

## THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Taught by Bruce Bickel

Session: June 3, 2011

Once again, our privilege to recognize that you are our Father, and we know that you provide our daily needs. We recognize, once again, that you are our King, and you pardon us from our sin, and we recognize, once again, that you are our Master and our Shepherd who protects us from evil. Father, we just humble ourselves again, recognizing that we have seen that which is perfect, the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ and realizing that we cannot achieve that. We can only receive that through justification by faith alone. So Father, we just pray that you'd cleanse us of all those things that are offensive to you this day, and that you would make us fit vessels to fit at your feet, that you might be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago, we began a new series on The Formation and Function of the Church. The formation and function of the church. You have lessons number one and two, I think, handouts. We've been talking about the word ecclesia, which is the word which means gathering or assembly. We went through a brief history of the use of that word and how God has always had an assembly of his people.

Ted Wood did some recent study for me on the use of that word biblically, and the majority of the times that that word is used, it is used in the context of a local body. There's also, primarily in the book of Ephesians, where you see the doctrine of the church, and you'll notice that the word is used to describe the universal, or what we would call the catholic church with a small "c." The large "C" refers to Roman Catholicism. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the word, small "c," which means catholic, which means universal.

[UNINTELLIGIBLE}...church universal versus the local church on the corner where you and I worship. We're going to be spending most of our time talking about the local church where we worship, because most of the time in the Scripture, that's how the word is used to describe a local assembly of [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. One of the things that we talked about so far is we saw that Jesus loves his church. We're going to get into more of that today and next week.

For someone to say, "I want to be a follower of Christ and I love Christ," and not be involved in the church is a dichotomy. How can you say that you really love Christ and you want to be a follower of his and then you're not involved in something that he says that he loves and gave his life for? So we just have to be very, very careful that we don't flippantly take a look at, "Well I'm a member of the church universal," or "Yes, you are if you have saving faith." But part of that being a member of the church universal is an obligation to be involved in the church local, because that's where the body of the church functions. So we need to understand in America we have really taken it very, very lightly that says, "Well I'm just covered. I don't need to go to church. I'm okay because I have saving faith." Well that would be an anomaly according to the use of the word gathering or assembly as we see it in the Scripture.

What is the church per se? It is not an organization. It's not a place. It's not a set of programs. It's not a denomination nor is it a building. It is a gathering, an assembly of people. Now in that group, you're going to have both the wheat and the tares. You're going to have the sheep and the goats. You're going to have some of those who know they have saving faith and some people who think they have saving faith or know that they don't have saving faith. So it's an assembly, and it's not a pure assembly. But it is not an organization, a building or a place or a program.

In the big context, it is a spiritual body, a living organism. It's a body with a personality made up of the people who are involved, which is alive and breathing, and yes, even suffering at times. That's all part of

the concept of the church universal.

Now it's also a place redeemed by God for God. It is a place where you will see people who are redeemed by God for God, and in that, they, you will be, the church is a gathering of people where they are living and loving together, where they are learning and laboring together, and where they are leading and following together, all for the glory of God.

If you look at some passages like Ephesians 5:30 and Ephesians 4:13-16, one of the things we talk about in 1 Corinthians 12 is the concept of unity. Now we talk about unity of spirit and we talk about being unified. Unity is not something that we achieve. Unity is something we maintain. It's already been achieved for us by the accomplishments of the person and work of Christ. So we don't go about, "We need to work at being unified." We need to start with the realization that if you are a redeemed child of God, and have been redeemed for God, then you are in a unified effort with everybody else. When you have been reconciled to God the Father, and somebody else has been reconciled to the God the Father, you are automatically reconciled to that person. So unity is not something that you and I work at to achieve. It is something that we start with and say it's already been achieved; we now need to maintain it. Unity is something we maintain, and that means there's an obligation and a responsibility as to how we get along with other people in the body of Christ.

If the body of Christ is loving and learning and loving and leading, all those things we start with the fact that we are unified because of the commonality of our salvation and grace and the fact that we have been redeemed by God for God. Now that's where the rubber meets the road, and that's where it's really difficult in the local church, is to maintain the integrity of that unity. But unity is not something that we achieve by creating a certain program or doing a certain activity. It's the realization that unity is something that we already have because of the accomplishments of the person and work of Christ, and our job is to maintain that.

