

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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Gracious Heavenly Father, it's with tremendous anticipation that we gather to sit at your feet. We are your assembly because of your grace, not because of anything we've constructed, but because of what you have redeemed. Father, we just pray that you'd be pleased, once again, to open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

Thank you, Don. Let's let Don know how much we appreciate what he does for us. [AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

Last week, we began a new study called The Formation and Function of the Church. We began, last week, by looking at a little bit of a history of the word, which we translate from the Greek and the Hebrew, which means the word assembly, seeing that the church historically, God's people, even before it was referred to as a church, have always been referred to as his assembly. In other words, there's an assembly of God's people. We saw the assembly, the day of the Lord, various other historical events because we began to realize that history is really his story. It's really his story.

One of the things we began to realize is that as we gather together, there's a specific purpose for our coming together. I would like to take you to John 4:23 to help us understand something about our assembly or gathering of God's people is no casual affair.

Church attendance is not something that's optional. If we're really going to say that we love Christ, and we saw that last week, that Christ loved his church, how can we not be involved in the church and call ourselves a follower of Christ. I think you have to take a serious look at that. There are a lot of people who will say, "Well, I've had a conversion experience, but I don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites, it's not perfect," etc. and so forth, "I don't get a blessing." I think you really have to question, although we are not to judge somebody, I think you have to question the legitimacy of that conversion. It may be a spurious conversion because a person who doesn't love Christ, a person who says they love Christ and doesn't love his church, that's an anomaly. Those are extreme differences, because Christ is the head of the church. If you say you're going to be a follower of Christ, and you don't love the church, you're basically saying, "I don't love the head of the church, and therefore I'm not a follower of Christ."

I think, Brothers, we have to take very seriously this concept of what we looked at last week about the assembly of God's people, the gathering of God's people. That's why when I was pastoring my church in both Kansas City and Chicago, every time we met on the Lord's day, and you know, you sometimes you say, "Welcome to Grace Church," I always said, "Welcome to the gathering of Grace Church," because I didn't want people to think that Grace Church was a denomination or a building or a place. I wanted them to realize it was a group of people.

You see, the church is a gathering, so welcome to the gathering of the Brave Men. You see, we are a gathering. Take a look at John 4:23. You'll see the reason for our salvation. We often talk about salvation in terms of eternal life. That's a consequence. It's not the reason for our salvation. It's one of the blessings of it, but it's not the general theme. When you look at John 4:23, we see this wonderful expression, in verse 23, we'll start in John 4, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." Now there's the purpose of the church. There's the purpose of the gathering. There's the purpose of your salvation and my salvation. God is seeking people who will worship him in spirit and in truth. In other words, the whole basis of our gathering together is to come together to worship. It's not to come

together to start programs, although programs may be an extension or expression of our worship.

The whole gathering of God's people centers around one thing, one concept, and that is worship. The idea of worship literally means to kiss toward. It means to bow down, show reverence, dignity, awe and respect for the object of your worship. So you begin to see that the father is seeking people who will gather, who will assemble, in his name to come to worship him. That's the purpose of our salvation. Salvation is much more than just eternal life.

Eternal life is one of the benefits of our salvation, but the purpose of it during our lifetime really is that we are gathered together to worship. Now that ought to be the focus of everything we do in our church. Do we worship? Or do we entertain? I think we have to take a close look at some of that. We'll get more into this as we develop a theology of worship as an expression of our following the leadership of Christ in the church. We need to take our assembling, Christ very seriously.

Let me show you one impact of the concept of God's people being an assembly. Let's go to Matthew 6, the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Then in chapter 6, verse 9, he says, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'" Let's take a look at that very first word, "Our." Notice it doesn't say my. It's an expression of a family prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of the assembling of God's family. It's "our" father, not my father or your father.

When you take a look at that word "our," it bespeaks of an assembly of people, all who are praying in the same manner, and the same matters and the same methodology. Jesus doesn't say this is what you should pray, he says, "When you are praying, pray like this," family, and you start off recognizing that you are a family. This is a filial word describing the relationship that God the father has with his assembly of people, his family.

That word "our" ought to generate within us three emotions, when you ponder this, "Our Father, who art in heaven." First of all, when I look at the word "our," it prompts in me a sense of fervency, which means there's a fervency that I have in my love for the father, because I understand what that word "Father" means and I understand what that word "our" means. There's a fervency of great love developed in the concept of just understanding this is a family prayer and everybody in the assembly of God's family worldwide is praying in the same manner, the same matters, and the same method. It's not something that we're left to do by ourselves. This ought to develop within us, and create an emotion of great fervency of love for our Father, because we realize that we are not alone. We are part of something much bigger than just, "I have a need right now, so would you take care of it." When I say the word "Our Father," I'm linking myself with every other believer in the assembly of the family of God in eternity past, eternity present and eternity future. That's a tremendous word, "our Father."

