

## THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: May 20, 2011

Father, we come to you this morning realizing once again You are our King who pardons our sins, You are our Father who provides our daily sustenance, and You are our Master who protects us from evil. May we realize as we embark upon this study of the church, that the church was something that you fostered, that You planned, that You ordained, and the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord. Father with that end, we trust that you'd cleanse us from unrighteousness [UNCLEAR] vessels that sit at Your feet once again. [UNCLEAR] open our eyes that we might behold You more clearly for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Thank you, Don. Brothers, we're going to embark today on a new series. We finished the Book of Colossians, which was our study on the Sufficiency of the Person and Work of Christ. We have looked at the sufficiency of Scripture. If you want to keep this in a series, we could look at this as the sufficiency of the church.

Now I do want to say one little disclaimer here. This is not an effort to design the perfect church. The moment you and I become members of a church, the church is no longer perfect. {LAUGHTER} That's not the point. We're not trying to convince somebody to be this denomination or that denomination, so please understand what we're not trying to do.

This is going to be an exhaustive study. Right now I think I have 35 lessons planned, but it may take us more than that because of the questions we ask and how the Holy Spirit might just move us around this whole topic of the church. Please understand that I'm sure there are going to be some differences that we all might have related to the church, and that can be healthy. We just have a responsibility to make sure that if there is disagreement there's no disruption.

Please understand that I don't have all the secret information on all this. We're just going to examine the Scripture and trust the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. The real responsibility, men, will be what will you do with this when you go back to your church. That's the real issue. We're not trying to form the perfect church. We're just trying to say, "Lord, are there things that we can learn now because we've learned of your sufficiency in the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ? Are there ways that we can take that back into the assembly with whom we worship, and how can we improve the quality not only of our worship but of our ministry to one another and to a lost world?"

I would be hopeful that this will be foundational. This is not going to be formative in the sense that we're going to create something. We're not going to create anything. We just want to study and see what the Lord's teaching us through the Scripture about the role of his church, and that the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ the Lord; it's not us.

I just trust that you'll understand what we're trying to do in this and just, we'll just walk through this together and see what the Lord might have for us, because this can be an exciting, exciting study for us to understand how we can go back into our fellowships and to our gatherings and improve the quality of the worship, quality of our service, and quality of the ministry we give to a lost world.

So with that end, I think one of the first things we have to say to ourselves is why do we study the doctrine of the church? I guess my simple answer would be from Ephesians 5:25 where it says that Jesus loved his church and gave his life for it. That means, for us, if you really say that you're a follower of Jesus Christ, if you really say you love the Lord, if you really say that you have a compassionate, fervent desire to love him, then you're going to have to love his church. Those two things are synonymous. You

can't have one without the other. You can't say that, "I'm a follower of Christ, but I'm not involved in a church." You can't say that, "I love Jesus, but I'm not involved in the church." You see, if Jesus says this, "I love the church. I love it. And I gave myself for it," how can you and I say that we love him, want to give ourselves to him, and then don't give ourselves to that which he gave himself to? We have to really start with understanding the hymn that Don played is The Church's One Foundation is...Jesus Christ our Lord, and if we really say that we love Christ, then we've got to love his church.

Now that doesn't mean that it's perfect. There's a lot of things that perhaps are unlovable about it, the way that it's manifested in our culture. That's not what I'm suggesting. I'm saying what is it that Jesus really gave himself to? Was it a building? Was it a movement? Or was it a gathering of people? We just need to take a look at that and see what is it he gave himself to. The more we know about the church, as revealed in the Scripture, the more we will know about the Lord Jesus, because he is the foundation of the church.

Let me give you just a little bit of a historical background here. The word church that we translate, ecclesia, is a word that means assembly. It means an assembly of people. When you look at Matthew 16:18, "Upon this rock I will build my church," that's the word assembly. The concept that we want to first realize is that historically the genesis of the church had the idea of an assembly of something or other, so we need to start with that. It's not a building.

That's why when I was pastoring the churches that I had in Chicago and in Kansas City, whenever I would welcome somebody, I didn't say, "Welcome to Grace Church," I said "Welcome to the gathering of Grace Church." There's a difference. I didn't want people to think that they were coming into an edifice. They were coming into a building, they were coming into a place. I wanted them to realize that they were coming to gather with a group of people, because that's the concept that we see at the very early stages of the concept of the church. It's an assembly.

