

How Can I Have Hope For The Future?

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January 13-14, 2001

"I Believe in the Church" Series

Ephesians 1:7-14

I was watching television the other day on my extremely static-y set and I saw this commercial from a woman advertising a psychic hotline. She was a very, very attractive woman and she said that only by calling her hotline would you be guaranteed of reaching an individual who is certified by the American Society of Professional Psychics. A true certified professional psychic, who is a member of the American Society of Professional Psychics – obviously a very well-respected national group.

As I watched her commercial, I wondered what kind of test an individual needs to pass in order to be certified by the American Society of Professional Psychics. What would the questions be to certify a psychic? Here are some of the ones I think may probably appear on the test:

1. Guess what day tomorrow will be. A: Uhhh, Sunday?
2. Will the sun come up in the morning? A: Uhhh, no?
3. Will the sun set tonight? A: Mmmmm, yes?

okay, you have two out of three questions right. With your obvious predictive powers, you are now certified to give psychic readings to anyone who calls into our hotline.

Predictions about the future are often wildly off the mark not only by the certified professionals at the American Society of Professional Psychics, but listen to some of these predictions by very reputable magazines and individuals that were supposed to take place by the year 2000.

1. Back in 1967 the NY Times predicted that a trip to Europe from the US would take only a half an hour by rocket and people would go about their normal everyday lives getting from place to place on floating air platforms.
2. Popular Mechanics back in 1950 predicted that by the year 2000 plastic dishes would replace all other kinds. But wait...they said this special plastic would melt in hot water, so no more washing dishes. Just put the dirty dishes in the sink, add hot water, and slush down the drain. Wouldn't that be cool? That's what Marlene and I do each evening. We just flush our dishes down the drain.
3. The modern home of the year 2000 would also be waterproof inside and out so that the lucky housewife of the year 2000 could do all her cleaning with a hose. Again, that's what we do. A couple of times a week, we just hose the house down. That prediction was in Popular Mechanics.

It doesn't take very much searching to find predictions of the mass use of solar cars, the discovery of life on other planets.

But you know, very serious minded people, business people, government officials – all want to peer into the future. Billions of dollars are spent on consultants who advise business and government in attempting to spot trends, to see opportunities – trend spotting in consumption, trend spotting in taste and style, so that businesses can reposition products and offer services where there is currently a gap in the market. That's a major, major part of our economy – trend spotting. This is generally rooted in a significant amount of research, a thoughtful analysis of the data, and then some extrapolation.

There are lots of trends that don't involve wild guesses about the future. For example, there is an increasing trend of fear in the US regarding the consumption of food and water. The headlines are screaming about E. coli and Mad-Cow Disease. The media is filled with reports about polluted ground water and towns where there have been concentrations of leukemia. Bottled water sales have tripled in the last ten years. The greatest fear in Sci-Fi movies is no longer some alien invading the planet, but viruses or some weird super-resistant bacteria that spreads. 73% of Americans now regularly use anti-bacterial soap as if we were getting ready for surgery every time we sit down to watch TV. There is a feeling that you can't be clean enough.

There is a trend of people wanting to find new ways to simplify their lives. A trend of moving out of the city, leaving the pressure cooker of various jobs. Literally millions of people have left their professions in the last decade – jobs and professions that they have sometimes spent years preparing for in school. Literally millions have left feeling the same thing – that they wanted to recapture their lives. They wanted to get out of the rat race.

There is a trend toward wanting more healthful living. Herbal additives are selling like crazy. GNC sales are booming. There is a surge in the sale of green tea.

There's even alternative pet care that is growing. People are taking their pets to alternative healers and not to traditional veterinarians, just as they are seeking alternative health therapies for themselves.

There is a trend in America towards an increased spirituality. The old hard line secular humanism that you saw taught on college campuses for decades in the 20th century that denied the existence of the supernatural or the spiritual, the old hard line secular humanism, is dead or dying everywhere. You can't open up any magazine or look over the titles of the best selling books or movies without seeing an increased appetite for spirituality and an increased openness to mystical experiences. There is a trend toward the spiritual.

Now the truth is that even as we have all kinds of consultants watching trend lines, no one knows the future—not Money Magazine, not all the consultants put together, not Alan Greenspan or the whole Federal Reserve Board, not all the prognosticators. Think about the fact that just a year ago millions of Americans were completely bunkered down on New Year's Eve. People were afraid to travel because they thought planes would drop out of the sky as a result of Y2K. A friend of mine stockpiled 200 gallons of water anticipating the shutting off of the community water supply. The truth is no one knows what the immediate future holds.