The second thing it ought to develop within us is a tremendous sense of reverence; a deep sense of reverence. This is *our Father*. Do you realize, guys, that when I say, "Our Father who art in heaven," I'm praying the same prayer that you're praying? That's a family prayer. People outside the family don't pray this. Jesus' disciples said, "Jesus, teach us how to pray." He said, "Here's how the family prays." You start off recognizing the tremendous love you have for the Father, who's redeemed you. Secondly, it creates within you a tremendous sense of reverence. It's *our Father*.

Thirdly, I think the last thing that it develops, in me at least, in addition to fervency and reverence, is devotion to the family. There's a devotion to the family. This is *our* family prayer.

Several years ago, I had a chance to go to the Sorbonne in Paris and teach a course on American business traditions based upon American religious heritage. I taught it for 12 days to a group of MBA

students in France. They were all coming to America to be involved in American corporations. It was rather interesting. The head of the Department of Education of the nation of France, somebody gave her my name. She called me and she said, "I've been looking around for a college or university in the United States who will teach a course on American business traditions based upon American religious heritage and I can't find one." I said, "You won't find it in America because you can't do that. That's politically incorrect." I said, "Why do you want that course?" and she said this, "If your nation was founded on religious freedom, it's rather obvious that it ought to affect the way that you run your business." I said, "Nice thought." {LAUGHTER} And she said, "I was told that you're a business man but also a minister. Could you do something?" and I said, "I'd rather go to Altoona. Do I have to go to Paris?" {LAUGHTER} She said, "We'll fly you over here."

So I put together a course, a 12-day course on American Business Traditions Based Upon American Religious Heritage. The interesting thing was, when I was teaching there in the Sorbonne, you know, their whole educational system is socialized, so nobody pays for anything. Do you know what they were most intrigued by about me? Was the fact that I wore a Naval Academy ring, because they had no allegiance to their college. I sat with the head of the Sorbonne, this institution that's been around since about 1200; one of the oldest educational institutions in the history of the world. He said, "Do you mean your graduates give money to the institution?" I said, "Yes." "Why would they do that?" I said, "Because it's a sense of devotion. It's a sense of gratitude." He said, "That's amazing. You have a sense of identity with your alumni association," and I said, "Yes." He said, "Is that why you wear your ring?" I said, "Yes. I'm identifying with everybody else who ever went to the Naval Academy." There's a sense of identity.

You see, that's what the word "our" does for us. When you say, "Our Father," you're saying, "I'm identifying myself with every other believer who's been redeemed by the grace of God into this magnificent assembly known as his church, and I'm identifying with all the church past, all the church present, and all the church future.

Don: I think, Bruce, that we, as believers, underestimate the importance of worship, particularly corporate worship. The world certainly thinks that the church, well, the business of the church is to help, you know, those in the community—feed the poor or whatever. Yeah, we are to feed the poor, but, you know, like you were saying, Jesus said the most important thing that the Father is seeking is worshipers, and there's something very important and special about the assembly gathering, particularly on Sunday mornings. This is what we'll be doing in eternity.

Absolutely.

Don: And whatever else we may be doing, that's what we'll be doing, that's our chief [UNCLEAR].

It's a great point, Don. That's why the Scripture says, "Do not forsake the...?"

Audience Members: Assembly.

Programs in the church. It says, "Do not forsake the assembly of the church." Do you guys realize the significance? Sig said, "You know, we've had 400 guys come through this over the last 16 years." Now that's overwhelming. That's wonderful. I'm more concerned about the 100 of you who show up week after week. It's nice to have 400 on our list, but I'm far more concerned about the ones who come than the ones who don't show. Because it's an assembly of the family. It's *our Father*. This is our prayer.

So when you say the word "our" and realize that when you pray and say, "Our Father," you're developing a sense of fervency in your love for God the father. You're developing a sense of reverence

for God the Father. You're developing a sense of devotion to the body, who also is praying, "Our Father."

Do you know what it means? Literally? This is what it means—that you and I, when we understand the word "our" and the concept of the assembly of God's people, redeemed, in all generations, it means that I don't have a right to offer a prayer that will inflict harm upon any other member of the body of Christ. I don't have a right to do that. I don't have a right to pray a prayer that will inflict harm upon another member of the body of Christ because of the word "our." It's *our Father*. Do you see that?

