

I. The Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia: God's Church for the Ages
"His Church—Our Home"
Ephesians 2:11-22
By: Dr. Harry Reeder
January 9, 2011 – Morning Sermon

We will be reading from God's Word in the New Testament in Ephesians 2. So let's look in Ephesians 2:11-22 which says, **11** *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—* **12** *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* **13** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* **14** *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility* **15** *by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,* **16** *and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.* **17** *And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.* **18** *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.* **19** *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* **20** *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,* **21** *in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* **22** *In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

May God bless this His Word for the grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I loved my father and mother. I was born when they were 18 and 17 years of age so I spent a long time with them. Some people that knew my dad well said that I actually went through adolescence before he did. It was really interesting to grow up in that family. I miss my dad quite a bit and he went to be with the Lord in 2002, not long after I came here. Interestingly a year later my mother went to be with the Lord and something happened around that I want to share as we start this new series on Ekklesia – God's church for the ages. I spent almost all of my sabbatical time studying for this series of sermons that were going to do over the next couple of months.

Very pointedly we are going into a new jubilee, a new year, until Jesus comes so what is it that we want to do? I really wanted to come back to this series on the church and each studying is going to be something from the divine perspective in the human experience – God's church, our home is this first sermon. Then let me start it this way. My mother had been without my dad for almost a year and in God's providence the PCA had their General Assembly that year in Charlotte, North Carolina. When I went back I had the chance to see some folks back at Christ's Covenant and also in God's providence one of the young little girls that I had led to Christ, baptized and been a part of discipling her was getting married. That makes you feel old. She had asked me to do the wedding.

I was very grateful for the privilege to do that. It all coincided and plus it would give me another reason to stay an extra day with my mom.

We had the General Assembly and we were through on Friday. That Friday night I went and picked up my mom and went to my sister's for a cookout. I said, "Mom you're my date tonight." We had that time together and when it was over she said "Well, it's time for me to go, are you going to take me?" I said, "I always take the girl home I went to the dance with, so let's go." I took her home and came back and about an hour later I got a phone call from her and she was in distress. By the time I got there she was just about to meet the Lord and I was able to be with her as she met the Lord that night. I thought "What am I going to do about the wedding tomorrow morning." I just kind of got up and went and did the wedding. I finished the wedding, got in the car with Cindy and we drove back to Birmingham in the early afternoon to be here with the congregation for worship that Lord's Day, Sunday.

A very well meaning, Godly person came out and said "You know pastor, you drove six and half hours to be back here, you didn't have to do that. I know you felt it was your duty and you had to be back here but you didn't have to do that. You could have stayed." I said, "No, no, no, no, you misunderstood something. I'll confess, the wedding was my duty that day and I just got up and got it done. That girl needed to get married and I was there to do it so I did it. Back here was not duty. I couldn't think of a place I wanted to be more when my mother went to be with the Lord. This is home for me." For a couple of years I have been blessed by elders and deacons who had been very gracious with this pastor taking the next step of the congregation. People have been very gracious to welcome us and getting to know them. There have been challenging moments where elders stepped up to the plate to provide leadership. Honestly there is my mom and dad with the Lord within a year and when that time comes that next day I couldn't think of a place more important to be than home and God's church is me and my family's home. It's our home.

It's not a boarding house to drive by on Sunday and get a sermon. It is home. It's my Father's household with His children who are my brothers and sisters in the Lord. Some mentor me as older brothers and sisters. Some encourage me. Some challenge me and like any other family it's a challenge. Like any other home, you can choose your friends but you can't choose your family. God gives them to you and so there are some challenges that are there. That's what I want to talk to you about – God's church, our home.

I'm going to walk you through things from that text in Ephesians but I'm so excited about the various passages we're going to look at in the next couple of months in going through this series of the Ekklesia, God's church, and the church for the ages. I thought this would be a wonderful text to start with. One of the things I think the Apostle Paul would turn over in his grave if he knew, is he would not be very pleased with our thoughts of a Jewish church or a Gentile church or a black church or a white church or a this church or a that church. I understand you can't overcome the language barrier but I think of everything else of people who are one in Christ, one in the Spirit, one by grace, with love, grace and mercy can overcome those things and be a part of each other and work with each other.

