

November 27, 2005 by Steve Brandon



Do You Know The Church?

Ephesians 3:8-11

- 1. The Church is God's Grace! (Eph. 3:8)**
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- 3. The Church is God's Wisdom! (Eph. 3:10)**
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This past Thursday was Thanksgiving. On Thanksgiving day, I received the local newspaper and began to look through the advertisements. As I looked at the advertisement from Best Buy, I saw many good deals on electronic equipment. My attention was drawn to a notebook computer that they were selling for \$379! This was a savings of \$350! This computer was much more powerful than the one that I am currently using. I was very interested in purchasing one. The advertisement said that it would go on sale at 5am! I was very encouraged by the small print, which said, "minimum 10 per store!" In my mind, I thought, "If I show up a few minutes before 5am, so that I am sure to be at the store when it opens, surely I can be one of the first 10 customers to nab one of these computers from the shelves."

I went to bed Thursday night and set my alarm clock for 4:30am, so that I might be able to get up and "beat the rush" by being at Best Buy when the doors opened. When I drove up to the store at 4:50am, I simply couldn't believe what I saw! There was an unbelievable crowd around the entrance to the building! From the street, some 100 yards away, I could tell by the fact that the parking lot was packed, that I hadn't "beat the rush." I thought about heading straight home, back into my warm bed. But, decided to continue on to the store. So, I found a parking spot in the far extremes of the parking lot and walked to the door. I was greeted by a mob of people. The line extended clear around the building. When I say that "a line," don't be deceived into thinking that this line was a nice single-file line. It was probably 8-10 people deep!

I stood near the entrance to the store, thinking that I might get in when the doors opened. To the credit of those in the store, they made it clear that they would let those who were standing in line enter the store first. And so, I watched as hundreds of people entered into the store. I waited for the end of the line to come so that I might enter the store. After about five minutes of people entering the store, they stopped the line outside. Apparently, the store was too full to continue with the line. And so, I figured, perhaps I just might stand in line and enter in my turn. I walked to the edge of the building to see where the line ended (for it still wrapped around the building). To my astonishment, after letting hundreds of people in the store, the line still continued around the store.

It was unbelievable. I had never seen anything like it. I was amazed at the number of people who had come to Best Buy at 5am! I quickly did the math and figured that the 10 notebook computers were probably gone. So, it probably wasn't necessary for me even to enter into the store. So, I went home. And then, I thought about the amount of time that I would need to stand in line to purchase an item. I couldn't even imagine how long that line would be!

Here's the question for you: Why did this great mob of people come to Best Buy so early in the morning? Because they knew what was taking place in that store. They had received the advertisement in Thursday's paper, like I had, and had come to obtain some knowledge about the incredible sales that were taking place in the store at 5am on Friday morning. Why did this great crowd of people sacrifice sleep? Why did this great crowd of people willingly stand outside in the cold? (It was 10 degrees at 5 o'clock in the morning!) Why was this great crowd of people willing to wait in long lines to purchase their sale items? Because they knew the store! Because they knew what was in the store!

The title of my message this morning is in the form of a question: "Do You Know The Church?" I believe that if people only knew the church, I believe that there is absolutely nothing that would ever be able to keep them away from coming, being involved, serving, and dying for the church of Jesus Christ! What we have in this church is worth far more than a few computers or digital cameras. Would the world know this, it would crowd around the doors of the church every Sunday morning to get in to hear of the "unfathomable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).

My message last week was entitled, "Do You Love The Church?" I sought to address your affections. Does the church find any sort of affection in your heart? Do you long for the church to do well? Do you make sacrifices for the church? I know that many of you could answer many of these questions in the affirmative. I know that because I have seen you sacrifice greatly for the church of Jesus Christ. I have seen you do so with great enthusiasm and great joy and great passion. Your actions have demonstrated your love for the church. But, for some others of you, I would guess that you may have been confronted by my message last week and said you yourself, "To be honest with you Steve, I don't have a love for the church." Joshua Harris speaks to this situation very well. He wrote, ...

