

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Session: June 10, 2011

Heavenly Father, we stand in awe of your magnificence and your glory and your grace to us, which is so unmerited. Thank you, Father, that you are our King, who pardons our sin. You are our Father, who provides our daily needs, and you are our Master, who leads us not into temptation. Father, we pray once again that you would cleanse us of all unrighteousness and make us worthy vessels to sit at your feet, that you might be pleased to open our eyes, once again, that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

I'll just call your attention, brothers, to a quick verse in John 14:13 dealing with prayer. We talk a lot about praying for one another, and rightfully so, and how we can help each other. I encourage you to do that, to send your prayer requests to Sig, and he will send it out to the mass body of the Brave Men and we can pray for one another and support one another in the body of Christ. I would call your attention to one verse that I just want to speak to for a moment to help us understand the purpose for prayer.

We talk a lot about prayer and the reason for it, but here's just a quick summary of it. In John 14:13, these are the words of Christ when he says this, "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Now there's a cause and effect relationship there. "Whatever you ask in my name," that is the cause, "that I will do," and the result is, the effect is, "so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

When you take a look at that expression of Jesus, we're basically seeing, brothers, that the purpose of prayer really is to give God an opportunity to glorify himself. That's what Jesus is saying. The reason you and I pray—certainly we pray for people's health, we pray for their needs, we pray for their salvation—but behind that, the real motive is this. It's to give God the opportunity to glorify himself. That is the Genesis, that is the reason behind all of our prayer.

Now there's a qualifier when Jesus says, "If you ask anything in my name." The word "name" is a concept, biblically, that means the total characteristics of nature and attributes of the person who's name you're calling upon. So Jesus is basically saying, "Whatever you ask in my name that is consistent with," not your heart's desire, "but consistent with my attributes, my characteristics and my nature, that will I do." Just because you and I think it's a good prayer, does not necessarily mean it's consistent with the nature, attributes or characteristics of Christ.

Whenever you see that concept of "name," is a totality description of the characteristics, nature and attributes of the person. Jesus is saying this, that "When you pray consistent with my nature, when you pray consistent with my characteristics, when you pray consistent with my attributes, that's what I'm going to do," because the reason for that prayer is that God will have the opportunity to glorify himself.

In that little synopsis, brothers, we have a magnificent instruction on prayer. We'll get into this deeper when we talk about the prayer and the activity of the church. But my point is this—I want to encourage us to continue to pray for each other, but with this motive, that prayer is essentially asking God to have the opportunity to give himself the chance to glorify himself. He will do that through dealing with Aaron and his wife and the illness and the cancer. It may be providing somebody's needs. But the real motive behind every request that you and I ask is essentially, Jesus says, is to give God the opportunity to glorify himself.

As we pray for one another, let's just keep that in mind. Lord, we're just praying now that you're going to deal in this young man's life, with this cancer, but it's really an opportunity for you to put your glory

on display. That's why I'm praying this unique prayer, and I do this because it's consistent with the nature, the attributes and the characteristics of the person of Christ himself. So let's just remember that as we pray.

I'm going to ask, brothers, that if you'd be kind enough to stand, I want to read a large passage of Scripture, and when we do that, I'd like us to stand and show due reverence and respect for the hearing of God's word. You'll want to open your Bibles to Ephesians 1. We're studying the formation and function of the church. The epistle of the book of Ephesians is the best doctrine on the local church as well as the universal church. I would like to read the first 14 verses of chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians.

Let us hear the word of the Lord, "¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰with 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 ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹²to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³In 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, ¹⁴who 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." This is the Word of the Lord.

Audience Members: *Thanks be to God.*

Please be seated. Now this is the passage, brothers, that we're looking at as we're looking at the formation and function of the church. In your handout number two, and this will also be number three that Sig will pass out for us next week, we began to look at these verses dealing with the past formation of the church. There are seven key facts about God's formation of the church that we find in those verses that I read for us.

The first one is this—the method by which God formed the body. The method by which God formed the body, as we saw last week, was election. God chose us in him before the foundation of the world. When was the church formed? It was not formed at Pentecost. It was demonstrated and revealed at Pentecost, but it was formed before the foundation of the world. He chose us totally apart from human will and purely based upon his sovereignty. The timing of the function of the church was in eternity past, and the next thing we see is the method that God used to form the church was election, as we discussed last week.