Let me back up for a minute. This really is not a letter to the church at Ephesus alone. This is what we call a catholic epistle. It was made to spread among all the

churches. In fact, the seven churches talked about in the book of Revelation all received this letter. Why did it have Ephesians on it? It was for the same reason that the seven churches were addressed. The first church was Ephesus which was the mother church and out of Ephesus came Hierapolis, Laodicea, Colosse, Pergamom and Thyatira and so this letter is circulating but it starts with the mother church which was the first church on the trade route that led to the rest of them so it gets the mother church's name, Ephesians. Notice though it's not personally directed like the letter to the Corinthians. It's very general in what it says.

In this text he says "Don't divide up Jew and Gentile because you are one in Christ. Some of you who were far off (which is code language for Gentile) and those who were near (which is code language for Jewish), now you are one in Christ. He has removed the hostility." How did He remove the hostility? He did it through the cross of Jesus Christ. He goes on to say "He reconciled you to Himself by removing the hostility of sin and He reconciled you to each other so there is one new man in Jesus Christ." We are one in Christ, young, old, male, female, Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, it doesn't matter for you are one in Christ. You all have the same foundation, the Apostles and Prophets, meaning Old Testament and New Testament, the Word of God. You have the same cornerstone, where Old Testament points to Christ and the New Testament explains Christ. Christ is the cornerstone.

It has all happened by Christ through the Gospel in the power of the Spirit. You now are members of God's Kingdom, fellow citizens and you are members of God's household. His church is your home. God's church, purchased by the blood of His Son, is your home where you meet God for the Holy Spirit dwells there and you meet with each other as brothers and sisters. Notice the emphasis and that is because of Christ, Christ being the center. Because of the power of the Gospel through the cross He reconciled you to Himself and He has reconciled you to one another. It was the Spirit of God that brought you to Christ. It's the Spirit of God that brings you together and it's the Spirit of God who meets with you in the household of God. So that's God's church, our home. It is Christ centered, Gospel driven, and Spirit filled with God's people that make it their home with their Father, indwelt by His Spirit because of what His Son, Jesus Christ has done.

So that is why we're doing this series going into the next fifty years. The next fifty years I don't think is a matter of Harry Reeder, the second pastor of Briarwood, coming up with some ingenious plan. I think it is coming back to what God says His church is and now God what You have done in the past let's move to the future. First of all I am going to give you why I am doing this series with three concerns.

The first concern is we have to stay focused on the fundamentals of what it means to be God's church which makes it our home. What does it mean to stay embracing the fundamentals? I think this is very crucial. I have talked to many young men going into the ministry about where they are going to pastor and where their heart is. Here are some of the responses I've heard. "I'm going to do an emergent church. I'm going to do a traditional church. I'm going to do a truly reformed church. I'm going to do a seeker centered church. I'm going to do a 'missional' church. I'm going to do a 'sonship' church." It's amazing. I'm asking God to use this series to liberate us from the hyphenated church.

I believe there is something called church and I don't care if you're in Kansas or Kenya this is what the church is and does. We may speak a different language when we land there but this is the church. Here's her message. Here's her mission. Here's her ministry. Here's her means of grace. Now small groups in a hut in Africa may be different than a small group discipleship that is taking place in a home that's over the mountain here but it's still small group disciple making, prayer, preaching, worship, all of those things are absolutely crucial. That's why our ministry theme this year is the two life lines of the church which are prayer and the Word. It is nothing sophisticated or ingenious but it's just coming back to the basics. What are the fundamentals of what the church is and does? It is prayer and the Word.

It is also Christ centered and the Word of God brings us to Jesus. It is also Spirit filled and what does the Holy Spirit use? The Spirit uses the Word of God. So through God's Word He speaks to us and in prayer we speak back to Him. These are the life lines of the church. By the way, we are going to develop this a lot more but I think this is very important. I want you and I to profess the priority of prayer but much more by the end of this year I want us to be practicing the priority of prayer. I don't know a single one of us that wouldn't profess the priority of prayer but we need to pray more. You have not because you ask not, we all know to say that but I want to move from the profession, at least in my life, to the practice of the priority of prayer.

Right now the Bible is under attack and so we defend its perfections. I want us to defend its perfections and I'll be glad to preach on the perfections and why the Bible is inerrant, infallible, absolutely trustworthy and reliable. Let every man be a liar, God speaks the truth but I want to go beyond that this year, in this sense. I don't want us to not only know the perfections of God's Word but I want us to make sure of the right place of God's Word in our life at the center. Didn't you say Christ centered? Yes but how do you know Jesus? You don't know Him by gazing at your navel or by transcendental meditation or by sentiment or by intuition but it's through His Word. If you want to know the God of the Word then come to the Word of God. If you want to know the Word Incarnate then you have to come to the Word and Scripture it. That is how He tells you who He is and what He has done. You know there is a God by looking in the heavens but you don't know about Jesus and His redeeming love until you look in the Word. So God's Word in its right place and prayer in its right practice are the basics and I think that's the key.

