

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

HOLINESS

Rev. Ted Wood

October 24, 2014

Ted: The Lord be with you.

Men: And also with you.

Ted: Let us pray. Lord God, You created all things, and You created them through Your Son, Jesus. You also created in us a new life. Without that new life we are as dead men. We are bound to sin. But in that new life we are free indeed. We pray that You may cause us to experience more and more every day that new life, so that, in the end, we may become like You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Ted: Okay, good. It’s one of those Fridays when I struggled for hours with this, and it still didn’t produce much in my mind, and my wife said, “Well, maybe you’ll get lucky. Maybe some of the guys will say something that will save the whole teaching.” (*Laughter.*) So I guess that’s what I’m counting on.

Bruce asked me to talk about the people of God, and that’s why the title is “The People of God: Equipped to the Fullest.” So I wanted to talk about what it means to be the people of God, and I think Bruce was trying to lay the distinction between the people of God and the ordained clergy, in the sense that we’ve gotten used to. We have the clergy. They are the leaders; they take care of everything. And then you have the people of God. They are the laity, and they follow. But that’s not the way that God set it up, and I want to talk a little bit about what it means to be one of the people of God.

I see that there are two problems we have that Christ resolves in our lives, and they are the problem of behavior and the problem of the soul. Now I don’t even know if the title “soul” is the right title. But the problem with behavior is, as it says in Isaiah 64:6, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy rag. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our iniquities sweep us away.”

So, in my own Christian life, something I struggle with quite a bit is the experience of the new life, and I’ve found in my prayers recently, over the past several months, I’ll tell you that I’ve been going through quite a dry spell in terms of my own spiritual life in the last several months, maybe even in the last year. I’m not in a panic. I’m not happy about it. But I look to the Lord to resolve that within me.

But, nonetheless, as I’ve been going through my morning devotions, I have a time of confession of sin, and I’ve shared that with you in the booklet I produced with Psalm 51, where David repents of his sinning, and he asks for forgiveness. And I’ve gone through that, and I’ve found that that doesn’t do a lot for me, because I kind of sense that I’m already forgiven. I understand that. And I understand it because the solution for the fact that I’m a sinner, and I do lots of sinful things, not so much outwardly in the body anymore. As Bishop Rodgers says, sanctification by aging and loss of testosterone. (*Laughter.*) So you guys who get into your sixties and seventies can brag about being more sanctified, but, in fact, it’s just the natural process. You run out of the energies, or even the inclination to do that, and having a good bowel movement becomes more

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

important than just about anything else. (*Laughter.*) Your studliness has gone out the window. There’s nothing to brag about. There’s no pride to be taken in that.

So I find that the sins are not as much of an issue because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ. We talk about this in Hebrews 9:22. “Under the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” So we say that. We evangelicals say it again and again. You see it in the messages of evangelical preachers again and again, and that is that the blood of Christ covers our sins. We need someone to atone for our sins. When Jesus went to the cross, He shed His blood. We understand that. I hope you understand that. And that’s the way your sins are taken care of.

But there is another problem, and it’s not just the problem of my behavior. It’s a problem with me, and I don’t know how else to say it, but maybe it’s a problem with my soul, and what’s going on inside of me. And I like what Paul says. “And I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” He’s saying that, in the fleshly part of me, there is nothing good at all in that.

So what is the solution to that problem? I’ve kind of thought about this recently, and it seems to me that the thing I really feel bad about isn’t so much my sins, as that I feel bad about me. That’s where I’m burdened, by who I am. It’s not so much my sins, because I know that the blood has taken care of the sins.

So how does God solve that problem of me? Even if I had every sin forgiven, there would still be a problem. Even though I had it all taken away, I would still be alienated from God, because there has to be another work done, and that work is the work of the life of Christ within me. The solution is that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” And I’m just wondering if a lot of evangelical preachers miss this point. It’s a critical point, and that is that they talk a lot about getting your sins forgiven, and the blood shed for you. But how much is talked about the new life in Christ, the union with Christ?

You know, Watchman Nee, who I like—I don’t like everything he says,—but Wachman Nee, the great Chinese evangelist from the 1920s and ‘30s and ‘40s, actually died in a Communist Chinese prison camp in the 1950s. He talks about the blood and the cross. The blood takes care of our sins, and the cross takes care of our sin. So while the blood that was shed covers and makes atonement for the bad things that we’ve done, there is a bigger issue, and that’s me.