You see, that's what this assembly is of the church. As we saw last week, as we went through a litany of verses to help us understand from the nation of Israel in its corporate sense, was an assembly. Now in the new covenant, there's an individual gathering of the assembly of God individually, and we're an assembly. It's all wrapped up in that one little word "our," in the Sermon on the Mount. I would encourage you to read that prayer, again, and go over...

Ted: Just an example, if you could give an example of praying a prayer that would hurt another part of the body. I mean, I'm thinking of something, but I just...

Well, let's do that. That's a good question. My point is this—because of the word "our," and we understand the concept of the assembly, and that we are called together to worship, that means in the Lord's Prayer, that I really don't have a right to offer a prayer that hinders another member of the body of Christ. I mean, you could create any situation. Anybody want to throw one out?

Audience Member: Hinders in what way? What do you mean by hinder?

That's the point of it.

Audience Member: I'm just asking a question.

Audience Member: Cause iron sharpens iron. Sometimes there's a little pain involved, but that's not necessarily hindering somebody. That...

No, no. Hinder means do something that would be harmful or deleterious, not productive. Iron sharpens iron is positive. When two brothers come together and iron sharpens iron, that's positive. I'm talking about something that would hinder them or be harmful.

Audience Member: One case in point may be, if you're working in a church, say for example, and you're both vying for a position or a spot, "Lord let me have this position," if you're praying against another brother. Realistically speaking, wouldn't it be, "Father, your will be done. If I'm the best candidate, allow that to happen. If Joe is better, let that happen. Ultimately we want you to be glorified."

Yeah. That's right.

Audience Member: There's a lot of situations where we try to play God when we think we know what's best so we say, "I hope that business venture fails to teach him a lesson so that he understands you better." And I don't know, that's not right.

Yeah, we need to be careful not to be playing God and the benefit to somebody else's life. We need to be careful about that.

Audience Member: *The bible has the example of the pompous Pharisee...*

Sure.

Audience Member: *...talking about how great he is, "I'm glad that I tithe and better than this other person over here," who gave all that she had, t widow's mite.*

Yeah. In Luke 6, the Pharisee says, "I'm glad I'm not like this person who did this or did that," and then the one who went away who was redeemed was, said, "Lord have mercy on me a sinner," and Jesus said which one of the two went away redeemed?" It was the one who said, "Lord have mercy on me a sinner," not the Pharisee who was saying, "I'm glad I'm not like somebody else.

Part of a prayer of hindrance might be judging somebody. Now there's a time when we are called to judge, collectively. We have to be careful about that. But my point is this—I'm just trying to drive home the significance of our assembly of God's people coming together and that we form a body. When you are praying for the hindrance or the harm to another member of the body of Christ, you're hindering the body. In other words, the ear doesn't say, "Oh, let the foot hurt so I can hear more," or the arm doesn't say, "Let me become stronger so the leg can't run." Now that's what I'm trying to say is that when you and I pray harmful prayers against another believer, we're basically hindering the body of Christ at large, because of the word "our."

Ted: *Perhaps a prayer might be, "Lord, we pray that you defeat Saddam Hussein," because we now know, with his removal, Christians have come under more persecution by the Islamic brotherhood and things of that sort, so actually Saddam Hussein used Christians in his government, and they had a certain protection, and now Christians are fleeing Iraq, and the same thing is happening in Egypt as well. It's just an interesting thought.*

We just don't know. I mean, we've got to be careful thinking that we have all the information on what is good for the family of God worldwide.

Tom: *Coming together is one thing, but what we do when we come together is very important.*

Absolutely.

Tom: *And we see in the watering down the aspect of worship in the United States these days. It's entertainment.*

You see, worship...worship is not a noun. It's a verb. You realize that? We go to worship. That means I go to give. And when I go to give, that means I'm giving a blessing. How many times have you heard somebody say, "I'm not going back to that church because I did not receive a...blessing"? Well guess what? You weren't supposed to. {LAUGHTER} You were supposed to go give one. It's in the giving of the blessing that you receive the blessing.

How often...I read a survey, and maybe some of you might correct me on my accuracy on this, but a couple of years ago, the Barna Institute did a survey of all the counties in the United States of America in the 50 states, and not one county in the 50 states of the United States of America had an increase in church attendance. Not one county. But you've got churches who've got 36,000 and 12,000 and 24,000. All we have are church hoppers. We don't have new converts. There's not one county in America had more increase in worshipers through conversion and redemption. You had increase in worshipers in certain locations because they were church hopping.

You see, we've got this backwards. We don't understand the concept of what it means to be an assembly.