Today, we want to take a look at the next feature of the seven features of the formation of the church in eternity past. The second object is this—the object of God's election. Who is it that God chose before the foundation of the world to form his heavenly body, his earthly expression of himself, known as the local church, the called out ones, the ecclesia, the assembly, the gathering? That is us. Notice how we see this in chapter 1, "³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him." So yes, the church was

formed in eternity past and the object of God's election, the means by which God formed the church, was the methodology of election. God choosing. And then the object of his choosing was us. That's believers. That's just not everyone.

Now look at John 6:39. These are the words of Jesus. Let's back up just a little bit, starting at verse 35 of chapter 6. I want you to see who God chose. He didn't choose everyone. The real question is why did he choose us? Or why did he choose me? Beginning at verse 35, "³⁵Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.'" Now the word believe there is the Greek word which means rely upon, depend upon, trust in or adhere to. It does not mean to give mental assent. It doesn't mean that he's saying you just believe some facts about me as a person. It's a much more aggressive word. Unfortunately, in the English vernacular, the word believe is a very, very passive word. It means you just kind of sit back on your haunches and you absorb facts. That's not what Jesus is saying.

He's saying here in verse 35 and 36, "I'm the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst." That means rely upon, depend upon, trust in or adhere to. It's the word DART—depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in. That's what he's saying. That's the person who believes in me will never thirst, "³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not," depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in Me. "³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." He's talking about the specific people whom God chose in eternity past to form the assembly, the gathering, known as the church.

"³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Now this is the key phrase, "³⁹This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." In other words, that's why we have the doctrine of the perseverance of saints, or the preservation of the saints. Christ preserves us so that we persevere. One of the indications of a person's salvation is that they will persevere, and the reason they will persevere is because Christ is preserving them. There's another insight behind this that we need to understand, guys, and that is this—that each believer is a love gift to Christ from the Father, chosen before the foundation of the world.

I want you to take a look at John 17, another expression of this. Now this is where we get our sense of identity. John 17; let's look at verse 6. My point is this—in John 6:39, we see this, that you, having chosen before the foundation of the world to make up the assembly, the ecclesia, the gathering of the body of Christ, are a love gift of God the Father to the Son. He loved you enough that he chose you in eternity past and gave you to the Son. The Son says, "Those who you gave me I will no wise cast out. They will believe." Who are the ones who are going to believe? Those who have been chosen. They are chosen so that they would believe. They don't believe so that you're chosen. You see, there's a difference.

Audience Member: *Say it again, Bruce.*

The reason they believe is because they were chosen. They don't believe...they were chosen to believe; they don't believe because they were chosen. You see, they were chosen so that they would believe. Now that's what Jesus says, "It's those that I will no longer cast out."

Take a look at John 17 please. Let's look at verse 6, "I have manifested Your name." The word name means what? Characteristic, attributes and nature of. He is saying, "I have manifested God, your nature, your attributes, and your characteristics to the men you gave me out of the world; they were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." You see, one of the indications of a person's

salvation is their desire to keep the Word. And we've got to remember this, that those whom God chose, the us, through his grace, before the foundation of the world, are the ones who will be committed to the Scripture because that's part of our calling, as we will see in a moment.

We are a love gift of God the Father to God the Son. The reason God preserves us is because views you, individually, having been chosen before the foundation of the world, as a love gift that the Father gave to the Son, and he's going to make sure that you keep it. Now there's your identity, guys. There's our sense of worth and value. Take a look at verse 8, "For the words you gave me, I've given to them." To who? To those who were chosen before the foundation of the world. To the love gifts of the Father to the Son. "And they received them, and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that you sent Me." Now you see, here's the security of our salvation. It's all in the fact that you and I were chosen before the foundation of the world. The mystery. Now we've got to realize, brothers, this is a mystery, so don't ask me why. I don't have an answer for it. All I can say is this is a mystery, and we need to let that mystery be a mystery. Why is it that God chose you before the foundation of the world? There's no rational explanation for that. I can't give you a reason for that. The only reason I can say is it pleased God to do according to the counsel of his own will.

He doesn't take us into consideration. He didn't say, "Bruce, would you like to be chosen?" [LAUGHTER] "I'll give you a pros and cons of it." It wasn't the case, you see. That's a mystery. And people are not going to understand this.