Phraseology can really set the tone for people about how they think for the church. I really wanted them to understand that when they walked in the door of this worship center, they were really coming into a gathering of people who comprised this church. So it wasn't a thing. It's a live organism of a gathering of people in the Name of the Lord Jesus because he is the foundation of this gathering. You get that from that word ecclesia, the whole idea of an assembly.

This was a word that was very, very familiar to the disciples, this idea of an assembly. You see, in Deuteronomy 23:3, Israel, the nation of Israel, God's chosen people during the old covenant dispensation, was referred to as the assembly of the Lord. When you look at them nationalistically, when God used the nation of Israel to be the means by which he was going to demonstrate that he was holy, and that they were the first nation on earth to have a single God, to be monotheistic, they were referred to as the assembly of the Lord. The whole group of people, the nation of Israel, was not called a nation per se, they were referred to as a gathering. They were referred to as an assembly. And so we have a historic gathering at Mt. Sinai.

In Exodus 7:16, you'll notice that Moses says to Pharaoh, "Let my people go so that they may serve me." That's the idea of worship. So what is the purpose of the gathering is it's worship. It starts off with worship. It's not just to meet their needs. He didn't say, "Let my people go so we can meet our felt needs." Now there's nothing wrong with felt needs. Understand what I'm not saying. But I am saying this, that when Moses said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go so that they might serve me," that word serve me literally means to worship me. What is the purpose of this assembly? It really has its roots in the whole concept of beginning to serve God as a gathering, as an assembly of people through the idea of worship. That worship takes many facets, and we'll get into that over the next several months, I'm sure.

In Deuteronomy 4:10, God summons his people, referred to as an assembly. In Exodus 19:4, he says, “I brought you to myself. I have assembled you to come to worship with me. I brought you to myself. I’m assembling you.” We get the idea from history, biblically and theologically, that there’s this concept of an assembly of people coming together to do something.

Now we need to figure out, as we will study this, what does that assembly do? But the idea I’m trying to lay right now is the concept is, it’s an assembly of people who are brought together to serve God through worship. You can look at such verses as Deuteronomy 9:10 and 10:4 and 18:16. Numerous verses refer to the people as the day of the assembly. Whenever they got together, for worship, it was called the day of the assembly. What is that saying to us? It says something about what the church is made up, and its concept really is the assembling of people. It’s not the location of a place. It’s the assembly of a people. That’s the concept that I want us to see historically.

After that, the assembly of the nation of Israel, historically, then we come to see that there was a tabernacle. In the wandering years, they assembled in the tabernacle. Then we had the temple at Mt. Zion. Then we go to the heavenly Mt. Zion. Now if you look at Hebrews 12—turn with me there. So just quickly, you have the assembly of God, the nation of Israel, then you have the assembly at the tabernacle, and then you have the assembly at the temple, and then you have the assembly in the eternal temple, which is in heaven, which is recorded for us in Hebrews 12.

There’s a difference between the earthly Mt. Zion and the heavenly Mt. Zion, and the difference is the work of Christ. We’ll see that in Hebrews 12. The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews all the way from verse 18 all the way up to about verse 23. It refers to a kingdom that can’t be shaken. This is the eternal Mt. Zion, the heavenly Mt. Zion, “For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’ But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.” You see, the difference between the earthly Mt. Zion and the eternal Mt. Zion is the work of Christ. “And to the assembly of the firstborn.” See there’s the word assembly again. This is what’s going on in heaven. It’s an assembly.

The very first thing that we see when God called a unique people to himself, he referred to them as an assembly. When he calls all of his believers, his elect, to himself in eternity, at the eternal Mt. Zion, he refers to them as a what? As an assembly. There’s something that we’ve got to understand about this concept of an assembly. What does that mean and translate for us? “And to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” You see, the difference between the earthly Mt. Zion and the heavenly Mt. Zion is the person and work of Christ, the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ.

