

I think this is the largest crowd I've ever seen in my life gathered in one place to take an afternoon nap. I feel like if I can even keep you half awake, I will have accomplished a great deal this afternoon. Well, when they invited me to Richmond, I talked to Mike on the phone. I hung up the phone. I couldn't help but think of a story that came out of East Texas, and every time I thought about coming to Richmond, I thought about that story again. He told me that my topic would be church history.

Back in East Texas, there was this farmer. He was very ignorant. In fact, he was so ignorant, he was ignorant. He couldn't read or write, but his kids got to go to school. Parents' Day came, and he decided to go. He walked in, and the teacher was showing him around. He stopped in front of the picture, and he said, "Wow, that is the most beautiful picture of Abraham Lincoln I have ever seen." And the teacher said, "Well, sir, that's not Abraham Lincoln. That's George Washington." And he said, "Really?" Now, that goes to show you how little I know about the Bible. I don't think I need to make my point here. Steven is here, Lance is here, and you're going to walk away from this conference this week thinking, well, Stephen, Lance knows a lot about the Bible, and they had this guy Gene Edwards. He didn't know anything about the Bible. They gave him church history.

I want to express my appreciation for the invitation to be here. I receive an awful lot of mail, and probably the two questions I am asked most in the mail are, "Can church life be brought to my hometown, and if not, where can I go? Is there anyone else in this city I can meet with?" And I have a Xerox letter that I keep in a file. I just put it in the envelope, mail it to them, and it says, "I don't know if there's anyone in your town." I don't know if there's any church life near you, but you should attend the conference in Richmond held every summer. Find Christians in your state, if you can, and see if there are any people near you who are experiencing church life. And I would like to say that again to all of you who are here. If you have not had that wonderful experience in your life, try to find some folks near you. If you have to choose between dying in your sins out in the middle of the desert somewhere all alone, either that or moving, then I would suggest you pack and move to Richmond, Virginia. Now, I can commercialize because it's the first time I've ever been to this conference and only the second time I've been to Richmond.

Okay, to introduce this subject, I think I need to start with something very personal. Church history is a hobby of mine, and it has been since before I was a Christian. I majored in history in college, and after graduating, I went to the seminary, where part of my studies were conducted in Europe. Rather than taking all those theological courses, I never did know what those people were talking about; I took all the courses I possibly could in church history. That's been way over 30 years ago. Since that time, I have kept a lifelong hobby of reading anything and everything I can find on church history. I probably owe a lot to my seminary, and they have allowed me to check out books from the seminary I graduated from all these years. And fortunately, it is one of the largest theological libraries in the English-speaking world. I've been finding everything I could anywhere on this subject. Consequently, I feel like I wore out the church history you are familiar with a long time ago. I started exploring other areas a long time ago. I'm going to concentrate today and tomorrow, especially tomorrow, on the first 400 years of church history. Make it the first 500,

forgetting the first hundred being the first century. Then there would be 400 after that. You are acquainted with that. If you're not acquainted with that era as it is usually described, get a good history book about the early church, and you will find it's the same old stuff, just a different literary style. You'll read about Origin and Tertullian and a fellow by the name Ignatius. You'll read about Augustine and Jerome and Ambrose and all of the Monists and the Donatists and all sorts of that.

Now that's the church history we've always known. I hope to crack that wide open this week. I wish to present to you some of the latest breaking developments in the study of church history, probably no more than two years old in the English-speaking world. The exciting thing about it is that, for the first time, Scholardom is having to look at church history, and it is vindicating...and this I assure you for the first time...is vindicating the position that you and I have taken from a historical viewpoint - those of us who stand outside the organized church. And as the archaeologist's spade is turned over, the proclamation coming forth is that you and I have a historical right to be here. A historical right to be here.

I wanted that to happen. I've hoped it always would. I've always felt very uncomfortable with how church history is explained to us up to 500 AD. But in going through all of church history, I've also gotten very tired of reading the rest of the story all the way up to say about 17 or 1800. After that, it's tough to find anything that's accurate because it's too recent. You don't know how to write recent history. So, some years ago, I don't know how long ago it was, but this is a magnificent obsession of mine...I hope it's magnificent...an obsession of mine has been with me ever since I was converted. I am mesmerized by this dichotomy in our minds. Let me see if I can explain it. How is it that my mind, your mind, the western mind, the 20th century mind can open the Bible, read the New Testament, announce that we must be obedient to the word of God, that we must have a New Testament church, and say that with a choir, a pulpit, people sitting in neat little rows, filing in, doing a ritual, don't know one another. Opening the scripture, finding something in there that was living, real, and dynamic, coming out of a true situation, and somehow turning it into something applicable to modern-day Protestantism. The leap from first-century church life to 20th-century tradition, and the mind is never bothered, never questions, and never wonders.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Here's the New Testament. There it is. You can read it from any direction you want to. Upside down, backwards. The story is there, and our eyes are covered, and we literally cannot see it. We read that thing and see 20th-century Christianity. That will fascinate me until the day I die. So, I started asking myself: Alright, I want to really know, historically, where, living in the 20th century, did we get our traditions, and two or three things became very clear. One of them is that no one writes on this subject. No one speaks on this subject. I don't think you can imagine how many times I've been reading some old dusty manuscript somewhere, and the man is saying, you know, this is where we got this particular tradition, and probably we should do more study in this area because we need to understand where we got many of our traditions. But no one has ever written a book on it. If they have, please let me know. In fact, if you know of any piece of material, some obscure writing that will give me any insight into anything that I'm talking to you about today, please don't hesitate to tell me about it, would you?

I'd like to know. I find some of the material that has allowed me to open this question up to an answer in some of the most obscure places imaginable. I've been very lucky, fortunate, providential. I don't know what it is to find things that have probably been written only once or twice by historians, and sometimes a historian will tell me something, not knowing he has told me. He does it accidentally. He's been reading some Latin or Greek manuscript, and as an aside, he mentions a tradition and where we got it.

Well, my point is this. For the first couple of days, I will be talking to you about second-, third-, and fourth-century church history as it has never been presented in a church history book. The discoveries I will discuss with you have reached the English-speaking world in less than 5 years. Most of it in the last two years. That will be the first thing. Secondly, I will be discussing with you where we got all the things that we Protestants do. Now, I warn you, dear Christian friend, some of this is going to get really embarrassing for you. You may find a little of this extremely difficult to handle, and I'm even worried a little bit about the front row down here, frankly. Probably some of you will say, "Well, Gene, you found this out. Couldn't you keep this to yourself?" I will illustrate. I will give you one passing illustration. We'll talk about it the day after tomorrow, and this is going to make a lot of us very uncomfortable. I've been doing this my whole life, and I'll probably keep doing it. You've never thought about this.