Why is [it] so difficult for so many of us [to love the church]? I mean, what comes to mind when *you* think of the Church?

Let's face it. Most of us probably don't picture a beautiful bride. Our view of the Church is distorted by negative experiences or our own wrong perceptions. We picture a particular building, a bickering denomination, a fraudulent televangelist, or some embarrassing scandal that hits the news. The Church isn't something we're particularly proud of or drawn to in our

hearts.

But maybe that would change if we looked at the Church from heaven's perspective. ^[1]

This is what I want to do this morning. I want to look at the church from heaven's perspective. "Do You Know The Church?" We will look at four verses from Ephesians 3. From each verse, we will have one point, which will help to give us God's perspective on the church. Here are the verses we will consider.

Ephesians 3:8-11

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. The Church is God's Grace! (Eph. 3:8)

In verse 8, Paul describes his ministry. He describes it as God-given and grace-driven. "To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ" (verse 8). These words force us to recall in our minds what happened to Paul, as described in Acts, chapter 9. He was on the road to Damascus, with papers in hand, to persecute the Christians who lived in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). But, as he was approaching Damascus, "a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3), which blinded him (Acts 9:8). He had a divine encounter with Jesus Christ. When Paul would later give his testimony to Agrippa, Paul told of how Jesus said to him, "I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness. ... [I am sending you to the Gentiles], to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:16-18).

This is what is going on in Ephesians 3:8. Paul calls himself the "least of all the saints" because he "persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9). Before Paul came to know the grace of God that was given through faith in Christ, he was "a blasphemer" against Jesus Christ, and a "violent aggressor" against those who would follow Jesus (1 Tim. 1:13). And yet, God showed him mercy (1 Tim. 1:16) to demonstration in Paul that great truth that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). When God saves people, he doesn't save deserving people. He saves wicked, undeserving people, who deserve the wrath of God! But, Paul was given grace to preach grace.

In Ephesians 3:8, Paul described his message as "the unfathomable riches of Christ" which has come to the Gentiles. On numerous occasions, Paul spoke of his mission from God to go to the Gentiles. Consider the following verses:

"He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the **Gentiles** and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

"We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the **Gentiles**" (Romans 1:5).

"I am an apostle of Gentiles" (Romans 11:13).

"The grace was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the **Gentiles**" (Romans 15:16).

"He was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the **Gentiles**" (Galatians 1:16).

"I had been entrusted with the gospel to the **uncircumcised**, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. He who effectually worked for Peter in His apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the **Gentiles**" (Galatians 2:7-8).

"I was appointed a preacher and an apostle ... as a teacher of the **Gentiles** in faith and truth" (1 Timothy 2:7).

It is so easy for us to lose the magnitude of such a statement that Paul made concerning his mission to the Gentiles. To understand these statements above, you need to first understand God's purpose for the Jews. The Jewish nation was formed by God, when he promised abundant blessing upon the descendants of Abraham. The first three verses in Genesis 12 described these incredible blessings: God would make the name of Abraham great. God would make a great nation from Abraham. God would bless this nation abundantly. God's blessing would so pour out upon Israel, that all of the families of the earth would be blessed as a result.

Then entire Old Testament is a working out of this promise. Now, the entire blessing didn't come right away, especially as the descendants from Abraham proved to be disobedient and rebellious. But, as you read through the Old Testament, God continues to promise this great blessing upon Israel, sinners though they be. On several occasions, God had promised to give new hearts and new desires to the people of Israel, so that they would dwell in peace with God (Jer. 33; Ezek. 36). Listen to this promise of Ezekiel 37:27-28, "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."

As you read further, you read of the anointed one from the Lord (Ps. 2:2), who would come and establish all of these things for Israel. You get this idea that the Lord would send His One great redeemer, who would finally free the people of Israel and give them the land of Israel and grant to them incredible blessing! This One was called, "the Messiah," or "the Christ." In every generation, the Jewish people were looking and anticipating the day when this Messiah would come. This was their hope! The hope was that God would use this Messiah to so exalt the people of Israel that all the nations would look upon Israel and be in awe and wonder at their great God, who would bless them so much.

