

(Introduction of Gene) I realized that here was a man who had a word from God. A mutual desire of those for us to get together, he and I, and we spent a record of three days last week together, and we thought this meeting would be profitable.

The only thing I know to tell you is that I believe Gene Edwards is a man who has won the right to be heard and has something to say from a direction where very few have been. You will hurt, you will laugh, you will cry, you will be enraged, and you will lose sleep. And God only knows what will come of our time together, but it'll be significant. Helen, we welcome you. Glad you're here. This is Mrs. Edwards. I've asked Gene to share tonight, His testimony. Part of sharing things he's never publicly shared before. And I respect the fact that he's willing to do, to bear his soul with you, because I think you and I need to know where he's been, and I think we will hear him more decisively as we hear his testimony tonight. Gene, we have the tapes in 45-minute increments. So, if every 45 minutes you could breathe while we turn over the tape and try to be through by 10, if we could. Gene Edwards, welcome, Gene Edwards. Welcome, buddy.

(Gene speaking) Thank you, Jack. I have already received a lot of razzing for this suit I've got on. But we'll be speaking where I have, I don't really know how to begin talking with you. It's funny, I haven't seen too many Baptist preachers in a long time, and I'm thrilled to be here, but I keep thinking historically about what's happening here, and I am very interested in history. I am in fact I'm spend my whole life looking at it, and historically, what is happening here is there a group of men now, this is not, not could this have been said 500 years ago, we have men within the organized church, and we have a man present who is not in the organized church, and, according to history when this conference is over according to the trends of history, you're supposed to take me out and stone me when this day is over, or burn me at the stake, and that's about the only thing I can think of or I stand up here. I hope you understand what I mean by that, I think you do. You've studied early Baptist and Anabaptist history, and the only reason I've got a little hope that I won't be burned at the stake is because of our own history as Baptists and because I used to be a Baptist pastor and a Baptist evangelist.

I'm going to probably lose you some this weekend because there's such a gap between our two mental processes, and don't hesitate to stop me if you just plain flat get lost, but there's going to be some to be probably some rearrangement of both vocabulary along the way, and some filling in some communication gaps. Don't hesitate to ask a question.

I think I'm going to try to do it this week, and at Jack's request, I'm going to give my testimony tonight. Tomorrow morning, I'm going to try to talk to you about how we got in the mess we're in, and then I am going to talk to you about things as they probably should have been, how they should have been in the second, third, fourth century, how they should be today rather than how they are in the light of how we got in the mess we're in. Then you're going to have to decide for yourself, and that's really what I'm here for, to give you more equipment for your own personal decision, and there will be many different decisions that come out this weekend. Many

different decisions and many different directions, and down toward the very end, try to save the best for the last.

I'm going to give you my personal judgment on what you and I and all of us should be doing in these days for what I would call a return to, a rediscovery of, a rebirth of, a restoration of a full experience of the Lord Jesus Christ and a full return to body life or church life, styled after the first century. And before I get started, does anybody want to ask any questions? I'll do this every few minutes.

All right, now, you have your chance. I don't know how to start this. I don't know how to do this. Y'all, I'm going to read a passage of scripture just like Baptists do. Is it all right if I poke fun at you? Say amen, a little louder than that. All right, is it all right if every once in a while, I just really just whack at you? Is that okay? Will you let me do that? Will you then be gracious after I've done it?

This passage of scripture, I'm not even going to tell you where it is. It's in Corinthians, that's good enough. For momentary right affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. While we look not at things which are seen, but we look at things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Prayer:

Oh Lord Jesus, cover this meeting and give us all grace to fellowship before you. Amen.

Well, my testimony. My grandmothers on both sides, my mother and my father, all Southern Baptists. I was asking Jack last night how long he'd been a Baptist. I've been a Baptist longer than he has. He's been a Christian longer than I have. I became a Baptist when I was six or seven years old. First Baptist church in Bay City, Texas. I became a Christian in my junior year in college at the age of 17, and I think I'll start there.

You know, I think some of you have had this experience, something that happened to you when you were quite young that marked you and maybe even has gotten in your way ever since then, and that happened at East Texas State University in Commerce, Texas, in the year 1950. Now, if you remember 1948 through 1952, there was a revival in America, and it was the beginning of the Billy Graham ministry, and many of us this age were either converted or greatly affected in that time. I was converted at that time, and that was the first touch of the Spirit of God I saw in America. Another one came exactly 20 years later, and most of you remember that one, do you not? 68 through 72, Okay.