And I have to be put out of the picture. “I’ve been crucified with Christ.” Paul talks about this idea of being united with Christ in His life, in His crucifixion and His resurrection, and His glorification.

And this is predicated on what Ezekiel prophesied in chapter 36, where he said, “I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes.” Or again, in 2 Corinthians, as we see it worked out in the New Testament, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”

And now, this is a separate issue, or a connected issue, with the shed blood. But this is about the new you. And I think that’s the thing that I’ve been meditating on more and

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

more, even as Bruce went through the twenty-eight attributes of God, to meditate on the attributes of God, and who He is. And then, now, to meditate on who I am in Christ. My sins have been forgiven; I understand that. But do I really understand what it means to be dead, and alive in Christ?

It’s interesting. I’m reading, and I would commend it to you, a great book, because I can pick it up and put it down. I usually don’t do a lot of reading. I do a lot of researching, but I don’t do a lot of reading. People say, “Have you read that book recently?” I say, “No.”

“What was the last book you read?”

“I think it was the classic comic books, where they had lots of pictures.” (*Laughter.*) I like books with lots of pictures in them. (*Laughter.*) But one book I have been able to read, with some success, is *George Whitfield’s Journals*.

Once, at Christ Church, they had a book sale, and they were selling it for two dollars a book. I should have bought twenty of them, because now, on eBay, they’re going for \$40 a book. I could have made a lot of money.

But George Whitfield, if you don’t know, was one of the greatest English speaking evangelists that ever lived. He did most of his work in the 1730s, ‘40s and ‘50s. He was a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley, who started the Methodist movement, and he was also a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards, probably the greatest philosopher and natural scientist this country has ever produced. And he was over in Northampton, in Massachusetts in that same period, the 1730s and ‘40s.

And George Whitfield had an amazing impact on America prior to the American Revolution. A number of scholars believe that the work of Whitfield and Wesley, Tennet and others, (maybe the bishop could help me out with some of these names), these great evangelists of that period, laid the groundwork for the American Revolution, for people to begin to think about the possibility of an independent and free country.

So Whitefield was a potent guy, and I love reading his journal, because all I have to read is a day. You see, every entry in his book is one day. So I can read what was happening that day. So maybe it was July the 2nd, 1741. So I’ve read that.

And he talks about his work, and the reaction that people are having. He became very good friends with Benjamin Franklin, and Benjamin Franklin wanted to test out. He was hearing these stories in England, how George Whitfield would gather tens of thousands of people to come and hear him preach. Now I want you to think about that. At a time, in the mid-1700s in England, where there was probably a population of about four or five million. In Bristol, for instance, (he spent a lot of time in Bristol), he would get crowds of ten, twenty or thirty thousand people. And Benjamin Franklin doubted that this was possible. So he went to hear Whitfield in Philadelphia. And then he began to walk away from the preaching to see if he could still hear it. And when he calculated how far he got out, he figured out, as Benjamin Franklin would do as a scientist, how many people per square yard, who would be each one of them,—he figured that that day in Philadelphia he preached to thirty thousand people who could hear him.

And I love the way Whitfield deals with his whole evangelistic approach. Whitfield’s primary focus and insistence was on the new birth, of being born again. He was not

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

talking about an experience, because you never see Whitfield, in his journals, in any place, say “a thousand people came forward and got saved. We had five hundred decisions for Christ.” He never says that. He never presumes to know what is going on in the hearts of those folks out there. What he does is, he looks at their reactions, and he said that many of them were “melted.” That’s the term he used. And I love that term! It’s a 1740s term. They were melted, because the word of God, the preaching of the word of God, the insistence upon the necessity of the new birth, or being born again, this is the thing that melts the hard hearts of people—the word of God going forth, and the insistence on the new birth.

He was not allowed in a lot of churches, because the clergy found him very threatening, because they were getting a few people out on Sunday, and he was getting tens of thousands. But he talked a lot about the importance of the new birth. And this new birth is the thing that takes away our old self, and gives us a new self. And that new self, that new person, is the Person of Jesus Christ. It’s not a better you. It’s not an improved version of you. It’s not you with greater understanding and insight into the gospel, into the Christian faith. It’s a brand new you. And that’s the thing that I want to cause myself to meditate on.