A lot of people are afraid. The immediate future may bring a downturn in the economy. There is certainly signs of weakening. There may be a downturn in the economy. There may be a long recession. No one knows what the immediate future holds. There might be a significant war in a completely unpredictable place in the next 5 years. Who would ever have thought that America would go to war in Vietnam, of all places, before it happened? Or in Kuwait? We don't know the immediate future.

Some terrorist group might start a bombing campaign on American soil. There are terrorist groups right now being trained by foreign governments in computer sabotage so that the computers of our banking system, our transportation system, our electrical power grids could be sabotaged.

Here's my message today – very simple: I don't know the immediate future and neither do you. And neither does any expert in the world, no matter what they say. No one knows the immediate future. But we can know the ultimate future and our ultimate future. And knowing our ultimate future brings us great peace.

Let me tell you what I mean. You may be going through a difficult patch with one of your children. Maybe you are encountering a lot of teenage rebellion. Your relationship with your child is very strained. Your child has gone off in a really bad direction. But if you knew that this was just a season, and that your child would fully turn to Christ, that your child would turn out to be Jesus' man or woman, it would be a lot easier to go through the present with peace and calm.

You may have some weird lump, some growth – perhaps your doctor has discovered a tumor in your uterus or breast. You are going in for some tests. If you knew that it was all going to work out, if you knew the results of the test ahead of time, that it was all going to turn out to be nothing, you could, you would experience peace and calm right now, wouldn't you?

The stock market might crash. Say it went down 800 points in a day and investors began going crazy in the lemming-like way and started to leap out of the market or out of their windows. What if you knew that the stock market would not just rebound, but would double in the next three years?

See, there is no fear if you know the ultimate end of things - whatever the immediate future brings in your life. I don't know what you are going through. In a crowd this size, we have lots of people here who have cancer or some other very serious condition. You have loved ones who are very sick. You may be experiencing a failed marriage. Or one of your parents has Alzheimer's or is in rapid decline. I don't know what you are going through. But I do know that some of you have great anxiety about the future.

The apostle Paul tells us in the text that we are going to be looking at today how you and I can hope for the future. Let's pray.

Ephesians 1:7-14

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

I have begun a series that I have titled, "I Believe in the Church." I have taken my title from the last part of the great Nicene Creed, a creed that was drafted by Bishops who came from all over the Roman world in 325 AD. They hammered out the tenets of Christian orthodoxy. I believe in God the Father. I believe in God the Son. I believe in God the Holy Spirit. And then in the last part of the Nicene Creed, I believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church – one universal church with lots of manifestations – the Vineyard manifestation, the Episcopal manifestation, the Lutheran manifestation, the Baptist manifestation. But anyone who has trusted in Christ is part of that one holy universal (that's what the word "Catholic" means) and apostolic church, a church built on the teaching of the apostles.

The book of Ephesians is a book about the one holy Catholic and apostolic church. It is Paul's great affirmation that he believes in the church. But Paul is painting the story of the church against an even larger canvas. And last week we saw the large canvas of the ultimate purpose of all existence, which was that all creation, all existence would be to the praise of God's glory. This week we are continuing with the very large canvas of the ultimate picture of the future.

Listen, when the apostle Paul begins this great hymn of praise to God in verse 3, “Praise be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” and he continues this prayer of blessing through verse 14, it is not just a series of unrelated clauses jumbled together. It is not some sort of mish-mash as Paul just emotionally heaps phrase upon phrase. Particularly in verses 7-14, we see a logic, a thread of a thought regarding the ultimate future of the universe and our ultimate future. There is a logical progression in this praise.

Paul begins his prayer of praise in eternity past, verse 4, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world.” He is reaching back to eternity past. And then in verse 10, he reaches forward to eternity future, “To be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment.”

And here is the logic of the thought. How can I be hopeful about the future? You are sick. You are experiencing family stress. Your marriage is an unhappy one. You don’t know what you want to do with your life. How can you be hopeful about the future?

Paul says, “Remember God is an extravagantly gracious God.” Verses 7-8, “In him, in Christ, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.” Remember God’s grace.

Well, what aspect of God’s extravagant grace has bearing on the future? Well, verse 9, “God has revealed to us the future and he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” Well, what exactly, is the content of this revelation? If God, through extravagant grace, has revealed to us the future, what exactly did God reveal? Verse 10: “To be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” The ultimate future is that God is going to bring everything together under the Lordship of Christ.