Now several years ago, we did a study on the one another commands. It's the Greek word *allelon*, which is used of 100 times in the Scripture, and it's translated one another. Now 58 of those one another commands are designed to teach us how to maintain our unity. How we get along with each other inside the church—the one another commands. They're divided up into four major themes—our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response to one another, and our restoration of one another. Now that's when you look at those one another commands, those are commands that teach us how inside the body of Christ, this living organism, this gathering, this assembly, how we are to get along with each other inside the body of Christ. We practice this on each other inside the body of Christ. We maintain the unity that is there, and then we take that and give that out to the world. So the real responsibility is relationships.

Now leadership is essentially influencing the behavior of people. Leadership stands for something that is good. The ultimate leader stands for something that is good. Really, what we do inside the church is we stand for that which is good and maintaining the relationships we have in the unity of the body of Christ. Now that is not easy. It's not done perfectly. If you think that there's a church that can do it, don't join it because the moment you join it, it will no longer be perfect.

We need to realize that this is something that the body is the living organism, and it functions that way. The body has different parts and they all function separately. Christ still has a body. He has a physical body, and we are it.

In Acts 1:9, Jesus ascended into heaven, and the reason he told his disciples in John 14 was so that he could be with them forever through ministry of the Holy Spirit. You see, during his physical incarnation, Jesus could only be in one spot. When he went to heaven to take up his residency in glory, where he was

before the foundation of the world, he said, “I’m going to leave you a paraclete, send a paraclete, who will be with you.” The reason that Jesus told his disciples, “I must depart is so that I can be with my body,” because he could only be in one location during his physical incarnation. And now through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he’s with all of us because he still has a body. That’s why you see in Colossians 1:24 that the body is still fulfilling the afflictions of Christ.

Now did Christ experience all the possible afflictions that a body could? The answer is no because he, as the Scripture says, the church, his physical body, us, is still suffering. We are fulfilling the afflictions of Christ, the ones that he did not fulfill because he still has a physical body, and we are it. That’s the understanding we need to have about the church universal, is that it is a physical body and within the expression of that, we have certain responsibilities that we have obligations to live that out in a local context, which would be the local church.

Now when was the church formed? When was the church formed? It was not formed at Pentecost. The church was made visible at Pentecost, but it was not formed at Pentecost. It was formed in eternity past. Let’s take a look at the book of Ephesians. We’ll spend most of our time today in the book of Ephesians, which is the doctrine of the universal church. Now notice, Ephesians 1:9-10. I’ll be reading from the New American Standard Version of the Bible. “He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

You see, we talk about the mystery. The church is a mystery.

**Audience Member:** What was that Scripture again please?

Ephesians 1:9-10. The church is a mystery. It’s a mystery that Christ still has a physical body made up of physical people made up by the redeemed children of God for the purpose of the glory of God. We are a living organism. We’re not a place. That’s why when I was pastoring, whenever I would welcome someone, I would say, to a worship service, I would say, “Welcome to the gathering of Grace Church,” because I didn’t want people to think that they were coming to a building, they were coming to a denomination, they were coming to a program. What I was wanting them to understand is that when they came into the church, they were coming into a gathering of the redeemed of God for the glory of God. So the church is a mystery. A lot of people are not going to understand that. We try to humanize it too much. We try to make it think that it’s a human organization. It’s a spiritual dynamic organization. And we need to let that mystery be a mystery.

Now how about chapter 3 of Ephesians. Ephesians 3:3-6, “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” We see here that other ages had not understood the mystery that you and I now have because of the completed sufficiency revelation of Scripture. We now understand it.

We see also in Ephesians 3:6 that the Gentiles, those non-Jews, are now people who are embraced by God’s grace and now have the same inheritance as God’s chosen people. The church is a mystery worldwide. I think the timing of Tin’s message to us is the realization, you know, that in his country, they are celebrating 100 years, which is a very, very short amount of time, of the reality of the person and work of Christ in the local church. To them, that’s a big event in his little church, because in that

culture, it's primarily Buddhist. For them to realize, you know, this has been 100 years where Christ's body is now physically functioning. That is a huge event. We take that for granted. I thought the timing of that message coming to us as we're talking about the mystery of the church was really very prophetic and very profound and certainly a testimony of God's merciful grace to us in his providence is to help us realize that there are some members of the body of Christ who this is a brand new revelation to them; it's fairly young—only 100 years in his country has there been the reality of the physical location of gathering of God's redeemed for God's glory. It's only been 100 years. We take it for granted in our own country.