And I think Watchman Nee was right. In the cross, when Jesus went up on the cross, every one of you who has been elected before the foundation of the world, every one of you went up on the cross with Him and died with Him, because God needed to replace the old you with the new you. And the new you is not a better you. The new you is—

Men: The new you.

Ted: It’s Christ Himself, right. That’s the life. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

That’s extraordinary! I mean, you can get the idea of the Atonement. You’ve done sins. “The soul that sins shall die.” “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.” You get that. It’s kind of a financial or book keeping transaction. You’ve done this bad stuff. Now how are you going to get rid of it? You need to have it covered by someone paying the debt, the penalty for your sins. You can get that. But do you get the new life? Do you get the fact that it’s no longer you, but Christ? “For me to live is Christ,” says Paul. He wasn’t talking about a more vivid expression. He was talking about an ultimate reality.

The greatest challenge to us is grasping and putting our arms around this. I am struggling with it myself. I know it intellectually, but in my heart, to get my arms around this teaching, is something else.

What we look to is, we look to experience. We say, “Am I experiencing this new life?” “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” Listen, let’s be honest! Let’s not deceive ourselves! I don’t look very new! I haven’t progressed very far. But does that negate what Christ has done? And I would say, “Absolutely not.”

Now we can go into the whole business of if you’re not showing anything, and you’re still living out your sins, and committed to those, that’s another issue. But I’m saying that we can’t let experience judge this new life, this new birth, this life in Christ, this

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

union with Christ. We can’t judge it based on our experience. It’s an absolute fact. And God’s facts and God’s truth take precedence over any experience that we have.

Participant: Ted?

Ted: Yes, Sig? Thanks for saving me! (*Laughter.*)

Sig: I just want to make a distinction, because I’ve been struggling with that, too. You know, I’m still floundering, I’m still sinning and making mistakes, and if you asked my wife, she could tell you about them.

Ted: Yes, my wife as well.

Sig: I guess I want to clarify, or have you clarify for me is this: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ.” So when I do something or say something, is my intention to reflect Christ or point to Christ, and not make me the object of whatever it is, that my doing and going about my life isn’t the focus. It’s Christ that I point to, as opposed to saying, “Well, I’m in Christ. I can walk on water. I can heal your son. I can raise the dead.” It’s like, no, let me tell you about Christ, because I don’t need what I thought I needed to be satisfied. I don’t really become Christ, right?

Ted: No, but you have the life of Christ. Bishop, maybe you can help me out with this.

Bishop Rodgers: Well, the passage that you quoted goes on to say, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” And then it goes on to say, “And the life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God.” So he understands himself now, totally in relationship to Christ.

Ted: Right. And if you have that relationship, your life is going to reflect it. Just automatically, you’ll start to reflect it, maybe poorly in the beginning, maybe greatly in the beginning. Everybody is different. I mean, some people start off as notorious sinners. They have the new life, the new birth, and my gosh, what happened to the guy? Others are more slow in that progress. I don’t know why that is. That’s a mystery to me. I don’t know why some of us explode into the Christian life, and others don’t. But they are still there.

Let me just say one other thing. I think it’s interesting. I’ve shared this statistic a number of times before, and it just always strikes me. There is an excellent book about evangelism in the early church, in the first four hundred years, and I won’t go into the title. But the author headed up one of these centers at Fuller Theological Seminary, so he comes with some credentials.

He did a study of the major evangelistic movements or organizations now in this country, and worldwide, and he found that, within a year after coming forward in an evangelistic crusade, only five to fifteen per cent of those who came forward were involved in a church. Now, if you say that being in a church is simply a way of helping you grow in the faith, then I can understand that, because you could say, “Well, it’s really not helping me grow all that much.” (*Unclear*) “It’s neither her nor there whether I show up.” But if you understand the church as the body of Christ, and you being with Jesus when you’re with His church, then I guess for what?—85 to 95 per cent of those who go forward, that’s not very important to be with Jesus! I mean, you would want to be with

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Jesus’ people, wouldn’t you? Wouldn’t you think that would naturally do it? I’m sorry. Go ahead, please.