Finally, the Messiah arrived. It was Jesus of Nazareth. He came, anointed by the Spirit of God to proclaim release to the captives. He came to recover the sight of the blind. He came to set free those who are downtrodden (Luke 4:18). Sadly, the Jews rejected their Messiah, crucifying Him instead of receiving Him by faith. But, it was through their rejection, that the Lord extended the scope of His promises to encompass all the nations. In other words, "the riches of the Messiah," have come to the Gentiles. The only explanation for such a thing is "God's grace." And this is my point: the Church is God's Grace! (Eph. 3:8). God had never promised to extend the blessings of the Messiah

to the Gentiles. Certainly, there were places in the Old Testament where you saw the Lord's blessing upon the nations. But, the sense that you get from them is that it would be a spillage of God's abundant blessings to Israel, and not the full weight of the blessing!

For instance, suppose that I took a cup and filled it to the rim with water. When the Old Testament spoke of the blessings of the Messiah that would come to the Gentiles was similar to seeking to take a drink from the spillage of the cup. So, just imagine taking a drink of water, by merely sloshing the water in a full cup from side to side and seeking to drink the water that spills out. This is what the Old Testament taught. This is what God promised to the Gentiles: a blessing that was overflow of the blessing to the Jews.

But, what God did in Christ was far more abundant. Now, in Christ, he gives us the cup and says, "Drink full of my grace and blessing!" This is sheer grace! To be sure, it was God's grace that extended salvation to the Jews. It was God's grace to choose Abraham in the first place. It was God's grace to promise these great blessings to Abraham. It was God's grace to bless Abraham to make his offspring into a great nation. It was God's grace that delivered this nation from the hand of Pharaoh. It was God's grace that brought them into the land. It was God's grace to continue to be faithful to sinful Israel. But, after His promise to bless them, the grace that He continued to give was to be expected, because "He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). After God gave His promise, the people of God could plead (with an assurance of success in their pleas) for God to come and help them. But, this is not the church. In the church, God has demonstrated grace to people to whom He never promised anything! The simple existence of any church is a testimony of God's grace.

Perhaps this illustration might help: From time to time, my children will ask something of me, say, "Can we order pizza tonight." The mere fact that they get pizza delivered to our home at all is an act of grace. They don't deserve to have pizza ordered. They don't earn the right to have pizza ordered. But, once they have the promise from me, they have leverage to expect this grace. Should the situation turn with some unexpected event taking place that would prohibit ordering pizza, they begin to play the part of lawyers! "Dad! What do you mean we can't order pizza tonight? You promised! You promised!" It's still grace. But, with a promise, it comes as expected. So also are the blessings of God. Since He promised, He will fulfill them.

But, imagine this situation. In our home, we don't say anything about what we are having for dinner. When the children ask, we say, "Oh, we are thinking about having Brussels sprouts and lima bean soup" (or something else that isn't particularly liked in our house). And then, ... "Ding-dong!" ... a pizza guy shows up at the door, completely unexpected by the children! It's pizza-time tonight! This is ultimate grace for our children! What sort of perspective do the children have? They are blown away with the kindness. They are thankful to mom and dad! They are extremely happy that they have received such a blessing! This is the blessing of Christ that has come to the Gentiles.

It's one thing to have a promise from God that the Messiah will come and deliver you from your bondage. But, it's an entirely different thing to receive the blessings of the promised Messiah, when you never received any promises that this would take place. A great illustration of the reality of this comes in Acts 13 when the gospel first came to a city called Psidian Antioch. On the Sabbath, Paul came in the synagogue and preached to the church of Christ. They wanted to hear more and encouraged Paul to come back again on the next Sabbath (Acts 13:42). Due to the great crowds, the Jews became jealous and rejected Paul's teaching. So, Paul turned to the Gentiles and told them that the promises of Christ had come to them. "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord!" (Acts 13:48). It was spontaneous rejoicing! They knew that God's grace had come to them!

