

## THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Indeed, Father, you are worthy of all of our praise, honor and our respect and our awe. We assemble this day at your feet, Lord, trusting that your Holy Spirit will once again fulfill his job description, and that is to guide us into all truth and set us free from ourselves. Guide us now in our study. We pray that you'd be pleased to open our eyes once again that we might behold you clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

We continue or study, guys, on the Formation and Function of the Church. As we've been developing so far the word "church" is a Greek word, *ecclesia*, which means gathering or assembly. We're talking about what it means to be part of the assembly of God's chosen people.

In lesson 3, we looked at Ephesians 1 and we saw that the method God used to form the church was the doctrine of election. We saw that the object of God's election was us. We saw the time of the formation of the body was before the foundation of the world. We saw the purpose of the formation of the body was that we would be holy and blameless before him, essentially so that we would be in a position to be reconciled to him and by him so that we could have fellowship with him.

Then we saw the motive of the formation of the body was in love. It was because of love that God predestined us to adoption as sons, that we would be holy and blameless. Then we saw the result of the formation of the body is that we would be adopted and be taken into his holy family. Then the goal of the formation of the body was to the praise of the glory of his grace.

That was lesson 3, and I would encourage you to take lesson 4, our outline for that, and that will take us to Ephesians 2. The reason we're spending so much time in the initial portions of this study is because the book Ephesians really is the doctrine of the church. If you wanted to find out what the church is, should be and can be, it really is the book of Ephesians, who's primary [UNCLEAR] is the doctrine of the *ecclesia*, the doctrine of the gathering of the assembly of God's people.

If you'd open your Bibles please and follow along as I read Ephesians 2:1-10. I'll be reading from the New American Standard Version of the Bible. <sup>1</sup>And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup>Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold him more clearly, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Brothers, that is just a marvelous passage that is just full of rich jewels of God's grace. You see the before, the after, and I call this, this is how one enters into the body of the *ecclesia*, of the fellowship, of the gathering. In other words, we talked about what the gathering is. We saw that in Chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians. Now we come to Chapter 2, and you're going to find out this is the way that one enters into the gathering, how one enters into the fellowship, and that is through the whole process of salvation.

What we're going to do over the next couple of weeks, we'll be studying this particular passage. You'll notice in outline number 4, I want you to see the outline that I've created for us. We're only going to probably spend today on the first one because we need to make sure that we understand it clearly.

You'll notice in Ephesians 2:1-10, first of all, in verses 1-3, we're going to see that we are saved from sin. We need to understand what we are saved from. We flippantly use the term, "are you saved," but we don't understand what we're saved from, and do I really need to be saved in the first place. We've really cheapened and watered down the Gospel of the person and work of Christ because we don't spend enough time telling people their natural condition from which they were born. We need to spend a lot of time today just understanding what is it we are saved from.

Then we'll move to verse four and we'll see that we are saved because of love. We need to understand why is it we are saved; not only what are we saved from, but we are saved because of God's great love.

To me, the most important verses in all the Scripture, at least in this passage, are found there in verse 4 when you notice that little phrase, "But God." You see the contrast of what I was and now what we can be, and the issue is "but God," it's not me. So we'll take a look at what does it mean that we are saved because of love.

Then in verse 5, we'll see that we're saved into something. What is we're saved from? Why is it we are saved? And what are we saved to? We are saved to life. We'll see that in verse 5.

Then we're going to see in verse 7, where saved for a purpose. There's a reason that God was pleased to write your name in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world and bring you into the gathering, the assembly of the fellowship of God's people, and there's a reason for that. There's a purpose behind that. You'll see that in verse 7.

Then we are saved by grace through faith—the mechanism by which we are saved is verse 8, by grace. Then we are saved unto good works. The result of all of this is verse 10. So that's what we're going to see in the next couple of weeks as we walk through this passage.

Today I want us to understand very clearly, brothers, that salvation is the means by which we enter into the gathering, to the assembly of God's chosen people, and that is all by grace. In verses 1-3, I want us to see that we are saved from sin. Again, let me read these verses, 1-3, "<sup>1</sup>And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup>Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. <sup>4</sup>But God..." The magnificent phrase there is that little phrase, "but God," but we're going to spend our time today looking at verses 1-3.