***Audience Member:** When I go to church, I always receive a blessing; a blessing of the fellowship of my church family.*

Absolutely. We receive that. You go, not with the attitude of looking for that. You go coming away realizing you've got it. So it's a discovery, not a desire. You discover the joy, the blessing, of have having worshipped, and the fellowship that you just described. That's a discovery. But you don't go, say, "Oh, I'm going to go have fellowship." You and I need to learn to go to give God the glory, to worship him. It literally means to kiss toward. So I go to do something. I go give to him. As a result of that, we receive.

Now unfortunately, much of our culture today, church has become entertainment. It's become entertainment. People go because they like a certain thing. They like the minister. They like the music. They like this. They like that. If they don't like it, they don't go; they go to another one.

But the tragedy is we don't see increased worshipers. We just see trans-worshippers—people who transfer from one to another because they're looking for the thing that gives them whatever they want.

We have to realize that we can be responsible and we need to make worship a joyful experience, so we just can't sloppily say, "It's your fault because you don't get what we give." That's not the point. We have a responsibility, those in leadership have a responsibility, to create a god-centered, spirit-filled worship that is attractive to people in the sense of it's attractive to their soul and to their spirit, not necessarily to their entertainment mode. So we do have a responsibility, so please understand what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that we can be sloppy and blame it on other people. The church leadership has a responsibility to provide biblical worship.

Now in my mind, worship for me is Word-centered worship. We read the Word, we pray the Word, we sing the Word, we preach the Word, and we demonstrate the Word through baptism and the Lord's supper. That's how we create worship. When is the last time you had somebody stand up and read a whole chapter of the Bible in a worship service? Asking people to stand and show reverence and dignity for the hearing of God's word. See, those little things that we've just lost because we've dumbed down worship service to be something that the people want. Worship is not for the people, folks. Again, understand what I'm not saying. We in church leadership have a responsibility to create a worship service that is God-centered, and we have to allow the results to be in his hands, not our hands. But at the same time, we can't be sloppy in the way that we do that.

***Don:** Yeah, I'm going to say something that may step on toes here, some people may disagree with, though I think that the purpose of worship is worship. It's not evangelism. I think a lot of times [UNCLEAR]...*

Correct.

***Don:** ...we have good intentions. We want to get unbelievers in the church and so they'll hear the service for that purpose, and I think that that's missing the mark. I think that worship is for the saved. If unbelievers come, hallelujah. But worship is for God's people because only God's people can worship him acceptably.*

That's right. Great point. You know, not all worship is acceptable. Just because we like it, does not necessarily mean its acceptable. Now in my judgment, Don's point is exactly right on. Worship is for

God, it's not evangelistic. There may be things that the Holy Spirit will apply to a person when they hear the message of the body of Christ proclaimed, Christ and him crucified. When that message is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit works, and so we don't need to manipulate people. We can proclaim Christ and him crucified, and the Holy Spirit will apply that to a person who may be unredeemed, and that may be an evangelistic event for them. The intent for us is just to proclaim Christ in the worship. The Holy Spirit will do his job. We need to let that happen.

In my mind, I think it's critical when a non-believer comes into a fellowship of the assembly of God's people, in my judgment, they ought to have two responses. This is the non-believer coming in. If a non-believer were to come into this fellowship of us, this gathering of the Brave Men, I would be hopeful that they would have two emotions. The first one is this, "I really feel uncomfortable." {LAUGHTER} "I really feel uncomfortable. I've never been in an environment like this before. I don't see this at work. I don't see this in my neighborhood. There's something that is so different among those men, that gathering, that assembly of people and what they're doing, that I just had this sense of being uncomfortable."

Now to counter balance that, I would be hopeful that they would say, "I've never been more well received at any group in the world. They really received me well. I really feel uncomfortable, but I've never been loved like that." How do you respond to visitors who come to church? How do we treat visitors? We give them a pamphlet that says, "Here are the programs. Get involved."

What I started doing in my church in Chicago, we asked people if they were visitors, and I started just making this statement, "We are such a friendly church that I betcha that you'll be invited out for lunch by at least two or three people." Now for the first six weeks, I took a lot of people out to lunch. {LAUGHTER} But after that, all of a sudden, I said that every Sunday, all of a sudden, when a visitor would raise his or her hand, one or two families would go over and say, "Would you like to have lunch with us? Come to our house." You see, that's what the non-believer needs to see, that we're like bees going to honey. We see that there's a person who's coming into this assembly of God's people where we are worshipping, and they feel uncomfortable because they're in an environment they've never experienced before. If it's entertainment, they can go to MTV and stay at home. But when they come into the church, it's got to be different. And so there's this feeling of being uncomfortable, but at the same time, we want them to feel absolutely welcome because we're reaching out to them because that's an expression of our worship to God. We're expressing that because we're the assembly of God's family.