So there's a mystery, and God is at work, and the church was formed in eternity past. It was not formed at Pentecost. That's when it became most visible, but it was formed in the heart of God in eternity past. The church was planted, planned in eternity. Ephesians 1, as we just saw, verses 3-6. Before we were born, God planned the body of Christ. The physical body of Christ that we're talking about. The church body of Christ. It was planned before the foundation of the world. It's a biblical mystery, is a truth that is ordained in eternity past and hid, which is to be revealed at a certain time, which we now see through the Scripture. That's the references that we saw in Ephesians 1.

Now this prompts Paul's wonderful statement about the mystery of Christ, and it starts and ends with praise, and this is one sentence in the Greek. There are 202 Greek words, and it has three parts. We're going to read Ephesians 1, beginning at verse 3 to the end of the chapter. In verses 4-6—here's the breakdown—in verses 4-6, we see the past aspect of God's eternal formation of the body, that is through election. The past aspect of God's eternal formation of the body, the church, is through election. You'll see that in verses 4-6.

Then in verses 6-11, you'll see the present aspect of the body of Christ, and that is redemption. The past history is election, the present reality is redemption. In verses 12-14, the future aspect of the church is inheritance. So that's beginning. That's how the church was formed—through election, presently redemption, and in the future inheritance.

Let's just take a look at Ephesians 1, and let me read the whole thing and follow along. You're going to see the three breakdowns of that. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Now to whom is he writing? "To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Now here is the beginning of a long sentence containing 202 words that is a song of praise, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him," that's election. "before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory."

In that, you see that wonderful expression to the three aspects of the formation of the church. It was formed in eternity past, it was made manifest, put on display, at Pentecost, and it involves three things—it

involved election, God's choosing people, God redeems people for himself for his own purposes. We see the next aspect of it is that we have been redeemed, and then the third aspect is our inheritance.

The body of Christ, you'll see that there are seven key facts about God's formation of the church that we need to examine. The first one is the method by which God formed the body. You might want to go to [UNCLEAR] number two, [UNCLEAR] because we want to talk about that.

Now let's take a look at this. There are three things, historically, the formation of the church were election, redemption and inheritance.

**Audience Member:** What does this do to the people he brought out Egypt into Israel, his chosen people? Does that...?

Well they were elect also. The nation of Israel was a chosen elect nation that God was pleased to choose them for reasons according to his own will, not because of any merit or achievement that they had. It was just a function of the pleasure of his own will to demonstrate the fact that he was a holy God. Now in the old covenant he used, the Old Testament, he used a nation corporately to do that. In the new covenant, he uses it individually, so the same concept is there. God's people have always been chosen by God for a specific reason, and that is to the praise of his glory. So whether it be the collective nation of Israel or the individual people in the new covenant, it's the same issue both ways. The reason is the same and the purpose is the same.

Let's take a look at this now. As we saw in verses 4-6, the church was formed because it was formed...the methodology that God methodology that God used was the method of election. God choosing us before the foundation of the world. Now this really...this, to me, is one of the most compassionate and merciful doctrines of all the Scripture. Is the real...I mean, I just still, still can't figure out, and I don't need to know, because the answer's already in the Scripture. But why did God choose me? There's no reason for that, other than just grace. God was pleased to do that, according to the counsel of his own will.

You see, that's what produces humility and gratitude in us, is understanding that the one thing that we could not do for ourselves, God did for us when he chose us before the foundation of the world. That means that if you are a redeemed child of God, you're saved by the grace of God today. When somebody says, "When did you become a Christian," it's three answers. I became a Christian before the foundation of the world when God was pleased to choose me, before I was ever born. Now do you understand that? That's a mystery. Let it be a mystery. Don't say, "I've got to figure it out humanly." You can't. That's what Paul says, "This is a mystery." The formation of the church is a mystery. It was held back from people for generations. They didn't understand it. Now it's being revealed. And now we have the joy of seeing it being revealed in the sufficiency of Scripture. So when is it you became a child of God? It was before the foundation of the world, when God planned the church, when he planned his body, which is you and me, when he planned the universal body of Christ, and he said, "I'm going to have him and him and him. They're going to be a part of this universal." It started in eternity past.

