part of that remnant that have to stand fast, and I'll guarantee it's going to get hot.*

It is. Now we need to understand that word "together." We need to stick together, whatever that means. Go to Galatians 2:20. We see in John 14:6 that you and I are, the way we have life with the Father is because we have life in the Son, and no one comes to the Father but by me, because we have life in Christ, we now have life with the Father. Now that means where is our identity? You see, that verse in Ephesians 2 about life with Christ together, where's our source of identity? Go to Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." You ought to mark that Galatians 2:20 as a cross-reference to Ephesians 2:4-5. "I have been crucified with Christ." When he died, what did you do? You died. You died to your old sinful life, to the deadness of your spiritual heart.

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." That's what we're talking about our identity. That's what we see...he gave us life with Christ. You were saved into a new life. "And the life I now live in the flesh..." It means you're still in your physical body; you're still here. "I live by faith in the Son of God." Now here's the reason for your faith, "who loved me and gave himself for me." That's where you see he love and justice. That's the definition of the of the phrase, "but God." He loved me and gave himself for me. He loved me and gave himself for me.

The next time you're struggling with your identity in the world, remind yourself of this. He loved me and he gave himself for me. I now have life in Christ. That's your identity. Your and my identity is not in your position in society. It's not your education. It's not your ethnic background. It's not where you work. It's not your anything. It's the fact that you've been saved into a new life with Christ. You are with him together. When you're sitting here with these other guys on Friday, you are sitting beside somebody. If they are in true saving faith, they're here because they have the same Heavenly Father that you do. That ought to tell us how we treat each other differently.

The world's not going to see good community relationships in the neighborhood. Where are they going to see it? They're going to see it in the remnant. They ought to see it in the remnant. They ought to see it in us. How we take care of each other.

We need to take seriously, brothers...you know, when Sig was asking if you know the guy right beside you. Do you really know the guy beside you? We need to work at that. We need to take time to get to know each other. Maybe sometime I just ought to come and shut up and let you guys talk to each other. That may be more spiritual value than anything I could give you, is just the realization that I'm here with my family.

I told you the story of how I met Pastor Win at the church in Vietnam. You want to hear that again? {LAUGHTER} Or you've heard it enough. Forget it. No, it's just a classic example. You know, I waiting to cross to Perfume River in my Jeep to go into do a briefing because I going to support the [UNCLEAR] with some air support from the Navy aircraft. My New Testament fell out of my flight suit, and a young man came by on a Moped and picked it up and brushed it off, saw that it was a Bible and came over to me very excitedly and pointed to me in my Jeep and said, "Christian?" I'd been to Vietnamese language school so I said, "Yes." He said, "Christian!" Well it got out of my Jeep. So we did this... Now the MP's came over with their weapons drawn {LAUGHTER} and saw me embracing a

Vietnamese, and they said, “Sir, are you okay?” I said, “Yes, I just met one of my family members.” They looked at me like, “Right.” {LAUGHTER} Then they saw, they were Army, then they saw that I was U.S. Navy, then they knew I was nuts. {LAUGHTER} But my point was this. I met a family member.

The rest of the story, the uniqueness is this. This will show you the sovereignty and magnificence of God’s mercy. One of the things my father told me years ago as a young man is wherever you go, ask the Lord to give you one brother to hold you spiritually accountable. One brother to hold you spiritually accountable. I’ve done that wherever I’ve been. On board ship, wherever I’ve been, I’ve always had one brother to hold me spiritually accountable. When I went in country, in Vietnam, pulled off the ship, I asked the Lord to give me one brother to hold me spiritually accountable. Do you know who it was? That guy. Pastor Win. He turned out to be the Pastor of the Evangelical Protestant Church of Wei. For the next 18 months, he held me spiritually accountable. I wasn’t the great white savior who came in to win the war and save everybody. The Lord provided a young Vietnamese pastor who had escaped from North Vietnam, was converted by a French missionary, started a little Bible church in the city of Wei, the only Protestant Evangelical movement in the city of Wei. There was a big Catholic church and the rest was Buddhist. He had a wonderful little ministry for the kingdom of God. That was the man the Lord brought into my life to hold me—a well-educated Naval Officer from America—to hold me spiritually accountable. You see, because you’re born into life together.

Guys, we need to get over this stuff about it’s my church, it’s the black church, the white church, the red church, the yellow church. It’s Christ’s church. It doesn’t make any difference. You and I have the same Heavenly Father because we were born into a life with Christ together, as we see. Remember this Galatians verse, it’s a great cross reference to our being together. “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) That’s the basis of our relationship with each other. I’m relating to you guys because I know this—he loved you and gave himself for you. He loved me and gave himself for me. That’s out common bond. That’s what it means to have life in Christ.

We need to understand that yes we’re saved because of love, but we’re saved into life; into life with Christ. Notice verse 7, we are saved for a purpose. Back to Ephesians, verses 6-7, “<sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6-7). You see, we were saved for a purpose. Our purpose is—now follow this—“<sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—<sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” In other words, one of the things that you and I have been saved to do is we have been saved with a purpose, and that is to show the immeasurable riches of grace and God in your life, so other people will see that. There’s a purpose behind your salvation. It’s just not eternal life.

Eternal life is a benefit; it’s not the cause or the motive for salvation. The purpose of your salvation and mine is that we will demonstrate the immeasurable riches of God’s grace in Christ Jesus to the world. That’s our purpose in life. If you’re looking for your purpose, your purpose is the same as mine. We all have the same purpose in Christ. Your purpose is not your job. That’s a different thing. That might be your calling. There’s a difference between your calling and your purpose. You and I have the same purpose. Whether you’re a man, woman, young in Christ, old in Christ, our purpose is the same. One of those expressions of that is, here in verse 7, that you and I will demonstrate the immeasurable riches of

God's grace in your life as you go live your life. That's your purpose in life, and you take that wherever you go. It's not a job.