There's a lot we're going to discuss about all of this, but I just wanted to help us understand the significance of what we introduced last week, and that was the assembly by the word "our" in the Lord's Prayer. It's "our" prayer. It's a family prayer. Were you're praying that prayer, and you recite that every Lord's day, you are praying that those activities in that prayer, the matters of that prayer, the content of that prayer, are applied to every person who's a member of the body of Christ. That's why you heard me pray last week that God is our King. You see that in the Lord's Prayer because he forgives us our sins. He's our Father. He provides our daily bread. And He's our Master. He protects us from evil. You see, when you say that prayer, you're praying those three things for every believer in the body of Christ.

***Dean:** On the our, prayer, you know, sometimes we're digging for these things that you're talking about, you know, any time, I think, we pray, we pray selfishly. Anything you do selfishly has a tendency to offend somebody else, in some way. Can I have? Can I do? Can I be? It has a tendency to offend somebody in some circle, in some way.*

Yeah, being selfish in your prayer is one of the ways that you'll hinder the body of Christ. Having a selfish mindset that thinking that the world revolves around me when the world revolves around us. So

that may be one of the ways in which we hinder people.

Dick: *Bruce, help us with, we use the word “entertainment,” we use the word “worship” and we use the word “the Word” being involved in preaching or in music, so that you have mindsets that some people can look at a service and say, “That’s entertainment.” But if the Word is ingrained within the songs that are being sung, and God is using that to mature a believer, a believer is there, are there not different worship music styles that are not as pleasing to one as to another? So somebody could say, “That’s entertainment,” but in reality, the person is a believer and that music and worship style is worshipping the Lord. How do...I think there’s a fine line between...*

Yeah, we don’t balance that. We can’t You’re absolutely right. One person’s perception is another person’s reality. Now, we’re going to get into all of this...hey, this is only our second week, guys. {LAUGHTER} I mean, give me a break! {LAUGHTER} We’re not going to answer all of these things today. We’re going to discuss these things as we go, because Dick’s got a good point, we need to look at all of these things. I’m just trying to help us establish the mindset that we are an assembly of people who’s primary purpose is to come to worship. Now we need to explore that in greater depth and see what that looks like and what that means.

Don: *Let me just give you an example that I think kind of clarifies the situation that Dick is saying. A few years ago, I do pulpit supply occasionally, and I was preaching at a church in Steubenville, who at the time was a part of the denomination that I belonged to, and they had the youth pastor dress up in a clown suit. One of the songs that they sang, maybe some of you have heard it, I call it the na-na song. “You make me move...,” “I don’t know all the words. I hope I’m not misrepresenting...but something like if, “Jesus you make me move,” and then there were three others and then the chorus went, “Na na na na...” Now to me, I don’t want to offend anybody, but to me that’s not Word centered music. I’m sorry.*

That’s true. Well said. Thank you. {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: *Back to what Dick was saying, though, it isn’t so much of matter of style...we can have variety...*

Variety of styles. Style is not the issue.

Audience Member: *Yes. I think its participation. Are we going to participate in worship and worship with others or are we going to sit and listen only.*

Carl: *Bruce, I think it’s important that we remember what we’re in the assembly for.*

Amen.

Carl: *You know, because so many times, and we talk about entertainment, and I’m sure we’ll get to it down the road a little bit, but I think you hit on it when you said the songs, the music, the Word of God has got to be entwined in everything that we do. I’ll give you an example only because God has blessed me to be a pastor. I don’t allow songs in my church that are not Word centered. If they’re not singing the Word, they are not sung.*

Amen. Amen. So it’s not a matter of style. Dick’s got a good point. One style might be a means of grace in one person’s life and another style might be a means of grace in another person’s life. The issue is the condition of the heart and what directs the style of the worship. What I’m saying is, and we will go through this, and I believe the Scripture will teach us, that the Word is what directs any style of worship. If the Word is not involved in any style, then it’s probably entertainment. What makes the difference is,

is it Word directed? That's why I say, I use the phrase, "Word directed worship." I don't talk about a certain style. I talk about Word directed worship, that it's function about the Word.