We see that in Hebrews 9, Jesus ministers in this heavenly sanctuary where he is now ministering. You’ll notice 22 to 23 of Hebrews 12, the celebration has already begun—it’s already begun—as the spirits of believers made perfect through Christ join with the holy angels in pleasing God. Now notice, it doesn’t say to us, as those still residing on our earth. It doesn’t say that we will one day enter that festival. It says we are now come to it; it’s already begun.

Now we need to understand something about this. That glorious eternal festival has already begun. It’s not something that you and I enter into later. It’s something that you and I are involved in now. We are involved in this eternal worship of God now. All of Hebrews 12 is saying it’s already begun. And God is forming a group of people, an assembly, here on the earth, who are joining with all the saints who’ve

gone before us—the firstborn—all of the saints there are enjoying that. We’re participating with them. It’s an assembly, of people who are called to worship God. What we see here is it’s already begun.

You see, when we worship on earth, we do so with Abraham. You’re worshipping with Abraham when you come on Sunday. Did you realize that? The festival’s begun! It’s not something that awaits us. You and I are participating in something. We’re just doing it now in the physical earth; they’re doing it in the eternal Jerusalem, in the eternal Mt. Zion. The difference is the person and work of Christ. God has his assembly. Brothers, when you and I worship, you’re worshipping with Abraham. You’re worshipping with Isaac. You’re worshipping with Jacob. That’s what they’re doing. That’s what we do when we gather on the Lord’s day. It’s the assembly of the Lord. We come to worship him. We worship with David. We worship with Elijah. We worship with Peter. We worship with James and John. And above all, we worship with Christ.

You see, there’s something magnificent about our understanding about this new covenant relationship that God has with us, because there is an eternal, everlasting assembly of people who in two locations are doing the same thing. Those who have gone before us, the firstborn, they are worshipping in the presence of Christ. We, here, who will anticipate being with them, are worshipping with them in the presence of Christ. When you come to church, the assembly, on the Lord’s day, you’re not coming just to an activity. You’re coming to something that eternally is going on all around you every day of your life, every day of my life, and when we come together on the Lord’s day, we’re just joining with all of those who are in heaven who are rejoicing and worshipping the Lord and serving him through worship.

**Brian:** *I was just going to say that that gives a glimpse of what heaven’s going to be like. We are practicing [UNCLEAR]...*

Absolutely. Amen.

**Brian:** *If you take that to the next level, every time we go to work, we’re going to work in heaven, so that work should be a display of worship, I mean, realistically speaking, you could take this across every...your marriage, your [UNCLEAR]...*

Absolutely.

**Brian:** *...everything in life is just a precursor of here’s your practice to what it’s going to be like in heaven, now celebrate it now.*

Now that’s a great point. What do they constantly do in heaven? Worship. What do we do on earth? Our attitude should be what? Worship. Worship is not an activity. It’s a style of life. It is something that...it’s not something you do; it is something that you are. Worship is who we are as a person. Why is that? Because we are part of the assembly of the Lord, which we refer to as the church.

The church has many expressions, which we’ll get into, but the whole idea here is when you become a redeemed sinner because of the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ, you enter into a constant eternal lifestyle of absolute worship in everything you do, because that’s what’s going on in the New Jerusalem, that’s what’s going on in the holy Mt. Zion, that is different from the earthly Mt. Zion, and that is the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ. Everything in our life radically changes.

This is just not something that you flip a switch on Sunday or Saturday night and go. We’re talking about a style of life that says this—that I’m a new person because I’m a member of an assembly. Do you see the significance? That’s why I’m trying to give us some theological historical background.

**Don:** *There are a lot of people today who profess to be Christians who say they have no need of the church.*

Absolutely.

**Don:** *And I have a problem with that. I mean yeah, I mean, I know of a man—I've told this group about him before—who's a quadriplegic, he's bedridden, can't go to church. He listens, he's able to watch the service on his computer. And yeah, I mean, there are exceptions, obviously, but I do have a problem with someone who says that he's a believer and yet has no desire for the truth, "I can worship God on the golf course," or whatever.*

That's a great...we're going to deal with that...