Well, how do we know that we are going to be included in this glorious future? Verses 11-14, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

I know I am going to be included in God’s glorious plan for the future because I have heard the gospel of truth and I have believed it and from God’s side, He sealed me with the Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing my inheritance.

Now, let's go through this step by step. How can you and I have hope for the future? Whatever we are experiencing in the present, remember God's extravagant grace. Look at this wonderful phrase in verse 7, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins..." and then we read this marvelous phrase, "in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us."

The riches of God's grace that He lavished on us. I love this phrase, "the riches of God's grace." In fact, when I was praying about a theme for our building campaign several years ago when we were raising money to put up this new auditorium, I felt God lead me to these very verses, Eph. 1:7-8. The phrase, "Responding to God's Extravagant Grace," just burned in my mind. Because if you want to know what VCF Columbus is at its core – you have not been here for very long, many of you have just come in the last few years, some of you might be long time members, but you've gotten fuzzy about what VCF Columbus is at its core – if you want to know what drives this place, what is the mainspring and engine of this church, it is an overwhelming, whole-hearted sense of God's extravagant grace to us. The Columbus Vineyard is a testimony of God's extravagant grace. That's what we are. As Paul puts it, "The riches of God's grace, which he has lavished on us."

Back in 1987 I felt like God was speaking to me and showing me this church's future potential. I felt like the Holy Spirit was saying to me that we would become a very large church and that we would plant other churches in this community and that we would have a broader influence in the world. And having felt from God's Spirit the kind of potential that we had, I thought of the biggest number I could think of at that time and I told our leaders that we had a goal of becoming 2000 people by the year 2000.

Danny Meyer, the associate pastor and my dear friend, told me later that at the time he just laughed to himself and he said, "Well, you know, I am glad Rich believes this – that we could grow ten times over in the next 13 years."

Last weekend, we had well over 5000 people worshipping in the Vineyard over the course of the weekend.

Why? Not because we are so smart or so talented or so holy. We are what we are by the extravagant grace of God. And it is not just the numbers. It is the extravagant grace of God that has been poured out in this place in changed lives. I wish you could read the email that I get day by day of person after person who tells me that their life has been changed, that their marriage has been healed, that their kid has come to Christ, that a friend has gotten saved, that a habit pattern in their life has been broken – it is because of God's extravagant grace that we have experienced the healings that we have seen over the years. It is because of God's extravagant grace, the riches of God's grace, which He lavished upon us, that we have gotten to see hundreds and hundreds of people

get saved through this church. It is because of the riches of God's extravagant grace that He lavished on us that we have been protected from the work of the enemy through disunity, disharmony, and sin – grace upon grace, wave after wave after wave of grace.

If you want to know what is the Columbus Vineyard, we are a people who have been recipients of the riches of God's grace.

Have you ever experienced extravagance? I mean just mind-blowing, beyond what you ever would have imagined, extravagance?

I mentioned to you, if you were here, seven or eight months ago Marlene and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary this past July. We were married when we were 11. No, we were quite young, I was 19; she was 20 – you can do the math. But to celebrate this, because we have put some money together now and we had no money when we were married, I planned a trip to Italy for the two of us.

At the time we went to Italy, we hooked up with a couple of dear friends from England who were going to be vacationing in Italy at the same time. These two dear friends have ministered for the last 20+ years in the poorest section of the entire country of England, the most impoverished area. They have been ministering in this little Anglican parish with great joy and with great effectiveness.

But as it turns out, the wife in this couple that is ministering in this inner-city neighborhood, is a descendent of a long line of Italian nobility, nobility that goes back to the 11th century in Italy. And so when we were planning our trip, this couple said, "We are going to go too and we would like you to join us" in what I thought they said was their villa. So I said, "Great. That would be a great privilege, a great honor, to join you in your villa."

As it turned out, I misheard her. Her family didn't own a villa. Her family owned a village – an entire medieval village with a real castle at the top of a hill, and a real moat and turrets. And in this medieval village in the center there was a huge gated estate with two large country houses. Prince Charles and Princess Diana had stayed at this estate back in the 1980's. Marlene and I got to be guests of this couple and their kids in their medieval village at this gated country estate – just their family and us – Rich and Marlene from Columbus, Ohio.

One morning we were sitting outside having breakfast at this table that had linens on it and crystal. We were sitting outside being served by this older Italian woman some more fresh squeezed orange juice, looking out over the orange trees and the whole estate and it was so overwhelming – the extravagance of this place and the fact that we were there – that I just began to laugh uncontrollably. Can you believe what we are experiencing?