God's will for you, guys, is not a job. God's purpose for you is not a job. God's purpose is the same for you as it is for me, and that's this. It's who are you where you are. It's who you are where you are. You are demonstrating the immeasurable riches of God's grace.

Go to Philippians 3:20, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." You see, we need to realize that when we're saved into life together, we have a community living experience because of being part of the remnant, but we also have this understanding that our citizenship is in heaven.

Go back to Ephesians 2:6. I want you to see something that already happened. Notice the verb tenses in Ephesians 2:6. This is something that has already happened. "By grace you have been saved—"and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:5b-6) Where are you seated right now? In heaven. That's where your life is. Do you realize that's something that's already occurred? That's a past tense activity. You and I need to live like that. That's already occurred. You were raised and seated—past tense verbs. It doesn't mean that there's going to be some prophecy that says you're going to do this. It's already happened. Your citizenship is in heaven. You've been raised and you've been seated. That's where you and I exist. That's the source of all of our energy, and we're motivated by God's mercy, because we realize that that's my identity.

Often times when we give the Gospel, we have a tendency to give the benefits of the gospel and not the Gospel itself. We talk about eternal life. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. That's a benefit. That's not the Gospel. The Gospel is your dead. Christ loved you and saved you. The Gospel is this. The soul that sins shall die. The wages of sin is death. Are you perfect? Then you need a Savior. That's the Gospel.

The Gospel is about the message of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. The benefits of the Gospel are evangelism is say, "Would you like to be content? Would you like to be happy? Would you like to be guilt free?" Those are benefits. That's not the Gospel; those are consequences of it. We've got to be careful, guys, when we start communicating the Gospel message. It is really about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith.

We need to realize that for those of you who God has been pleased to love before the foundation of the world and grant us saving faith, notice that verses again, in verses 6-7, "and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:5b-6) That is a past tense event that's already occurred.

In the Greek language, that's a unique expression because it means that you're secure in your past. Now notice, how many of you and I are secure in our past? Not in our past life. I'm not secure in my past sinful life. But now Jesus is saying this, Paul is saying, "Because you've been raised up and seated, you're now secure in your past." Your past is what? You're now seated and you're raised. That's a past tense act that has a present reality. You and I have a whole new past in which we now find our security. It is a past tense act of having been raised with Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenlies. So now you and I go back and we don't look at our past childhood, our past adulthood; we look back and see now our past salvation included this—you were raised and you're seated. You now have a whole new past to feel secure about. Do you realize that? That's significant for many of us whose past is not something that we take great pride in, or we have great pain in. You've got a whole new past. Your past

is gone. You've got a new one, because it's a past tense reality that you've been raised with Christ and seated with him.

**Bob:** *That's an interesting concept that for some reason has just hit me this morning. When somebody says, "Where is heaven?" the tendency is to say, "Well it's someplace up there," or whatever, but in fact, heaven is here and now for those who are in Christ.*

Absolutely. You're in it right now.

**Bob:** *We're in it now.*

You're tasting it right now. There's a greater fruition of it, a greater culmination of it, certainly. But you've got part of that right now. The important thing I want to talk about now is, in our church today, there's this branch of counseling called victimization therapy. It basically says, "Bruce, the reason you're messed up as a 60-year old is because your dad didn't tie his shoes right when he was 12. You're the victim of what your dad did." Now there's no question that the sins go from one generation to the next. I'm not belittling that at all. But I'm trying to say this, guys. When God grants you saving faith, he gives you a new past in which you now can be secure. Your past now is...in my past, I have been raised and I have been seated. That's how you begin to look at your life because your identity is in Christ.

It radically changes the history of your life. Now that's a benefit of the Gospel. That is not the Gospel; that is the benefit. It's a consequence of the Gospel. That you have a whole new past that you can look upon and say, "That's the foundation of my life. It's not what I used to be." That's what you see in that wonderful little phrase, "but God," who is rich in mercy.

Remember when Stephen was stoned in Acts 6 and 7? It says that he looked up and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. It was standing. Now most of the time, we see where is Christ in heaven? He's seated at the right hand of the Father. Now he's seated there because in the culture of the biblical times, when you had a monarch or a king and somebody was seated at the right hand, it meant that he was the spokesperson or could speak with the authority of the reigning king. Jesus is seated at the right hand of Father. He is the spokesperson for the reigning King of kings and Lord of lords. When that person would stand up, it meant you now have the approval of the person who I'm sitting beside the king. You notice that Stephen said he saw Jesus standing. That's because he saw Jesus giving approval for what Stephen was doing. What is Stephen's next comment? Forgive them. He's basically saying, "Stephen, the King and I, the Father and I approve of what you're doing."

What is it Stephen needed at that moment? The confirmation that he was doing the right thing. He just saw in this wonderful act of God's grace, he saw the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father giving approval for what he was going through. May God give us the grace, guys, that periodically, just in our faithful life, that if we were to look up and see Jesus at the right hand of the Father, we would see him standing. May it be so that that's the day we will live today, that Jesus would be standing and saying, "Guys, the Father and I approve of what you're doing." Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that the motive for your salvation for us was love. We thank you that we are saved into a new life with you, and that we are saved for a purpose. Father, we just pray, Lord, that as we live our life today, it will be one in obedience that will bring glory and attention to you, and that somebody today might experience the immeasurable riches of your grace in our life, and somehow you might use that as a seed to draw them to a saving knowledge of you. And to that end, we just thank you in Christ's name. All the Brave Men said...Amen!!