**Audience Members:** *[MANY COMMENTS...UNINTELLIGIBLE]...*

We're not going to deal with the golf course. {LAUGHTER} Don's got a great point, brothers. What was the first thing that I said? The first thing that I said is how can you say that you love Jesus and don't love the church? When Jesus says, "I loved it. I love the church. I love the assembly. That's what I came to do. I came to redeem those whom God gave me before the creation of the foundation of the world, so that I could redeem them so that the assembly would come and their life would be an act of worship forever." How can you say that you are a follower and lover of Christ and don't love what he loved? Don's got a great point, and we'll talk about that later. I agree with him. Now I can't say that I know who's a believer and who's not. I can't say that, so understand what I'm not saying. But I do say this. I personally have to question that person's legitimate salvation if they say, "I'm a follower of Christ and I don't want to go to church." There's a disconnect there because it violates the concept of what? The assembly. The assembly.

**Audience Member:** *This assembly that you're talking to, would this be what David was referring to in his great Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51:12 when he said, "Restore unto me the joy thy salvation."*

Absolutely. You see, there's a joy in our salvation that transcends everything else in our life. That becomes a style of life, and it's because we recognize this, that we're part of a massive eternal assembly that is called to worship, to serve him—that's the same thing as worship. Worship and service are synonyms.

**Tom:** *I don't think there's any doubt that we know that Christ loved the church. At the same time, he says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." He really knew what kind of people we are.*

Absolutely. And where is that going to be demonstrated most effectively? Inside the assembly. It's going to be demonstrated...that loving one another, that's not going to happen when I go to PNC. They're going to think well of me, or may not think well of me, but I'm not going to be loved the way that he's referring to, and what Tom is eluding to. The only place I'm going to find that is on Friday morning with you guys.

Do we take time to get know one another here? Have we really done that? I mean, guys, you don't come here just to be taught. We do something far more than that, that is to come together because we are a called assembly of people who are coming together from all walks of life. You've got Greensburg, you've got Monroeville, you've got the South Hills, you've got Wexford. That's not the identity that we have. The identity is that we are a called assembly. The question what do we do about that? Do we really get to know each other? Can you really say, "I know the guy that I'm sitting right beside." Why don't

you go have breakfast with somebody. Call somebody up and say, “Let’s go have a cup of coffee.” Some of you guys go play golf. That’s wonderful. What I’m saying, guys, is there’s power in the assembly that we have. We need to get to know each other because of the uniqueness of the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ. There’s power in the assembly of God’s people, and we need to take that seriously. We don’t come here just for an event. We come to express the fact that we are a called assembly who’ve been assembled by the grace of God to come and worship him and help us do that more effectively in our lives.

***Audience Member:** My point may be obvious, but the other side of the coin is that there is weakness in division and isolation among, in our case, brothers. I suppose it seems in one sense very obvious, but I think it’s an important, that you have the other side of the coin, is that there’s strength in unity, but there’s weakness and division. We’ve all experienced that sometime [UNCLEAR].*

Absolutely. We’re going to get into that. How do we handle those type of things? The Scripture gives us wonderful instruction on how does the church handle that. You’re not going to find it in the system of this world. We’re going to find that only within the confines of the truth of the assembly. Sometimes we have to discover that together. That means often times we have to give each other the freedom to fail.

We’re not perfect. But the question is not whether or not we fail. That’s not the sign of our maturity. The sign of our maturity is how quickly get up when we do fail, because we are going to fail. The issue is how quickly do I get up and who helps me get up? You see, that’s what the assembly does.

***Audience Member:** That’s why you talk about chord of three strands [UNCLEAR]...*

Yes, Ecclesiastes. A chord of three strands cannot be broken. You and a brother and the Holy Spirit. That’s powerful. That’s the assembly concept. We have the idea, in the church in America unfortunately that the church is a thing. The church isn’t a thing. It’s a it. It’s an organic, living mechanism of an assembly of God’s people coming together to learn how to love each other, work on those things together inside the church. That’s why the 58 one another commands are so critical for us as the assembly to understand.

The word allelon is the Greek word for one another. It’s used 103 times in the New Testament; 58 of those times are commands for the assembly of God’s people to know how to get along with each other. Love one another. Exhort one another. Serve one another. Rebuke one another. All those one another commands give us marvelous instructions on how do we relate to each other inside the assembly. No, you don’t do this outside in the world. They’ll have no concept of what you’re doing. What you and I do is we practice those 58 one another commands inside the assembly. We work on that together and then we take it outside in the world and we radically change the world because they see that we’re so radically different. And why is it? Because we’ve got this plug in. We go back to the assembly. It’s the base of my power. So we’re never doing it alone.