My favorite golfer of all time at this time is Jack Nicklaus. When he wrote his autobiography he made an interesting comment and that was every year he took December and January off and in February before the season really began he went to his pro, Jack Grout. They had a ritual every year. He was the greatest golfer in the world and he goes to his coach and says this to him; "Jack (Grout), would you teach me how to play golf?" Now what is he saying? He starts with the grip then the alignment, then the takeaway and then maintaining the club head following the line of the path all the way through and then finishing high. Do the basics. He understood that.

Effectiveness and greatness is not in ingenuity and sophistication and that's why I am not interested in re-engineering the church. I'm not interested in reinventing the church. For instance, right now there is this notion that we have to church the un-churched. Stop and think about that. Is that what we really want to do, is church the un-churched? Do I want the un-churched in church? Absolutely but getting them in church

isn't going to get them into heaven. Church the un-churched is like saying if you get people to church then they are saved. There are a lot of people in church that aren't saved. In fact, George Whitfield said in the culture of the United States when he was here before the Great Awakening, "There may be more lost people who are professing Christ and who aren't possessors of Christ." There may be more people lost in the church than outside the church. So the point is not to church the un-churched. The point is to find people that don't know Jesus then lead them to Jesus and then they will love Christ's church because that's where they are fed, grow and from which they do their mission and ministry.

However in our re-engineering the church there is a side thing that is happening which has been documented and you can this by looking at our young people. In our effort to church the un-churched by reinventing the church we are actually un-churching the church as our young people leave. It is because of trivial, how-to, self help sermons that come every Sunday. There is also trivial worship and superficial ministries that take place. The young people look at that and say "There has got to be more substance out there because I can get this on reality TV." On my way here last week I heard a commercial on the radio that said "Would you like to make a quarter of a million dollars in the next six months from your own home? Just buy a computer, get my book on the four basic principles..." I'm not encouraging that but it was interesting that he used the words four basic principles. Play golf and get Ben Hogan's five principles to effective golf.

It is the fundamentals we need to get back to. What does God say His church is, her message, her ministry and her methods? That's our home and that will transcend all the ages. It doesn't matter whether you are in North America or South America. They will have to change languages but not the message or ministry of the church. So we need to come back to those fundamentals.

Secondly, we have to maintain focus. Our focus is Christ centered, Gospel driven, and Spirit filled which is our glorious focus that God has given to us. We have to maintain it and the reason is in every Christian's life, every Christian institution and in every Christian church there is an inevitable slide to sin, error, heresy and apostasy. Why do you think the Lord gives us the means of grace, tells us to come, do regularly the Lord's Supper and preaching? It is because He knows that left alone there is the old man within us and there is an inevitable slide. In every church and every Christian institution there is an inevitable slide that begins to take place unless intentionally you stay focused on Christ, the Gospel and filled with the Spirit of God. You have to intentionally stay focused there with utter reliance upon His power, with an ultimate commitment to Christ as the center of everything. That is so crucial.

How do you draw a circle? It is not with a boundary. You put the center first. The center is Christ, the Gospel, empowering God's people and with the Spirit of God is the utter reliance and the filling of God's people. That focus has to be maintained otherwise there will be an inevitable slide. Unless God intervenes with the preeminence of Christ, the power of the Gospel and a fresh movement of God, every Christian, every church and every Christian institution always go into liberalism, apostasy, error or something. So God we want to get the fundamentals in place. We want to make sure our focus is Christ, the Gospel, to the glory of God by the power of the Spirit of God.

Thirdly, we want to look to the future. I do not want somebody to ride by that circle, read that historical marker, go look at that monument and say forty years from now, "That used to be a great church." Here's a book that you can find out how great they were. I have no interest. I know the people in 1988 that built this building. I know the way they built it. They didn't build the building for 15 years. I know they had an interest in the coming generations. It wasn't just all about us. They wanted a building here for the coming generations and they wanted a ministry here that could reach the coming generations. I don't want somebody to ride by and say "Now that was a church." I have no interest in Briarwood being a museum. I want it to be a movement of the Kingdom of God that is expanding the Kingdom from Birmingham to around the world.