***Audience Member:** Someone will ask then how do you know that you're one of the chosen.*

Alright. That's a great question. The question is how do you know if you are one of the chosen. May I take you to 2 Peter 1. Well let me give you one other verse here.

***Audience Member:** Before you jump away from that, my Bible has a heading of "Christ Prays for the Disciples" for that portion, and then "Christ Prays for All Believers." How do I personally know what you just said applies to me rather than to them.*

That's the same question that he asked about our salvation. I'll get into that in a just a moment. Look at verse 9, please of chapter 17. Key verses are 6, 8, and 9. "I asked on their behalf." Who's the their? The chosen. "I do not ask on behalf of the world." The "world" there means system of the world. It doesn't mean every person who's ever been born. "I asked on their behalf. I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those who you have given me, for they are yours." Now, guys, do you understand what I'm trying to say? If you're in Christ today, you, personally, are a love gift that God the Father gave to the Son. What the Father ordained, in eternity past, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applied. Do you see how that works? You and I have a Trinitarian—three part—salvation. You are a love gift from God the Father to the Son, and when Jesus was on the cross, he accomplished your salvation. He didn't make it possible for you to believe, he accomplished it so that the consequence is that you would believe. You see that? What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, and now the Holy Spirit applies.

When you heard the gospel, the presentation of the gospel of Christ, your heart repented and you believed, and God went through the regeneration process of taking that heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh, and you believe. You depend upon, you adhere to, you relied upon and trusted in—trust upon God. That is grace, guys. That's a mystery. That's a mystery.

The real issue is don't try to figure out the why's and the how come's. The thing you need to deal with is why me. Why me? And have your life be an expression of your gratitude for this mystery that God chose you in eternity past and gave you as a love gift to the Son, so that the Son would preserve you, so that you would believe and no one would cast you out, and you will persevere.

Now the question is how do I know if I am one of the elect? We don't run around pulling up our t-shirts and seeing a big "E" on our belly. {LAUGHTER} We're not looking for that. We're not look...

***Audience Member:** Bruce, I'm sitting here and I've got a problem with this, and hopefully you can explain it to me, but number nine, in my book, it says, or verse number nine says, "My prayer is not for the world." Were we all not made in His image, and if we all came from Adam and Eve, aren't we all, the whole world is?*

Only in one regard. From a creation point of view, but not from a familial relationship point of view. No. You cannot say that God is fatherhood of mankind and the brotherhood of man. You can't say that. You can only say it from a creation point of view. Yes, God is the creator of each and every human being. You can say that, but you cannot say that God is the father relationally, familiarly, from a familial relationship point of view of every creature who's ever been born. You can't say that. Because he's not. Right here he's saying, "I'm praying for those, I'm not praying for the world. I'm not praying for every person who's ever been born. Yes, I can do that from a creation point of view, but God does not have a saving relationship with everybody who's ever been born, so you cannot say, truthfully, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of mankind. You can only say that from God being the creator. You can't say that from God being in relationship with them.

Now let me take you to 2 Peter 1. As I introduce this, let me say that the doctrine of the assurance of salvation is the sole ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is not a ministry that you and I have. You and I have not been given the ministry of telling somebody else to give them the assure of their salvation. All we can do is take them to the Scripture and let Scripture be that judge.

A quick summary of the doctrine of the security of one's faith would be this. There's increased righteousness in your life. You see a difference in your own conduct externally. There's increased righteousness. You used to live like this, and now you don't, and the reason is because of the saving work of the grace of God. There's got to be evidence in your own life. That's number one.

Secondly is this—Scripture promises. The Scripture makes promises. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Have you done that? The word believe doesn't mean give mental assent. It doesn't mean that I agree with that statement. It means this—that I depend upon, I adhere to, I rely upon and I trust in the person and work of Christ for my salvation. The Scripture promise is if you do that, you're saved. Have you done that? Now only you can answer that. I can't tell you if you have or if you haven't, and you can't tell me if I have or if I haven't. You have to go to the Scripture and say, "That's the best that I'm doing. Yes, I have believed that promise."