I was converted, this was the time of the youth revival movement born at ...University, and brought forth a lot of young names, most of whom I don't know what happened to them. But that revival hit my campus in a very unique way, and it happened this way.

The Baptist student director married a Baptist preacher, and the Baptist student union was suddenly left without a director. We sneaked off and got the keys to the building. It was a house across from the university, just a home, and we began holding our own meetings there, and nobody ever found that out. There were about 20 or 25 of us, we were all around 18 years old, 19 maybe, I don't think anybody 20. And the Spirit of the Lord did something among us, and we were over there constantly holding meetings. And at that age, you don't have leaders. And we were praying, and we were preaching, and we were hallelujahing, and we had one meeting there, and we all remember the date - it was August 1st, 1950. Everybody who was there will be remembered as long as we live. We were visited by the Lord. And just recently, someone in that group sent a diary notation of that night I had never seen. And the brother who wrote it was my roommate at that time. And it said in there, as he walked outside, he said, "My roommate Gene Edwards said, I wonder ultimately what's going to come out of it." And it's still coming because I never shook that summer.

We used to go out to the park and sing until the wee hours of the night, just holding on to one another and loving one another. That was one of my very first experiences of being a Christian. Now, I'm going to tell you what was happening to us. We were having a spontaneous experience of church life, which always dies; it cannot go on. Mark it down, it always dies. If you don't know that, you will be in for great disappointment, especially you young men, and it died the day they hired a new Baptist Student director, and it was at that time that I met the system for the first time.

Two or three of us went over and talked to this lady and told her, you know, this is how we've been doing it, and they chose me to be the spokesman to talk to her, and it was really interesting. A few weeks later, they chose offices for the Baptist students for the coming year, and there must be a hundred offices, and there were only 25 people, and some of us had one, two, three, four, and five offices. There was one person who didn't get a single office. I bet you can't guess who it was. 17 years old, that was my first encounter with "it".

A lot of things happened that were glorious in those days. I surrendered to preach the day after I finished college, and on Monday morning, I went to Southwestern and enrolled. I was there for one semester, and then I was graciously given the opportunity by the foreign mission board in Richmond, Virginia, if you don't know where it's located, to go to a new seminary in Switzerland. It was called the Rüslikon Zurich Baptist Theological Seminary. Do you know about it? It was an international school. I was there the second year. Each year, they tried to send one American representative during those years. A lot of things happened to me over there, too. I helped start with another young man whose name was ???; we started four little Baptist preaching stations in southern Germany, going out and preaching every weekend.

Something happened to me that I don't think I fully understood until years later. Most of the courses I took there that year, I did it on purpose. I took courses in Anabaptist history. Now, you've got to remember something. I'm only 19 years old, and at 19, you can get a lot of mixed messages, and I studied Anabaptist history and came out of there knowing it about as well as a

human could know it. I think most of you probably have forgotten your heritage. I've stood where those men died. They were called the Radicals of the Reformation. No one listened to them, and I was taught in my class by Dr. John Alan Moore that I was the son of those men. And it got into my head that I didn't belong in the religious system, that I was part of the radical movement of the Reformation at the age of 19. Now, you can be that dumb, and I was. Do you understand what I'm saying to you? I really believed that's what I was: someone outside the tradition of the Reformation, and it stuck in my head. I don't guess I ever recovered from it.

Another vivid memory I have and that was the memory of going to the Holy Lands and spending the summer in the Holy Lands in Italy and at the age of 19 meeting missionaries. Now, this is, let me stop here, brothers. I had to think hard to remember all this stuff. And one of the reasons I've never discussed it, not even with Helen, is because I've never felt it important. But I'm trying to remember what got me out of the organized church, and these are some of the influences, and I think you're going to understand. But if you ever think that these things dog me, just don't. I'll tell you eventually what really got me out. I'm simply remembering some of those early influences. I'm going to tell you something else. Anything I tell you tonight, you can top. Is that not true? I'll bet you can top it. I don't care what kind of wild story I tell you; you can tell me a better one. The problem is, what are you going to do with that? What are we going to do with the same experiences that I had?

Well, at 19, missionaries aren't really careful when they're around you. This is not like Baker James Coffin came flying through. This is some 19-year-old kid they'll never see again. And I picked up on more stuff living with missionaries from one end of the holy lands to the other, and I was a little shocked. I remember very vividly one of the sisters, one of the Christian missionary women, and they'd been there about three months, and she was having a coke fit, and she got me in a room and made me swear that when I got home, I'd send her some Coca-Cola syrup because she had to have a Coca-Cola. There were none in Israel, and something in me was saying that was not exactly my image of a missionary.