***Audience Member:** If we're all to be worshipers, should we look only to worship on Sundays or should we seek to worship [UNCLEAR]...*

Great point. Our brother said, "If we're called to be worshipers, do we only do that on Sunday?" Worship is a style of life, guys. It's not an activity that you do on the Lord's day. It's a style of living. It's something that we do all the time. It's 24/7. And we're going to see that. That's the assembly. That's why we are salt and light. Salt and light as we take it into the marketplace is an expression of our worship. So you and I worship when we go to work. Do you realize God gives us work so that we can worship? Now we're going to get into that later on. You see, one of the expressions of our worship is how do we work? It's an expression of our worship. Great point.

***Bob:** Bruce, let's take just a moment, at least for me, let's take a moment and reflect. What does the Word say about what we should do when we go to a physical place like a church on Sunday mornings? What does it say?*

That's about lesson 11. {LAUGHTER}

***Bob:** Okay.*

At the rate we're going, it's going to be lesson 20. {LAUGHTER} We'll get to that, because that's part of the heart of it. Hey, we're just figuring out who we are.

***Audience Member:** Sorry if this is a little bit off the worship section, but talking about the term assembly or church that word, it would be helpful at the beginning here for us to define a little bit what we mean by local church, universal church. We use that word [UNCLEAR] big "C," little "c" or whatever [UNCLEAR]...*

Yep. Good question. The word ecclesia is a word that which we translate assembly, and it means both the invisible and the visible church. The invisible meaning the worldwide church. It's what we would say would be the small "c," the catholic church, which is universal. There's a lot of confusion when we say the Holy Catholic Church. We're not talking about Romanism. We're talking about the universal assembly of God's redeemed, little "c," not big "C." Big "C" would stand for Roman Catholicism. Little "c" stands for the universal church.

Now nine out of the ten verses in the Scripture deal with the church on the corner, the local assembly. Who did Paul write letters to? He wrote to churches. Now, granted, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the universal church sees it and reads that. But his intent was to write something specific to the people of Corinth, to the people of Ephesus. And notice to whom he didn't write only. He didn't write only to the leaders of the church. He wrote to the assembly of the church. Take 1 Corinthians for an example. 1 Corinthians 13 is a rebuke, as we talked about, the love chapter. He's basically writing to the members of the assembly of the church at Corinth, and he's saying, "Members, take care of yourself." He's not saying, "Leaders make sure they do it," he's saying, "Everybody does it. You're a body. You function as one body, therefore, you have responsibility, church members, church assembly, church gathering. You have a responsibility to corrects these ills." And he's writing to the whole body of the church, just not the church leaders.

Sometimes we have a misunderstanding of thinking that it is only the responsibility of the church leaders to do things, when really, Paul is saying, "Hey, it's the assembly of all the members in that city who are

called to do things,” and that means clean up your own act. Take care of yourself. You don’t know how to love. Here’s how you do it, people, assembly, Corinthians, Pittsburghers. You see, he’s writing to a local assembly of people.

So there’s a fine line. Yes, there is the universal church of which we’re a huge member. That’s what gives us confidence. But the expression of that one body, is manifested in the local area at a little church on the corner.

***Audience Member:** You just made me think of a prayer that might hinder the church. I can go into my church and [UNCLEAR]...I’d love to lead a Bible study, especially after what I’ve learned here, and wouldn’t it be great to take it to a small group. But what if a pastor called on me to do something totally different, and I’m thinking, “Oh, is that what you want me...oh, god, that’s why...I have to do that?” and thinking I want to do this, you know, but I could get on the wrong path and not be what the leadership needs, instead of going after my needs, go after what the body needs.*

Well, you know, that’s when we did our study a couple of years ago on the seven spiritual gift motivations. You don’t determine your spiritual gift motivation in a vacuum. The gift motivations are for whom?

***Audience Members:** The body.*

The body of Christ, not for you. So you have to have the body of Christ affirm the fact that you do have that spiritual gift motivation, not just because you want to do it. You have to have the affirmation of the body of Christ to say, “Yes, this is a gift that the Holy Spirit is giving to us, and you just happen to be the means by which he’s going to work.” So there has to be the affirmation of the body of Christ to affirm what we do. Just because we have an inkling or a tendency or desire to do something, does not necessarily mean it’s a gift to the body of Christ. The body of Christ will know that.

***Brian:** That’s a hard one because we look at the gift motivation and we’re seeking, I’m not going to say joy, but I’ll say, it would be too obvious, seek happiness, so we think, “Well, if that doesn’t make me happy, then obviously God isn’t in it and that’s not what he wants me to do,” which isn’t necessarily the case.*

Correct. You said it was hard. That’s by design. It’s by design to be hard, because the righteous person walks by figuring it all out. No, the righteousness walks by faith. It’s designed to be hard because that forces us to be on our knees and seek the Holy Spirit who’s our Comforter, who comes along side us, the paraclete, who will always be there with us. It’s designed to be hard for that very reason.