The simple existence of the church is a testimony to God's grace. This is what Paul called, "the unfathomable riches of Christ!" (in verse 8). Such unfathomable riches that have been extended to Gentiles is a display of the incredible, manifold wisdom of God! (verse 10).

2. The Church is God's Surprise! (Eph. 3:9)

This comes in verse 9, which reads, "and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things."

Three times in this chapter, Paul mentions this "mystery." The first comes in verse 3, when Paul speaks about how the mystery was made known to him in a revelation (verse 3). The second comes in verse 4, when he speaks about having an insight into "the mystery in Christ." (verse 4). In verse 5, Paul explains how God didn't make known this "mystery" in past ages, but has only revealed it during his own generation. Finally, in verse 6, Paul tells us what this "mystery" is. It is "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (verse 6).

God knew that the church was going to come into existence. He knew that the Messiah would come into the world and be rejected. It says in Acts 4:28 that His death was "predestined" to take place. God knew that He would then form the church as a place where men from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" would come to worship Him (Rev. 5:9). In fact, in verse 11, we read that the church "was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But, the catch is simply this. God never told anybody about the church. The church was a surprise! Or, to use Paul's word, it was a mystery. Paul means that it was a surprise! For ages, God kept it a secret from the entire world. But, now, He has revealed it to us! And this makes God excited and enthused about the church.

In my house, we have three girls: An eleven year old, a six year old, and a two year old. My oldest two daughters fully understand Christmas. They fully understand that it is a time of giving gifts in our home. Well, recently, they determined that they would combine some of their money and purchase a doll for their youngest sister, Stephanie. This past Tuesday, they went with mom to Walmart to purchase a baby doll for Stephanie. What you need to know about Stephanie is that she simply loves "babies" of all types. For instance, yesterday, our family was putting up a Christmas tree with an angel on the top. Stephanie kept pointing to it and saying, "Baby! Baby! Baby!" Several other angelic figurines were placed on the Christmas tree. She insisted on carrying them around, saying "Baby! Baby! Baby!" Thus, you know why my older two daughters wanted to purchase a baby doll for her.

This isn't any baby doll. This is a special baby doll. It is called "Baby Annabell." On the back of the package, it reads, ...

Baby Annabell is just like a real baby. She babbles, giggles, and gurgles with joy. Give Baby Annabell a pacifier, and she joyfully sucks on it. She even drinks real water out of a bottle. See her mouth move as she drinks! When Baby Annabell has had enough, she burps and gets drowsy. Then, she yawns and falls asleep. Loud noises will awaken Baby Annabell. Sometimes she cries and tears roll down her face, just like a real baby. Sing her a song, and she will soon be calmed and smiling with satisfaction.

On the front of the package, there are a series of pictures of Annabell with a little girl, who is feeding her, burping her, and letting her sleep in her arms. My daughters are extremely excited to give this present to their little sister. But they need to wait a month, until Christmas Day arrives. Right now, it is being kept a secret. But, when Christmas Day arrives, they will be absolutely delighted to give it to their little sister. They will long for the look of joy and amazement that this little baby doll will put on the face of their little sister.

This is the church of Jesus Christ. For years, God has kept the church a secret. But, now, in our day, God has revealed His secret to us! His great desire is to see us be excited about the church as well. If God is enthused about the church, are you enthused as well?

At this point, you might ask yourself, "But why did God keep the church a secret for so long?" This question leads us nicely into our next point. Verse 10 begins with the three words, "in order that." These are words of purpose. Verse 10 explains verse 9. Verse 10 explains why it is that God keep the church a secret, only revealing it in later days.

3. The Church is God's Wisdom! (Eph. 3:10)

Look at verse 10, "In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." The church displays the wisdom of God! In delaying to extend His grace to the world, the effect has been to magnify the incredible grace of God, as it was extended to a people who had received no promises.

Notice the ones who are beholding this incredible wisdom of God. It is the angelic realm. Look again at verse 10: "In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." The rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places are the angels, who are looking down at what God is doing in the church are learning of the "manifold wisdom of God." (verse 10).