Oh, I guess I'm going to really chance one here now, and I'm going to tell you that I also went to what was probably, and I say this in all gentleness. I really don't know much about the problems y'all are having in the convention right now, and I can tell you I am monumentally disinterested. But I probably did go to the only ranked liberal seminary that southern to Southern Baptists feed their money into, and that was Rüscliikon. And I've never said that publicly in my life. I mean there my roommate doubted the resurrection. It was a high German theological training, and my roommate has been teaching at Rüscliikon now for nearly 30 years, and he's worse now than he was then.

My faith was shaken at Rüscliikon for about 24 hours and I really didn't want to not believe in scripture and I decided there had to be some other view than what I was being taught and I found a book by a grand Dutch scholar on the Pentateuch which he was defending the inspiration of the Pentateuch and I read that thing in my room and it was absolutely incredible for

this 19-year-old kid. I put that book down, I said, "Well, if the conservative view can defend the Pentateuch that perfectly, then I figure they can defend all the rest of it, too. And I have never had a question about the scripture since that hour. I didn't want to be one of those people, and I was going to find some way to be convinced that I didn't have to be.

Now, I think I told you that to tell you this. When I got home, I didn't think my wife knows this story. When I got home, I enrolled in Southwestern, and Helen and I planned to certainly investigate to its fullest the possibility of going to a mission field. And I can still remember the people's names, and I'm fighting hard to not tell you who they were, but the mission board sent their people there to Southwestern, and I remember talking to the lady. She came, and I said, "I want to talk with you." I had my arm around her, and I'm 20 now, and I said, "Do you realize what's going on in Israel with our missionaries? Do you know what's going on in Italy with our missionaries?" She didn't say anything, and honest to goodness, I was just a kid, I didn't know up from down, and I thought, you know, she'd be fascinated with this kind of thing. I mean, surely it would go and tear the whole thing apart, and it'd all be put back together again because no one knew. She didn't have much to say to me. Well, I was interviewed, and Helen was interviewed together. It so happened I lived in that building, and I was a janitor for that building, and that night it was my duty to clean that building, including the room in which I was interviewed. And there, sitting on the desk, were all the notes of all the applicants or mission positions.

Do you think the Lord's going to forgive me for what I did? I didn't have the nerve to read it, but I know that at the top of the page, they had, right above the name, at the very top, it said excellent, above average, good, below average, and poor. And I walked over and looked, and the X on mine was marked "Poor." I want you to know something: I'm really grateful that I was a janitor at that place. I really felt, well, Gene, if that's how they feel about you, then well, I don't know how you would have felt? *Persona non grata*, I was not really welcome there.

There are so many things to tell you about that. By the way, I have no bad memories of Southwestern, and I have nothing to say in criticism of that place. I enjoyed every minute of it, loved it. It took me five years to get over going there; it turned me from a Christian to a Baptist preacher. I'm not sure I'll ever forgive them for that because I don't want to be a Baptist preacher. I want to be a Christian, and that's what I want to be.

While I was at Southwestern, I became a pastor. Now, I recently did a first draft of a book called "The Church in Crisis," in which I spend the first two or three chapters telling stories about splits I saw in Baptist churches before I got converted. I was present; my mama dragged me to those meetings, you know. Now I am a Baptist pastor. In fact, I won the honor of being one of the outstanding; I got a certificate to prove this, one of the outstanding rural and village pastors in the state of Texas, the first year it was ever given. In fact, our church came in second, and the second church I pastored was the one that came in first. Do they still do that? They still get there right away, okay.

Have you ever been a pastor of a Baptist church? How many of you have pastored a Baptist church? I want to see your hand. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. I'm going to tell you quite frankly, brothers, if I were a Baptist pastor, what I would do. Come Easter, I would give it up for Lent. Yes, or I would shoot myself. My dear brother, you are in the most unscriptural, indefensible from a scriptural viewpoint situation that anybody could ever conjure up. It ain't in the New Testament, not by a long shot. Try to find it, go home, and try to find it. I got it; in Ephesians, it says pastor. I'm not talking about an obscure passage in Ephesians. I'm talking about in the New Testament; there simply isn't any such thing.

Brothers, I would not go through the agonies and turmoils that you go through as a minister for anything on earth, and God never intended for you to be in such a mess; it's not in His cards. It's not in His way. It is an invention born in the reformation, and you have become part of it without even realizing it. You didn't start it, but it is not. I am going to repeat emphatically, it is not in the New Testament, and if you can find it there, well, I know you can't find it there. I don't know a whole lot about much, but I know a great deal about first-century Christian history. There is no such thing.