Somebody might say that they believe in Jesus; in other words, they give mental assent to the fact that he was a teacher and he was a prophet, he was even, some might say he was God's son, whatever they might say. But remember, the word "believe" means to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in. It's the acronymic DART. I depend upon Christ, I adhere to Christ, I rely upon Christ and I trust in Christ. So somebody might give mental assent to Jesus, but have never been saved from their sins because they have never repented and they have never moved away from that one style of life and moved into the new style of life that has its transitional prepositional phrase by the wonderful little concept of "but God."

You see, they've never gone from what they were to the "but God" to what they now are. That does not mean that we're talking about sinless perfection. There is a different life pattern that has to happen for

one to be granted saving faith. You'll see that and 2 Corinthians 5:17 when Paul says, "Behold when a person becomes a Christian, they become a brand new person."

Now we're not talking about sinless perfection. We know that is not the case because in 1 John, the Apostle John says, "If you say you have no sin, you're a liar and there's no truth in you." We're not talking about sinless perfection. What we're talking about is a radical change of your nature. From verses 1-3 to verses 4-10, there's a radical change, and the radical change is the result of "but God." That's the key emphasis on this particular chapter.

We need to understand that natural man came into the world spiritually dead. The real issue here, guys, for us, is do I believe that dead means dead. Or do I mean that dead means sick? Now much of modern evangelism basically says that we were sick. They'll say you're dead in your trespasses and sins, but the theory would be something like this. You've heard these illustrations. You're in the ocean and you're drowning and you've got one last breath and somebody throws you a life preserver. In your very last effort of your own strength, you reach up and grab that life preserver. That's works. That's works. Now if you're dead, what's a dead man going to do when he sees a life preserver? {LAUGHTER} Nothing. Because you can't do anything. The real battleground, guys, is do you believe the Scripture says dead means dead, or does dead mean sick?

You've heard another illustration in modern evangelism. You're in a hospital and you're in the ICU unit. The doctor comes in and says, "You're about ready to die. If you will just take this one pill...you're on your way to death, but if you will just take this one pill, just take this one little pill, you'll be okay, and you'll live." That is works. You see, what's a dead man going to do when the doctor says take a pill? Nothing.

You see, guys, you've got to realize this. Paul, in the Scripture, makes it very clear that by nature we were born spiritually dead. Now that does not mean that we sin because we are sinners; it means that we were born sinful and therefore we sin. The problem is not use of our harmony, we're not out of harmony with mankind. The real issue is that we're alienated from God because of our natural inclination of having been born dead in our trespasses and sin.

Spiritual death is an active condition. Now notice, it's active. What are we dead in? Trespasses and sins. Dead, spiritually, is an active style of life. You are dead in your trespasses and you are dead in your sins. It is an active style of living. It is not something that is passive. Scripture says that you are dead in your trespasses and sins, and natural man comes into the world spiritually dead. Now man is not a sinner because he sins. He sins because he was born a sinner.

What does the word sin mean? It literally means to miss the mark. We were born dead, actively born dead, in our nature, dead in our trespasses and sins. The word sin means to miss the mark. What is the mark? Look at Matthew 5:48. Here is the mark. Matthew 5:48 is the mark that we miss because we were born dead spiritually. "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Are you perfect?

***Audience Members:*** No.

Then you need a Savior. You see, that's simple. But most people say, "I don't need that because I was born in America and I'm a good guy. I don't drink and I don't smoke and I don't go with girls that do." You've heard all those expressions. You see, we don't understand the significance of what it means to be born dead spiritually. It means you cannot respond. You cannot respond to anything. We confuse human goodness with godly righteousness.

Look at Luke 6:33. My point here is we confuse human goodness with godly righteousness. There's a difference. When we start comparing ourselves to other people, we run into problems. The comparison is not me to you or you to me or you to the person sitting beside you. The comparison is you to the absolute perfection of God's righteousness. The standard is this, "Be perfect because your Father in heaven is perfect." That's the standard. It is not you versus me in comparing our human goodness.

Look what Jesus says in Luke 6:33, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." In other words, you can't compare your act of goodness and say, "I'm okay with the Lord." You're not. Because when you are dead, you're dead. That means you cannot respond to anything. Something supernatural has to happen, and that supernatural grace is called regeneration; when God takes your heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh, and now he breathes new life into you and you become spiritually alive. That's what it means when we see "but God." You see, a dead man cannot respond.