The second indication of the doctrine of security of your faith and salvation is Scripture promises. First increased righteousness. Secondly, Scripture promises, and thirdly the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. The Holy Spirit works in your life. Sometimes the only defense that you have of knowing that you're part of God's chosen people, his church, his ecclesia, his assembly, his gathering, is this—I know because I know. The Holy Spirit identifies with your spirit and says, "Yes! When I look into the Scripture, that's what I want to be. Yes, that's who I want to become." You begin to see the implications of all of what we just read about the person and work of Christ making sure that you're not passed out, that you have a desire to listen to the Scripture. You're the sheep. You hear his voice. You follow his voice.

One of the great indicators in John 10 is, "My sheep hear my voice." One of the questions is to whom do you listen to? Do you listen to his voice through the Scripture? Or the latest fad that comes down the pole? You see, you've got to ask yourself. Jesus, in John 10 says, "My sheep listen to me. They hear my

voice and they follow me.” Is that you? Those are Scripture promises. When you can unequivocally say, “Yes, that’s me,” then you know that you’re part of God’s chosen, part of his elect, because of grace.

Bob: *Bruce, those that are not chosen, what role does Jesus and the Holy Spirit play with the non-believer?*

He works in them just as much as he does the other...Pharaoh is a great example. He says, “Pharaoh, I hardened your heart for my glory.” He works in the non-believer for his glory. He works in the non-believer just the way he works in the believer for his glory. Everything is for God’s glory. Now I can’t give you any other answer than that. I can give you illustrations in the Scripture, the primary one being Pharaoh, when he says, “I hardened your heart so that you would bring glory to me in the nation of Israel.” It’s a mystery. God works in the non-believer in ways that you and I do not understand, and should not probe because those are the secret things. We need to give our time to that which we do know.

Go to 2 Peter 1. Let me read this...well, first of all, let me read verse 10. I’m going to give the answer to the question, then we’re going to back up, “¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.” That is election. Make certain. Be diligent, “to make certain about his calling and choosing you ; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.” What are these things?

Let’s go back and read them, beginning at verse “¹Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith.” Notice, have received. Didn’t say achieve. You received it. You didn’t achieve it. You didn’t earn it. You didn’t work for it. It was a gift. It’s called grace. “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: ²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.” No do you believe that? That you have, now notice, “his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness , through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” He’s saying this. One of the indications of your having been chosen is you have escaped the corruption of this world and there’s increased righteousness in your life. There’s an obvious fact that your conduct is changed.

“⁵Now for this very reason.” Now when you see that expression, you go back to verse 4, “having escaped the corruption.” There’s got to be an indication in your life, guys, that you have escaped the corruption of this world. It doesn’t mean that you’re sinlessly perfect. We are not talking about sinless perfection. We’re talking about this. That once you were moving in this direction of the system of the world and you were interrupted by acts of human goodness. Contrast that with now you’re moving in the direction of holiness interrupted by occasional sin. The question is what’s the direction of your life. He says “you have escaped” that direction and now you’re moving in this direction. Now he says this, “for this reason,” for the reason that you have escaped corruption of this world, “applying all diligence, in your faith.” Here you see human responsibility. We saw the sovereignty of God in that you received a faith that he gave you through the righteousness of God our Savior. That is something that God, the mystery is, that he gave you that. That’s the sovereignty of God. Now you see the responsibility of man, “applying all diligence, in your faith, supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶ and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, ⁷and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For if these *qualities*.” What qualities? The seven we just went through. If those qualities are yours and are increasing, meaning that you’ve escaped the corruption of this world and you’re moving

in a different direction in the righteousness of your own life, and you look back upon your life and say, “You know, I’m different than I was a year ago. I’m different than I was two years ago. I’m different than I was yesterday. Because of the grace of God.” It’s increasing. These are not stagnant. You begin to see these things develop in your life. That’s an indication that you’ve been called. It’s an indication of your election. There’s external evidence as a result of these internal qualities that God through his grace is producing through the Holy Spirit.

“⁸For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He uses a double negative when he says, “neither useless nor unfruitful.” He’s basically saying, “If you want to be useful and want to be fruitful, work on those seven things.” There. If you want to be useful for the kingdom, and you want to be fruitful for the kingdom, work on those seven character qualities. “⁹For he who lacks these *qualities*,” those seven things, “is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things.” What things? Those seven character qualities. What are they? Moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. When you practice those seven things, as long as you practice those, you’ll never stumble.

Let me explain...we studied this several yours ago in-depth. When you look at this in the construction of the language of the original passage in the Greek text, these seven things fit together like the cog of a wheel. It’s interesting, notice, what is the first evidence of your true, saving faith? What is it?