Now, that may not bother you. Eventually, that was to greatly bother me. Anyway, I was in a Baptist church that had an annual call. Have any of you ever been pastor of a church with an annual call? Let me see your hands if you have. You have? Do they still do that to people? Surely, they got rid of that, didn't they? I think they do. That is the most awful thing that can be done every year, man. They decide whether they're going to keep you or throw you out.

One of the turning points of my life was the third year, when the gentleman who always threw him out decided my time was up, and he moderated the meeting, and he knew what he was doing. You want to hear this story? This is wild. They called for a vote, and I was not there, and the reason was that I had a flat tire outside, and a young brother was out there helping me. I wasn't in the meeting putting my tire on, so I could get out of that place. So, they had to vote again. By that time, the tire had been put back on, and I don't know what happened, but somebody switched their vote, and brothers, I won by two votes.

What a way to live. What a way to live. Well, I have something to tell you. You're still on annual call. You know good and well you're still on annual call. You're not going to do it. (laughing in the audience) Listen, every bone in me is Baptist theological through and through. I don't know anything except Baptist theology, but I back off on one thing, and that's the Baptist church government. They have no business holding you captive like that, but the whole problem is not in that. The whole problem is in the birth and concept of what a church is, and herein we could do a little revising.

My second pastorate, just like your second pastorate. When you got through preaching all the good sermons and then the medium sermons, and you got down to your poor sermons, you remember? And then it was time to go. But things were building in me. I have memories, simple little memories of simple little things that a young, simple brother began to get just slightly worried

about. Why did we call it an orphanage when there was not a single orphan there? They don't call it that anymore, do they? They changed the name. I think that they were still at that time promoting the idea that it was for orphans, which greatly disturbed me.

I remember the time that I found out that there was a dear lady in Houston, Texas, who had a million dollars that she wanted to give to a Bible School. I was one of only two people who knew. She had had a great-grandfather or a grandfather who had been a circuit rider on the Baptist circuit back in the frontier days. She was a very ancient woman; she wanted to start Bible school to send out young preachers who would go out on horses or whatever her concept was and go out and preach.

You know, brothers, I want you to know that I'm flatfootedly ashamed of what Baptists did to get that million dollars. They knew that they couldn't start a Bible School with it. They had convinced her to give that to a certain school to put up a building, which was not what she wanted to do. And you're ashamed, too; we're both ashamed of that. The only problem is, I wonder how much more you know of that which is troubling you or ought to be troubling you. And if it is not troubling you, why isn't it troubling you?

Now that's about all I'm going to say, except there was a world of trouble out there, and somehow, we just came to accept those things. Why did we come to accept those things and continue in them? I think I'm going to add one more thing, and this is one of the reasons I'm very reluctant to talk about any of this, and that is, we as ministers, when we got together, somebody would always tell some of these stories, and that always disturbed me. If these things were true, why didn't we repent? Why didn't somebody do something? Do you understand what I'm saying? If you live in the midst of dishonesty, you will become dishonest. And I'm going to speak as a man outside the religious system, whoever once in a while bumped into it.

I live in a world that probably doesn't have 20 or 30,000 Christians in it in North America. And it is not a world, I don't know all those 20 and 30,000 people Christians. Do you know that we talk about y'all, I mean, we talk about you as being in the religious system? I don't mean we gossip about you. I mean, we say you're in the religious system. You didn't know that, did you? We're out there, we're real, and we're alive; we exist. We always have for the last 1,800 years. And you know, until the Lord comes, we always will because there has to be a testimony out there.

I don't know if you understand that, but throughout the ages, you ought to if you're a Baptist, you were taught this when you were a young man. Haven't you ever heard of the trail of blood? I know you have. There have always been both out there, and they're all over the world, but they're not very large, and every one of them has come out, and all of us bear the same testimony, and it is a testimony of many things, but ultimately is a testimony of conscience. Conscience in relation to the word of God, the word of God within us, the word of God in print before us, and a matter of conscience within our spirit and our soul. We could simply no longer bear it. We knew if we stayed, something would happen to us.

Now, later, I'll get to when I left, but now I am an evangelist. All right, let me find out how many of you have been Southern Baptist Evangelists. Hi, Peter, how are you doing, buddy? Here's one right here. Bless your heart. How many more? Brother Jack, Brother Houston, Brother Jim. Yes, brother. What is your name? Clark. Is that the first name? Clark and Ralph. Gene Edwards.