When you take those 58 one another commands, you can divide them up into four major themes. The first one is this—our relation to one another. It’s based upon this one concept. You and I have the same heavenly father. It has nothing to do with your ethnic background, the color of your skin, your education or where you live. One thing alone determines the relationship that you and I have within the assembly of God’s chosen people, and that is we recognize that we all have the same heavenly father. That means that I’m going to treat you differently by choice because I know that when I relate to you, I’m relating to someone who has the same heavenly father that I do. That changes the way I relate to you. There’s a whole series of those one another commands that teach us how to do that.

The second thing is this—our reception of one another. How do we receive one another inside the

assembly? It's radically different—it should be—than how we receive one another in the world. We receive one another differently—and the Scripture teaches us in a half a dozen of those one another commands—because of our relation to one another. Because I know that you have the same heavenly father that I do, I'm going to receive you differently.

Now I gave you this illustration years ago, so sometimes you have to sit through repeated illustrations because I only have a few. {LAUGHTER} But they're mine. How I got involved with the church in Vietnam, in building the orphanage. One of the great pieces of advice my father gave me was, "Wherever you go, son, ask the Lord to give you one brother to hold you spiritually accountable." Probably the greatest piece of advice he ever gave me. Ask the Lord to give you one brother to hold you spiritually accountable wherever you go.

When I was on board ship, flying, I asked the Lord to give me a brother, and he did. It happened to be a machinist mate, an enlisted man. We had a wonderful time of holding each other spiritually accountable. You see, I was an officer and he was an enlisted man, but what made my relation to him and my reception of him radically different? It's because we knew this—we had the same heavenly father. That transcended the officer/enlisted man relationship. We still maintained that at the human level because we had to do that as a matter of excellence and proficiency and responsibility. But behind that was this deep-rooted commitment to each other because I knew this—when he was working on my plane, he had the same heavenly father I did. That transcended every way that I received him.

It's our relation to one another, our reception of one another. So when I asked the Lord to give me one brother, I was driving in my Jeep on my second tour in Vietnam as a Forward Air Controller, living with the Army. I was the only Naval officer among 20,000 Army guys, but that made the odds about even. {LAUGHTER}

***Audience Member:** God loves you.*

No ego with our Naval Academy grads. {LAUGHTER} I'm driving in the Jeep to do a briefing with the [UNCLEAR] troops that I was going to fly cover for. My New Testament fell out of my flight suit. A young man came by on Moped. He was Vietnamese. Saw the Bible there in the dust. He picked it up and he looked at it. He had a big smile. He came over to my Jeep, and he pointed to himself and said, "Christian!" Well I'd been to language school for six weeks, and so I said, in perfect English, "Yes." He said, "Christian" (pointing to himself). Well I got out of my Jeep and I hugged this guy.

Here I am, I'm hugging this Vietnamese little guy and we're jumping up and down, and the MP's, the Army MP's came running over with their weapons drawn. {LAUGHTER} They said, "Sir! Are you okay?" I said, "Yes. I just found one of my family members." They looked at me and saw U.S. Navy, then they knew I was nuts. {LAUGHTER} I said, "This is a family member. We've got the same heavenly father." They said, "Right. Sir. Right." That turned out to be Pastor Win. You know the rest of the story. You guys participated in that when we brought Tin back here to get him his new leg.

You see, that all began one day when, in God's providence, came in contact with another person who's part of the assembly. It had nothing to do with his education background or ethnic background or the fact that he was Vietnamese and I was an American. It had one common thread and that was this. In the assembly of God's people known as the church, we have the same heavenly father. My relationship to him began on that, and the reception of him was totally different. I didn't greet every Vietnamese like that. I certainly didn't. I was counseled not to do that. It's stupid if you're going to do that. But the one that I could trust was the one who I knew had the same heavenly father. There's a whole litany of stories, which you guys are a part of.