Audience Member: *Your faith...*

Moral excellence. Add to your faith moral excellence. It doesn’t say Scripture knowledge. It says moral excellence. The first evidence of God’s choosing you is your conduct changes. That’s increased righteousness. That’s an evidence of something supernatural happened in your life. It’s the same thing that Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Nicodemus, unless something supernatural happens in your life and God implants a life that has its origin in heaven, not in this earth, you can’t even see the kingdom.” You see, the first evidence of true saving faith, the first evidence of your election, that gives you the assurance that you know that you are part of the ecclesia, part of the gathering, part of the family of God, is this—I see a moral excellence change in my life produced by the grace of God. It’s not something that I do of my own will. I now have a desire to do that. God implants within you this desire, and that desire is called grace. As a result of that desire, you have a desire to change your moral excellence and work on it. Then after that, you add on top of that, knowledge, and on top...knowledge is a desire to know the truth and the ability to apply it. The first evidence of your knowledge is what? Self-control. First evidence of your knowledge of the Scripture is not being able to recite Bible verses. It’s that you control your own conduct. That’s the evidence of true knowledge, as a result of your moral excellence.

Then self control leads to what? Perseverance. Have you ever seen somebody hang in there but who can’t control themselves? Robert E. Lee said “Never put into the control of somebody else the responsibility to manage people who can’t manage himself.” Self-control before perseverance. If you’re not persevering, it’s because you’re not controlling yourself. And then perseverance leads to what? Godliness. Godliness is worship rightly directed. And then godliness leads to brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness leads to love.

Now guys, when you put those seven things together, it works like this. The first one leads to the second one, and the second one completes the first one. Now moral excellence is the first one we worked on. That leads us to have a greater knowledge of how do I need to respond. What do I do? I need to have more knowledge, so I have a desire to learn. I go to the Scripture. Scripture begins to teach us and you begin to find out what you need to do in your moral conduct, because the Scripture gives us. Who

determines what sin is?

Audience Member: God.

God does. Culture doesn't do that. You don't read the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal to find out what is sin. You read the Scripture and say that's sin in my life. I need to correct that. You now have knowledge. That impacts the moral excellence of your life.

Knowledge leads you to the next one. I now need to control myself. Self-control. When you control yourself, that takes you back to understanding more knowledge. And so these all fit together like the cog of a wheel. These are not random in order, guys. There's a divine sequence to these. When you put one leads to two, two completes one. Two leads to three, three completes two. Three leads to four, four completes three. All the way up. And notice what is the last one?

Audience Members: Love.

Love. That tells you this, guys. Love can be learned and love can be taught. If you want to teach somebody to love, teach them 2 Peter 1. Start with their moral excellence and add knowledge and add self control and add perseverance and add godliness, add brotherly kindness, and end result will be you will know how to love.

What Peter is saying is this. The successful person who will be useful and fruitful is the person who knows how to love. Love defined biblically, not by Hollywood or by the movies or songs or TV. Defined biblically. He says, "Therefore make sure of your own election," and you go back and you examine your own life. That is why the ministry of the doctrine of assurance of salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit alone. It is not something that you and I can pronounce and give to somebody.

In our modern evangelism, here's how it works. Somebody says the sinner's prayer, and then we say, "Where is Jesus?" He's in my heart. Would Jesus lie? No. You're a Christian. That takes ten seconds. This takes more than that. It takes a lifetime. Exactly. It's something that you, personally, are constantly examining and saying, "Am I this?" That's why you can't pronounce and tell somebody, give them the doctrine of assurance of salvation. All you can do is take them to the Scripture and say, "Is that you?" If it is you, then you know, because that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, brothers, you'll know if you're God's elect by three things. Increased righteousness in your own life. You see your conduct change. That's produced by the supernatural act of God's grace. God gives you a desire to be morally excellent, where before you didn't have that desire. Now you want to. It doesn't mean you're always going to achieve it, but you're going to have this desire to do it.

The second thing is this. What does the Scripture say? The Scripture says this. If you're working on these seven things, Bruce, and they're increasing. It doesn't mean that you're perfect at it. It means they're increasing. Then you know that you're part of God's elect. You know that.