Boy, I didn't know what I was getting into when I was getting into evangelism. I started out as a Southern Baptist evangelist, but I had a meteoric, is that the word? That thing went to the top fast. My ministry was unique and became very popular. Now, I want you to know something. Those of you who are in the ministry, you as a pastor sometimes get the feeling that you have a lot of trouble around you, and things must really be bad locally. But when you start traveling, something awesome happens. You discover it's that way everywhere. Kitty, do you identify with that? You, Jack, do you identify with that? This was a real shock to me. I don't want to pile up your mind with the things that you see, but I will speak generally. Pastors frightened by their people, just under strains that I doubt God ever intended for any man to be under. Not that kind, not that kind of politics. And by the way, a few dishonest preachers out there are as crooked as a dog's hind leg.

I'll tell you one story; it's just a little bitty story. This pastor, I can remember him taking up this offering for me. I was in his church for two weeks too long. Oh man, the money was coming in by the piles. It was really impressive. You can't help but look. So, when the two weeks were over, he handed me a check for \$200. He said before, he was really pushing this offering. Now, you understand? And it was a great two weeks, something like that, rarely, if ever, is seen. He said, "Before you came, the deacons and I voted to give you \$200." And then I remember one other was really funny. They had given me an offering of \$150 for that week and when I got through, they also decided to buy some books I had and they bought a bunch of them and they subtracted their purchase of those books from my love offering, and when I got home, I told Helen, "Boy, I'm sure glad they didn't buy more books than there." But I want you to know something, brother.

You pastors used to ask me what kind of car I drove and try to figure out whether I was one of those who deserved the big offering or a small offering. The first thing I was told when I was brought into evangelism, I was this by at least two evangelists. Gene, you got to go buy a Cadillac, and you got to dress well, and you got to look good, brother. Shame on you, shame on you. I'm going to say it again, Shame on you.

I decided at the outset of my ministry and evangelism; I would never discuss money with a pastor or a church in any way or form. I went in that way, and I left that way, and when they thought I was one of those top dogs, they gave large offerings, and when they thought I was a peasant, they gave small ones. And I want to take a rag and just wipe it on the table and say, "Brother, I'm not saying that kind of conduct should exist," brothers, that whole mentality ought not to exist. Just take the whole thing out. Our whole concept and mentality of 20th-century Christianity ought not to exist, and I'm not speaking theologically. I'm speaking of our practice, our mindset, and the schematic of our brain ought not to exist.

Well, I moved from holding meetings with churches to holding citywide crusades. And that's what I did the last year of my life, and I did it mostly outside of the Baptist circle, and my world broadened to the entire evangelistic world. I think the last two years were that way, I was speaking in coliseums now. Not always, I was speaking in buildings bigger than churches, put it that way.

I was flying all over America constantly, and I was beginning to get the VIP treatment. I don't know how that might affect you or how much you want that kind of world, but when I sat there on that platform, I better stop and just tell you that brothers, the higher up I got on that ladder, the physically more exhausted I got and the more I searched my heart and what I was seeing and what I was feeling and what I knew of myself, I was becoming a seeker, not the kind that wants to go out and get tongues, speak in tongues to get empowered to go out and do greater wonders and eat bigger cucumbers. *I wanted to know my Lord.*

I remember sitting in motel rooms and watching TV until 2 and 3:00 in the morning. I couldn't sleep. Get up the next morning and wonder what in the name of sanity am I doing? Walk out on a platform and be introduced as one of God's great men of this generation, and just get nauseated. And I got introduced that way by people who didn't even know who I was. I have been lied about on the platform so many times, it is unreal.

I'm going to ask you one more time. Why do you do that, brother? Why do you do that? I'm going to ask you something else. Why are you always going around saying, "I'll pray for you, I'm praying for you." Why do you do that? Why do you talk the way you do? You know, I've heard more baritone voices in the last 72 hours than I've heard in the last 22 years, with a little quiver at the bottom of them. How do you do that?

I hope you won't feel offended, but I think that you need to know something. You sound like preachers. Now, I want you to remember who I am. I'm a Christian who stepped outside. I'm a spy who stepped out into the cold, to pun the title of a book or something, a movie, or I don't know what it is. I was heartsick about the whole show, but I don't know what would have happened to me at that point if the Lord, in His mercy, and I mean in His mercy, had not accelerated the process far beyond anything I could possibly imagine at my age.

I'm about 28 now. I have been a pastor for five years, and I've been in evangelism for three or five years. I had something that happened to me, I suppose, that has never happened to anybody before or since, maybe things similar to it. But while I was holding these evangelistic crusades and going everywhere, John Kennedy got elected president of the United States, and just scared the living daylights out of the entire evangelical world.