Participant: When we receive Christ for our salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, and has become our Teacher, as you’ve said previously. But the key to all of that has to do with surrender and obedience. As we surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit, and are obedient to the claim that He has on our lives, then we find ourselves becoming more like Christ because of that. But, unfortunately, too many of us too often are not willing to surrender fully. We talk about surrendering, but do we surrender fully? And yes, You can come into this room, and You can come into this room, and You can come into that room, but this room is kind of off limits. Until we open up that door to that room and say, “That room is not off limits. You can come into that room,” then you’re not going to grow and be more like Christ, because of our unwillingness to be surrendered and to be obedient.

Ted: Well,--

Participant: True.

Ted: It’s true, but I want to know. That’s easy. Okay, guys, the solution to the problem is get more surrendered and more obedient. No, that’s not the solution to the problem. The solution to the problem is the same solution that you start off with, and that is the life of Christ. That life of Christ, in fact, causes you to surrender, and causes you to be obedient. I think that’s so critical, because we often hear “when you’re fully surrendered.” Well, I want to know. Is there anybody in this room that is fully surrendered? I mean, is there anybody in this room that is fifty per cent surrendered? I mean, how do you even calculate percentages on that? You are, Jim?

Jim: I don’t think there is any part of our fallen nature—

Ted: Yes.

Jim: That wants to surrender, or will surrender. It has to be the life of Christ in us that causes us both to will,--

Ted: Right. And to do.

Jim: According to the new life. And the other thing is that this addresses the whole issue of faith and works. You know, so many people get confused, and think, “Well, is it just faith, or is it faith and works?” Well, the new nature makes it possible.

Ted: Yes. Kit makes it possible, and it drives it. Now I want to be very clear. If you have the new life of Christ, if you have been regenerated, if you’ve been born again, and Christ lives in you, that will cause you to find that you’re obedient and surrendered. If you’re not obedient and surrendered, then there is something wrong not with the behavior, but there is something wrong with the root, the origin, the new birth. And if somebody goes through his whole life, and finds himself not obedient, and not surrendered, we need to look not at your behavior, that you’re not behaving correctly. We need to look at the root, the original birth. Were you indeed born again? Yes?

Participant: Faith is a gift.

Ted: Yes.

Participant: You’re saved. He gives us the faith.

Ted: Yes.

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Participant: And so we work it out, through the Holy Spirit.

Ted: Yes. We will experience that, the working out. But indeed, the new life, the life of Christ, drives that working out.

Participant: It’s faith. We’re saved by grace, through faith.

Ted: “And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith.” But even that faith is a gift. Yes, Leroy?

Leroy: When that new you, that new creature, becomes formed, it’s like a daily walk, day in and day out.

Ted: Sure.

Leroy: And we know in Scripture, in Romans 10:17, that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Ted: Right.

Leroy: And daily meditation, and prayer, and meditation on God’s holy word.

Ted: Yes.

Leroy: And relationship to God through Christ. It transforms and matures you to be able to become that new you, day in and day out.

Ted: Yes. But the point I want to leave with you is that all of that is correct, except that you are the new you. You are already that. Now you’re beginning to experience what that’s like through all these disciplines. If you’ve been born again, you will desire to experience more of that new you. That’s what you will desire to do. Wow! I prayed for the wrong thing! (*Laughter.*) Yes?

Participant: I just want to throw in a time sequence. Are you suggesting that this forgiveness of sins, and this understanding in our minds about that process, is a different time sequence from the new life?

Ted: Well, I think that this is what happens. I think that, before the foundation of the world, God elected those who would be His people. And, in His time, He is going to give them the new birth, the new life of Christ. When He comes to you, He applies it. All that Christ is is applied immediately to you. You may not experience it, but all that He is is applied to you. And part of that application to you in the new life is the blood shed for your sins. So it’s not like you get shed blood, and then the new life. When that new life in Christ enters you, and becomes part of you, and takes ownership of you, one of the things you get is that you get the shed blood. You also get things like the ultimate glorification, that we’re going to be with God forever. You get the intimacy of communion with Him. You get a understanding of His word.

