

WHO ARE WE AND WHY ARE WE HERE?

Jesus gave a promise concerning His church. He declared, *"...Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18). Years ago in the earlier days of television, we would hear the announcer say, "We now pause for station identification." When we would hear the call letters, we knew what they stood for, such as: WGN in Chicago stands for "World's Greatest Newspaper" (Chicago Tribune), WTTW is "Windows to the World" (an early PBS station) and WLS "World's Largest Store" (Sears). In Houston we have a couple of Christian radio stations that often give station identification. KHCB means "Keeping Him Close By" and KAFR means "American Family Radio."

I would like to "pause for station identification" and talk about who we are as a church and why we are here. When you hear or see our name "Christchurch Baptist Fellowship," what comes to your mind? When we moved to our present location from the Prestonwood Forest Subdivision, it was important to change our name, lest people keep traveling to Prestonwood Forest to find us. Had we kept our name we would have been Prestonwood Baptist Church in Greenwood Forest on Champion Forest Drive. We would have had three subdivision names in our name and address. I asked the congregation to consider re-naming our church and encouraged them to stay away from naming it after another subdivision. In the size of our town, many of the traditional names had been taken, so we went further back in the history of the English church and found Christ Church was an ancient name for the church that actually takes us back before the formation of denominations. We wanted our name to speak of the authority of Christ, the preeminence of Christ as well as the unity of Christ and His church. We have merged the word "church" with "Christ." We designated the lower case "c" in "church" and placed it next to "Christ" in the same word, showing we are inextricably linked to Him. We are Christchurch, not Christ Church. So Christ is first and the church is subservient to Him. Then "Baptist" shows who we are doctrinally. Since the word church is already used, we call ourselves by the biblical word, "Fellowship." *"...We have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7b).

About fifteen years ago we were looking for a statement that says who we are and why we are here. One of the fine men in our church came up with these three two-word definitions of who we are and why we are here. Today, I would like to share with you, using these three thoughts: We are caught up in His Love and we are overwhelmed with His Grace and we are in fact, His Church.

1. HIS LOVE

Man is lost and completely undone without Christ. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6-8). God came looking for man; man did not go looking for God. *"We love him, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). And as many as receive this unconditional, undying love, they will be saved (John 1:12). God willing, Christchurch is, and forever shall be, a herald of His love.

I pray that we shall always be not only recipients of the love of Jesus, but we also will love Him supremely. May God help us to be lost in His love. One Puritan wrote, "Since he hath looked at me, my heart has not been mine own, He hath run to heaven with it." Approximately 565 years ago Nicholas of Cusa wrote these timeless words: "When all my endeavour is turned toward Thee because all Thy endeavour is turned toward me; when I look unto Thee alone with all my attention, nor ever turn aside the eyes of my mind, because Thou dost enfold me with Thy constant regard; when I direct my love toward Thee alone because Thou, who art Love's self hast turned Thee toward me alone. And what, Lord, is my life, save that embrace wherein Thy delightsome sweetness doth so lovingly enfold me?"

One step further, not only should we be receivers of this great love and reciprocators of this love back to our Lord and Savior, but we need to extend this greatest love to a world that does not know Christ as personal Savior. Jesus said, *"...as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you"* (John 20:21). We are sent into the world to share His love.

II. HIS GRACE

But by the grace of God I am what I am..." (1 Corinthians 15:10a). Grace is the modus operandi of our Christian ministry. Grace is the bridge to Christ. But

understand this, God constructs the bridge. The Bible says, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Ephesians 2:8,9). It is either grace or works; it cannot be both. Paul put it like this, *"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work"* (Romans 11:6).

The definition I heard all my life is that the grace of God is defined in three words, "God's unmerited favor." An easy way to remember is to make an acrostic of the word, "Grace": God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Dr. J. I. Packer said, "What is *grace*? In the New Testament grace means God's love in action towards men who merited the opposite of love. Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves. Grace means God sending His only Son to descend into hell on the cross so that we guilty ones might be reconciled to God and received into heaven. *'He (God) hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him'* (II Corinthians 5:21)."

A. W. Tozer said, "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the undeserving." Berkhof said that grace is "the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit."

Grace is even more than unmerited favor; it is loving-kindness not only on strangers, but also on enemies. *"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled"* (Colossians 1:21).

Spurgeon said something to this effect in his book, *All of Grace*: "Too many see grace as the barge of God's favor that is carried to us by the river of our faith." He said, "Ah grace is the river that brings the faith to us!" This is the river in which we navigate. The same grace that saved us is the same grace that enables us to serve Christ.

III. HIS CHURCH

Whenever we mention the church in which we serve, we eventually move to the shortest wording to describe it, such as, we moved from saying Prestonwood Baptist Church to Prestonwood Baptist and finally to just Prestonwood. For instance, "Here at Prestonwood we strive to please Jesus." This is acceptable and practiced. The inner workings of Second Baptist of

Houston almost always refer to themselves as "Second." I wanted a name that would never leave out Jesus Christ. He will be our highest aim and lowest common denominator. No matter how few words you use, you cannot describe this church without mentioning the Head of the church, "Christ!" "Here at Christchurch we strive to please Jesus." This is His Church, so we have named it thusly. No organization in the earth has the Divine protection against the very gates of Hell. When we invite people to this church, it is not our church but "His" church. His church is the place of designated glory, *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen"* (Ephesians 3:21).

Conclusion:

Who are we? *"...We are His people, and the sheep of his pasture"* (Psalm 100:3b). We are HIS CHURCH, operating in HIS LOVE by HIS GRACE. Why are we here? We are here to bring glory in HIS CHURCH operating in HIS LOVE by HIS GRACE.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.