Take a look at Romans 3—another illustration, understanding of our nature of which we are born. Romans 3:10-18, "<sup>10</sup>as it is written, 'there is none righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup>there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; <sup>12</sup>all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.'" Now what does it mean, "do good?" It doesn't mean good at the human level; it means goodness is described by the character, nature and attributes of God. When the Pharisees came to Jesus and they called him Good Master, he said, "Why do you call me good? There's only one good, and that is God himself." Who defines goodness? God does. Goodness is defined by the righteous character of God, not human activity. So Paul is saying there's not even any of us who do good as defined by God's character. Not even one.

"<sup>13</sup>their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; <sup>14</sup>whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; <sup>15</sup>their feet are swift to shed blood, <sup>16</sup>destruction and misery are in their paths, <sup>17</sup>and the path of peace they have not known. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear of god before their eyes." (Romans 3:13-18) That's what it means to be dead.

You see, guys, that's why we've got to preach a biblical gospel; not a weak, Americanized cultural version that says if you invite Jesus into your life, you're going to have a happy, well, meaningful, successful life. Now that may be the result, but you don't deal with the issue. The issue is that you're dead in your sins and you can't do anything. You cannot respond. Another word—trespasses.

We see that we dead actively in our sin, which means we're missing the mark of God's standard, which is perfection. Therefore we need to understand how we are justified by grace, which we will get into. You're justified by faith alone, in the grace of God. You get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of somebody else's righteousness. That's what we call an alien righteousness. You're justified by faith. You're trusting in the person and work of Christ and his sinless perfection and his perfect obedience. That's where you meet the standard of perfection. You and I by faith get credit for his righteousness. That's the only way that we can have fellowship with God, because we're born alienated from him. We are dead in our trespasses and sins.

The word trespasses literally means you're traveling the wrong road. It means you're going the wrong way. Paul is saying this—that you're born dead because you missed the mark and you're going the wrong way.

**Don:** *I can't help but think, Bruce, that is so opposite to what most people in our culture believe. You hear it on TV all the time, for example, kids going with a clean slate, that if they commit a crime or something, well it's mental illness or something like that. Sin is just about out of the picture. People, I say the majority of Americans, believe that not only are we maybe [UNCLEAR] dead, most people don't*

*even believe we're sick. Well, you know, we're just a clean slate, we're just a blank slate when we're born and innocent and everything like that. They can't understand why people behave the way they do. Well because we're dead in our trespasses and sins.*

We're active in our trespasses and sins. We're active in missing the mark of God's perfection, and we're active in going the wrong way. You see, that's what the word trespass means. It means you're following the wrong course of life. It means you're going in the wrong direction. You're trespassing.

Why do you think it says repent and believe? Because the way that when you repent you're changing a direction of your life. When you're trespassing you're going this way. Repent and believe the Gospel of Christ, you'll be saved. Repentance means I'm going to change the direction of my life. I'm no longer moving in the direction of trespassing because I've repented and I'm now trusting the person and work of Christ to give me credit for his sinless perfection so that I can meet the standard.

**Brian:** *In Luke 6:33 that you pointed out, dropping down to verse 35 where it says, "but love your enemies, be good to them and lend to them without," tell you what, you want to show a real Christ-like manner, that's it because so often we don't live the life of Matthew 5:5, blessed are the meek. We don't live that. We'd rather talk about our rights or put up with, or fight with, or go back on people that are our enemies instead of being meek and saying, "Hey, my love is through Christ. I'm going to show you his same love," and we really don't live that out.*

Amen. But you can't do that in your natural, unregenerated state because what Brian just described is supernatural. That is not natural. That is absolutely supernatural. We need to under, ever underestimate the supernatural of conversion, regeneration, in the Gospel of Christ. That's all found in that little phrase, "but God." That means it is supernatural to go from this style of life, being dead in your trespasses and sins, missing the mark and going in the wrong direction, and to change that and to radically change the conduct of your life. When you become a Christian, you become a brand new person; the old is gone, the new is come. That's supernatural. The supernatural is this, "but God." We'll get into that as we go through Ephesians 2.

We need to understand that what we're born in, in our natural state, is we're born in an active, aggressive lifestyle of missing the mark and going the wrong way. Look at Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Now, as Don just said, we think there's a right way of doing this, that we can manufacture it in ourselves.