There is a song that I have mentioned to you in the past that is sung at Passover time in Jewish homes regarding the extravagance of God's grace that He lavished on us. It is called Dyanu, which means, "It would have been sufficient." And in the song the participants around the Passover table sing to God:

If you had only led us out of Egypt, it would have been sufficient. But you fed us in the wilderness.

If you had only fed us in the wilderness with manna, it would have been sufficient. But you gave us the law of Mt. Sinai.

If you had only given us the law, it would have been sufficient. But you led us across the Jordan River.

And in reciting the blessings of God and heaping them up, there is this refrain, "It would have been sufficient," but you kept pouring it out, lavishing grace on us.

Friend, do you ever say to God, "If you had only done such and such, only forgiven my sins, it would have been sufficient." In your own life do you regularly take time to reflect on the extravagance of God's grace to you and your family? That what you have and what you are, if there is anything good, you are what you are by the grace of God. In the New Testament the apostles cannot talk about grace without using superlatives – abundant grace, free grace, exceeding, abundant, above all that we ask or think – grace upon grace upon grace.

You know, you can tell if a person spends time contemplating the riches of God's grace because like what we are reading in Ephesians 1:3-14, there will be the great note of thanksgiving, worship, thankfulness, joy and triumph. There will be this "praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whatever I am going through."

So let me ask you a personal question. Is your life, your life this past week, characterized by a note of joy, a note of triumph, a note of celebration? I don't mean that you aren't going through some very hard times right now. I told you at the beginning, I don't know what you are going through. I don't mean that you aren't going through some trial or some pain. But in the midst of whatever it is that you have experienced, is there something else there? Is there this power, this theme that is playing over and over in the background, this sense that despite all that's going on, God has been gracious?

Listen, when the apostle Paul penned these words about the riches of God's grace, which He lavished on us, he was in prison, chained to a Roman guard. He had in his life been beaten many times. Stoned. Lost at sea. Hungry. Rejected by most people. But he knew that he was what he was by the grace of God.

Do you know that? Is there a thrill of joy, a sense of triumph that marks your life? You, who have been a recipient of God's grace?

Now what particular aspect of the riches of God's grace bears on our futures? Verse 9, "And he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ." He made known to us the mystery of His will. The book of Ephesians is filled with what Steve Robbins, the head of VLI, calls revelatory language – language in which God is said to make something known, to reveal, to give us insight, wisdom, or understanding. One of the great aspects of the riches of God's grace, is that He makes known to us the mystery of His will.

Mystery is an important word for the apostle Paul. You find it all over the New Testament. But scholars tell us that it means something that is undiscoverable by unaided human intellect. It is something you couldn't figure out on your own, but that God has chosen to reveal to anyone who has chosen to receive the truth by faith. It doesn't matter, in other words, how smart you are, how many years you have been in school, what your grades were, what your IQ is, what your SAT score was. It doesn't matter how many degrees you have next to your name, how big a pile of money you have in your bank account, who you can boss around, how many detective novels you have read or whether you consider yourself a Jr. Sherlock Holmes – it doesn't matter. You can't understand many things about life, or this world, or the future, unless God chooses to reveal them to you.

There is much about life that is a mystery. It's utterly closed off to human inquiry and discovery and so it is a particular cause of celebration, it is one of the many manifestations of God's extravagant grace when God chooses to reveal the future to those of us who believe.

This is amazing. You talk about bringing into your life a note of joy, a note of triumph, this is amazing. God would be gracious if He just worked out the future, according to His good pleasure and purpose. But it's an extraordinary grace, it is part of the extravagance of God's grace, that God would let us in on His purpose and plan.

Psychics don't get to see this. Nor do the experts. No trend watchers, no matter how they look at the trends, would ever be able to come up with what the future holds. It doesn't matter what your doctor says is in your future. Or your lawyer. Or your counselor. Or the marketing people. No one is aware of the future, except those to whom Christ has revealed it by His Spirit.

Extravagant grace. See, it is one thing to be blessed, to do well in school, or to be sustained through a crisis, or to have your life spared in an accident, to have a baby or a good marriage, or strength to endure a bad marriage. It is one thing to be blessed. It is another thing to have God reveal himself as the source of the

blessing – to have God give you insight and understanding into what He is doing. It is an extravagant grace to have God give you insight. God could just do what He is doing. But to let us in on it? To show us what He is about? How it's all unfolding?