The Protestant custom of walking up to a pulpit, opening your Bible, and reading a passage of Scripture out of it before you speak is a pagan tradition. Has its roots in paganism. How do you feel? Now, I hope you won't get angry with me because I'm simply going to tell you what I have discovered. What you're going to do with it is your own business. But when you've taken one, two, three, four, five, ten, fifteen, or twenty of our most sacred held practices and begin to discover their origin, you no longer have the right to walk out of this building and return to business as usual. Somewhere, dear friend, there comes the issue of honesty and conscience, and there are things we've got to face. I will leave the reading of Scripture at the beginning of the meeting, of our message, for Lance and for Stephen and for me and for the other brothers to wrestle with the rest of the week, but we've got a lot more things to wrestle with, too.

Now, I'd like to go back and talk with you a little bit, and don't run for the door when I say this. If you don't know what I'll be doing for the next few minutes, I'll give you an introduction to historiography. That's a great big word that means the history of the writing of history. The history of the study of history, and I think this will help us understand a great deal, why you and I have gotten the short end of the stick when it comes to church history as it has been written throughout the last 500 years. This should be a book entitled *The Rise of Christianity*. If you want a classical treatment of Christian history from AD 100 to AD 500, it is a new book. It is called *The Rise of Christianity*. I'll give you the publisher tomorrow. It is exhaustive. It even begins to show a few of the more recent developments in Christian archaeology, just a few. It will take you two years to read it. I affectionately refer to it as the doorstop. It is also excellent for slowing down Sherman tanks. When you have read it, you will not understand one thing. It is too detailed. You get lost. Therefore, I recommend you do it this way.

I recommend you get a copy of a small book on the history of the first five centuries. This one is called *From Christ to Constantine*. Wonderful book. You should be jealous of me. You ought to own this book and read it. The problem is it's out of print. Read this, and then you'll be able to comprehend this, but when you have finished, you will have a classical understanding of the first 500 years of church history, and they've got us backed into a corner. You will read it and gain a distinct impression of the early church. You will feel very defensive, and you will feel like I, a Christian outside the religious system, have absolutely no business existing if the second, third, and fourth centuries reflect the first century. They have us on the run.

Now let me tell you why. You'll be reading along, and you're getting duped even while you're reading. You'll come to a chapter that says, "What was the liturgy of the early church?" Speaking of 100 to 500 A.D., well, you've lost right there because, first of all, you don't know what liturgy means, but whatever it is, it looks awfully somber and dry. Then they describe the liturgy of the early church from 100 to 500, and this is the way it'll sound. "They came into the meeting, and they had the singing of the Psalms, and someone who had been appointed would read a psalm or some passage out of the Scripture, and then someone within the meeting, the bishop would stand and bring a homily. There would be a solemn observance of the Eucharist, and then they would dismiss with a prayer and go home. That sounded like a Baptist church to me, boy. Or maybe even a Catholic one.

Now, you go back and check the original documents, find out where in the world they came up with this. First thing you have to understand is that the word liturgy simply means how they worshiped. That was the question being asked. Then you discover that they have interpreted what they have read. And I, a Christian outside the organized church from East Texas, who loves to not go to church. I can read those same original documents, and I can tell you what they did. You want to hear it? Different interpretation; here it comes: They came into the living room together, and they sang till they were hoarse. Somebody in the room could read. He had gone down to the synagogue, copied something from the Greek, and translated it into Latin. It was the book of Proverbs or Isaiah, and he read it, and everybody was really excited because it was something they had never heard before. Then brother Apollos, who had never gotten up and spoken in his life, got up and spoke to us that day, preached for three and a half hours till he was standing on 4 inches of his trouser legs. Then we had dinner together; dinner on the grounds. We had a wonderful, glorious meal together, and after it, we took the Lord's supper, and then we sang for another two hours, and we finally went home, and that was the liturgy of the second and third century Christians. It's all on how you interpret the original documents.

Now, in fear of losing every one of you to sleep, I'm going to attempt to talk to you about some things that are not easy to grasp. The first thing I want to talk to you about is introducing some words you will need to understand. Historians are getting a little bit more sophisticated. Church history is not simplistic. There are, in the words of Will Durant, the diastolic and systolic of history. There are many pressures and influences on every age, and we used to say, and they did this, and this, and we didn't exactly know why. Church history is written very simplistically. We are

beginning to understand what the surrounding culture, the social environment, and the particular land you're living in do. I'm going to introduce a word: matrix. It comes from the word "womb." That which surrounds the infant in his mother's womb. Everything around him is what influences him. The matrix, the womb, everything around him has an influence on him. So, when I use the word matrix, I am talking about the total influence of everything around you.

The second thing I introduced to you is the word "mindset." I want you to listen to me very carefully if you possibly can. We have been studying history from the viewpoints of events, but in about 1920, Fernando Lot wrote a book of history and made a point. His point was not only valid but correct. He said it is not events that change the course of history. He presented four or five major turning points in the history of Western man, and said those changes occurred when Western man's mindset was altered. We heard about Martin Luther this morning. We have always looked at the events. But what Martin Luther really did... the Renaissance cracked the medieval mindset in science and art; Martin Luther cracked the medieval mindset in religion and changed it. When you can change the mindset of a people, you can change history.

Now, brothers and sisters, we are speaking this week about restoration. I want to confess to you exactly what I am up here to do in the afternoons more than anything else: it is to crack your present mindset, and that is always revolutionary, to crack the way you process thinking, culture, society, religion, Scripture, everything. I would use the word, I've invented for lack of any other way, I would invite you to turn your television set around sometimes and see plastered on the back of it something called a schematic, and at the bottom of it will show a little picture of the electric plug. It shows the path of the electricity, and by following that path, it eventually gives you a picture on your TV set. If you turn your big radio console around, you'll find another totally different schematic. Electricity comes in, and beautiful stereo music comes out. Plug in something else, and it's a heart machine. Different schematic; always electricity. The information comes in; the transistor puts it one way; the computer chip puts it another way. A transformer puts it somewhere else, and eventually, it comes out as a product. You have a brain and a mind, and information is coming into them all the time, but it is not the information; it's the way you compute it. The way your mindset flows through its channels makes you and me people living in the latter part of the 20th century. We're not medieval. We're not early Socratic; we are not 21st-century; we are captured in this society with this particular mindset. Are you still awake?