***Ian:** Well, as I listen to these various conversations about the “our” and in the prayer about Fran’s comment and styles of worship and music, it seems to me that the distinction between what we’ve talked about as a healthy perspective and an unhealthy perspective, at the end of the day it comes down to what’s the focal point of our worship, our song, our prayer, our preaching. If our focal is in any way a, anything, or anyone other than the Father, then we’re off base.*

Correct.

***Ian:** The point of the music is the congregation and pleasing them or the performers and glorifying them. In Brian’s example, if the focal point is our prayer, it’s our happiness, it’s the focal point that counts, in all of these things.*

Absolutely. That’s why you see “Our Father.” It’s the object. Worship must have, as its object, the One

True Living God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the object of all that we do.

Audience Member: *I guess one of the topics I’ve been struggling with this whole morning, when we made the comment about praying for the hindrance of a fellow believer. I’m sitting here thinking how, you know, trying draw up an example of when I pray, you know, “Boy, I hope Sig gets sick today so we don’t have the to [UNCLEAR].” {LAUGHTER} [UNCLEAR] hear you guys talking and I’m thinking one of the indicators there must be, there’s two, I think, one is our motive for the prayer, the other us God centeredness, like Ted’s example of Frank for the ouster of Hussein, and now look what happened. If I prayed for Hussein to be removed from power, knowing that Christians would be killed and all these things would happen, I had to really question my motives, and I think, because, I can see in listening to some of these others, I can pray for a fellow believer to succeed in something, but if I know that something is not God-centered, it’s not for, it’s not biblically based, I’m really praying for his detriment, that he would get something that is not, so I really think our motive is the key behind that, not necessarily, if I prayed for something bad to happen, I can be praying for something the world sees as good, but if I know that it’s not in line with the Gospel, then I’m praying to his detriment.*

That’s a good point. I think, guys, now that we’ve had this truth exposed to us, the next time you pray a selfish prayer, you’re going to know it. That’s what the Holy Spirit’s going to do. I can’t give you a litany of here’s one, here’s an example, here’s an example, here’s an example. I can’t do that, and you can’t do that, either. The role of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all truth. You’re absolutely right, the motive is a critical ingredient in our prayer. What’s the motive of my heart? Now that we know that truth, when you and I start praying, selfishly or inappropriately, the Holy Spirit’s going to come along side and kick us in the rear end. It’s going to make it obvious to you. You’re going to realize it the next time you pray a selfish prayer, you’re going to know it, because I can’t tell you what it is, but the Holy Spirit will do that for us.

Audience Member: *In light of the sovereignty of God and the omniscience of God, can there possibly be a pure prayer other than thy will be done?*

No. God is sovereign. Look guys, we are in an unredeemed body, and as Romans 6 tells us, we have the influence of the senses of our body that misshape everything that we do. We think that we’re so spiritual, and we really were beggars, you know, we’re spiritually inept. We’re spiritual beggars. There’s nothing that we can do that’s going to gain merit in God’s eyes for us. We’re not going to earn anything. Our whole salvation and our whole redemption is wrapped up in the blood of Christ. When we pray a correct prayer, God doesn’t say, “Oh finally Bruce got it down right.” {LAUGHTER} I don’t get merit for that. I don’t get credit for that. I got all the credit I ever needed when Christ died for me at the cross and I was justified by faith and I got credit for his alien righteousness. It’s the righteousness of Christ that gains merit in God’s eyes, not what you and I do. You and I express that gratitude. But no, we don’t have a perfect prayer. The moment you think it’s perfect, it’s no longer perfect, because you’ve just made it imperfect because of pride, so no. That’s where we walk by faith.

Audience Member: *We visited a [UNCLEAR] in Africa where they worshipped at 7:00 in the morning every day, and they sang as hard as their bodies would sing. I was belittled and humbled and...*

Absolutely.

Audience Member: *An I looked within myself and saw that [UNCLEAR] I was reluctant to do that every day.*

Yeah, I’ve had the same experience. That’s part of the body of Christ. Now there’s a reason that they’re

doing that, and it's an expression of their deep sense of gratitude, so we can learn from other people in their style of worship, but the point of it is, first of all, is it Word-centered and what's our motive. That's the two things we can zero in on. Is it Word-centered and what's our motive?