**Audience Member:** *I was in a study last night and the pastor brought up along the line you're talking about. This is beautiful. He said, "If you say you love your heavenly father, Jesus Christ, and you can't stand another one who's proclaiming to love your heavenly father, Jesus Christ, you are a liar."*

Yeah, that's what... 1 John tells us this.

**Audience Member:** *So remember who you're calling a liar.*

That's right.

**Audience Member:** *Your brother in Christ.*

Yes. You know, take a look at this. Let me finish this, because I'm going off on all sorts of things here. Our relation to one another, our reception of each other, of one another. Our response to one another. How do we respond to each other in the assembly? Do I respond with irritation, anger and perturbation like I do to people in the other world? Or how do I respond to somebody who's part of the assembly? That goes back to our relation, our reception, and now our response to one another. We have a different response to each other in the assembly by design. Because the world's not going to see those kind of relationships at their office. The only place they're going to see it is where? In the assembly. They're going to see that when they come to worship with us at the church.

The last thing is, the last 58 one another commands deal with our restoration of one another. Sometimes the first three don't work, and so there has to be a restoration of one another. When you look at the 58 one another commands that tell us how to get along with each other inside the assembly known as the church, it's our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response of one another and then our restoration of one another.

**Audience Member:** *Everything you're talking about where we screw it up is our pride and ego, and I think Philippians 2:3 all the way through probably 12 or 13, but basically Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain deceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others," and here's the capstone, "your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." So if Jesus loved the church so much that he gave himself up for it, and [UNCLEAR] king, how foolish are we whenever we don't [UNCLEAR] rude and won't talk to somebody or don't like how they're dressed or the way they sing or whatever else stupid that we bring up and still love them.*

There's all sorts of issues. I would hope, brothers, that at a minimum, the one thing that the Holy Spirit might do with us over the next months, as we look at this topic of the assembly, that it would just deepen our love for the church. If you want a goal from me, that would be it. Not to telling us what the church we need to do or this or that type of stuff. We're not talking about theological differences. All I'm saying is I would just be hopeful that the Lord might develop within us as men a love for his church, a love for his assembly. And then let the Holy Spirit work that out in your life—in your own church, in your own assembly. How does that translate into your life because you come here on Friday and we're developing a greater sense of love for the church because Jesus loved the church, brothers. You and I have to do that if we're going to say that we love Christ.

**Ted:** *I think that loving the brethren is the most difficult thing God commands.*

Yes, it probably is.

**Ted:** *It's not possible without living supernaturally. It's humanly impossible to love the brethren.*

Yes. It's a supernatural activity. It's not something that you and I do naturally. It's something that you have to have a desire to want to do. Where does that desire come from? It doesn't come from yourself. It comes from the Holy Spirit, from God's just infusion of his grace into you, that implants within you and removes your heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh that says, "This is a hellacious thing I've got to do is love that brother, but I have a desire to do it." That's where we have to really trust him and learn how to do this.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, you know, Jesus loved the church, a husband is supposed to love their wife like the church, and we're supposed to love each other [UNCLEAR] brief description of what that word love means? I mean, I hear it a lot all the time that I think what does that word love mean in those contexts?*

Well, there several ways of looking at that. Love means doing the right thing. If you want a basic definition, it means doing the right thing. Now who defines right? Scripture does. Scripture does. Not the world. So how do I define love? You don't define it by watching a movie on TV or going to see a flick. You go to the Scripture and say, if I really want to love my wife and do the right thing, what does that look like? Well the Scripture is going to define that for us.

One of the simple ways of looking at that—we talk about sacrificial love. Another way of looking at it would be this, Dean, doing the right thing and expecting nothing in return. Do the right thing and expect nothing in return. That has to deal with a motive. You see, what's the motive that you have? If I do this, she's going to do that? Then I've just put her in an old covenant concept that says, "Alright, God, if I do this, then you do that." You see, we often times live an old covenant style of life because we do that very thing. If I do this, then she's going to do that. So I think we could define love as doing the right thing and expecting nothing in return. That's the heart of a servant. If Jesus came to serve his church, then that defines us. We have to look at Christ's love definition for us to understand. We also need to realize this—we are imperfect; we're not sinlessly perfect, we're never going to be perfect at it. But that's the direction we're moving. And we think that way and we have the motive of wanting to do that, and that is really, really difficult.