I remember when I was in college, when I first came to know Christ. One of the first things that jumped out at me, one of the first evidences of that new birth was that the Bible just came alive for me. You’ve heard it. I hate to tell stories over and over again, but I went to the William and Mary bookstore. I walked in, and I said, “Do you have a Bible you could sell me?” I didn’t know where else to find one. (*Laughter.*) I had not been brought up in a church family.

And they said, “Yes. I think we have one on the back shelf.” (*Laughter.*)

And, I’m telling you,—and this is the truth!—I went back with them into the storage room, and there was one Bible on the shelf. And there was a parallel edition, King James

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Version and the RSV. That shows you how old I am. And I bought that New Testament, that parallel, and I would say that, within 24 to 48 hours, I read the entire thing. I could not put it down. All of a sudden, it was a book written for me! Before that, it was an interesting piece of philosophy and speculation. After the new birth, maybe it hits you that way. But that’s how it hit me. All of a sudden, the word of God grabbed me, and it has been that way ever since. I mean, I’m a student of God, the Bible, and history. I’m a student of those three things. And I’ve been a student of the Bible ever since. That’s just the way it hit me.

It may have hit you some other way. IK mean, maybe the way it hit you was that you were able to give up all kinds of carnal activity. Or maybe the way it hit you was that you were able to have love for people, and forgiveness that you never had before. I’m still working on both of those. But the Word jumped out, and it grabbed me, and I just consumed that. I just sat there in the dorm, and read and read and read the New Testament, and it was like a letter written for me, which is a sign of the new birth.

I was compelled. I didn’t have to say, “I’m a Christian. I gave my life to Jesus on the bridge outside of Yates Dormitory, and I said the sinner’s prayer, and now I’ve got to do these things.” I was compelled to do them. I wanted to do them.

Guys, I’m just trying to sort all this out, rather than just say, “Well, if you do this, and this.” It becomes a bunch of clichés. I’m trying to figure out what really happens when it hits the road. John?

John: Dragging a couple of things in from looking at the wholeness of Scripture, Jesus talked about these things as well, okay? And among them, He said, “The kingdom of God is like . . .” and then He goes into an analogy.

Ted: Right. **John:** And often, that analogy is about a crop, and it takes time to grow.

Ted: Yes.

John: And one of them, and I believe it’s out of Luke, says, you know, that the kingdom of God is like a farmer who plants his seed, and he cares for it, and the days come and the days go, and somehow this seed grows within the ground. He doesn’t really know how it happens, but one day it’s time for the harvest. He puts in the sickle and he harvests. I believe that happens to us as well.

Ted: Right.

John: And I think that Jesus was repeating how it happens individually for us in John chapter 15, where He says, “I am the vine, and you are the branches.” (*Paraphrase.*) “You’ve got to abide in Me. You’re grafted into Me, and you’re going to get your life source from Me.” So it’s not a matter of being and doing independently, the way our society or country conditions us. It is learning to abide in the Fountain of Life that is Jesus Christ, and to derive our spiritual life and our transformation from that relationship. And I think that’s what Paul was getting at in Romans 12, where he says, “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

Ted: Yes.

John: So it’s a process, gentlemen, not “a dilly, and you’re done.”

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Ted: It’s just like Bruce says. Have you ever seen a tree grunt to produce fruit? (*Laughter.*) The thing is that, it doesn’t depend upon your activity, but you will be active. It doesn’t depend on your activity. It doesn’t depend on your obedience, or your sacrifice, or your commitment, but you will be sacrificial, obedient and active. All those things will be signs of what’s going on in your life.

Okay, wow! Well, praise the Lord! (*Laughter.*)

Item number two: Meditating on what Christ has already done, and who He is. Not just simply His death for your sins, but the very life that you have is His life, and the life that we live we live by faith in Him. I call it the new you’uns. I wanted to say that, because it’s like the new you’all. Once again, when you’re born again, and you’re born anew in Him, it’s simply not about you. You’re put into a new thing, a new group, a new community. Your life is not a life of Christ outside of the community of Christ. You don’t have a separate life. I’m out there. Jesus and I are like this. We’re very tight, but I’m really not connected to anybody else.

And that’s why Peter uses these great community images. “You yourselves, like living stones, . . .” Okay, living stones. Jesus is the Living Stone. He’s the Rock of Ages. “On this rock I will build My church.” He is all these things. That life of Christ makes you alive, but you don’t sit out there. Like Bruce said last week, if you’re not being built into a spiritual house, if you’re not being corporate as a living stone into a living spiritual house, you’re just rubble. You’re just out there. You’re just out there. We have oodles and oodles of Christians out there that are rubble, basically, because they are disconnected.