By means, I am still not sure how this happened, because all I did was one day walk up to a gentleman who was speaking at the Baptist pastor's conference in Houston, Texas. The ministerial conference every month was at the Second Baptist Church in the basement there, and said, "Hello, I'm interested in what you said." The next thing I knew, I was getting calls. The next

thing I knew, I was being asked by one of the Southern Baptists' most wealthy laymen to do something, and this is what he asked me to do. They were putting together an organization, you won't believe this, this is 1960, to get Christians involved in politics.

This is way back there, before anybody had ever thought this up. He wanted me to go around America and interview all of America's leading Christian leaders, laymen, and ministers. I mean the top and also all leading Christians in government, and I was given what was at that time called a universal credit card. I doubt they still exist. That thing would do anything, and I was given two or three credit cards, and I was given carte blanche expenses.

I spent \$80,000 in nine months traveling, interviewing the leaders of America. The way I was able to get to them was, he would ask outstanding Christian leaders that he knew to write to people whom they knew to get me an interview with these people. I walked into governors' and senators' offices like I was walking into the kitchen, and I walked into the leadership of America's Christianity. By the way, this gentleman's name, I'd better not say, this gentleman was from Denver, Colorado.

A lot of things happened to me that were absolutely unbelievable. I have three or four meetings I have vivid memories of. When I was home, which was very rare, Tyler, Texas, which at that time was my hometown, was having a revival. And I was spiritually distraught, and when I was home, I would meet with this little group of about 10 Christians in the living room. And we were studying a book by a man none of us had ever heard of. His name was Watchman Nee, and a book that was just getting popular was called "The Normal Christian Life." And I began reading that book, found out I'd owned that book for two years previously to that, and tried to read it and couldn't understand it. Now I read it, and it was as clear as it could be. I should show you my copy of that book. It's just butchered with notes.

And now my heart, something is happening to my heart. I remember these meetings. I will skip the crusades, and I will skip the interdenominational movements that I worked with. I will skip the denominational headquarters of other organizations, of other denominations that invited me in to build evangelistic programs for them nationally. I built the Assembly of God's evangelism program. Roy told me the other day he still uses some of my stuff in his evangelism classes. I have a hard time believing that. If you're in the seminary, which one of you brothers is in seminary? I wouldn't do any supplemental reading under the name Gene Edwards. I wouldn't read those books if I were you, brother.

I remember Dr... bringing together the top leaders of the Southern Baptist to Bellevue Baptist Church to do a barnstorming on evangelism. It was who's who; there were four Southern Baptist presidents at that meeting. In fact, I think I used to have a picture of Gene Edwards standing beside four Southern Baptist Convention presidents. I bet you can't say that. They were the luminaries of the convention, and two young men they had brought in. I was one of them; we were there for a week.

Now, without any criticism whatsoever, I just want you to know that was the most sterile thing I ever saw in my life. There were no new ideas, and those men got up and dickered over nothing. We spent one entire afternoon trying to figure out the conversion of children in the church. And I heard those people get up and talk for hours and hours on that subject, and no one ever made the suggestion that maybe what we needed to do when children came forward was to get down on our knees with them and pray with them for their redemption. That was never brought up. I don't know how it was when I left, but little kids come up, they take your hand, shake your hand, little kid, is that what they did to you? You coming forward? Do you believe in Jesus? You want to be baptized? That's what I did at six, and I pretty much went to hell over it.

If that pastor had taken me by the hand and knelt with me, I might have gotten saved at six and had me pray; my heart went down there to get converted. I didn't get converted by shaking his hand. All I was, was scared that day. Nobody, nobody, nothing. The two young men walked out of there. We were really upset. I have a picture of myself on an airplane coming home from that meeting that someone took, and I wouldn't tell you the names of the men in that picture. It was unbelievable. And I came home a Southern Baptist, knowing that there was not one original idea within the entire Southern Baptist Convention for the problems and the needs of evangelism, nothing. And I think the word sterility is a word that bounced through my head in the coming months.

I had another experience, quite remarkable, and I think I'd like to tell it in two parts. This wealthy Denver man, who had me chasing all over America, wanted to talk with the most powerful Presbyterian, I suppose, in North America or the world. And I will use his name because you can't hide that fact. The name was Howard Hughes. He was the chairman of the board of Sun Oil Company and one of the 10 richest men in North America. Very close to being a billionaire, very devout Christian. He was trying to save the Presbyterian church. My friend Jerry wanted to have an interview with him, and he only knew one man who could get that interview, and this was a devout Christian, somebody. And he went to his brother, and he said to him, "I want to talk to Howard Hughes." And the brother said, "I can arrange it."