How does that happen? Some of you may be thinking I don't have much self confidence to come up with anything new. I have an absolute commitment not to come up with something new. I can't think of anything more relevant than the Gospel, more needed than Jesus and more powerful than the Holy Spirit. I know sin is constantly configuring and reconfiguring its brokenness but I know the one answer to sin is always Jesus Christ, the power of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. I am confident of that. If I wasn't I would turn in my robe.

So what kind of a movement does that look like? I will give this to you on the back of a note sheet in the next couple of weeks but if we stay focused on the fundamentals, we maintain our focus and if we're moving into the future what does that look like? Let me remind you of the mission of Briarwood and this is it; *For God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.* For God's glory Briarwood is committed to **equipping** Christians (key phrase). We believe in the Great Commission to make disciples. We worship God. We go, we baptize, we teach. We want to equip Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. Very simply that statement with every dollar which includes all tithes, gifts that you use, the ministries we put in place, every single thing has to be to accomplish that mission statement and if it doesn't then we cross it off. Our vertical in that statement is to worship God and our horizontal is to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. By the way, we don't want to reach the world and miss Birmingham and we don't want to just reach Birmingham without overflowing to the world. That's our mission.

It answers five questions. *Who are we?* We are Briarwood. *What do we do?* We worship God and reach people. *How do we do this?* We do this by equipping Christians. *Where do we do this?* We do this in Birmingham and around the world. *Why do we do this?* We do this for God's glory. This isn't Harry Reeder's church. This isn't Dr. Frank Barker's church. This isn't the PCA's church. We are thankful to be a part of the PCA and praise the Lord for our elders, deacons and everybody else. We all own the ministry. It's our home but it is God's church doing His mission for His glory that only He can do. Not to us O Lord but to Thine own Name, give glory and honor because of Your loving kindness and truth.

Secondly, if we do that mission, now notice that phrase that we are committed. That's our commitment. Every gift, every time, every treasure, every talent, all of it is our commitment. Now if we're able to accomplish the mission what does that look like? That is our vision. A mission is what you want to do. A vision is what you want to be by God's grace when you do it. So here's our vision. Our vision is that for the coming

generations Briarwood desires to be a Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled, equipping center where every member is a minister and every member is a missionary. So we equip Christians by having a church just like your home is raising up your children to go out, this home is raising up the children of God to go out for Jesus Christ.

We are equipping Christians to minister to God with worship which is our ministry of up-reach. To minister it to the world with evangelism is our ministry of out-reach. To minister to one another in love is our ministry of in-reach and to minister to ourselves by growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. We call this a W.E.L.L church. W – worship, E – evangelize, L – love, and L – learn. This is spiritually healthy Christians where it's not just the pastor is our minister with the pastoral staff. They are equipping us under the oversight of elders, shepherded by elders and served by deacons so that we are the ministers. You are the ministers. You minister to God with worship to the world with the Gospel and evangelism. You minister to one another with love and we minister to ourselves by growing deep because when the root goes deeper the fruit goes higher. So by God's grace that's what we want to do. Every member is not only a minister but every member is a missionary. We are all ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

How are we going to do this? It is nothing ingenious. Look at the book of Acts and how did they turn the world upside down? Our mission is our purpose. Our vision is our passion for coming generations which will be Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled with every member a minister and a missionary. Where does that lead us to? That leads us to the strategy for our ministry. Now what is our strategy? What did Paul do with the world turned upside down? Everywhere he went, for coming generations Briarwood will prayerfully seek to implement the Biblical strategy.

We are going to do what they did in the book of Acts. Every time they went to a city they did Gospel evangelism and discipleship. They lifted up Jesus with the power of the Spirit and they communicated the Gospel for evangelism and discipleship and then they planted a church. If there was already a church they strengthened the church with Gospel church planting and revitalization. Then they did Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice. People saw the love of Christ. They felt the mercy of Christ. They saw the justice of Christ as wrongs were made right and people were ministered to and then everywhere Paul went he produced leaders for the church and from the church into the community. So that Gospel leaders were being developed and deployed. That's simply our strategy.

Every ministry, every dollar, everything will be put toward evangelism, disciple making, church planting and church revitalization. This is fundamental. This is our focus. We are Christ centered for coming generations. It's not just a matter of I want my nice little happy hour church where I can get my nice little pick me up three steps to success on Sunday. No, this is where we are being equipped in such a way that if Jesus doesn't come back the next generation is set up for the glory of God. We are reproducing this Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled church with new leaders and new Christians. Our children our coming to Christ and new people are coming to Christ. Leaders are being developed for the church and from the church into the world.