I want for you to think a bit about my message this morning. It has been filled with object lessons. From time to time, I like to do this, because I believe that it helps for you to understand the Bible better. Intentionally, this morning, I have used several of them. I pulled before you an advertisement from Thursday's paper regarding the sale at Best Buy. I used a cup filled with water, which I sloshed around, attempting to take a drink of water from the spillage. I also used a doll that my children purchased for their youngest daughter.

Did you realize that God uses object lessons as well? The church is God's object lesson to teach the angels of His own wisdom. These rulers and authorities in the heavenly places are being taught great things about God when they observe the church. These angels watch what takes place upon the earth and see that God's wisdom isn't understood by the wisest of human beings. The Scripture says that "the world through its wisdom did not come to know God" (1 Cor. 1:21). The wisdom of the word crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). But God's wisdom is a message of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:22), which is believed by the weak and lowly of this world (1 Cor. 1:26-31). Through believing the gospel, they are empowered by God to do His will (1 Cor. 1:18).

They are no longer held under the power of sin. No longer do they seek their selfish ways. But rather, they gather together in the church (which is what verse 10 speaks about). They function together to build up the church in love (Eph. 4:16). And the angels watch these things and give great glory to God.

Lest you think that these angels aren't interested in these things, think again. Peter tells us that the angels "long to look" into these things. They are on the edge of their seats, seeking to understand the workings of God's grace in our lives! As these angels watch us, they learn the ways of God's wonder-working grace in our lives!

Joshua Harris says it well, ...

The Bible teaches in Ephesians 3:9-11 that the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places "look down at God's work through the Church with amazement and wonder. They're in awe. They're glued to the action unfolding through the Church. Why? Because the "manifold wisdom" of God is being displayed, and the spiritual mystery hidden for ages past is being revealed through the Church.

What is this wisdom? It's the powerful effects of the gospel being worked out in real lives and real relationships. Ephesians tells us that through the gospel sinners are not only being reconciled to God; they're also being reconciled to each other in the church.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household (Ephesians 2:19).

The heavenly beings look down at the Church, and they see an amazing family. The power of the gospel is not only changing individuals, but is also creating a whole new kind of humanity. In the midst of a strife-torn world—a world divided by gender, by race, by class, and by political ideology—the Church is a city set on a hill where people who once hated God

and each other become God's children and members of one family. —

Please understand that the church is far bigger than it first appears. It may appear to you to be a mere earthly reality. Oh, you may understand a slight bit of its spiritual dimension when you consider that our great object of worship is the risen Lamb, who is seated in the heavens. But, has it ever occurred to you that our assembly with one another on Sundays teaches the angels about God? And then, as the church functions as a body throughout the week, the angels are no less interested as they see the effect that believing a message about a crucified Savior will have upon a group of individuals? Do you know the church?

4. The Church is God's Plan! (Eph. 3:11)

This comes in verse 11, "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The church isn't some other man-made institution, like the Rotary or the Kiwanas club, or any other social-service oriented organization. The church isn't the opium of the people, to help them endure the difficulties of life. The church isn't some successful social experiment which some people discovered: as if those who attend church help society. The church wasn't even thought up by Christians, who thought of some way in which they might be helped along in their heavenly journey. Christians didn't get together one day and reason with each other, "Hey, you believe in Jesus. I believe in Jesus. Wouldn't it be great, if we gathered together all of the Christians in a particular city and worship God every week! Wouldn't it be an encouraging thing for all of us? Wouldn't it give God great glory? Couldn't we use this gathering of people to really get some things done for the Lord? Gathering like this, we would have strength in numbers to accomplish some great things!" The church is nothing like this.

The church didn't come from the mind of man. The church originated in the mind of God. As we learned earlier, He kept it a secret for years. But, when the time was right, He sent forth His Son to be the cornerstone of the church (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:20). He appointed the apostles to become the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). He gave other leaders for the building of the church (Eph. 4:11). And today, we all have a responsibility to play our part in this institution called the church (Eph. 4:16).