You became a believer in the mind and heart of God long before you were ever born. That's the first time you became a Christian. The second time you became a Christian is at the cross. When Christ redeemed you by paying for your sins at the cross. That's when he accomplished your salvation. He didn't make it possible for you to believe. He accomplished those that Father gave him. John 10 says, "I gave you these. I've not lost anyone that you gave me." The ones he gave are the ones from eternity past. Christ accomplished their salvation at the cross. He didn't make it possible so you one day could say yes I believe. That's why Jesus says, "It is finished."

When you look at passages like John 10, “I will not lose any of those that you gave me.” Who are the ones he gave? The ones in eternity past. Now that’s a mystery guys. Let it be a mystery. Don’t try to figure it out and say it’s not fair. We’re going to talk about that in a moment. Let it be a mystery. That’s what Paul is saying. The whole church is a mystery. The greatest mystery in my mind is why me?

**Bob:** *But Bruce, in your case, somebody had to do it, and God knew you’d do a good job.*

{LAUGHTER} No, it’s not...God didn’t know that I would choose him one day. That’s not it. God chose me so that I would choose him. It’s not because he knew I would do something. He chose me in eternity past and in his grace, know then that I would choose him because he chose me first. [UNCLEAR] God would do something. It’s not like God says, “Well I know Bruce will one day choose me.” No, it’s reverse that. It’s he chose me so that I would choose him. That’s what Jesus says when no one’s going to get lost. None of them are going to be lost the Father gave me. So the second time you became a believer is at the cross.

**Audience Member:** *Does that imply the he could have lost?*

Pardon me?

**Audience Member:** *Does that statement imply that he could have lost some that have been given to him?*

No.

**Audience Member:** *Okay.*

Not at all.

**Ian:** *The notion that, we often hear that Christ died on the cross, you know, for us by name, and we personalize that in a lot of songs and poems and things like that. That really doesn’t make any sense unless we have in fact been chosen before the beginning of time...*

Amen

**Ian:** *...and so our name has been known by God since the beginning of time because he chose us.*

That’s right.

**Ian:** *Otherwise it’s just sort of cutesy Christian poetry when Christ died on the cross for us, personally, individually, one by one. So it...and I hadn’t thought of it, frankly, that part of it, till now, and it make perfect sense, if we have been known since the beginning of time, one by one, then Christ knew us personally on the cross.*

There’s that great Gospel hymn that I referred to several times, When He Was On the Cross, I Was On His Mind. That’s exactly what Ian’s saying. You see, when Jesus was on the cross, he was saying, “You were on my mind, Bruce, because of eternity past.” That’s a mystery, guys. Let that be a marvelous mystery that you just embrace, that you rejoice in, that you praise God for.

You see, if there were no election, then praising God would be ridiculous. You see, if there’s no election, praising God would be ridiculous, because there’d be nothing to praise him for.

**Audience Member:** *Bruce, in Revelation 13:8 it reads, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the*

*beast, all whose names have not been written in the Book of Life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from creation of the world.” I mean, there is a [UNCLEAR]...*

No, I was going to refer to that later on. That’s a wonderful verse. It’s exactly what Ian is suggesting. When did you become a believer? When God was pleased to choose you before the foundation of the world and write your name in the Lamb’s Book of Life, that when Christ was on the cross, you were on his mind by name, by person.

And then what’s the third time that you became a Christian? It’s when you repented and believed. When the Gospel was applied to you at some time in your life, you heard the message of salvation through the biblical Gospel and your heart was pricked because you were chosen before the foundation of the world, because Christ accomplished your salvation, and the Holy Spirit now applies that to you in present day reality and you repented and believed.

You see, we have a Trinitarian salvation, and we need to have a correct biblical understanding of the concept of salvation in the Gospel. It’s a Trinitarian, meaning God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Here’s how it works. What the Father ordained, the son accomplished, the Holy Spirit applies. That’s why you’re a believer. And how in the world do you have the audacity to say that I can’t praise him for that?

You see, guys, if you don’t understand, and we don’t understand election, this marvelous compassionate, merciful, loving doctrine of what I just described, it’s senseless then to praise God, because without the understanding of election, praising God is ridiculous, because you’re basically saying, “I could have done that.” He’s worthy of praise because he’s done something that is a mystery to us. You see, that’s why it’s foreign to the people who’s name are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. This is really a mystery, and it’s a beautiful mystery. We need to let it be that. But that’s what motivates us, you see, with the response of praising God in gratitude, and that’s what Paul in this one long sentence is doing. He’s just praising God for this mystery known of the formation of the body of Christ. When God chose us in eternity past...