One of the real tragedies of the Christian church today is what I call victimization therapy. As Don was saying, we think that we're born with a clean slate, and the reason I messed up, in my age now, is because my dad didn't tie his shoes right when he was 12. {LAUGHTER} You see, I'm a victim of what my dad didn't do. No, I'm a victim of the fact that I was born dead in sin and I have an aggressive style life of choosing to not meet the standard of God and choosing to go in the wrong direction. That's the reason I'm messed up. But God. But you see, "but God" makes a difference. Don't ever lose the fact that there's something supernatural in our response to this. There's got to be evidence of our conversion.

I want you to see a couple of other things. Here's man's condition in summary. We're told that we're dead in Ephesians 2:1. Go to John 6:43-44, "<sup>43</sup>Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. <sup>44</sup>No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Notice the little verb there is the word "but." Can means ability. May means permission. The verse does not say no one *may* come to me unless the Father draws them. It's saying no one *can* come to Me. Why is that? It's because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We're dead. You can't respond until something supernatural happens, and that is the proclamation of the gospel.

*Don: I don't know if you're ready to go here or not, but it's even more emphatic in verse 65.*

Alright go to John 6:65. Good point, Don. John 6:65, "And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." Excellent. Good cross-reference to John 6:44 to John 6:65. There again the word is "can." Now notice, when you were in first or second grade, and you had to go to the bathroom, you might have said something to your teacher, "Miss Ice, can I go to the bathroom?" and she would say, "Yes, you can, and yes, you may." She made a distinction between yes, you have the ability to go to the bathroom, and yes, you have my permission to go to the bathroom. A clear distinction between the concept of ability versus permission. Jesus is not saying here you have permission to come to me unless the Father draws you, he says, "You don't have the ability to come to me."

*Audience Member: I like where the NIV says, "Unless the Father has enabled..." That phrase [UNCLEAR]...*

Absolutely.

*Audience Member: [UNCLEAR]...she bought into, went through these same verses [UNCLEAR] nobody can do it. God has to do all that work, but I still have a choice, which I said [UNCLEAR] mean then that you can refuse God's grace [UNCLEAR] I'm sick, but I choose not to grab it even though God threw it to me and all that part was and...*

Yeah, you can't convince somebody of that. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. You're not going to argue with people on that because the Holy Spirit's gotta do it. All we can do is take them into truth and let the Holy Spirit do his job.

Let me just give you another expression of this, because that is so common. That is the common mentality of the church in America, is choice. It's because we think that we are captain of our own ship. Several years ago, when I was involved with my friend, Don, in the publishing ministry at Soli Deo Gloria, we would go every year to the Christian Booksellers Convention. We would have a booth there for Soli Deo Gloria Books. People would come by and take...well this was a book that was reprinting all the great works of the Puritans of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, so we were not real popular. {LAUGHTER}

In fact, when I came back from England years ago, after doing my doctoral work, and I had about 100 of these rare volumes, I mean, I had the original texts. I called Zondervan and I called Word—two largest Christian publishers—and said, "I've got these magnificent works, these sermons of the Puritans, public domain. I bought them. I own them. I will give them to you if you will just re-typeset them and reprint them. I'll give them to you, because these need to be preserved for the church. The two world's largest Christian publishers, here was their response, "Too deep theologically, too God-centered and there's no market for it." Too God-centered, too deep theologically, there's no market for it and no one will buy them.

*Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] was most important to them.*

To them it was. Absolutely. There's no market. That's when my friend, Don, said, "Why do we do it?" I said, "What do we know about publishing?" He said, "Nothing." {LAUGHTER} So we did it. We decided to do it and we did. We brought back 250 of these works that are now under Soli Deo Gloria, which is now part of Ligonier Ministries with R. C. Sproull, and they're now back in public domain. But that was the response—they're too God centered, no one's going to read it, and there's no market for it. You see, that's the mentality of our country. It's just that mindset that we have constructed a god of our own human imagination.

But your point there, brother, is really accurate. That is what most people think is that there is a choice involved in this and because we've watered down the Gospel to such a point that we really think that we are captain of our souls. Jesus says that in John 6, "No one can." It means you don't have the ability unless something radically supernatural happens. And that is this—that God changes your heart. He takes your heart of stone, gives you a heart of flesh, and all of a sudden, you begin to understand.

You know what the first evidence of your true saving faith is? Belief. Belief doesn't save you. How can a dead man believe? You see, the very first evidence of grace being operative in your life is all of a sudden, you used to be dead and you can think about anything spiritual, and now all of a sudden, you have an interest in spiritual things. You see, that's the first glimmer of the fact that you may have a saving relationship because of repentance and faith, because you now believe. The first evidence of your salvation is your belief. Belief doesn't save anybody. What saves you? Christ does. But God. He's the one who saves us. Because we're dead.