“You yourselves, like living stones, “ (I’m reading from 1 Peter 2:5, and then 9 and 10), “are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

And I want to take this verse apart, just to see what we are. It says what you were previously. This is your state of being prior to the new life, the new birth. This was your state of being. You were not a people, and you had not received mercy. OI mean, that’s just the matter of it. These verses are taken out of Hosea, in which he talks about Israel, and he says, in effect, “Israel, because of your sins, you are no longer My people, and you are no longer receiving mercy.” But then later, in Hosea, he says that there is going to come a time when you will be My people. I will make you My people, and you will receive mercy.

The fact that the unbelieving world, the unregenerate, do not understand, is that they are no one. They are absolutely zero without Christ, without His life, because He is what it’s all about. All of history, all of the meaning of life, in the end of time, will all funnel down to Him. He will be the interpretation, the meaning, the sum of all things. And if we’re not in Him, we are going to be zero. We are going to be as if there were no meaning to our lives at all. People fill up their lives with all kinds of ways to say, “I’m

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

somebody.” But, in fact, they are nobody outside of Christ. May I just finish, Sig? Thanks.

I love that passage in Isaiah 40, verse 15. “The nations are like a drop in the bucket. They are accounted as dust on the scales.” The nations! Once He says, “Once you were no people.” That’s like being one of the nations, one of those groups out there. Well, I’m very proud of being an American. Well, I love my Irish ancestry. You know, being Anglo-Saxon is just the very best thing that anybody could ever be!

I was raised in a house in which the subliminal message was that anything that was south of Germany was not really very valuable and important, and so only northern Europeans were the best kind of people. And, you know, although we never said anything contrary to that, yet there was the message.

And I’ve shared with you that Diane, my wife, was previously married, as I was, and, although she was Anglo-Saxon in her blood line, she married an Italian guy. When I first introduced her to my mother, I did not want to tell my mom her last name. (*Laughter.*) That was the message. I’m saying that’s awful! I’m not defending that. But I’m saying that this is where my parents got their identity, from that. That’s who they were. We’re descended from the original Puritan stock that came to America. Our people are buried in the Boston cemeteries, through the Patriots. Here we are, DAR. All these things.

You know ,that’s nothing! It’s absolutely meaningless! It’s like a drop in the bucket! It’s like dust on the scales! As much as we love this country, in the end, it will mean nothing, outside of Jesus Christ, outside of being found in Him.

Men: Amen.

Ted: So that is who we were. But who are you now? What are you now? And this is a fact, if you’ve been born again, regenerated, have the new life, this is a fact of who you are, regardless of whether you feel it or not. You will, but it doesn’t depend on it.

First of all, he says, “You are living stones.” Christ is the Living Stone. He’s the Rock of Ages, and he says to Peter, in Matthew 16, “On this rock I will build My church.” What is Jesus going to build His church on? He’s going to build it on Himself! That’s who He’s going to build it on. He’s the Rock.

Secondly, it says that we are “a spiritual house.” And in 2 Corinthians it reinforces that. We are a dwelling of the living God. As God said, “I will make My dwelling among them, and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

So, in 2 Corinthians, Paul refers to the spiritual house as the “temple of the living God.” We are the temple of the living God. As a group, as the whole body of Christ, we are the temple of the living God.

Now that’s an interesting image. What do you think that means? What do you think it means that we are a spiritual house? That is where, in the Spirit, we make our lives. You live in a house. But what do you think this temple of the living God is? If we are called the body of Christ, if all those who are born again in Jesus Christ are the temple of the living God, what happens at a temple?

Men: Worship.

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Ted: We worship God? Okay. What else happens at the temple in Jerusalem? What else happens in there?

Men: Sacrifices.

Ted: That’s right. What else happened there? Worship, sacrifice. You won’t get in or out of heaven based on your answer. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Serving.

Ted: There’s a lot of serving to make all of that happen. That’s part of it. That’s excellent. Yes?

Participant: Tithing.

Ted: Tithing! (*Laughter.*) Disregard that.