I believe that it was no small accident for Jesus to mention the church, long before any of the early disciples had any idea of what was going to take place. Long before Jesus actually went to the cross to die for our sins, He said, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). I believe that Jesus said this so early on so as to show that this church was His plan from eternity past! God's plan from the foundation of the world was to give a bride to His Son. Before the world was created, we who believe in Christ, were chosen in Christ, to be a part of this church that would someday be joined to Jesus Christ in holy matrimony (Rev. 19). This bride is called, "The church."

And this church that God is building is indestructible. Nothing can stop it. Nothing can destroy it. "The gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). To be sure, there will be those who will attempt to resist it and to stop its progress. But, please be sure, that nothing will overpower it! Nothing can stand in its way. When the odds makers in Las Vegas decide the odds of victory, they are making their own educated guess as to the outcomes of the games. They know nothing of a certain-win. But, the church is different. The church will win! It is in God's plan from eternity! It will not be thwarted.

This is the church of Jesus Christ! "Do You Know The Church?" How about Rock Valley Bible Church? Do you know Rock Valley Bible Church?

1. Do you know of our history?

We began in 1998 as a simple Bible study, meeting in the basement of a house. At the time, I was working at the local hospital in DeKalb. In 2000, we began renting a little church building and began conducting Sunday evening services. In 2001, I quit my job in DeKalb and moved to Rockford to establish the church here in Rockford. Initially, Kishwaukee Bible Church in DeKalb was paying much of my salary. By 2003, we were self-supporting financially. By the end of 2003, Lance Milton was installed as our first deacon. This past summer, Gordy Bell was installed as our second elder, which completed the process of becoming an independent church.

We are looking to raise up other leaders. I am currently meeting every other week with two men in this congregation, training them to join Lance as deacons. You will hear more about that in the weeks and months to come. We are a young church, only recently gaining our independence and in need of more leaders.

Do you know of our priorities?

First and foremost, we are a church of worship. We want to exalt Jesus Christ, the Lamb upon the throne! It's not only on Sunday mornings that this takes place. Throughout the week, our lives are to be lived in worship of Him!

Our focus is upon the word of God. God has revealed His will to us in His word. Whether we gather together as an entire congregation or whether we are all alone, our focus is upon the Scripture. The majority of our Sunday morning is spent in proclaiming the truth found in the word of God, because we want to know God, and because we want to believe what God has revealed about Himself. We want to know the word of God because we want to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

The church will often gather in smaller groups, which we call "Flocks." A central focus of these times is the study of the Scripture to train us to know and to obey it. We encourage everyone to be involved in a Flock! We strongly encourage every family at Rock Valley Bible Church to gather for a time of worship in your home, where Bible reading and prayer would be a central part. Individually, we want each of you to be regular readers of the Bible.

And yet, with all of that activity, we don't want to become a holy huddle. We want to make an impact in this world for Christ. The only way to do this is to go out and be talking with other people about Jesus. We encourage you to take your eyes off of yourself and focus it upon those who don't know Christ and who desperately need to hear the gospel! Within your sphere of influence, model the Christian life and tell others of the hope that you have found in Christ. Pray for opportunities.

Do you know of our doctrine?

We are Trinitarian, believing in the Tri-unity of God. We believe in God, the Father. We believe in God, the Son. We believe in God, the Spirit.

We believe that God is sovereign over all things. God is sovereign over the universe. God is sovereign over the wind and the rain. God is sovereign over the land and the sea. God is sovereign over our wills. God is sovereign over our salvation. Our salvation does not depend upon "the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Romans 9:16).

We believe in the cries of the reformation: Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Soli Deo Gloria. It is Scripture alone that God has inspired. Our salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Our lives are to be lived only to the glory of God!

We believe in the centrality of the local church. God works in and through the local church. Elders and deacons are the two offices that God has given to lead the church. God has given two ordinances to the church to practice: Baptism and the Lord's supper. We believe that those who believe in Christ should be baptized in obedience to Christ's command. We believe that the Lord's supper is an aid to help us to continually remember the death of our Lord.

Do you know of our methods?