Now, I'm ashamed to tell you the story, but I have a question to ask. I'm ashamed to tell you the story. The man said, "I'll let you talk to him, but I've got two lots in Winona Lake; I need to sell, I need to sell fast. I'll swap those two lots for an interview with Howard Hughes. Jerry flew to Winona Lake and bought those two lots. I said, "Jerry, that is the most unbelievable thing I have ever heard of in my life." And he said, "Gene, why are you shocked?" He said, "I have been a Baptist X number of years. I've been a millionaire for X number of years, have been a multi-millionaire for X number of years," and he said, "I do this thing, this kind of thing with Baptists all the time now."

Brothers, my world may be small, but my world's got integrity. We may be only 30,000, but most of us out there have got a clear conscience. That's the only reason in this world I told that

story. I want to ask you a question. How can you know and do things like that and just keep on going? Do you know you're going to have to meet God?

Okay, Howard Hughes did something that made what Dr. ... did look little. Kennedy has just taken office, and I don't know, maybe the Bay of Pigs had just happened, I don't know what's happened. Howard Hughes and his great place of influence decide to call together America's national leaders, and he calls them together in Philadelphia. He asks Jerry to be there, and Jerry says there's a young man, Gene Edwards, the world's smallest peasant. We walked into the Union League in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is a men's club. I don't know how rich you got to be in that thing. It's one of those: if you have to ask how much the membership is, you can't afford it. They had cathedral-like rooms in it with these leather chairs and little men sitting in them, just like you see in the cartoon. Sitting around all with servants walking around and all dressed up, just like you saw in the cartoon, going around there with little trays serving these men things, while they all looked like they were about to die, and we walked into this conference room. It was the biggest table I have ever seen in my life. And here I am, a Texas rebel, and at the end of it is this huge statue of Lincoln, and I am told that the Union League was founded by a group of Christian Philadelphia people for the sole purpose of making sure the South did not win that war.

We sat down in that room, and it was who's who in America. On this side of me was Billy Graham's father-in-law, who came in Billy Graham's place. On this side of me sat the man who founded the National Association of Evangelicals. Over here, I'm sorry, I don't remember all these people. Over here was the man who was the National Lutheran Hour, Dr. ... was there. I'm sure you've heard of Dr. ..., the Mr. Evangelical, I believe. And that's how the whole room was, and Howard Hughes asked that each man, we were there for the whole day, each man to stand and take 15 minutes and tell us what Christians could do to save America. And this was the Christian voice, and Dr. Bell spoke first, and it started that way, which meant I was going to be the last person to speak.

I was already at the very end of my being in the organized church; I didn't know that. But I've often said when Dr. Bell started, I was in, and when it got to me, I was out. I've sat there all day long listening to men say things that I heard when I was 18 years old. Do you know what the main point made that day was? It was that we needed to read our Bibles more. That was what came out of that meeting.

Number one, forgive me, but until I stood up, there wasn't a bright idea in that room. And then the young kid stood up, and I got up, and I did what I guess I'm getting known for again. I gave them an entire plan of how to save America. I mean, from top to bottom. And I'm not even going to go into it, but I'll tell you, while I delivered it, I gave it up because at that moment, I didn't think it was worth saving. And when I got through, now you're not going to believe that. The only thing that those men were was offended. And yet Howard Hughes had called us into that room to do this very thing. Howard Hughes thought it was great.

Just previous to that or just after that, I was sitting in the, I had been to Washington DC so many times and talked to so many congressmen and so many senators, Christian gentlemen, every born-again believer on the hill. I even got my picture in Time magazine with John Kennedy. Can you believe that? But I was sitting in the office of the governor of Nebraska, and I was in there to talk to him about Christians doing something to save America. Have you ever been to the governor's office? This thing was gigantic. Their whole thing, their whole government, is in one, is that one building they've got there? Anyway, he has one. Have you been to Nebraska? Lincoln, Nebraska. Huge room. I think his office was one entire floor. We looked like a couple of little ants sitting there at his desk, and I started talking to him. He said, "Young man, excuse me, but he said, "You're trying to get Christians involved in politics?" He was a Christian. He said, "Sir, I want to tell you something. I think that's the worst thing that ever happened. I don't know anybody worse than Christians are. I'd hate to think what would happen to America if Christians got into politics. And I almost said to him, "Yeah, you and me both."