Well, we're going to have to understand the matrix of the early ages of our faith, and we're going to have to understand our mindset. Now, there is one other thing: historiography. I am now going to try to explain to you why we never got a fair shake in church history. But before I do, I have one other thing to tell you. I was about to leave something out. We are unaware of the influences on us theologically, biblically, socially, and culturally. We are unaware of our matrix, and there are things we do not question in the world around us. The same thing is true about our Christian faith. We, for instance, trape into a church building every Sunday and never ask where it came from. We sit down in a pew and never ask who built that barbaric thing. We look up at the pulpit, and we assume that it is some wonderful, glorious thing given to us by God. We listen to the

preacher preach his long, droll messages. We look at our stained-glass windows, and we don't ask why. We need to crack open our present mindset. It will liberate you, and I think it will help us know the word of God better. I intend, toward the end of this week, to attack, if you please, the modern-day Christian mindset, including the Christian mindset outside the religious system. If I leave here this week with any friends at all, I will have probably, utterly failed.

Now, I want to show you, right here in living color, things you have never questioned but are ridiculous. Now then, as I do, keep in mind you're doing this all the time as a believer in the Christian faith. Here is illustration number one. What is it? We never ask what it is, why it is, or where it came from. We need to do this as Christians. Not the tie, but where do these things come from? This used to be a napkin, and this is what's left. It has absolutely no utilitarian value whatsoever. It is the most diabolical, uncomfortable thing that has ever been created. Look here. You see those buttons right there on my suit? You know where those came from? Do you have any ideas? Does anyone know? Raise your hand if you do. I'm going to tell the story. But you know, okay. Well, there was this queen who got tired of watching her guards when they had runny noses in winter do this. So, she demanded that they have buttons sewn on their palace uniforms, and that's what's left of it right there. I have no idea, and if you do, tell me where this stupid lapel came from. Have you ever walked in a suit in unexpected cold weather? These things have no utilitarian value. They'll freeze you to death up front.

But more than that, do you have any idea why we have sleeves? Why a sleeve? Do you know why we have sleeves? It is because Nordic fashion won out over Southern European fashion. This came from the killing of sheep, goats, and bears. The skins were cut, and the bear's arm was left for the human to keep his arm warm with, tight and uncomfortable. The Romans wore togas and tunics; they were much more comfortable and warmer in winter and cooler in summer. But Northwestern fashion gave us this, so I walk around all day in these uncomfortable things. The heel on your shoe, which is terrible for your spine, and you would never ask why. Came from the invention of the stirrup on the saddle so that a man wouldn't stick his foot all the way through the saddle. You're wearing one right now; it's putting your spine two inches out of whack, and that's why you've got a backache. You've never asked. Well, we're going to ask some of these questions this week. Now, see these terrible things that we're doing to ourselves. Let's get rid of them. Now we're free! The only problem left is you're not going to let me take off my shoes.

Modern archaeology began in 1620, when a Roman Catholic Jesuit gentleman cataloged and classified all known second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-century literature, documents, and objects. And that's all there is - literature, documents, and objects. The objects are frescos, monuments, gravestones, artifacts, paintings, graffiti, icons, documents, which could be religious censuses, city censuses, letters to people, and then doggone it, the literature, and there you're dealing with Ambrose and Tertullian and all these fellas who really have us messed up. There are 2.5 million documents, artifacts, objects, and pieces of literature that bear directly on the Christian faith. Approximately 1% of that is Christian. 1% is Christian. That means we have about 25,000

documents, pieces of literature, or artifacts that open up to us second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-century Christianity.

The Jesuits were the fathers of modern archaeology. Therefore, they gave us the very first interpretations. By 1700, they had pretty well cemented their interpretation of early church history. They did it in a most unscientific and very prejudiced way, and that concept, that model of church history, is only beginning right now to crack. I would say it'll be another hundred years before it cracks wide open. It's slow to change once the model is accepted. This is going to be, today and this week, one of the first times we have ever discussed any of the new developments. Anyway, they interpreted what they had in front of them first in the light of church dogma. Secondly, with the prejudicial need to push their traditions as far forward as possible into the first century, they interpreted everything on the basis of unbroken Catholic tradition from the first century. Consequently, they attributed fourth- and fifth-century objects and literature to the second century, thereby distorting the history of the church.

When I was 19 years old, I went into the catacombs. I think I was with a Jesuit, whatever they are, a priest, and he was giving me a one-man guided tour of the catacombs, and he was showing me the graffiti and telling me that this was the second century. Even though I was only 19, I knew what he was telling me had to be inaccurate, because it said, "Peter and Paul, pray for us in this hour." That is fifth-century graffiti. That is fourth- and fifth-century graffiti, and they dated it to the second century. Christianity started off with this archaeology majoring mostly in church history. I hope you can follow this. There was a shift away from research on Christian church history toward biblical archaeology, and for 200 years, this has reigned. And so, we've been out in Palestine digging up things. Now, let me tell you one other thing that is very important for you to understand. I want you to be armed with this. I want you to be able to shoot down the next Presbyterian preacher who pushes you in a corner. I want you to be able to intimidate this guy. I'm going to tell you why. I learned a long, long time ago that we can argue about scripture till doomsday, but if you're the only one who knows church history, you can win any argument you want to.

Christian archaeology of church history was pretty well solidified, and most of it is centered around the city of Rome. Once more, you and I are in big trouble. First of all, they've got it all down in the Vatican. Secondly, they've got their interpretations and dating's of it. Thirdly, the corruption of the Christian faith began in Rome, and it took 200 years to spread into the churches in villages in Asia Minor and North Africa. Rome has been the center of church history, archaeology, and literature. Now then, something had to happen, and I guess by the grace of God, I've never attributed this to the Lord, but I'm going to today. Something needed to bust this thinking wide open. In the year 1918, a group of British soldiers, I believe, were missing in Mesopotamia, and they were digging in for the night. As they dug, one of them came up on a hole. I mean, he either fell through or there was a hole there. In the 1920s, an excavation began, and some of the archaeologists opened up, and right there on that very spot, they found a second- and third-century Jewish synagogue. It shocked the world.

The Jews wanted to disclaim it, but they couldn't. It was obviously a Jewish synagogue. It had art on the walls of people, and Jews don't do that, but there it was in bright living color. So, the entire town began to be excavated. The town was Duro Europa, and when you walk out of here today, say, "Thank the Lord for Duro Europa," because it was to cause a revolution in the interpretation of Christian history, because two doors down, out here near the Mesopotamia River, was discovered for the first time ever a Christian meeting house that came before Constantine. It was a home. This sent shock waves throughout Christendom. By the way, if you want to see a duplicate of that building, you can visit Yale University's museum; they have built a replica. This thing has historical importance. It's a home, folks. It was probably built around 180, 190, 200 A.D., no one knows. It was destroyed during a war in 253 AD. It was frozen in the womb of time, waiting there. This caused the archaeological world to scratch its head and wonder whether there's a place outside Rome to dig for evidence of the early church. A mass of information has been pouring in ever since from all over the area that was once the Roman Empire, and it is devastating all previous interpretations of Christian history A.D. 100 to A.D. 500.