Ted's absolutely right. Loving one another in the assembly is probably the most difficult thing we do because we irritate each other, and we have our own perceptions of what that person ought to be.

***Audience Member:** 1 Corinthians chapter [UNCLEAR]...*

1 Corinthians 13 is a good chapter. Now understand this—that chapter is a rebuke. It's a rebuke. He's telling the Corinthian church, "You don't know how to love." He's not saying this is what love is. He's saying, "You don't know how to love each other. Here's what love is," and then he writes 1 Corinthians 13. We recite that at every marriage. Any time anybody's ever gotten married they recite that. That's alright, but it's a rebuke. He's saying, "You have no idea what it's like to love somebody. Let me remind you." One of those things is love doesn't keep a record.

***Audience Member:** You know, Bruce, let me add something to that.*

Please.

***Audience Member:** Actually, when I look at that text, you're absolutely right, it is a rebuke, and most people look at it as a love chapter.*

Right.

**Audience Member:** *But it's a rebuke. More importantly, we have to remember that God is love. So if God is love, that means that Jesus is love. Right? Well, this is the way I explained it, and I'll stand corrected if I'm wrong, but I don't think, I believe I am, I think I'm right. {LAUGHTER} It says, "Do I speak with the tongues of men and angels that have not love, okay, have not Jesus, I am become a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, and though I give the gift of prophecy and understand the mysteries and all knowledge and though I have all faith so that I can remove mountains and have not Jesus, I am nothing." See, when you start putting Jesus where love is, then you understand that this is not something that should but glorified. This is something that we're not doing.*

Correct. Exactly right. That's why we need to understand it's a rebuke. We need to take ourselves up and say, "Is this me?" Is this me?

**Audience Member:** *A rebuke is also in love.*

Absolutely. A rebuke is a lesson by design. All Scripture is given for, profitable for four things—teaching...rebuke is one of them. That's why we read the Scripture. It rebukes us. It's a lesson to us to say, "Look, you understand what is perfection. You can't attain it." That's humility. See, humility is seeing that which is perfect and realizing I can't attain it. That's humility.

**Audience Member:** *There was an illustration that really comes to mind, particularly to me. There's a man who was a dean of a university, and he quit his job when because his wife had early onset Alzheimer's. One time someone asked him, "It must very difficult to have to take care your wife this way." He said, "I don't have to take care of her, I get to take care of her."*

I get to take care of her.

**Audience Member:** *Wow!*

**Audience Member:** *That was a great illustration.*

Great illustration. In Hebrews 12 that I read, there is the mention of the new covenant. I want to take you to Jeremiah 32 quickly, as we wrap this up, as part of our introduction today. Turn with me to Jeremiah 32.

Now, as you know, as we've been talking in recent months, the word covenant means arrangement. God has a new arrangement with his assembly. We need to understand this arrangement. The old arrangement, known as the old covenant, was essentially this. If you obey, I will be your God. Now that implies what? That you do something, God will be on your side. If you don't do something, God will not be on your side. In other words, if you obey, I will be your God, implying that when you don't obey, I'm not your God. It's in and out and in and out and in and out. Now we know that was by design, that in God's sovereign declaration and decree, he established the old covenant as a means of leading us to the person and work of Christ.

As Paul tells us in Galatians 3:24, "The old covenant was a school master that lead me to Christ." You see, it was designed to show the futility of living a life that says, "If I can. If I can't. If I can. If I can't." It was designed to show the futility of that so that you could say, "Is there someone who has really done all of that, that I can trust?" That's leading us to Christ. So there's the design of the old covenant. It was useful. It was designed. It was not a failure. It accomplished exactly what God ordained it to do.

Now Jeremiah is talking about a new arrangement among the assembly of God's people, and we pick it

up in...

*Audience Member: I think you want 31, Bruce.*

No this is 32. I'll show you what I mean. Thirty-one is also good. Read it. {LAUGHTER} We start here. We start at verse 38, of chapter 32. Now notice the contrast between if you obey I will be your god. Notice this, "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." "And they shall be my people, and I will be there God." Now notice this, "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant." The word arrangement there is the word covenant. It's everlasting—has no end. Now here's how it is maintained, "that I will not turn away from doing good to them." What is the arrangement God has with his assembly? He never tires of doing good to you. Do you understand that? God's arrangement is if you're part of the assembly of God's redeemed elect people, he is never, ever going to get tired of doing good to you. Why is it that you do good to people? It's because you love them. You love them. God never tires of doing good for those who are in his assembly.