Brian: *Pulling this all together, we're a servant of Christ. Christ is in us; we are in Christ. Without overstepping boundaries or anything, if we are servants of Christ, aren't we also [UNCLEAR] servants to the body?*

Absolutely. Absolutely. Your ear serves your legs. Your arm serves your back. That's why you take care of the whole body, just not the one part of it. You're absolutely correct.

Brian: *So if we are to serve the body with the same reverence, if you will, or same...*

Sense of dignity and respect.

Brian: *...zeal...*

Yes.

Brian: *...that we would serve Christ, because my serving another brother or sister, we are in fact serving Christ.*

Look at the 58 one another commands. Who are they addressed to? They're not addressed to the non-believer. They're addressed to the believer. This is how you get along with each other. You practice that on each other inside the assembly, and you take that experience out into the world. You practice it on each other.

Audience Member: *Closest thing to a perfect prayer is thy will be done.*

That's it. If you want a perfect prayer, just say that and stop. {LAUGHTER} That's correct.

Audience Member: *We're being too self-centered people [UNCLEAR] for giving me [UNCLEAR]...*

No, that's part of the role of the Father, is to provide our daily sustenance. That's one of the things that Jesus said. Not only will he take of our spiritual needs, but also our temporal needs. That is a legitimate form of our prayer is, "Father, provide the needs that I have for your glory, your will be done." So it's very legitimate for us to pray for our temporal needs, just as much as our spiritual needs.

Audience Member: *The word gratitude always pops into my mind when I hear these conversations because I learned recently that every time something happens to me, I just close my eyes or I look up and I say, "Thank you." I don't care how big or how small, how miniscule, I say, "Thank you." I think a lot of the times we forget to say thank you.*

Paul writes to the believers, to the assembly, to the gathering at the church Thessalonica, and he says, "In all things give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Let me tell you one other thing. Do you find out God's will or do you find in God's will? Is God's will found out? Or is God's will found in us? It's in us. You don't find it out. You find it in us. That's gratitude. One of God's wills, revealed wills, is, "In all things give thanks." You are found in God's will; you don't find it out. You already know what it is.

The secret things remain to God. We spend most of our time dwelling on the secret things. Deuteronomy

29:29 says, “The secret things belong to God.” Guess what, guys? You’re not going find them out because they’re secret. You do know what the revealed will is, and one of those is this—in all things give thanks for this is God’s will for you. When you are saying gratitude and expressing gratitude to the Father, you are found in God’s will. You don’t find it out. You are found in it, because you’re doing it.

***Audience Member:** This might be a small point, but can you illuminate the difference between praise and thankfulness, because so often we hear a prayer, somebody says, you know, “God gave me a new car. I praise you God. You gave me a new car,” that should be, I mean, a thankfulness, not necessarily a praise. I understand that you praise God for who he is. You thank him for things he does. Is that...?*

That’s lesson 9. {LAUGHTER} I don’t mean to give you a curt answer. We’re going to explore these things, guys. It’s going to take us a while, so let’s just deal with what we’ve got today. Keep asking your questions and bring them, because that’s going to help me understand what we need to discuss. We will discuss the difference. Is there a difference between praise and thanksgiving and worship? What does all that look like? We’ll have to go where?

***Audience Members:** The Word.*

To the Word. That’s where we’re going to find that out, and we’re not going to do it in one minute. We’ll do it over the next year or so as it’s going to take us awhile. Now in my planning this out, I have 35 lessons planned. I can see it’s going to be a lot longer than that. But that’s okay, guys. That’s okay, because we want the Holy Spirit to fulfill his job description, and that is to guide us into all truth. Guide us into all truth. Let’s just pray that for the body, that this body of believers, the Holy Spirit will be with us every day and guide us into all truth. We’re not giving our opinions. My opinion really doesn’t make a hill of beans about anything. What matters is how do I understand to the best of my ability through inspiration of the Holy Spirit the content of biblical truth and its sufficiency, and how do we begin to apply that. So bothers, let’s just pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth.

***Audience Member:** I was just taking a quick glance at some of the Epistles that Paul wrote, and it always starts out, [UNCLEAR] about church with a little “c” and also, “God, our Father.” [UNCLEAR] all the time, emphasizing that [UNCLEAR].*

Yes. It’s a reminder that we’re an assembly. Let’s pray. Father, we have said much today, based upon our own perceptions, experiences. Father, we pray that you would refine those and make them centered upon your Word. Teach us. Father, we really are ignorant. We really don’t know the answer to the questions we ask, and yet we have such a hunger to be taught by your Holy Spirit, so Father, I just pray that your will would be done as it is in heaven, that it might occur on earth, and it will be as a result of the Holy Spirit guiding us into all truth. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!