Participant: Prayer.

Ted: Prayer and intercession.

Participant: The presence of God.

Ted: The very presence of God. So how does that apply to the body of Christ? As we gather together, and we are the temple of the living God, what happens? What sacrifice is made? What is the sacrifice that’s made in the body of Christ?

Participant: Praise and thanksgiving.

Ted: There is praise and thanksgiving, and also, offering to the world the sacrifice of Christ. We offer Him. What intercession is made in the temple of the living God today?

Participant: The prayers of the saints.

Ted: Yes, the prayers of the saints. But remember, the best prayers are the prayers that Jesus prays, and that is the life of Christ within us that does the praying. We pray, absolutely. I get down on my knees and I pray every morning, and I forget the rest of the day, but I pray every morning. But that intercession is taking place with the life of Christ. He Himself is praying. It tells us in Romans that the Spirit intercedes for us, interceding for the saints. So, as good as my prayers are, and you might think that my prayers are pretty lousy today; I feel bad; there is nothing going on,—listen! Take courage! It’s ultimately not about you! It’s ultimately about what He’s doing! And He is praying in the new life within you, in a much more effective and better way than you could ever pray. Yes?

Participant: In regard to that living temple, Jesus being the chief cornerstone, built upon the foundation of the prophets and the apostles, and as we are a part of that temple, when we share the gospel with people who are not yet born again, that temple is growing.

Ted: Oh, absolutely right. That’s the whole purpose—more living stones to put into that temple. Ephesians 2:22: “In Him you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit,” or, another way of translating it is, “in the Spirit.”

So that’s the promise. In Him we’re being built together, into a dwelling place for God.

Now, (and this is where, I must say, and I must say this right), I would say that for Bruce’s teaching, he is taking this from a Congregational standpoint, from individual congregations that are, in essence, autonomous. I don’t see that as the thrust of the New Testament. I see it that we are not spiritual houses of God. We are not bodies of Christ.

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

We are all a body of Christ. We are all one temple; we’re all one body; we’re all one spiritual house.

Therefore, in some way, those congregations need to be associated and accountable to each other, in some fashion. This was the image of the early church. And for us to say that we can do our own thing, and not have to be concerned about anybody else around us, any other congregation, is to say that there isn’t one body. There are many bodies. There is not one temple; there are many temples. There is not one spiritual house; there are many houses.

And I think that this is very troublesome. I think it’s a huge blind spot in modern evangelical thinking, and it was not the thinking of the church for the first fifteen hundred years. But later, we thought we could do our own thing.

I mean, does it seem right to you to have a lively, strong, large evangelical church in a community, and another church move in, without even consulting that other church, until the pastor of the first church goes to the new plant and says, “Why didn’t you guys come and talk to me?” Because, as it says in 1 Corinthians, in describing the gifts of the Spirit, where Paul says, no one can say “I have no need of you.” I mean, even we at North Hills Anglican Fellowship up here on Nicholson Road, Christ Church knows we’re here. But we’ve not gone to the Presbyterian church or the Baptist church down the street, and said, “Brothers, we’re here. We want to have fellowship with you.” Somehow, it can’t become more and more individualized. We have this idea that it’s just about Jesus and me, and me getting the blessings. (Watch Channel 40 if you want to see that worked out.) I’ve got all the blessings. But it can’t just be about my congregation!

Participant: Amen.

Ted: It’s got to be about the whole body of Christ. There is no place in Scripture that says that we can have lots of autonomous places, and think that that’s God’s will, because God is always striving toward the unity of all believers. And, even though it’s an awful task, and it’s a totally fractured task,--and today I looked this up. There are between eight to twenty thousand different denominations! “Yes, I know Ted. We really need to work on that.” We need to work on that? Eight to twenty thousand? I mean, it’s like saying, “Well, Ted, there’s a lot of sin in the church, and I know we’ve got to work on it.” But we need to make the intention to deal with it.

Participant: Amen.

Ted: To me, to be disunited is a sin. Now somebody raised his hand here. Save me, please.

Participant: I did.

Ted: Okay. Thank you, Sig.

Sig: The thing you taught me just now is like Bruce.

Ted: Yes. It’s the same thing. We’re all one in the Spirit.