When I walked out of the Union League, that's how I felt. You want to really ruin America? Get Christians in government. A few weeks later, I was speaking at the National Association of Evangelicals. I had two experiences that all happened very close to one another.

I was meeting in a home studying Romans 6, 7, and 8. What a way to go, brother. What a way to go. What a glorious, wonderful way to go. I was meeting in a home and fellowshiping with Christians, and experiencing more light, more life, and more fellowship than I had since I was 17 as a college kid when we had no Baptist director and I was doing something else.

I reached a point where I decided to take no more meetings, and God in His mercy allowed about five, three, five, six, or seven of them to cancel just like that. Something that never happened to me, and for no particular reason. And I took that time to sequester myself in my study, and I began doing two things. I would read Nee's books and read Nee's books. I picked every book I could find in the English language on the history of the first-century church and began to write out in longhand the entire story as it was made, putting in dates and places and seasons and sometimes even times of day and rebuilding that thing inch by inch. I had books, I had maps, I had everything I could find in the English language.

Since that time, I have never stopped doing that until this day. I still work on that. I have brought in literature from all over the Middle East. Literature that's not even available in America to find the most microscopic, little details about the world in that day, the race of people, the languages, their temperature and of what they planted in those days, what they wore, how they lived, their homes, what the towns looked like, the religions in each town, how far those towns were apart. Just the most miniature things, and when and where and how Paul and Barnabas got there, the route they took, what that route looked like, and I could keep you up all evening, just that's what I started doing, rebuilding the first century, just stand back and look at it because I had to know what it was, I was obsessed with knowing.

Well, there were some meetings I couldn't cancel, and there were some meetings I had to go to, and one of them was to speak at the National Association of Evangelicals. And while I was there, I got a call from a young man whose name I had never heard of, and neither had you or anyone else on Earth. He was running a rescue mission on Clinton Street in Brooklyn, New York. And he had read my books, and he wanted to talk to me, and he asked me to come spend a week with him, and he took me into Dante's Inferno.

He took me into a world I was later to become very, very, very acquainted with. He took me into the drug world before there was a drug world, except there in New York. And I went into the halls of New York. I felt like I passed up Sodom and Gomorrah in the first hour. I saw things that absolutely caused me to stand in horror. He had just received a box of a book he wrote, he hadn't even opened it yet. The name of the book was "The Cross and the Switchblade." By the way, just for kicks, he told me that day he had not spoken in tongues in five years, and that he had talked to Oral Roberts recently, who had also not spoken in tongues in about five years.

Thought I'd pass on a little gossip to you. I was there on Clinton Street and witnessed those people in those horrible conditions. And Sunday, it was the Sunday before Easter, and I went to the largest Christian evangelical church building in greater New York, and I sat in the balcony, and I heard the pastor, nationally known, preach and bless his heart, it was an off day. He aimed at nothing, and he hit it, and I looked at those well-dressed people, and I looked at that well-dressed minister, and I looked at that ritual. I had been through that ritual so many times, and I was so tired of that ritual.

And I looked back at what I had just been through, and that was the real world. And this was what, I did not know what it was; I was sitting in the balcony. I knew it was not the living, breathing organism of the first century that I was certain of. And when the meeting was over, as innocently but as honestly as I've ever done anything, I stood up there in the balcony and everybody had left and I said out loud, "Lord Jesus, I will never again walk inside a church building as long as I live, I am good. I've been to two or three funerals. I've been pushed into a situation once or twice I couldn't get out of." And just recently, I volunteered, broke my vow, brothers. And I preached in a Baptist church about two months ago. Can you believe that?

I know where that building came from. I know where that ritual came from. I know where those traditions came from. I am a student of history, I know, and I know, forgive me, but I know about as much about the history of the first century probably as any man living that has to do with the church of the living God.

And brothers, I tell you in the simple retelling of the story, it's not there. Something else was there, and we are the recipients of a tradition. I'm not angry about tradition. I just want you to know, it has no place in Scripture. And I left, I left that day. I had, I think, one more conference to take in, and it was not in a church building.

I came home, and I shall never forget that it was in April; this is in November. I spent all that time just sitting in my study. I was sitting out in the hammock in my backyard, 1620 ..., Tyler, Texas, on a hot and muggy November day. And I think it must have been 1962; it could have been 1963, probably 1962. And I was reading Romans 7. And I closed my Bible, and I said, "Lord, I will never serve You again as long as I live. I am finished forever."

For I had made an incredible discovery that my God was not God. My God, my God, the God that I fell down before and worshiped, not realizing it, my God was *serv*ing God.