Now, let me see if I can explain to you why the literature has remained the same, but it is the documents and the objects that are causing the revolution. Unfortunately, for us, virtually all the research on this is in German and French, and it was not until there were some other books...I have another book. I will talk to you about it tomorrow. It just came out in English, written by a gentleman named Snyder. I wish that every one of you could own a copy, and the only reason you will not own one this week is that the little book costs \$30. I wish every one of you could read it. It is an up-to-date discussion of all these documents. It is putting to the torch all the concepts of the second, third, and fourth centuries. This creates a problem. What about Tertullian, and what about Origen, and what about Ignatius, who was a madman? What about Irenaeus, and Ambrose, and Augustine, and Jerome, and all these other precious saints?

Recently, I believe one of the professors in the archaeology department at Chicago University was reviewing Snyder's book, and he said...I want to quote him. He said, "For us to study Tertullian and on Augustine and Jerome and Ambrose to discover what the early church was like would be like trying to find out a thousand years from now what 20th-century Christianity was like by studying Brunner, Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and Niebuhr. You know who those guys are? Well, there won't be any pain if you never find out. Well, they are philosopher-theologians who write in our day, and if you took everything they ever wrote, including their letters home to mother, and studied it for 300 years, you would have no idea what 20th-century Christianity looks like. It's not even discussed. They are out in a metaphysical, theological, philosophical, ectoplasmic wonderland. So let us abandon Ambrose and Jerome and all these fellas that we were forced to read and study about. They do not tell us what the early church was really like. Well, then I'm going to tell you just a little bit, and we're going to quit and go home. Are you still awake?

Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to ask you to write me notes and hand them to me or to anyone who can get them to me this week if you have questions. I'd like to end all these sessions with a Q&A. I'm going to throw open today and all the rest of the week for you to ask me questions.

Now, if you ask me if Ambrose was right or left-handed, I may not be able to tell you that, but I should be able to handle most of what you're asking, unless you did a paper on some obscure iota subscript, and you want to show us all how smart you are. I may not know the answer to your question. Just quickly, we are going to discover tomorrow that the entire meeting will be shocking and uncomfortable. When I say it's uncomfortable, I don't mean they were more pagan or more ritualistic; in fact, they may have been freer than we are.

I want to come back to the word matrix and say this to you really quickly. With a flood of new information coming in, the archaeologists and scholars have been pulling their hair out. The material is there. Everything that's needed is there. Starting with about 400, you can come all the way back; it's there. That little 1% is just pregnant with information. To get to 100 AD, coming back to the first century, 180 AD, and it all stops, and there's no Christian evidence from 180 backward. There's no graffiti. There are no artifacts. There are no Frescos. There's no literature. There are no gravestones. All the things that ought to be there aren't there. They disappear. Why? Did it get burned? No, it's got to be there. Finally, someone in great wisdom said, "It is there. It's under our noses, and we're reading it every day." And he paid the second-century church perhaps the highest compliment it could ever have received. The Second-century church lived outside the influence of its matrix.

Now, that's wonderful. I'll explain to you what I mean. Let me give you a modern illustration. Am I boring you? I'm so afraid you're just going to go outside and go. In the mid-1950s, rock and roll was invented. I don't know who did it, but it wasn't me, and I don't think it was by the Lord. You could not find any Christian rock and roll in the 1950s or the 1960s. The matrix, the cultural room in which we live, had not made its way into the Christian fabric. But a historian a thousand years from now would suddenly realize that there was a change in Christian music in the early 70s. You come up to about 1980, and you come up with acid rock that is supposedly Christian. Do you understand that the matrix had won? The social environment had won. Today, when you turn on your Christian radio, you don't know whether you're getting a rock radio station or a Christian radio station. The stuff is unintelligible. Sounds like it was written in the bottom basement of Bedlam. The Matrix took over. It only took 30 years. That's pretty fast. The matrix hadn't affected the Christians of the second century. They were neutral in it. Excuse me, but you're not going to understand what I'm about to say, but the Christian faith has not made any inroads into them either. They were in a neutral matrix.

Now, what on earth did you mean by that? I mean, the archaeologist picks up a letter and reads it. Dear Zeus, we've been having a wonderful time since you left. Everybody here has really been enjoying themselves. It was just wonderful last Thursday night. Hermes and Diana will pick you up at the boat. We're looking forward to your return. Signed, Apollos. That's Christian literature. You want to hear it interpreted? Dear brother, our meetings down at so and so's house this week have been a gully washer. We're really glad you came. We're looking forward to your coming. A sister and a brother will come to meet you at the port and bring you to your brother's home. Do you understand what I'm saying? They had not even adopted terms like 'brother' and 'sister'. They

had not yet created a Christian matrix. You may not understand this, but say, "Praise the Lord." They were unaffected by the world's matrix, and they had not created a Christian culture. They were free. They were neutral in it.

Now, if I haven't gotten through to you, let me explain something. Oh, boy. I hope you don't drown in this. We have choirs. Well, the Bible teaches in the Old Testament about choirs, right? There were priests in the Old Testament, and there are priests today. The Old Testament had temples. There was ritual in the Old Testament temple observance and choirs, priests, and robes, and somewhere we have believed that there was this solemn meeting in which the Christian faith adopted this from Judaism. I think the greatest shock I had in the study of church history was to find out that that is, and I'm going to make a radical statement here, but history will bear me out, that is a total 100% fallacy. Early Jewish Christianity had very little influence on Gentile Christianity as it swept westward. The tragedy came with the arrival of Constantine, and the influence on the Christian faith came from Rome, not Jerusalem.

Now, here is a mind-boggler. You and I name our kids after Bible characters, right? We think we picked that up from Judaism. I can assure you, without any question whatsoever, that, even though that was a Jewish habit of naming one another Joseph and whatever, and Isaac and Abraham, and all of those things, naming their kids after great Old Testament people, the Christian concept of naming our kids Paul and John and Peter and Joseph came out of the Roman influence of people naming their children after the gods, Apollos and Zeus. Now, what do you think of your Christian name? It started with Constantine, who began naming the buildings he built. He had always named the buildings he had built of worship after gods. He built these buildings for Christians to meet in, named them after saints of scripture, and out of that a new matrix began to form. Christians began naming their children after Bible people. It was really a sad day. If you can understand, I hope you will tomorrow...brothers and sisters, the second-century Christians didn't name their kids after Bible characters. They were matrix neutral.