***Sig:** When you talk about that, as you have other things, it seems I'm reminded of things that are symbolic that carry a deeper meaning. Like Lazarus being raised from the dead. We know that later on, Lazarus died. Right? And now being born again is something we experience today, but we're all still going to die, so is born again symbolic of something, the real thing is going to happen later, but we're still, I mean, you know what I mean, like when we're down, I'm not going to be able to wake myself up, even though I've come to know Christ and he's called me into his kingdom He still has to wake me up, right, after I physically die.*

Well, no, I don't think there's any symbolism there at all. I think it's reality. It's really reality. You are born again. Now the reason that you have eternal life... eternal life does not mean more time. Eternal life means you take on the nature of the one who breathed his life into you, and that's the eternality of the person and work of Christ. If you look at 1 John 5:20, "This is eternal life that you know God." That's John 17. And then 1 John 5:20, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Now that means that you have a saving relationship. You are in Christ, "This is the true God and eternal life." Eternal life is described as a person. Not as more time. When you are in Christ, you are in the person of Christ. You are baptized into that union with him. You've been adopted into the family, and now you are in Christ, and it's a result of you're being in Christ that your life is eternal.

Now yes, we have a physical body that must die because it is an unredeemed shell. It's an unredeemed body. That is why we call glorification, when the death of a saint is glorified, because for the very first time in their life, they are free from the presence of sin. That's glorification. Life continues, the soul continues because we are in Christ. The body dies because it is now removed and now for the very first time, the believer who is living, his soul is still living in Christ, in Him, now is no longer in the presence of sin. That's glorification.

***Don:** I'm sure you'll be getting to this eventually, but in the later verses there, in that Chapter 2 of Ephesians, it says that "we are seated with Christ in heavenly places." That means it's as good as done. I mean, yeah, we still have a body that suffers and will die, but as far as God is concerned, we are there. That's why it talks about...well I'd better stop, I'm going to start getting preachy.*

No, that's fine. Go for it.

***Don:** That's why we're to set our affections on things above because we are seated with him. He's seated us with him in heavenly places. We're there, in reality.*

In reality. Absolutely. That's a great point Don is making. There's a present expression of our eternal life, and there's going to be a final consummation of it, but it's one continuation.

Here's another way of looking at it. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 5. You see, when you're saved from your sins, it's one life but two locations. That's the reality. One life, two locations. Death, for the believer, is just a transfer of location. In 2 Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down," that means your physical body, description as an earthly tent, "we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The contrast there is a house that is torn down versus a building from God. He's talking about your physical body versus the permanent location that God has for you because of your eternal salvation. You can see from that verse, we're saying that it's one continual life, it's just two locations.

When a believer goes from this world and takes up his final residency of his inheritance in the kingdom of God, you begin to see that it's one life, but two locations. We are alive here and we're going to be alive with him. It's just the same life, but it's just a location change. That's what we call glorification.

***Audience Member:** Wouldn't it also be true, Bruce, for the unregenerate, for the unsaved, that they have two locations as well?*

Absolutely.

***Audience Member:** Their location is the separation from God [UNCLEAR] eternally, so they have eternal life, but it's going to be eternally separated.*

Everybody needs to understand that everybody has eternal life. It's just which one do you have?

Also, let's be careful. We have been duped into believing that hell is separation from God. That is not hell. That's exactly what the unregenerate has been living his life for, "I want to be separate from God. I'm going to choose to live my live my own way I want. So you're telling me that hell is going to be a continuation of what I've wanted all my life? That's not hell, that's what I want." Hell is not separation from God. What makes hell, hell, is God's presence. God's presence is hell to one person and heaven to the other. But you see, hell is not separation from God. That's what the believer wants right now. He's saying, "You're going to give me what I want. I've been living this way for 65 years and you're telling me that hell is being separate from God. That's what I've wanted all my life. Let me continue." You see, hell, for that person, is going to be, "I'm now confronted with the awesome reality of the glory of God himself, and that, for me, is going to be hell," because it's his presence that makes hell, hell. But it's also God's presence that makes it heaven. You see that.

***Don:** There is a passage in, I believe its 1 Thessalonians. It's about the wicked being separated from the presence of God. But I think the Puritans understood that to mean God's comfortable presence.*

Yes.