Sig: You pointed out, Ted, if I can make sense out of this, in my mind, it’s troubling when we even talk about it, in terms of who I am in relation to Christ, in sight of you guys, who are my friends, or anybody. But I think what you’ve taught me now, it’s not so much that my friends will look at me and say, “Oh, you’re different! Oh, look what you do!”

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Ted: Right.

Sig: No. When God looks at me, He sees Christ!

Ted: Right.

Sig: That’s what I’m worried about, and I can tell people about it. And they say, “You don’t seem to live it.” And you’re right! I screw up! I’m trying to be better. But the point of the fact is, He sees me differently. It’s not that I read Oprah Winfrey’s magazine, and I can improve my life. That’s what the world wants to see! I want to be better at this, and better at that, and have all this, and have all that. “When I see that, I’ll follow you.” But I don’t want you to follow me! Follow Christ! Let me tell you about Him! I see what you’re trying to tell me, if I’m accurate, and I guess I’m trying to check with you on this, in what’s changed, is that God sees me differently.

Ted: Because indeed, you are different!

Sig: Right. (*Unclear*) may not see me differently. I’ll help them. I want to show them.

Ted: That’s correct.

Sig: But if that doesn’t work, there is nothing I can do about that.

Ted: Right. That’s right. Yes.

Well, let me just finish up this part here, because I’m running out of time. We’re “a spiritual house.” He calls us “a royal priesthood.” In Revelation 1, verses 5-6, Jesus Christ “has freed us from our sins by His blood.” Remember, that’s what He does with the Atonement. That takes care of my sins. “And made us a kingdom.” That’s a different me. “A kingdom of priests to His God and Father.” And, when we offer the world as priests, we’re offering Christ’s sacrifice to the world, because that’s the only way they learn about the sacrifice of Christ, through our mouthpiece and our witness, and offering Christ’s prayers. Dick, let me just finish these other two. We’re also “a chosen race, a holy nation.”

And, in Deuteronomy, this was God’s purpose from the beginning. “You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” So this is an amazing claim, that of all the people who have ever been, we’ve been chosen. And we’ve been chosen, not just individually to get saved. We’ve been chosen to be put in to the spiritual house, the temple of the living God, the body of Christ, all the images that are used about the Christian community. This is the new nation! This is the new thing that God is doing, and by regeneration we are given a godly desire not only to be a part of that, but to grow, and to become more like who Christ is. And this, our new identity, is in community. We’re the people of God, the *koinonia*, not the peoples of God.

So I’m going to stop and take one other comment.

Participant: And I say that this new you, that we see in ourselves, is ordained by God from before the foundation of the world. And the new you, as you said earlier, is not us, but the work of God in us.

Ted: Yes.

“God’s People: Equipped . . . To The Fullest”

Participant: (*Unclear.*) God is working in us, and He’s working through us, in Christ, and He chose us before the foundation of the world, as we come to the knowledge of Him. It’s not about us, but it’s the work of God in us.

Ted: Right. And that’s the great thing about the twenty-eight attributes of God. It’s really all about Him. As we gaze into His face, as we look at who He is, we are changed by Him. As we conform to His likeness, we are changed.

Participant: Ted, may I just mention one thing?

Ted: Sure.

Participant: In the beginning, you talked a little bit about the struggle. Just as you said, we still do some things, and we still have this internal struggle.

Ted: Yes, we do.

Participant: And is that the human in us?

Ted: Paul says it’s his flesh that is the principle. I don’t know. This is the one mystery that I cannot figure out—why God did not eliminate the flesh completely at that crucifixion. I don’t understand that. I don’t understand why so much of my old self hangs on. I don’t understand it. It’s a great, great mystery. The Scripture says, “The mystery of lawlessness is great.” And it sure is the mystery of lawlessness.

Participant: It’s okay to struggle.

Ted: No, Tom, it isn’t. You have to have it perfect. (*Laughter.*) No, no, no! If you’re not struggling, you’ve not been born again, because the life of Christ is in there, struggling with that old person.

So let’s pray. Lord God, everything we are, everything we hope to be, is in Your origin and in Your making, and in Your progress, and in Your growth. We thank You for that great mystery, whereby we are supernaturally made one with You, and take on a new life, and in that the only hope of being the persons that we wish to be. And we pray this in Your name. Amen. (*Applause.*)