On Sunday morning, we aim our worship services at the most mature people in the church. Many churches are doing just the opposite: aiming their Sunday morning services at the weak. As a result, they are driving the strong away, who are being neglected in their spiritual growth. We are doing just the opposite. One reason for this is quite simple. We want the mature people of the church to feel edified and challenged and encouraged. Because, they are the ones who are equipped to do much of the ministry, because they understand the Scriptures and it's emphasis upon serving others.

Now, it's not that we neglect the less mature. As I preach this message this morning, I'm preaching to some six year olds. I'm preaching to five year olds and four year olds and three year olds (all of whom happen to be with us this morning). I'm telling you that they are gleaned from this message as well.

But, I'm aiming high, because it's the mature that we desperately need to stay around and minister to others. This is because we are not a program-driven, administratively heavy church, which seeks merely to get you involved in lots of activities. We are driven by relationships.

Rather than creating busy work for you to be involved with, we want to let you loose to humbly love and serve others. We want for you to love those in our church naturally through your relationships with them. We want for you to greet those who come into our midst. We want for you to go out into your neighborhoods and work places and tell others of Christ.

Certainly, there is much more to say about Rock Valley Bible Church. But, all of that should give you a flavor of what we are trying to accomplish here at this church.

In closing, I want to ask you one more question: Do you know the people of Rock Valley Bible Church? Take all that I have said about our history, our priorities, our doctrine, and our methods and funnel it down to this: Do you know the people of Rock Valley Bible Church? Our church will stand or fall based upon the strength of our relationships. We provide several opportunities for us as a church to form and strengthen relationships. Each of them are key to the proper functioning of our church.

1. Fellowship after the Sunday morning worship service. Let's face it, the service itself doesn't provide too many opportunities to get to know people. Our worship service is directed toward God. But, out time of fellowship afterwards is an intentional effort on our part to give you opportunities to strengthen relationships with others in the church. But, please realize that it doesn't just happen. We have intentionally provided you with some things to eat, encouraging you to stay and talk with other people. I'm encouraged that this time often lasts for well over an hour after this service. The fellowship time is key in knowing the people of Rock Valley Bible Church. So, please, know that if your habit on Sunday morning is to leave right away, you are losing opportunities to know the people of Rock Valley Bible Church.

2. Corporate prayer each Sunday morning. We gather together for a time of prayer at 8:45. You all are invited. If you want to know the people of Rock Valley Bible Church, this is an excellent opportunity. It gives us a time to open up and share our sorrows and hurts together. It gives us a time to share our joys together. It gives us an opportunity to pray for and with one another. When relationships are spiritual relationships, the bond of love grows much deeper. Do you really want to know the people of Rock Valley Bible Church? Then come to the prayer meeting and pray with us. There is something about hearing of a sister's struggle with cancer and hearing a parent's perspective on their daughter's leukemia and hearing a family's joy over the opportunities they had to share the gospel over this holiday. There is something about hearing about these things from others and then responding by praying about them that is strengthening in your knowledge of those at Rock Valley Bible Church.

3. Flocks. This is the name that we have given to the home Bible studies that we have provided for you to attend. They meet on various times and in various locations, usually every other week. If you want to know the people of Rock Valley

Bible Church, then come to one of our Flocks. Information about the times and locations are given in the bulletin. At those times, our groups are even smaller. During the times they meet, our purpose is several. First of all, it's for training, as the Scripture is central during these times. But, it also provides a further opportunity to know others of the church. As a pastor, these groups have helped me immensely to have more one-on-one time with the people of the church as we have grown bigger. A second purpose of the Flocks is to provide opportunities for others to get to know one another and invest your lives with one another. You can know people standing around in your church clothes, talking in a cafeteria. But, you can really know people when you lounge together on a couch in someone's home. A further purpose of these groups is to provide a context in which those at the church can serve one another. When facing a crisis, those attending Flocks will naturally be the primary ones to help others through the crisis.

Do you know the church? Do you know Rock Valley Bible Church?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 27, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, pp. 31-32.

[2] Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, pp. 32-33.