***Don:** There are other passages in Revelation, for instance, that talk about enduring the wrath of God and of the Lamb. Separation from God's gracious presence—all that makes [UNCLEAR] is what hell is, and separation from that.*

Absolutely. Remember...

***Audience Member:** Getting back, if I may, to the first evidence the person is born again. I would say*



*may not be believe, may be the desire to believe.*

Well, however, you want to say it, it's the same thing.

***Audience Member:*** *The dead have no desire.*

The dead have no desire. They can't do anything. The first evidence is your desire to believe. Whatever it is; however you want to phrase it, but there's got to be a radical change.

Let me show you another expression of that. Go to 1 John 5:1. The Scripture says this, in the English, which we lose some power of the translation, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." Now, I don't mean to be too academic for you, but let me give you the Greek expression of that. 1 John 5:1 is the Greek phrase, "[ectao tao d'genetai]." That's what it is in the Greek. We translate that into English what you just saw, but we lose a little bit of it. The word [d'genetai]" means an event has occurred in my life in the past that has the present result that I believe. What is that act in my life that occurred that now has me believe? Born of God. It's saying this, "He who is born of God believes." That's why I say the first evidence of true saving faith is you believe because it's an indication of what? You've been born of God. If you're not born of God, you're not going to believe. You're not going to have the desire to believe, let alone have the ability to believe because you can't do it. [Ectao tao d'genetai]—having been born of god, the person believes. Which comes first? Life? Or belief? Life.

I've told you several times that I'm involved in the ordination of young men who are called into the Gospel ministry. I think I've been involved in four of those over the years. I only ask one or two very basic questions. One of them is this, "Which comes first—life or faith?" Three out of the four times I've asked that question, the answer has been faith. Now that just tells me, very quietly, that this young man does not understand you're dead in your trespasses and sins, and the likelihood is that he will preach a weak Gospel because he thinks this, "It is my faith that saves me." You see, it is the faith that is the evidence that you've been born of God. That's called [ectao tao d'genetai]. Having been born of God in the past, has the present result now that I what? Believe. That you believe. That's because you're dead in your trespasses and sins.

Another way of looking at this is, that we're dead (Ephesians 2:1), we're blind,(2 Corinthians 4:4-6), we're lost, (Luke 15), and we're condemned (John 3:18). Look at John 3:18. Guys, the reason I'm spending so much time on this one principle of our understanding the Gospel is so that when we come to verse 4, you're going to see magnificence of the phrase "but God." You see, that's what you're going to understand when you come to verse 4. The words "but God" now takes on significant meaning because you understand the first three verses.

John 3:18, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." In other words, you're condemned. Now you're condemned. We notice this—you're dead, you're blind, you're lost and you're condemned. How can you choose to do anything? You can't. But God. But God.

We need to understand, guys, what we're talking about here in this description, as we work through this verse, here are some of the characteristics of being spiritually dead. We said that we're dead, actively, in our trespasses and sins. Trespasses means we're going actively in the wrong way. Sins means we're actively violating God's standard, which is perfection—the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. We're dead.

***Audience Member:*** *So that 3:18 means that the actual judgment occurred before the foundation of the*

world.

Absolutely.

**Audience Member:** *And without getting into [UNCLEAR] about the coming judgment, it's the acting out it in our experience.*

Yes. They are living a lifestyle, active in their trespasses and sins, that reveals the fact that they've already been judged. But God. But God. Don't forget the "but God," guys. That's the magnificence of this. We're not going to dwell on verses 1-3. We're going to pick up the rest and the see the magnificence of seeing the understanding of what I've been saved from. If anything produces gratitude in a matter of obedience in your life, it's this understanding of this is what I was. But God. You see, God did something, and how can I now live a life of violating his standard, and how can I choose to go the wrong when I understand "but God" has done something in me, and that is grace?

**Audience Member:** *It seems to be easy to a point of a Roman Catholic and say [UNCLEAR] works, but in our arrogance and our sin, we feel the same thing because we want to have something in the [UNCLEAR] as far as we would say.*

Yeah.

**Audience Member:** *Can you genuinely be saved if you don't understand that's your debt?*

Yes.