I think I lost you. I'm sure you got the...you look like you've been hit in the face with a piece of pie. It was not. Now look, let me try one more time. What happens when an artist gets saved? You know what he does? He wants to go make Christian art. What happens when a pianist gets saved? He wants to play Christian music. What happens when a rock and roll band gets saved? They want to make rock Christian music. Well, when a second-century Christian who had been a pagan artist got saved, he did not create Christian art. Praise the Lord. Folks, don't you know what I'm telling you? They were not of this world. They were not being influenced by their matrix. It was not until 180 AD, brothers, that is, well, I'm sorry, 180 AD. That is a good hundred years after the time of most of the apostles, before a Christian culture began to grow up, a Christian tradition. The brothers and sisters lived free of tradition until that time. Now, I'm going to close with a little...it would be wonderful if I could see that watch. I'd know what time it was.

I'm going to tell you a story. It's got nothing to do with this, but it has to do with three days from now when I tell you where we got our Christian traditions. I want to close because brother Steven

talked about Luther this morning. I would like to tell you where we got our 11:00 Sunday morning church service. Now, a few of you have heard me tell this story, and before I tell it, I did not make this up. This is a true story. This is a historical fact. I told it to a group of people one day. The man said to me, "Gene, you made that up." I was about to tell him where I got it, and another man said, "No, during the year that we celebrated Luther's birthday here recently, 500th birthday." He said, "I heard some Lutheran scholars on television telling this story." But I'm going to make a point. I want you to listen to it very carefully, because I want you to consider your matrix, your mindset, and what it's doing to you. And I want to ask you a question: what are you going to do about it? In fact, I am giving you an invitation at this moment. What are you going to do about this story?

In Wittenberg. Martin Luther started the Protestant church services at about 5:00 a.m. At the same time, he'd been saying mass, but Martin Luther had this interesting eccentricity. He loved to talk on Saturday night. And so, one Sunday morning at 5:00 a.m., he got up and announced, "We're going to start having our Protestant mass at 7 a.m.," so he could stay up a little later on Saturday night at the tavern or at his home and drink beer. Good German drinking beer and talking. The older he got, the more beer he drank. So, one morning, he got up and said, "We're going to have an 8:00 a.m. mass." And he got a little bit older, talked a little longer, stayed up a little bit more, drank a little bit more beer, and one day he got up and said, "We're going to have a 9:00 a.m. mass." He got a little older. He drank a little bit more. He stayed up a little bit longer, and he took some more of that beer. He drank a lot more of that beer and more and more of that beer, and one day he got up, and he said, "We're going to have to have mass Protestant church services at 10:00 a.m." One morning, he started to get up to change it, and someone said, "Now, Luther, if it's going to be morning, you're down to your last hour." And Martin Luther, because of your beer-drinking habits, moved the church service to this sacred, God-given, unmovable, holy biblical 11 a.m. Why are you clapping? You do it like Pavlov's dogs.

I was in the jungles of Thailand. I went out there and found a group of Christians who had been led to the Lord by a missionary 50 years ago. He had left. Nobody had seen those people. They had been forced out of the jungles after the collapse of Vietnam. They were in a refugee camp. I was one of the first people in our time to lay eyes on them. They had not been seen. They were a tribe of Christians. They were Hmong. I walked into this refugee camp. I am trying to talk to you about a matrix and a mindset that holds us all. I walked into that place. They had not seen Christians from the outside in two generations, but sitting in the middle of that plastic refugee camp was one building about three feet higher than any other hut. I walked into it and there, made out of bamboo sticks, were these little things in a row for everybody to sit down on. And in the front, made of bamboo, was a little pulpit, and those people met at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning. Your mind and my mind have been caught in this matrix unknowingly and unwittingly, and if ever that revolution and that total restoration is to come, brothers and sisters, those things must be cracked wide open.

Now, I ask you, as the waters get rougher these afternoons, that you start bringing these things to the Lord. I don't think there's one of us here, but we need to be a little bit liberated from our own present-day matrix and from a vast, long, and too venerable Protestant history. I forgot the

questions this afternoon. We'll pick some up tomorrow. Is there anything you have to ask? Is anybody just dying to ask something? Did I misquote anything that needs correction here? Tomorrow we're going to discover what second, third, and fourth-century Christians were really like.

That had been put on these people for the last 400 years; what is called the Roman school of archaeology has been a very religious, liturgy-oriented, strongly ecclesiastical, very much under the bishops. The Roman School of Archaeology had to bridge a gap from, let's start with, the 19th century. They know what they are from there back to Constantine. From there, they leap over to the first century and interpret the Scripture in the light of those 1700 years. Now they have to make the second and third centuries match with the fourth and fifth, and so on. They have to make them match or their interpretation of the first century will fold. Are you following me? Everything pivots around Constantine. There is no doubt that the church took a nosedive after Emperor Constantine came to the throne. No question, no contest. The question is, was there a Roman Catholic established orthodoxy previous to that? Was there an unbroken line of what is from here to here, also going that way? If so, then we who are evangelicals and especially those of us outside the religious system are in big trouble. All their interpretations of those 200, 230 years are toward an extremely religious, pious group of people, very ritual-oriented, very Roman Catholic, and that they gave Constantine the torch, and everything after that is justified on the basis of second- and third-century Christianity.

When this building was excavated in Duro Europa, it literally reignited interest in church archaeology rather than biblical archaeology. Archaeology outside of Palestine. Archaeology outside of the Holy Lands. In this case, two places, not archaeology, not in the Bible lands, and not in Rome, but to begin looking everywhere else for evidence that will help unlock the door. What were second and third-century Christians like? Yesterday, I used the term "matrix neutral." It may not be a totally accurate term; I made that up on the spot. I was asked, "You mean the Christians of the first century in Jerusalem and Judea were not affected by their culture?" Of course they were. They were Jewish Christians, and there was a strong Judean heritage. But let's get out in some little bitty obscure town that no one ever heard of, 150 years later, when someone comes through and preaches the Gospel about who is a gentile and what happens the next 50 years in his little world. Is he being greatly affected by the pagan society around him, and is his Christian faith being paganized? Or is he becoming inverted into a ghetto Christianity that is extremely religious, overly pious, with a world of its own vocabulary and its own creation? And in both cases, the answer is, gloriously, no. They are not being greatly affected by their pagan surroundings. Neither are they becoming an inverted religious...I don't only use the word monastic, but ghettoized, a ghetto type movement...and they have, and they did greatly and successfully resist those two pressures. Now, then, can you prove that, Gene?