**Brian:** *I’m trying to find it here, but there’s, in one of the Gospel accounts, where Jesus preaches some pretty, preaches the truth, and a number of those disciples walked away, John 6...*

Yes, John 6.

**Brian:** *So would it be fair to say based upon what we’re talking about, those disciples were not truly disciples. They...*

Correct. Yes. Let me show you something, before I get into some more detail here. Turn with me to Acts 13:48. Now guys, this should not give us the big head. This does not mean that we’re better than anybody else. It’s a function of grace. Acts 13:48–now Paul and Barnabas were preaching. Let’s look at verse 44 of chapter 13 of the book of Acts, “The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’”

Now this is an expression of the new covenant relationship that God is now going to deal with people individually, through his grace. Now notice this, “When the Gentile heard this,” these were not

believers, “they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Guys, that’s election. That happened in eternity past. The reality is through the preaching of the word, the application of the Holy Spirit applying that to non-believers, as many as were appointed by God’s gracious, merciful, tender loving doctrine of election believed. Why is they believed? It’s not because they were smart enough to say, “I need salvation.” It was because in eternity past, the mystery was this—their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Why do you think they were rejoicing? Why do you think it says that they were glorifying the word of the Lord? It’s because the Holy Spirit penetrated the depths of their heart and applied something that had occurred in eternity past, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Guys, that’s the church. That’s how the church was formed. It wasn’t formed by some event. It was formed in the heart of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in eternity past. What we now have to participate as Paul is writing in Ephesians 1, you and I are now participating in that glorious mystery, known as the church. What a glorious mystery we’re involved in. That’s why it’s so important, friends, that we have we have a biblical understanding of the Gospel of Christ. A biblical understanding, not just a present day American version of the Gospel of Christ, a biblical one, that says that you were saved back in eternity past in the heart of God, and that’s what produces rejoicing and praising God.

***Ted:** What you’re saying is the opposite of what a lot evangelical churches teach. You’re teaching as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. There are many churches that say as many as believed were appointed to eternal life.*

Right. Exactly right. Ted’s got a good point. Many would say this—they believed because...how did you say it Ted?

***Ted:** I said, well, I’m just reversing that sentence—as many as believed were appointed to eternal life.*

Yes. God appointed them because they believed. No, it’s the other way around. They believed because God appointed them. That’s what produces rejoicing.

***Audience Member:** If we’re in earnest praying for somebody to be saved and are tenacious in that, could we potentially be guilty of sinning, of being, wanting something against the will of God because I’ve, you know, not letting go and trusting...*

You would have to know what God’s going to do to answer that question, and I don’t know the answer to that, so I can’t say it’s against him or for him because I don’t know God’s mind. God’s mind is not mine. His ways are not ours. I don’t know that answer. But I do know this, that when you and I pray earnestly for the salvation of a soul, what happens to our affection for that person? It increases. It increases. That may be the value. The value may be what it’s doing in my life. Eternally I don’t know what’s going to happen in their life, but the real benefit is it’s increasing my affection for that person for whom I’m praying, and the next time I see them, my conduct may change toward them because of my increased affection because of the tenacity and perseverance of my prayer for their salvation. The value may be what happens to you and me, the prayer-er, as much as the one we’re praying for. You see, that’s the beauty of it.

***Audience Member:** A year or so ago, my wife and I received a wedding invitation, which was a little bit of a surprise, from a distant relative, and they, when we accepted that invitation, we wrote out that RSVP, we believed that they were sincere, they had chosen us to be a part of that wedding celebration some months before. I use that analogy in a Bible study that I teach. When you receive an invitation, you either reject it or you accept it. God sent his invitation in eternity past. He said, “You believe me, and you accept my invitation, and you’ll come home to be [UNCLEAR]...”*



That's the application of the Holy Spirit in present reality through the proclamation of the Gospel. Look at Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." What's our greatest weapon in the church, guys? It's a biblical gospel message. It's our message, not our methodology. It doesn't mean that we don't use modern technology. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is what's the content of what we are preaching to people? Do we make it fit the situation or do we with clarity and great conviction proclaim a biblical gospel.