**Audience Member:** *How so?*

Because God is gracious. If your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, you may not have the complete understanding of what we're talking about right now. That's what grace is. I would say this—the person who doesn't understand what we're talking about is not going to be motivated by gratitude as much as the one who does. But I can't say that just because somebody doesn't believe every jot and tittle of doctrine, that they're not a believer. I don't know that. But I do know this—if their name is written in Lamb's Book of Life, they will come to saving faith. They will come to it. My role is not to go judge them and say, "Do you understand this particular doctrine?" They may not understand the doctrine of election and still have saving faith. They just may not understand that. They may resist that.

Look at Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. Two magnificent men, spiritual giants. They had a different perception of what we're talking about. George Whitefield—there are some wonderful letters that you can read of the dialogue between these two very godly men. In fact, it was really George Whitefield who started Methodism. He started it, and then Wesley got involved and they had a conflict over this whole issue of what we're talking about election. Whitefield backed off and said, "Go ahead and do it yourself," and they became Methodists, because the methodology of salvation was what Wesley worked out.

Here's what Whitefield said about him. One day a woman said to Pastor Whitefield, "Do you think that John Wesley will be in heaven?" Whitefield's response was this, "I will not see him there because he'll be so much closer to the throne of grace than I will and I won't even find him." That was his response. You see, so we can't say yes or no, you have to believe everything perfectly. You see, the Holy Spirit will take any grain of truth that he can and put that in the person's life to give them the desire to want to learn. That's what it means to be [UNCLEAR]. So it may not be total, and it may be progressive over one's life, because revelation is not given to us all at once. So we don't know, Smitty. We just have to

realize this—we have to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. I would have to say that if somebody doesn't understand what it means they're saved from, they're going to have a less clear understanding of the gratitude motivation in their heart because they don't understand the concept of "but God" yet. That's why we need to keep preaching a biblical gospel, the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith in our pulpits, so they will come to understand the magnificence of what it means [UNCLEAR] I was totally incapable of believing. Yes. And God chose me anyway? Yes. Hallelujah. Hopefully they will come to that.

***Audience Member:** A number of years ago, I was here, the preacher and the people talked about believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. [UNCLEAR] believing in or believing on?*

We believe in.

***Audience Member:** Believe in is one thing [UNCLEAR] believe on it [UNCLEAR]...*

That's why the word believe, remember, is depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in. It doesn't mean mental assent.

***Tom:** Bruce, I understand and I got that salvation is god initiated. You also mentioned that this is why we have [UNCLEAR]... God initiated and it's not me... [UNCLEAR]...*

Because it's an act of obedience. Evangelism is an act of obedience. That's right. Go into all the world and preach the Gospel. There's you are marching orders. For whom? The assembly. For the gathering. That's our marching order. You know what our battle cry is? Thy Kingdom come! That's our battle cry.

***Audience Member:** That statement bothers me. It's not just God-initiated, it's God completed.*

Well yes.

***Audience Member:** But I mean...*

He achieved it. God accomplished.

***Audience Member:** Right. But the thing is, is that we say God initiated it, [UNCLEAR] yeah that's right, [UNCLEAR], I still chose...*

You have to be careful. You're right. You have to be careful to explain that teaching to the point of understanding so that we're accurate. Charles Spurgeon, the great Puritan Preacher of the 1850's said it this way, "When you go to heaven, you're going to see a door that says this, 'Whosoever believes,' and you're going to walk through that door and you're going to see the sign on the other side says, 'Chosen before the foundation of the world.'" Now there's your balance. God accomplished that. He initiated your salvation. He completed your salvation at the cross. We had a response to it. Response is repent and believe. That's why in the Gospel you've got to remember the last two elements are this—repent and believe. It's the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. There is a response that we have. When God initiates, if you want to use that phrase, he initiates this new life that produces within us through the work of the Holy Spirit, a response. The response is, "Father, forgive me. I'm a sinner, and I change the direction of my life." So absolutely, we need to understand that, at the cross, Jesus did not make your salvation possible; he accomplished your salvation—it was completed.

***Audience Member:** In Acts, it says, "Repentance is a gift of God."*

Absolutely. Repentance is something God does in you. Repentance is not something you choose to do. Repentance is something that God works in you. It's a gift. One of the most loving verses in all of the Scripture is this, "Jesus came to take away the sin of the world." That means this—one of the things that you and I ought to be really grateful for is when somebody comes up and says, "Bruce, you're sinning. What you're doing, your attitude is sinful. The words you are saying is sinful. It's an offense to God." That ought to be one of the most comforting things you can hear. Why? Because you know this—that I have a Savior who will take that away from me. He'll take it away from me. It's no longer mine. I'm not longer a slave to it. I'm no longer a slave to righteousness. I have a Savior who says, "Bruce, I'm going to come and take that sin away from you. You've been exposed to that. Repent of that. Give it to me. I'm going to take it away. It's over with. It's a done deal. That cycle has been broken."