From the literature, you are virtually locked out, as the only written literature during this period is by men who were philosophers converted to Christ. They come in with their dialectical mind, look at the Scripture, and begin defending their view of the Scripture or Christianity to a pagan friend,

or write a tract defending Christianity. There is nothing in that literature that lets us know what church life was like after 100 AD, from 100 AD to 313 AD. So, it has taken the shovel to give us a really clear understanding of what went on during this silent era, and it has been called the silent era many times throughout the centuries. Now, is that era going to stand with the ritual and so forth of the Roman Catholic Church? Is it going to stand with the Baptists and the Presbyterians? Or is there an outside chance, for the first time ever, that we who are outside the religious system will get a shot at historical acceptance?

Let me explain to you why this is very important. In case you don't know it, you are not considered part of the great heritage of historical Christianity. You are in the term given to us by the British; you are dissenters. You're rebels and troublemakers. You're gripers and complainers. You're out here, unhappy with church on Sunday morning. You don't like Baptist preachers, and so forth. We're out here seeking to establish a testimony based on what we see in holy Scripture given and delivered to us in the first century, and that's all we've got other than a long but very small line of faithful Christians throughout church history. And we can hardly pick up their testimony before 380 AD. There's still that silent era in there. It's a thin line from 380 AD with Priscillian, all the way forward to, say, the Moravians. It's a thin, small line. You can almost not find it at times. What do the second and third-century Christians tell us? We cannot look to literature for help. We have to look at the shovel and what comes out of it.

Now, is it really possible for artifacts, art, frescoes, and a couple of other words in here I cannot even pronounce, graffiti, and other things like that to really tell us anything? And the answer is, it's incredible what they can tell us. And not only that, but with the recent shoveling that's been going on in certain places and with the advent of the computer, there is an absolute deluge of new information coming to us. Let me get off the subject here for just a minute. Forget church history for a moment. The archaeologists of our day have turned to the computer, feeding in all sorts of information and coming out with all kinds of new information. They will perhaps find, on a papyrus, certain ships going to certain places and what they've got on those ships, and they'll take that information and feed it into ship schedules and some information written by captains. They will find out how much corn was sold for in Pompeii on a certain day. Combine that with a census of the population of a city somewhere in Carthage, and they punch a lot of buttons. They come out with a total and complete schedule of ships sailing dates across the Mediterranean, what they're carrying, and how much they're carrying.

Now, with these same incredible approaches, they're beginning to estimate the populations of certain cities at any given time and grasp their growth or decline. At the same time, for the first time, they are performing incredible calculations and telling us what the Christian population was in the second, third, or fourth century, and the results are very surprising. I've always read that the Christian family, probably at the time of Constantine, was around 5%. I think the information will ultimately go down. It's going to be more like 2-3%. The Christian church was not as large as we thought, and it didn't grow as great as we were always told it did. That's wonderful; believe me, trust me, that's wonderful. She was still a beautiful thing to behold right up until about 300 AD.

Now, then, I think as far as I'm concerned, there's only one bulwark left in the other interpretation of second and third century Christianity, and that's all built around one word: bishop, and they've still got us in a corner with that one.

I'm going to close this meeting today by talking about the one great citadel they're still waving over our heads. Bishops, bishops, bishops, all these bishops that we've heard about all of our lives. And I'm going to take that one on last. I'm less prepared to do that than with anything else, but I'm going to make some guesswork as to what's going to come out in the next 15 or 20 years if the Lord tarries. I'm going to tell you again, I feel very inadequate. I'm not an archaeologist. I am not a historian, but I have been very lucky and have read an awful lot. Now, let me see if I can do this. Can you imagine someone picking up art coloring and then going to draw something? He unwittingly draws according to his culture, his thinking, and his age. Can you appreciate that? He does not draw a spaceship or the surface of the moon, right? Because he doesn't understand those things. And when you and I do artwork, we don't usually do tunics, sandals, and chariots, but rather automobiles and airplanes, because that's where we are.

Well, the reflection of our thinking, our feelings, and our emotions is put into what we write, what we say, and what we think in every age. Now, I'm going to try to take one more stab at this. There seems to be no Christian anything from 100 AD to 180 AD, which simply means that a Christian culture and a religious atmosphere had not yet settled in. That can be pushed back to 160. It can be brought up to around 190. But just be grateful. If you could only understand the interpretation of that age, those people should have been calling their revered heroes saints. They should have been building and creating paintings simply honoring a pope. And they haven't even gotten into their literature, such a term as brother. Now, that's good; from your viewpoint, that's good. Don't look at me like that.

Okay, I'm going to try again. I'm going to start with what to me is just about the most important thing of all: any and all works of art or anything that symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ. You know what a fresco is, or do you know what the two-dimensional things were? They hatched out on the side, hacked out of the side of the tombstones, little two-and-a-half-dimensional figures. A painting of the Lord, a painting of the Lord, and whatever group is around him. Now, a lot of this stuff was misinterpreted 400 years ago. Today, when this thing has become an exact science and is compared with the thinking of the secular art of that day, these artifacts can be pinpointed to within 20 or 25 years of when they were done. Boy, a whole new concept of what second-century Christians saw of the Lord Jesus Christ emerges.

I'm sorry to those of you doing the video, but I can't stand still any longer. Oh, shoot. Alright, I get excited about this. There ought to be, within these artifacts, and I'm going to use the word artifacts to cover it all. Everything that would in any way depict the Lord Jesus Christ, there ought to be things there that would show doctrinal orientation. There should be evidence, things that show an ecclesiastical orientation. There should be things there that speak of judgment and eschatology and all sorts of things that we, as Christians, after the third century, came to understand and have woven

into the warp and woof of our thinking. None of it is there - none of it. What emerges is quite incredible. What you see, and the first thing that strikes you, is He's young. The second thing is that He is always swift. This means he is moving. He is itinerant. Now then, it is impossible for anyone to depict that without their having that kind of understanding of the Christian faith that there will be this maybe it's a mosaic maybe it's something on the side of a tomb two three four fixtures he's always moving it's graphic it's living, he's in one place another place and he's on the move to yet some other place they are reflecting their understanding of a Christian leader. He is itinerant.

I did not make this up. When I read these things, I was as dumbfounded as I could be. I was stunned and shocked...or I was amazed, I don't know, I've exhausted my vocabulary. I haven't gotten over it. Here is the next incredible thing about Him: He is smiling. Say praise the Lord. He is invariably and always happy, and everyone in the crowd around him is happy. For pity's sake, don't look so unhappy. In the background, a raised hand may be visible. To an archaeologist, this is incredibly significant - a bodily symbol of joy and rejoicing.