It is one thing to know that God is going to work out the future. Lots of people are content with that. Oh well, God will work it out somehow. *Que sera sera* – what will be, will be. The Muslims talk about living with the will of Allah.

It is a whole other order of blessing when God, because of His extravagant grace, comes along and says to you, “Now let Me show you what I am up to.” To know, to understand, to be let in on the secret, to have God whisper in your ear – here's the ultimate future; here's where we are going.

Well, what is the mystery that God, in His extravagant grace, has chosen to reveal to us? Verse 10, “He has made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on the earth together under one head, even Christ.”

See, right now there is so much alienation, so much separation, so much brokenness in relationships as a result of the Fall. We saw that when we recently studied Genesis 3. People are separated from God. People are separated from each other. People are separated from creation, from what we call nature, from the animals, from the world. As a result of our first parent's sin, as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, the whole universe like Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall and cracked in a million pieces.

What Ephesians 1:10 is saying to us is that God is going to put the Humpty Dumpty universe back together again up on the wall with Christ as the Lord of everything. All of the cracks, all of the separations, they are all going to be healed when the Humpty Dumpty universe is put back on the wall. That's what we are praying for in the Lord's Prayer when we pray, “May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Make all the universe, make my life, my family, my boss, my child, my sex life, my financial life, my relationships, relationships of nations to each other – make it all under your Lordship so that everything is reunited under Christ.

It is only when Christ is the head, it is only when Christ is the Lord, that all the old divisions get healed. We spend an amazing amount of time in this world wrestling over issues – the UN negotiating Mideast Peace Talks – and all of it, I am afraid, whether the efforts of Camp David, or shadow diplomacy – all of what is going on in the Middle East right now I am afraid is doomed to ultimate failure. I think that what's been going on is a noble effort. But it is all doomed to failure because there is only going to be one healing, one way that Arab and Jew are brought together. And that is if both groups come to Christ and have Christ as

Lord. All of the business of land exchanges and border adjustments, and concessions and compromises regarding the temple mount, I tell you friends, none of it will matter. None of it is ultimately going to work to heal thousands of years of old disputes until Jews like me kneel down and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. And until the Arabs kneel down and acknowledge Jesus as Lord – until Jesus Christ changes people's hearts, all of the reconciliation efforts, I believe, are all doomed to failure.

I think Ephesians 1:10 is the only hope for racial reconciliation in this country. African Americans and whites are not going to trust each other, respect each other, get rid of their racist attitudes and their judgments and fears, by laws and government commissions. It is only when people submit to Jesus Christ as Lord will there ever be a bringing together.

Let me say this. If you are African American, if you are an Asian, if you are Hispanic or some other minority group, I realize as pastor here – it doesn't take a genius to know, that this is a predominately white-Anglo church. And it takes some effort for you to be here. It takes a little bit of effort for me to be here – I am a NY Jew. This is not my people. But I want to say to you that we want you here. My dream church would be an integrated church that has a diverse body that is obviously diverse, where there are different kinds of music and artistic expressions coming forth from the stage. We aren't there yet. But you can help us. We are reaching so many people who are lost and we just need to keep pressing this out until this church looks like the community that is around here. You can help us.

But friends, I will tell you that the only way divisions get healed is when people have Jesus as Lord. And that's true at a personal level in your life. You may be separated from your spouse. Your marriage is not what it could be. Counseling is important. Reading books is important. But until you and your mate kneel under the Lordship of Christ, where you just surrender the past, surrender your bitterness, surrender your claims, your rights – until you become Jesus' man or woman, there is no coming together – no bringing together that's being spoken of here in Eph. 1:10.

This week I got a foretaste, I got to experience a little bit of the ultimate end-time bringing together. I mentioned last week that VCF Columbus co-hosted along with First Church of God down on Refugee Road, a gathering for pastors of the largest churches in our city. We have never had anything like that before in Central Ohio. We had about 14 pastors come. 18 said they would, and 14 actually did. We had the senior pastors of most of the largest churches – Grace Brethren, Xenos, UALC, Christian Assembly, and many of the largest African American churches in the city – New Covenant Believers, and First Church of God. We all came together for a couple of days, and I discovered in that room the presence of God because I saw that all of these men, whatever their theological traditions, whatever the style and background of their churches, they

all loved the Lord and they all love the lost. I experienced a foretaste of that phrase in the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church."