The third reason you know it is because my Holy Spirit is going to confirm in your spirit that those are the things that you're working on, and you put those two things together, and you can say, "Thank you, Lord, that you've done something for me that I couldn't do for myself, and that is to change the way that I live my life through your grace." You see, that's the us. You see, the church was formed in eternity past. It was formed by the methodology of election. The object of his election was us. It's you. It's me. You are the love gift of God the Father to God the Son.

Let's talk about self-esteem. {LAUGHTER} You see, the problem with self-esteem is it's the disease,

not the cure. You see, self-esteem basically says you need to think better of yourself. Guys, the way that you understand your worth and your value is understanding this, that in the mystery of God ordaining in the past, Christ accomplishing at the cross, and the Holy Spirit applying in the present, for reasons only known to God, I was one of the elect. Now that does not breed egotism, pride or we're better than anybody else. It ought to drive to a tremendous sense of humility. Humility, of saying, "You did for me the one thing that I could not do for myself, and that was this. You redeemed me. Therein lies my worth. Therein lies my value."

You see, self-esteem has nothing to do with what you think of yourself. It has everything to do with what God says about you. The battleground is this, brothers. Who do you believe? Do you believe what the world says about you? And that's going to be this—your enough is never enough. Or do you believe this? Bruce, Ted, Dick, Grunt, Jim, Bill, Don—YOU, personally, are a love gift that I gave to the Son. And the Son says this, "Those whom you gave me—Grunt, Bruce, Don, Dick, Jim, Ted—those are the ones that will come to me and believe. Those are the ones who will want to see the Scripture fulfilled in their lives, and they will not be cast out because they will come and they will depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in Me. Those are the ones who I will no wise cast out." Guys, you're secure, because of the grace of God the Father through God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. You see, there's your worth, guys. It has nothing to do with your position, your possessions, your personality, your anything. It has everything to do with this mystery, which is called the church. That's the mystery. We need to let that be a mystery, and just say to ourselves, "Thank you."

So what begins to be our motivation for everything we do? Is an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Now Christ...now let me just take you to Romans 9. Look at verse 11...well, verse 10...well, verse 9. {LAUGHTER} Romans 9:9, "For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.'"¹⁰ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹²it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.'¹³ Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" Now here's what the world's going to say, "That's not fair." Now here's Paul's response, "¹⁴What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" In other words, Paul anticipates your response, which is, "Bruce, what you just read isn't fair." Paul says, "Okay, let's deal with that." "There is no injustice with God, is there?" "Of course not," he says, "May it never be?" "¹⁵For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'¹⁶ So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Guys, you are a love gift of God the Father to God the Son, and it wasn't because of anything that you did or didn't do. It was absolutely because of God choosing to do that before the foundation of the world. Brothers, if that doesn't motivate us towards that then I don't know what will. If that doesn't breathe within us a sense of humility.

You see, what is that is our greatest asset that we have that we offer the world? It's not our skills. It's not our experience. It's not our position. It's our humility. It's our humility. Humility is seeing that which is perfect and realizing I can't achieve it. Seeing that which is perfect and realizing I can't achieve it. The best thing that gives us our confidence in life is our humility, because we see this—it just pleased God according to the counsel of his own will to give me, personally, as a love gift to the Son, and the Son says, "Love gift, you will come to me. You will believe. You will depend. You will adhere to my Scripture. And no one can snatch you out of my hands. No one can do that."

Audience Member: *Dr. Bickel, a brother over here asked about [UNCLEAR]...21st verse of the 9th chapter, "21 Or does not potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?"*

23 *And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory.*”

Yes, thank you for finishing that. I would encourage you read those verses, chapter 9, verse 9, all the way down through verse 20, and those other verses that our brother just read, because that also says this. When somebody says, “That isn’t fair,” well, first of all, we know that fairness is a human qualifier, not a divine one. The Scripture says that God is righteous, God is just, so fairness is not something that God is, because that’s a human designator. When somebody says to me, “Well God isn’t fair,” I say, “Isn’t that terrific.” {LAUGHTER} “I’m really grateful that God is not fair,” because I’ll tell you what is not fair, guys. It is not fair that Christ died for me. That is not fair! Absolutely, you define it by human terms, it is not fair that another man paid for my sins and died in my place. That is not fair. It is righteous. It is just. But it is not fair. When somebody tells you, “Well then God is not fair,” say, “Isn’t that wonderful? Because if it were fair, Christ would never had died for me.”