By God's grace over the last fifty years hundreds of churches have been planted. Literally over thousands have said from this church they have gone into the pastorate and the mission field. Now we are going into the future for the coming generations. We are the coming generations that were done from 1960 so who are the coming generations that

will be here fifty years from now? We are to be Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled because we did Gospel evangelism, disciple making, Gospel church planting, Gospel church revitalization, Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice and Gospel leaders that are developed and deployed for the glory of God. Those are the fundamentals. We will be fleshing this out in the next couple of sermons over the next couple of months. That is the focus and that is the future. It is the coming generations.

Lastly, we are in a season. I want to talk with you about three words here. This is a season of responsibility. To whom much is given much is required. God has given much to us here and much is required of us. I have great news. The fifty years that we have just celebrated, who gave Briarwood those fifty years of imperfect but blessed existence for Jesus Christ? This is not a trick question. Jesus gave it to us. I have a story on that. There was this preacher who was trying to help the kids by doing a children's sermon every week and trying to come up with one. How many of you have ever taught Sunday school children? I don't care what you ask them but what are they going to answer? Who built the ark? Jesus because they know that answer is safe. It's kind of like a Presbyterian. Why do we do this? They answer "It's for God's glory." You just know that's the answer. This preacher worked so hard for the illustration and said "What is this long, gray, furry, long tailed, lives in the trees, gets nuts and eats them all winter?" Johnny answers "Well, preacher, I know the answer is Jesus but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me."

Jesus, by the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father, purchased Briarwood with His own blood. He led us with the Spirit of God. He gave us an imperfect but intentional commitment to the Gospel and disciple making and the same Jesus that gave it to us then can give it to us for the future. He is able to do it and there is our hope. I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So this is a season of responsibility. It's a season of stewardship but we're not trying to maintain a monument here. We are asking God to move us forward into the future. Out there are hundreds of churches, ministers, pastors, leaders, new believers and this is a season of responsibility.

Secondly, it's a season of anticipation. What will God do for the coming generations? Perhaps the next Frank Barker is sitting out there reading this today, or the next elders, the next deacons, the next Christian leaders in the business world, the next Christian statesman, the next missionaries, the next church planters, the next church revitalization pastors, the next leaders for the community and beyond the community. The Lord who has given this to us will enable us and so I'm not just trying to hold on. I want us to see where God will yet take us. Out there is this glorious future. Though sin descends and the seas roar God's Kingdom will spread.

I love the phrase the choir just sang which says "Hence forth in fields of conquest Thy tent shall be our home." Isn't that great? These guys that can write that stuff just absolutely overwhelm me. He doesn't say "Your tent shall be our home so we're going to take a nap until Jesus comes back." Your tents are our home, why? It is because day after day we are in the fields of conquest, taking one nation, one people group, one unbeliever, one family, one life after another after another with the conquering power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what we anticipate in this season of responsibility of what the Lord will yet and has yet and has promised to do which gives us the fact that we're in a season of opportunity.

I love the church of Jesus Christ. Why? It is because Jesus gave Himself for her. Ephesians 5:25 says “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*” I love the church because it is sacred. God says “This is My church. I have purchased it with the blood of My Son. It is holy.” I love the church because it’s the one institution I’m engaged in that’s headed to the new heavens and the new earth. So I’m not going to play like the church is an orphanage where I just stop by or a boarding house that I will come to periodically when I get into trouble. It’s safe for sinners and it receives people any time and every time but this is more than that. It is my home of God’s family in which I have responsibilities, chores, privileges, blessings, relationships and all of those things and from which we go out.

In fact, this isn’t a back door suggestion from the pulpit but I have often thought and would love these doors in that what would it look like if on the outside of these doors we had the ‘come’ verses written on them, like ‘come and worship’, ‘come and hear the Gospel’, ‘come, taste and see the Lord is good.’ Then on this side when you’re leaving we have the ‘go’ verses, like ‘go and preach the Gospel’, ‘go be like Me’. Come into the home, be refreshed, now go to the fields of conquest. Conquer that business, conquer that community. Don’t go there and say “My office has a bunch of unsaved people that are laughing and doing these things...” Yes they have unsaved people. You are in an unsaved world, a broken world, now take the Gospel there. We are to be salt and light. Let’s not go whine. Let’s go to the fields of conquest. Our Savior has won the victory.