Now let me tell you something else incredible: from the time of Constantine until this day, which means right now, June 1987, there has never been a period or age of Christian art in which the happy Lord Jesus was depicted. Never has there been, nor has there ever been, any period when Christians had smiles on their faces. Something terrible happened after Constantine. This isn't one obscure piece of artifact; this happens again and again. But here are some other things I could never have figured out. This has come through a very brainy scholastic work. There is no depiction of the cross or the resurrection in these early years. Now you're, but wait a minute. Just wait a minute. Are they heretics, or are we maybe a little off here? Because the resurrection...through the eyes of the scholar...he says these people have not created these things. These people are not heavy into doctrine. What they are depicting here is a living Lord, someone that they personally sense a great living relationship with. And here's another thing. He is always depicted as triumphant. It is as though they have taken the triumph of the cross, the victory of the resurrection, and brought it back and depicted it within his own earthly life. That is a remarkable thing when they see victory everywhere. Deliverance everywhere.

Well, let me tell you what else is not there: the incarnation is never depicted; the word is "never." They are not seeing him, they're not worried about it. Please understand, these people are believers. They are not worried about whether or not he was born a virgin. They have accepted that; it is not under contention. What they depict is their personal relationship to Him, as they view Him in their hearts and minds. Now, there are a couple of other little things about all of this: as they study the crowds, they find a variety of dress. They find nothing typical. Nothing is repeated. Nothing that shows stagnation, stereotype. No one's trying to preach a sermon on his pet view of how we ought to conduct ourselves in all this. Now, one other incredible thing, and when I read this, I had to say, "Wait a minute. This doesn't fit." There is no depiction of the Lord's supper in any solemn way, nor is the Lord's supper ever depicted by cup or bread as best as they can interpret. The most frequent, in fact, the almost universal depiction of taking the Lord's supper or the Lord's table,

depending on where you come from, is the Lord feeding the multitude whether it's the 5,000 or some other thousand; it's the Lord himself feeding a multitude of people and once more, and boy, this ought to make you stop and wonder if it is always depicted as a joyful festivity. They can only be taking the Lord's supper, the Lord's table, whatever you want to call it. They could only be taking it in the middle of themselves, with unabashed joy to be able to depict the way they depicted it.

Are you awake? You are awfully quiet. Does that not mean anything to you? It's not solemn. It's not miserable. It's not mournful or groanful. It's not some terrible time of searching out your heart. I had to go back and reread the stories of the Lord's feeding the multitudes to see why that would relate to the Lord's supper. I think, saints, they must have understood a lot, because it is in this passage that the Lord says, "What I'm speaking to you is not flesh and blood, but what I'm speaking to you is Spirit and Life." Could they have possibly truly understood the depths of that statement, looked past the feeding of the multitude, and understood what He was saying, and joined in an eternal rejoicing with their Lord? I think there's a strong possibility that's what we're seeing depicted. Well, I would go on and on and on, but I want to quote...no, I'm going to wait...don't let me, Bridget, don't let me leave this meeting without quoting to you what was the summation of the archaeologist interpretation of all of this artifacts concerning the Lord Jesus Christ as He was being understood and seen in the local body of believers everywhere.

Now, I'm just going to quickly tell you a few other things because we're moving along here time-wise. In Egypt, a great deal of papyrus has reached the poor, and because of the dry climate there, it has been well preserved. It's been dug up. All sorts of things are found there. They have found all sorts of accounts. They have found all sorts of industry and commerce recorded, and religious censuses taken door to door in many cities. They have found architectural studies of all the houses in their towns. They have also found taxation lists describing every commercial and residential building in the city. You have to understand that people worked where they lived, and they lived where they worked. So that if you walked up to this guy named Diogenes and said, "What's going on in this building?" He would say, "I have a wife, three kids. I'm running a pottery. I also sell wine and oats for cows." And they'd write this all down. Now, literally thousands and thousands of such documents from this era have come to light, and the results are absolutely fascinating. A lot of correspondence has emerged from this age, and I've got to stop here and talk to you a little bit about this book.

Tomorrow, I'll try to give you my one reservation for this book. Now, that book cost me \$30. I bought 30 copies of this and brought them with me. I got them wholesale, and if you pay \$20 for them, I'll break even. I'm going to take the rest of them back to the publisher because those 30 books cost \$500. I would have brought 200. This book, actually the chapter on the papyri, goes through and lists many of the Christian findings that are there. They are mindboggling. The only pre-Constantinian hymn ever found was found in North Africa on the backside of an invoice for corn, and it is a Christian hymn. You can read it. They've even attempted to set it to music here. And Baptists are going to be thrilled, speechless. How many of you are, or were, Baptists? Will

you please raise your hand? Oh, my cow. That's per everybody. How? All right. Have you ever moved your letter from one place to another? Well, they actually found one of these things, and it's late 200, probably around 280 AD. Here again, it screams so much to Maximus. It doesn't say to the bishop of the church in or the holy so and so; to Maximus, our brother. Greetings. We commend to you Theophilus, our brother in the Lord. We pray for your help, and the letter is unsigned. The guy who sent it wasn't even important enough to sign it. There's no Christian name in there. There's no great spillage over of...you ever get one of these letters from a brother or a sister, and you could throw the first three pages away? Oh, dear brothers, and the peace and the Lord and the Holy Trinity, and on and on, and then you go to page after page after page of that. There's none of that there, saints. This screams volumes as to how those people were thinking.

In the middle of all this, they come up to one of the censuses in Egypt, and they find a statement that this fella is using this place to sell pottery and corn, and the Ecclesia of God meets here. Now, I'm going to talk about church buildings later, but this is mind-boggling for any hope of the Roman school of archaeology holding out. It's crumbling fast. Here is an ordinary home used for living and selling things. We know the name of the man, just an ordinary, good old pagan name, and the house is being used as a Christian gathering, and this is almost at the time of Constantine.

And here's the one that I thought was the funniest of all. It was written...again, I'm speaking of the reeds that came out of Egypt, used as paper to document civilization in that day. Somebody has obviously written this dear Christian, and he's in trouble because there's a Christian house there, or they're trying to tax the church. I don't know what it is, but it's just downright hilarious. They have obviously asked him, "What does the church of the living God, that meets in your home, what does it own?" And his answer is classical. "The church owns no slaves, no gold, no silver, no furniture. It owns no property. It owns no corn, no this, no that. It owns nothing except an iron gate." Say, praise the Lord. This is a church standing at the precipice of the Constantinian era, meeting in a home. It hadn't got a candlestick. It hadn't got a candelabra. It hadn't got a cross. It hadn't got an altar. It hasn't got any paraphernalia whatsoever. Somehow or other, that home had to have been where the church was meeting; it had to have an iron gate put up somewhere. And they had ordered an iron gate from Alexandria and had it installed, and for what reasons we could only guess or imagine, and there they are, the Lord's people own one iron gate. I've been a member of a fellowship of believers that owned nothing but folding chairs, and when we bought them, we made a covenant that we'd take them out to sea and dump them. If it came down to the church owning anything, I can relate to their sense and the feeling that they must have had on that day.