Let's read on, "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts" The word fear, that means, not terror, it means reverence, respect, honor. It means a reverential respect and honor for God. Now notice, the reason he does that, "And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." Now he's already said this, "I'm not going to turn from you and I'm just going to make sure the you don't have a desire to turn from me. How am I going to do that? I'm going to put my fear in you, which means you're going to have a reverential, awe, respect and a sense of dignity for who I am, and that's going to be the formation and the foundation of your desire never to leave me." That's why it's called an everlasting covenant. And why is that? Because God did it. This is isn't when you raised your hand to become a believer. It wasn't when you walked forward at an evangelistic campaign or said a prayer. You see, this occurred in eternity past when he said, "Here's the arrangement we're going to have, folks, in the assembly of my people. I'm never, ever going to turn from them. And I'm going to make sure that they never have the desire to turn from me. The way I'm going to do that," which we understand our principle four is this—God never requires of us something he doesn't equip us to do beforehand.

Now here's God's expectation, "Bruce, I don't want you to ever turn from me. I don't want you to ever turn from me. That's my expectation of you as a redeemed sinner. Now just to make sure that you don't ever have a desire to do that, I'm going to do something that you can't do. I'm going to put within your heart, a singleness of purpose where you're going to hold me in reverential awe, respect and with a sense of dignity, because when you think of me in those terms, you will never, ever want to turn away from me." That's why you have eternal life. You see that? It's because of this new covenant arrangement.

The reason that you and I have eternal life is because there is an everlasting arrangement. God says, "I'm never going to turn from you." Read John 10, "No one can snatch them out of my hand." No one! You talk about the security of the believer. You've got it both here in the prophecy of the new covenant and in John 10, Jesus' words which says, "No one can take them out of my hand." Why is that? It's because of this everlasting covenant. God makes this arrangement with you and me when he redeemed us, brothers, and he says, "I'm never going to get tired of doing good to you, and just to make sure that you never leave me, I'm going to build within you a reverential sense of respect, awe and dignity for who I am, and that's going to be the desire formation that you will never, ever choose to leave me.

Now let's read on, just quickly. Don, this pretty good, isn't it? Thirty-two? {LAUGHTER}

*Don: Me and my big mouth.*

But do read 31; it's good. "And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good." Look at that! "I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul." Why is it you and I have eternal life? It's because of this everlasting covenant that God made with you. He made with me. And you've been equipped to live a life that says, "I hold you in reverential awe, respect and dignity, and that's going to shape everything that I do in my life, and now my life is an act of worship 24/7." It's just not something that you do at 11:00 on the Lord's day. You have this reverential awe that says, "I never want to leave you. Yeah, I'm going through hell right now. I don't understand what it means. I can't explain this stuff. But I'm never going to leave him. I'm going to hang on," because you know this—one of the great doctrines of we persevere because Christ preserves. "No one," he says in John 10, "can snatch them out of my hand, and just to make sure, the father is stronger than I am, and he puts his hand around my hand, and if you think nobody can take you out of my hand, guess what? Nobody can take you out of the father's hand because the father's greater than me."

Brothers, that's the assembly. That's what we need to understand, historically, about who we are. And we love the church because we understand this historical background of what we've just gone through in this eternal, everlasting covenant arrangement that God has with his people, known as his assembly. That is us. The question is what are we going to do about it? We'll begin talking next week about how did he form the assembly.

Let's pray. Father, it's overwhelming when we just stop and listen to you. Not your audible voice. That's not what we're saying. But through the sufficiency of Scripture, you reveal to us that which we need to know about your assembly. And this isn't my church. It's your church. It isn't a denominational church, it's your church, it's your assembly. Father, as we progress through this diligently, we pray that your Holy Spirit would fulfill his job description and guide us into all truth that we might be aggressive responders to that which you teach us for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men of the assembly said...Amen!