You see, guys, one of the most loving verses in all the Scripture is this—Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. That means yours and mine. When you are forgiven, he's paid for your sins past, present and future. It is done. Because he took away the sin of the world from you and me. That's the "but God" that we're going to talk about next week.

Let me give you a couple of other things. I want you to follow this verse. I want you to see some of the characteristics of what it means to be spiritually dead as we see it in Ephesians 2:1-3. First of all, you'll notice that we follow the system of the world. The course of this world, the Scripture says. Does that mean you're doing your own thing? No. A non-believer doesn't do his own thing. He's following the course of the world. You either follow God or you follow Satan. They're not doing their own thing. They're doing the only thing they can do, and that's follow the course of this world. The first characteristic of a dead person is they follow the course of the world.

The next thing is this—they follow in disobedience. The Scripture says, "they are sons of disobedience." They don't learn how to be obedient. When did you teach your six-month old child to be disobedient? They didn't learn that from you. That's natural. You don't teach children to be disobedient. Parenting is teaching them to be obedient. That's because we were born that way. You see, we not only follow the course of this world, but we follow the sons of disobedience.

The third thing is—we follow fleshly desires. The Scripture says the desires of the flesh. If you want a list of those desires, look at Galatians 5:19.

When you put those three things together—following the course of this world, following the sons of disobedience, and following our fleshly desires—you put one, two and three together, and you'll notice judgment. That's what you'll see at the end result of verse three. That's what it means to be dead. Those are the characteristics of our deadness. But guys, the magnificent thing is the next two words, "but God." But God. Yes, we need to understand verses 1-3, but those verses 1-3 have got to point us to verse 4, and that is this—yes, I was dead, yes I was a son of disobedience, yes I followed my fleshly desires, yes I followed the prince of the power of the air, the system of this world. That was my consuming desire. But something changed." But God. That's what you're saved from.

Guys, you've heard me say for 16 years, what motivates us is an overwhelming sense of gratitude. How can we be motivated by anything other than realizing this is what I was saved from, and this is what I'm saved to. And the difference is that little phrase, "but God."

My mother, who was our church choir director when I was growing up, I was teaching a Sunday school class in my church in Mt. Lebanon before my mom went to be with the Lord. One of the great, humbling experiences in my life is when I came to Pittsburgh and moved my parents back up here, because they [UNCLEAR] Alzheimer's and I needed to be their primary caregiver. My mom and dad started coming

to a Sunday school class that I was teaching. I had the humbling experience of teaching my mother and my father, the ones who lead me to saving faith, in the environment that is through my father that I came to embrace Christ as my Savior and Lord. I had the privilege of teaching my mother and my father theology. To me, that was the most humbling experience in my life is to look at my mom and my dad out there and say, "Lord, you know, you gave me life into that couple's family, and I came to saving faith in that couple's family." You see, children don't make a family; they expand your family. My mom and dad were a family the day they got married. I just had to come along and expand it. It was in that family that the Lord was pleased to grant me saving faith, and I was teaching my mom and my dad theology. After teaching this, something similar to this, my mom came up to me afterward and she said, "Bruce, I want you to do one thing before you take up residence with me in heaven. Write a book and call it 'But God.'" She said, "That's the title of your next book." Well I've never had a chance to do that. {LAUGHTER} But what a great title. Wouldn't that be a great title? But God.

Yes, brothers, we've been saved from our sins, but we need to see it's because of God. Let's look at verse 4 and we'll pick that up next week. But God. Be grateful. But God.

Let's pray. Father, there's so much we can glean from this, the depths which we're just touching, the tip of the iceberg. Father, thank you that you have done for us that which we cannot do for ourselves, and that is save us from our sin, from missing the mark of your absolute perfection, from choosing to live a life following the evil one, the courses of this world, the sons of disobedience, to follow our fleshly desires. Thank you, Lord, that you have rescued us from that. You've redeemed us. You've rescued us through the payment of the price of your Son, who accomplished our salvation. So Father, as we leave this place today, may our minds be focused upon this wonderful phrase, "But God," and may our lives reflect this overwhelming sense of awesome gratitude for your grace and your mercy. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!!!