***Don:** I would say that I don't think that we could be, I think what you said is very true. I don't think that we could potentially be guilty of sin by praying for anyone. The only caveat in Scripture, and I don't think, I mean, I don't know, maybe it's possible to know, I don't think it would be for me, but where John says that there is a sin that leads unto death. I don't say that a person should pray about that, but I don't know, I don't think it's possible for us to know if [UNCLEAR] we've committed that sin, but since we don't know who God has and has not elected, we are to pray.*

Absolutely.

***Don:** God uses those means.*

That's right. He may use us as a means, but he's the reason.

***Don:** In that way.*

He's the reason. He may use us as the means. [UNCLEAR] I've learned that I've been praying for people for years, and every time I see them, my heart goes out to them. I have changed over the years because I've been praying for that person. Now they've not come to saving faith yet, but that's not the issue. The issue is my praying for them because it's increasing my affection for that person. That may be the value is what's happening to me, Smitty, more than what's in eternity past, to eternity future.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, as you say that, though, it's still a mystery, when you say, okay, I'm praying out of obedience for that individual. We're not changing God's heart. God is already even turning that individual [UNCLEAR] like it or not...*

That's right.

***Audience Member:** ...so it's just for our obedience. We're not changing the mind of god.*

Not at all. He could be changing our mind. Changing our heart as we pray.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, when Jesus spoke with Nicodemus and he talked of being born again, and then, you know, he spoke the words of John 3:16, you know, what's the context that supports what we're talking about?*

Okay.

***Audience Member:** Could it...I read through the chapter, and it really doesn't give a context to election. It just gives a context to election, it just gives a context to [UNCLEAR]...*

John 3 is the primary chapter on regeneration, being born again. The context is that Nicodemus is a Pharisee. He's a teacher of the law. He taught the Brave Men on Friday. Okay. He did something like that. Now the Pharisees were known for their impeccable external righteousness. When you look at the

history of the Pharisees through some of literature of the history of Judaism, you'll notice that there is never one divorce among the Pharisees. They never had child abuse in the Pharisees. When you look at their life externally, they were impeccable in their conduct because their mindset was this—as long as I act this way, I'm to going to be okay. It was all external.

Now Jesus comes along and talks to Nicodemus. Nicodemus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was drawn to Jesus for a reason we don't know, other than the fact that God was working in his life. And so he says to Jesus, "What do I do to be saved? What is this?" And Jesus says, "Nicodemus, you made one fatal flaw, one fatal error. You've externalized religion. You've made it all external conduct. And let me tell you something Nicodemus, you're a teacher of the law. You're externally perfect. But you've made one fatal error. You have said that you can earn God's approval by your externalism. Let me tell you this, Nicodemus, until something supernatural happens in your life, until something supernatural happens in your life, you can't even see the kingdom of God."

Now that word "see" has three dimensions to it. It means see the entrance to, it means understand how to enter into, and it means enjoy the blessings of. He's saying, "Nicodemus, you can't even see how to get there, let alone know how to get inside, and let alone know how to enjoy the benefits of the kingdom, until something supernatural happens in your life where God implants in his mercy a life that has its origin in heaven, not in earth, but a life that has its origin in heaven." That's election. See that? Where does the origin of life? It's in election. It's in eternity past. And Nicodemus, until that happens in you, you can't even see it regardless of your conduct."

So in the context of that Dean, you see, there is a concept of election because what he says this—unless you're born again and you're born from above. The word "above" takes it back where? Back to eternity past, before the foundation of the world. "Unless that happens to you, Nicodemus, you can't even see it, regardless of your external conduct."

***Audience Member:** Yeah, he, to quote the Scripture, it says, "flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit."*

That's taking us back to what we're talking about, about when the was the church formed? Formed in eternity past.

Let me give you a couple of other things. Let me show you another illustration. Go to Acts 16. Now this is the history event of the first convert in Europe. We're going to meet Lydia. Now guys, we're going to tie all this together over the next several months, so don't think you're going to get all the answers today. I'm just laying groundwork for some confusion that we'll eliminate later. {LAUGHTER}

***Audience Member:** You've said that before.*

Acts 16:14, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God." Now she's not a believer. She's a worshiper, but what is she worshipping? How does worship? Why is she worshipping? We don't know. All we're told is she was faithful in her worship. She was listening. Listening to what? To the message that was preached before them. "And the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." That's election. That's forming the body of Christ.