So here is the anticipation of what we have before us because of the opportunities that stands out there that God has called us to and God will use us. His mission, His message, His ministry – God uses that and God will use that in your life and my life. Look out there at all those future missionaries, churches that are going to be planted and all of those things that are going to be done. Then look at all the stories of when the families get together.

I love my wife so much and I love it when she gets excited. Do you know when she gets excited? I wished I could tell you it is when I walk in the room but that’s not it. It is when she is balancing the check book and it balances. “Whoa!” That’s what I hear. I kind of have someone like Cindy here on staff at Briarwood and his name is Matt Moore. Have you ever heard a church administrator say “Hallelujah!”? Did that add up? What’s the bottom line? But Matt says “hallelujah” when things add up.

You have heard how we have prayed and God blessed us with that 2.2 million we needed, praise the Lord, right? I want to tell you the story behind the story. We were \$5,000 short on the last day of the 2.1 million. Matt the church administrator says “If it’s dated it can still be used.” So he goes to ask Rick, “Any envelopes dated December 31?” Rick says, “There are two.” So he opens up one and some wonderful dear Godly saint heard the call, had already given a tithe and an offering and he sent another \$40 in. It wasn’t quite \$5,000 and so Matt says “Praise the Lord.” He then opened the second envelope and I don’t know what happened but I heard through the walls of Briarwood was “HALLELUJAH!” Do you have those kinds of stories in your family of what God did at certain times and all that?

You don’t get those stories of what God is doing by not being a part of the family. Then you watch what God will do. I love ordination services. I love the vows of membership. I love the gathering of worship. I love her covenants. I love her family. I

love her people. Yeah, the church is kind of like sausage where it tastes good but you don't want to always watch it get made but I tell you it's great. It is still great.

I will finish with this. I was up at our denomination's college on the Advisory Council. I had the chance to talk with the vice president this year. His daddy had been giving a lot of money to Covenant College. Now he's not a Christian but he's probably thinking "I'm going to go up to that college to see where my daddy is giving my inheritance away." So he makes an unscheduled visit and pulls up to the office. He walked in and said "Hi, my name is so and so and I rode by and just wanted to stop and look at the college." The administrative assistant said "You're so and so? Your name is on one of our buildings." He said "That's not my name. It's my name but it's really from my daddy and I just wanted to come by because my daddy has been giving money here. I just wanted to see what was happening." "Okay, but did you know you're name is on one of our buildings?" "Yes I know my name is on that building."

So the vice president walked out and gave him the tour. They certainly went down to that building. By the time they got down to that building the vice president received a phone call. The vice president told the man, "I have to go handle an emergency and I'll be right back." He looked around and picked a junior Covenant College student and of all things a philosophy major which is what you take when you can't figure out life. The vice president said to this student, "Hey I have to go so would you take this visitor around and continue to show him the campus." The student said, "Yes sir I'll be glad to do that." He was a good Christian college student and he starts sharing the Gospel with him and the man starts challenging the student because he is not a believer. Then the student said "And what was your name sir?" He told him and the student said "Did you know your name is on one of these buildings?" He said, "Yes I know my name is on one of these buildings! My daddy gives money here. I just wanted to stop by and see what all was happening."

They began to talk further and finally this guy who had his own philosophy bent said "Thank you so much but I'm not a Christian but I do want to give you one piece of advice before I leave here." The student said, "Yes sir, what is it?" The man said respectfully and appropriately, "Before you go into life, before you leave college, find your passion and give yourself to it. Find your passion and give your life to it." The student without blinking said, "Sir, thank you so much but I want you to know I have and it's written on that campus that sign you passed. It is in all things that Christ would have preeminence. I want to thank your family for allowing that in my life. Sir, can I be even clearer? I didn't find my passion. My passion found me and it was His passion to save me and that's why He is my passion for the rest of my life."

That is Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled for the coming generations. That's God's church. That's our home. That's the season of opportunity for us right now. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we have been able to be together. Thank You for the privilege of serving Jesus as Lord and Savior in His church. We confess this is not our church. It's Yours but it is our home with You, our Father. Come and dwell with us by the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ would be exalted and that the Gospel would fill our hearts with joy and spill over from us to Birmingham to around the world. Father I pray

that each and every person reading this today, I know many know You so this has been an in-house pastoral time but there are some here that are wanting to know and may they hear. There is a forever family of God in His home, His church but you come there by trusting in Jesus alone. So friend may I invite you to Him even as we consecrate ourselves to Him. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.