Sig: We were chatting back here and we realized that if it was left up to us, none of us would have chosen him.

Correct.

Sig: And so maybe election is even more positive than I thought of it before because no one has the heart of God, no one desires to go after God. We’re the ones who are lost. He had to find us.

That’s right. We didn’t find him. He found us. Years ago, there was an evangelical campaign about 30 years ago. It was called “I Found It.” It really should have been “He Found Me.” It wasn’t...I didn’t find it, who found me.

Audience Member: The Scripture says go and made disciples in all nations [UNCLEAR]...

Well, we don’t know who he’s talking...yes, he’s talking to the elect, “Go make disciples of the elect because the elect are the only ones who can become disciples.” We just don’t know who they are. So the command of the church is what? Go pull up their chest to see if they’ve got an “E” tattoo. {LAUGHTER} It doesn’t say that. It says, “Go into all the world” and what? Preach the Gospel to all creatures. Now we are the means by which God pulls out his elect, his ecclesia, his gathering, his church. We don’t know that. We can’t be satisfied until the church fulfills our command, which is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, what you’ve heard today, proclaim that to every single creature because God has his elect in all nations. We don’t know where they are. It’s not our job to go find that out. Our job is to be obedient. Evangelism is an act of obedience. It’s not a program. It’s not something that you start; it’s something that you are. Evangelism is an act of obedience. Why do we evangelize? Not to convert people. We evangelize because the Master of the Church said go do it. We’re evangelistic as a matter of obedience. It’s through that obedience that God, in the mystery of his will, is pleased to call out his called ones, his love gifts, who we don’t know who they are.

Guys, what a tremendous opportunity we have in the church. What a tremendous responsibility. Let me close with taking you to Romans 10. I want you to see human responsibility for a moment because I’m not talking about letting go and letting God. I’m not talking about that. In Romans 10:9, “⁹that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” That’s a Scripture promise. Now notice this—if you confess. The word confess is different than the word profess. The word profess means to make a statement about something. The word confess is the Greek word homolegeo. It means to say the same thing as, what somebody else has already said. He’s saying this—if you say the same thing that somebody else has already said about Jesus being Lord, then you’re going to be saved.” Who is that says something about Christ? God does. The

Holy Spirit. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We're agreeing with what the Scripture says about Jesus. He's a man; he's not a woman. You don't call him Sophia just to get everybody feeling good. He's a man. The Scripture says he's a man. Don't say that he's a woman. Yes, there's a feminine side to him in his sensitivity, but he's a man. I confess that. I don't say that he was a female, he was an it. The Scripture says do you agree with what the Scripture says about the person and work of Christ? Was he sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient? My answer is yes. Why do I confess that? Because God said that. The real issue is do I believe what God said about his Son, not what the world says the Son ought to be. It's the person who confesses, not the person who professes, is the person who's saved. You see the difference?

Who says what sin is?

Audience Member: God.

I thought it was the New York Times. No, you see, we agree with what the Scripture says. I agree with what somebody else has already said about it. You go to a verse like 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins." That means I agree with what the Scripture has already described as sinful. I agree with that, not what the world says it's changing. I don't make a profession about sin. I make a confession of my sin. When I agree with what the Scripture has already said about sin, then I am forgiven of my sin when I repent and ask for forgiveness. It's because I agree with what somebody else has already said.

Fellas, there's a degree of human responsibility in here. The beautiful balance of Scripture is this—the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Those are two things that are in equal balance. Now can I balance that out? Absolutely not. But I know that God can. I'm just going to DART. I'm just going to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust that he can balance that out. His sovereignty in your and my life and his responsibility that I have to live that out because chosen before the foundation of the world is us, and that us, brothers, means that we have a tremendous responsibility to live out our calling. We'll see next week what that is.

Let's pray. Father, you have given us much this day through your Holy Spirit teaching us. Father, I pray that that which you have given us would be the chance for you to put your glory on display. And as I pray now, Father, I pray that this would be an opportunity for you to demonstrate your glory to us individually and to a lost world through us. Father, if we've said anything that's inconsistent with your revealed word, the sufficiency of your Scripture, and either your characteristic nature or your attributes, then would you be kind and gracious to remove those thoughts from our mind, and only those things that are consistent with your name would be the things that we remember. And to that end, we pray that you'd be glorified through Jesus and for his sake. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!