The fruit of this meeting I think was seen in two ways. 1) At the end of the meeting everyone, to a man, said, "Rich, will you help to lead another meeting like this in the future?" 2) I think out of this meeting there will be a commitment on the part of pastors, and I hope it will spread to the churches and to Christians, to speak well of each other.

See, anytime we bring separated people together, we are moving in the direction of Eph. 1:10. When the times will have reached their fulfillment, the plan of God is to have all things on heaven and earth brought together under one head. Anytime we take separated people – folks who are having marriage problems, parents and children – anytime we bring them together, Eph. 1:10 is beginning to happen.

Let me say a word to you if you are a long time member of the VCF Columbus. We have a lot of new people coming in here. We have folks coming every week who are hurting. They come to a weekend service having seen one of our billboards or they heard me on the radio or were invited by someone at work. Somehow they got here. But many people are hurting. They are going through a divorce. They have lost a loved one through death. They discovered one of their kids is involved in a major sin or self-destructive behavior. Whether people know it or not, wherever they are coming from – success or failure – everyone is looking for love.

About a month ago I got to speak in an African American church here in the community. From the moment I walked in, I was greeted so warmly. I was hugged. I was smiled at. I came away from the evening so encouraged. I felt great.

Here is what I want to say to long-time members. Every week you see people raise their hands for tapes saying that they are guests. You see people walking by themselves in the lobby. Long-time members, when you walk by someone, look up, smile, greet them. With our guests, tell them that you are glad they are here. Put your arm around someone in the church. I am not saying to lay on them. Be appropriate, especially men with the ladies and vice versa. But there is something so healing, so encouraging about a touch, a hug, when you come to a strange place and someone puts their arm around you.

You say no one would ever do that at Banc One where I work. No one would ever do that in the state government where I work. Maybe no one does that in your home.

But we aren't supposed to be Banc One or the state government or even a broken family. We are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when people

kneel down under that one head, even Christ, they are brought together. And an expression of that is that we are more personal, we are more connected, we are more loving than the rest of the world around us.

Last question: How do we know that we are going to get to share in this great future? If God has revealed a future, the ultimate future, which is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ, if that is our ultimate destiny, this great reconciliation of people to God, people to each other and people to nature, how do we know that we are going to get to share in it?

Well, the apostle Paul says, "In him we were also chosen, [he's talking about we believing Jews] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you [you Gentiles] were also included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed..."

You are going to get in because you heard the gospel and you believed it. You trusted in Christ. And from God's side you were sealed, marked in Him with the seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

In the ancient Roman world a seal was used to form a stamped impression in wax on a contract, or on a bag of grain, it was a stamped impression in wax that bore the imprint of the owner's ring often, or of a seal. A person several hundred miles away could look at the hardened wax and say, "I know that document isn't a forgery. It has the imprint, the mark, the impression that only could have been made by the owner."

Now, what the apostle Paul is saying is that you who have heard the gospel and believed it, you have the mark, the imprint, the impression of your owner, God the Father. And the mark that God has left on your life is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit himself is the seal. There is no other seal. It is not baptism. It is not your dress, whether you are wearing a tie or not. It is not what you wear or where you go or what songs you sing. The mark of God's ownership and the fact that you will share in this great glorious testimony is the Holy Spirit.

I happen to think that there is an experiential dimension to this. I don't think that the apostle Paul ever thought about the Spirit of God coming into a person's life without thinking about an experience. Now I am not saying that the sealing work of the Spirit has to have a certain intensity in your life. That you have to cry or fall down or shake in order to be sealed by the Spirit. But the sealing of the Holy Spirit carries with it, in my understanding, a deep inward sense that you know that you know that you know that you are a child of God and that God loves you and that He is bearing witness to your Spirit that you are His son or His daughter. That He is going to bring you safely home.

And I think here in this church we have a great need to learn more about the work of the Holy Spirit. That's why tonight we are hosting another one of our renewal meetings. We are going to do these every few months. We had one a few months ago on a Sunday evening and we are going to do another one tonight. I want to encourage you to come and to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We are having a Holy Spirit weekend. If you have never been instructed in who is the Holy Spirit, you have never felt his presence, you may want to sign up to go away for a night and morning for a little retreat where you will be instructed in the Holy Spirit and his gifts.

But you know, when you know the ultimate future – that God in the end is going to repair everything and that you are going to be a part of that because you have trusted Christ and you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, when you know where everything is ultimately going, you don't need to know the immediate future. However big the wave is right now, you can have an internal calm because of God's extravagant grace. Let's pray.