Why it guys that you responded to the Gospel of Christ? It's because of eternity past. It's because of eternity at the cross, and now present day reality is the Gospel is being preached to you and God opened your hearts so that you would respond. You responded because you were chosen in eternity past. Do you see that? That's a story of the first convert in Europe. She was a church attender, for all we know, the temple. She went to the synagogue. We don't know much about her other than the fact that she was a

worshiper. That could mean anything. You got all kind of people coming to churches in America. They say, “Yeah, I worship.” Worship what? Worship why? Worship how?

You see, the real issue is until God opens the heart, you don’t believe. That’s the formation of the church. That’s how the church was formed. The method that God used is the method of election. And guys, that’s why we need to understand the biblical gospel involves God the Father who ordained it, God the Son who accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit who applies it to you and you believe, and the reason you believe is because God opens your heart, because that’s what Christ accomplished at the cross. When he died, you were on his mind because your name was written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before eternity ever began.

***Audience Member:** Matthew 7:7, the ask, seek knock? I don’t get this whole election thing. There’s overwhelming evidence that it is the truth, so I get that and I believe that. But typically, whenever you talk about it, for whatever reason, there’s a lot of anger over this for some reason.*

Of course it is. It’s basically saying you’re not the captain of your own soul. It’s an offense to people, “You’re telling me that God did something that I don’t [UNCLEAR] control? Who does he think he is?” I mean, this is an offense to people because we think that we’re the captain of our own soul, and we’re not. If you understand the [UNCLEAR] God and God’s merciful providence, you’re going to rejoice at that. You’re going to fall on your face and say thank you. You’re not going to resist it. The people who resist it say, “I want to control my life. I can do a better job.” They’re resisting the sovereignty of God.

***Audience Member:** So we were chosen in eternity past, and we don’t have the choice of resisting him?*

That is correct. You will believe. That is correct. That’s why we have the wonderful, gracious doctrine of perseverance of the saints. Who is it will persevere? The evidence of our salvation is our perseverance. God preserves us. Now, do we have human responsibility? Absolutely. You have the duality of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Can you and I rectify that? No. The real issue is can God do it? Yes. Let him do it. You have absolute responsibility to believe.

Now I’ve told you the story of Charles Spurgeon. In 1856, he gave a very, very powerful sermon, apparently, one day, and a woman was walking across the bridge and saw Pastor Spurgeon. She said, “Pastor Spurgeon, I almost repented of my sins and became a believer today because of your powerful sermon.” He said, “You must.” She said, “I can’t.” He said, “You must.” She said, “I can’t.” He said, “You must.” She said, “Don’t you hear me? I can’t.” He said, “Don’t you hear me? You must.” She said, “I can’t.” He said, “You must.” Six times they went through that. Finally she said, “God help me!” He said, “You just did.” {LAUGHTER} Now notice, human responsibility. She had a responsibility to repent and believe. God will hold us responsible, but God also is the one who chooses. Can you balance that out? I can’t. You don’t need to. You just realize that God is the one who can balance that out, and we walk by faith.

So yes, you’ve got to preach election. You’ve got to preach predestination. You’ve got to do that. At the same time, you’ve got tell people you’re responsible to believe. Now that’s going to be an offense to people who say, “What do you mean? I don’t get to make the decision?” The answer is absolutely not. You don’t. That’s an offense to people because they say, “I want to run my life.”

You see, when you understand...that’s why Paul writes in Ephesians 1—I’m spending my time there as this introduction is this—it’s a mystery, guys. It’s just a glorious, wonderful mystery. And the mystery, is I have a part of it. That’s where my life is now. I’m a part of this mystery known as the physical body of Christ.

**Audience Member:** Bruce, this has to be for next week, but conversely, those that are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, that do not have the choice or the opportunity for salvation because they were not elected, and that has to be for another week [UNCLEAR] I'm sure.

That's correct. Yes, it will. Thank you for delaying that. {LAUGHTER}

**Audience Member:** Bruce, you made a statement of what the Father ordains, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit...

Applies. Correct. Now just let me give you a couple of things to understand this doctrine of God choosing us to form the body of Christ. Now he chose us totally apart from human will, and purely based on his own sovereignty. He didn't choose us because he knew that you would believe one day. He chose you so that you would believe one day, not knowing that you would, chose you that you did.

The verb chosen is in the middle voice, and it literally means according as he has chosen us for himself. In other words, you're not reason God chose you. He's the reason God chose us. God acted totally independent of any outside influence. You can look at Revelation 17:8. You'll notice that's the verse that Dean mentioned about the name in the Lamb's Book of Life. God acted totally independent of any outside influence. In other words, there was no influence that you and I had upon him to choose us. You see how merciful that is? Do you see how great? He did the one thing that you can't do for yourself. And that's reconcile yourself to him. We are reconciled to him. He's not reconciled to us. He doesn't come down and reconcile himself to us. We don't bring God down to our level; we take people up to his level, because we're reconciled to God. That's the one thing that we could not do for ourselves. Everything God does is according to his own will.

Now notice in Exodus 6, Israel, the nation, was elect, nationalistically. The angels were elect in 1 Timothy 5. Christ was elect in 1 Peter 2. Certain believers were elect for certain tasks in the formation of the church (Acts 9). The forming of the body of Christ is by God's choice, it's by God's elect, and there is human responsibility. Salvation depends upon man and then praise to God is [UNCLEAR]. You see that? Why would we come to worship if it were up to us? Because you could say, "I just did it." You see, that's ridiculous. Salvation is a mystery, and that's what prompts us to be motivated by grace, guys, to be motivated by gratitude.

Now if somebody were to say, let's just say if God were pleased to take me home today, and he were to say, "Bruce, why should I let you into my presence?" My answer would be this, "You shouldn't. Because I have sinned against you in a debt that I cannot repay." But I wouldn't stop there. I would then go on to say this, "Yet, I am depending upon the blood of Christ as a sacrifice for my sins, who paid the penalty in my moral sinfulness, who met the holy standards of your just law and who removed God's wrath from my sinfulness." That's what my answer would be. My first answer would be, "There's no reason you should let me in. No reason, because I have sinned against you and have a debt that I cannot repay, yet that debt has been paid in the blood of Christ." I wouldn't stop there. I would go on to the next phrase and say, "I'm depending upon the blood of Christ. I'm depending upon the blood of Christ who is the sacrifice for my sin, in my situation, in my stead, as a substitute. Cleansed me from my moral sin, met your just requirements of the law, and removed your wrath from me and my sinfulness." That's all you can say, guys. That's all you can say, because it's not something that you did.

**Audience Member:** Do you believe he'll buy that?

Yes, I do. He'll say, "Bruce, that's the only answer [UNCLEAR]..."

**Audience Member:** You know the prayer is missing.

He'll say, "That's the only answer. Somebody taught you well."

*Audience Member: Bruce, wouldn't Christ say that on your behalf?*

I'm just... hey, give me a break guys. {LAUGHTER} [UNCLEAR]... Certainly Christ would say, "He's one of ours, Father. Let him in." Of course he would say that. But the question was given to me, not to Christ, so what would I say? That's what I would say, and I would look to Christ, and he would say, "Yes. Enter in to my family because when I was on the cross, you Bruce, were on my mind." Yes. Absolutely.

*Audience Member: The Lord God says he's the Alpha and the Omega. He already knows before and after. He's timeless.*

Absolutely.

*Audience Member: The mystery to us is time.*

Mystery to us is time. Well guys, we're just touching the iceberg here. How was the church formed? It was formed in eternity past. What was his method? His method was election. Now that says something about our modern day understanding of who makes the assembly of the church, and we'll get into that next week. So look at lesson number two. We're going to work our way through the rest of Ephesians and you'll see the seven features of how the church was formed in lesson number two, and we'll pick that up next week.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this mystery, and thank you, Lord, that it is a mystery, because that means that we can only throw ourselves at your feet and trust you and your Holy Spirit. Thank you that we can't figure it out, but thank you, Father, that in eternity past, you were pleased to write our names in the Lamb's Book of Life so that this day in 2011, we can believe, and we can act responsibly because of our obligations to praise you and worship you and to glorify you because of your electing grace. And thank you, Father, that when you chose us in eternity past, you chose us with other brothers and sisters, that we could form the physical body of Christ for your glory. We just thank you in Jesus' name. And all the Brave Men said... Amen!