Now, this is not all. There is correspondence from Christian to Christian. Now again, we should be looking at an era in which there is an overlordship of bishops, where there is ritual, where there is orthodoxy, where the entire Christian family throughout the entire Roman Empire ought to be basically monolithic, stereotype everybody almost the same way, except for these heretics over here somewhere. Here is this pile of Christian correspondents, free open non-religious, no Christian names, even a minimum of Christian terms, and listen to this, not one single reference to any kind of clergy. As one of the writers said, by all statistics and all mathematical formulas, by

all matters of chance, by the amount of literature there, there ought to be many references to elders, bishops, deacons, or other kinds of Christian leaders, and they are not there.

Don't you care? Don't you care just a little bit? Doesn't that mean anything to you? Can't you say, "Praise the Lord." Say, "Praise the Lord." Thank you. In fact, in one of the conclusions to all this, one of the authors said, "Taking all the Christian evidence that exists during this era, pre-Constantine, his statement is that there is virtually nowhere...we're talking about in everything combined...there is virtually no reference to any clergy. Brother, praise the Lord. You're getting...what's emerging here is a free-swinging bunch of Christians meeting in homes, with a strong understanding of itineracy. I didn't make this up.

Now, I'm going to have to take this next one and say it's been plucked from the tombstones and the crypts. It's been taken out of the museums. It comes out of the literature, the documents, everything, and I thought this was one of the most precious things imaginable, both on their tombstones and in everything else they do. And again, I'm quoting one of the authors just almost perfectly here. I think he said, "This was in direct contrast to all other elements of society within the Roman Empire." It's a little bitty thing. Christians dropped their last names. No one else did, and it seemed to be universal. Now, can you imagine why? Because...and this is on their tombs, this is your final resting place where you're going to be remembered forever, this is in their correspondence to one another. In direct opposition to all customs of that day, Christians dropped their last names, and they did not have Christian first names. They dropped their last names. Why? Do you know? Does anybody want to make a guess? Yes, sister.

It indicated their social standing. You could tell by their last name whether they were royalty, upper class, middle class, or lower class, and especially whether they were slaves. I'm going to quote again in all of Christian literature and everything else that's been put together from 100 to 313 AD, there is virtually no or absolutely no reference to a Christian as a slave. Now, by other means, they had discovered that many of these little local assemblies of believers in these cities were probably 50, 60, 70, or 80% slaves, with some of Caesar's household, some middle class, some Jews, some soldiers, but they all, in the Christian community, that they understood to be the ekklesia, they all universally dropped their last name. Brothers and sisters were looking at a classless society. This screams to the scholar. This screams to the archaeologists that there is one pervading thing going on among them. They have an enormous, overwhelming sense of community to which they are all totally committed.

Well, what was their view of the church? They have been able to dig up three, maybe four, Pre-Constantinian meeting places. One of them is fascinating because it survived for a little while into the post-Constantinian era. And by the way, it was in Rome, and it gives great insight into what happened. Now, archaeologists can enter these foundational buildings, study them, and gather enormous amounts of information. The first thing they find out is that this home had Christians meeting in it, and at some point, a wall was ripped out. There is absolutely nothing in it that speaks of anything that has been installed for the purpose of liturgy or ritualistic worship. Toward the end

of the 4th century, around 350-360 AD, something was added to that building, suggesting they adopted some kind of liturgy. They've got a little raised platform. Then, after 400 AD, it was no longer used as a Christian building. Soon after that, somewhere after 400 AD, the first known choir was installed. It does not appear in any other Christian buildings that have been excavated, and every one of them that has been excavated has been a home. The most well-preserved, almost perfectly preserved, of course, is the home in Duro Europa, and the archaeologists got in there and measured the room. They said that before they tore the wall out, it could hold 40 people. And then they tore the wall out, and then it held 60 to 75 people.

There would be little question in the minds of those people that the assembly of God, the church of the living God in the city of Duro Europa had a total adult population of about 75 people. By the way, there's half a letter somewhere that's survived, and it says, "We have doubled this right after Constantine." It says we have doubled in size in the last year. We have added 50 people. Now that is clear evidence: from 100 AD until Constantine came along, in that town they had 50 believers, and in one year they added 50 more.

What can we gather from all of this information, put it together, and take a good, clear look at it? Here's what emerges: out of the hand that writes the papyri, there is the reflection of what's going on in the head and the heart. The paintbrush reflects that person's own experience, what he picks up with a chisel and chisels into stone. What is put on a grave marker about a brother or a sister reflects the thinking of those people and the way they saw the Christian faith. What are we looking at? What we are looking at is astounding. We are looking at symbols. I didn't get into this, but in all the symbols of the early church, there is not once a depiction of a cross. It's post-Constantinian.

All of the things that we consider religious symbols today were not theirs. Jonah was the number one depiction, and you and I, you see, we see Jonah's being punished by the Lord over into that ocean and that big old whale. Well, when they depict him, they depict him in the belly of the whale, and he's happy as he can be. The Lord has delivered him. He got a big smile on his face. He's been delivered by the Lord. Noah has a big smile on his face as he leads all these people and animals in deliverance from the mess around. Always Noah, Jonah, everybody who got depicted got depicted with a smile. The total lack, I'm going to give you the statistics. You can write this down. From the year 400 A.D. and back, every known Christian name was put into a computer. Every known Christian had his name put into a computer and fed out. Eight of them who lived after the rise of Constantine had Christian names, and two had Christian names before Constantine, and that is all. You're dealing with a group of people who have got their hearts and minds somewhere else. They don't feel the need to name their kids John, Paul, Peter, and so on. Well, here is the summary, and I will quote it just around the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a quotation. It is not mine.

This takes into account the depictions of baptism. Always a happy, joyful thing. Seems to have no doctrinal statement to it all. It's always a festival. Christians getting together to have the Lord's supper. It looks like a big banquet with everybody having fun. Put all of it together with all those pictures of the Lord, and this is what the writer said: "This is what we see. We see a Christ, not

one who has come to deliver people from guilt. We find no evidence of a sense of guilt, nor a Lord who has come incarnated upon the earth to fulfill some eschatological role or to buttress some doctrine, but rather a Lord has come to deliver them from the surrounding wisdom that they are in." The sense that they have been delivered out of the Roman Empire by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now then, I would immediately ask: how do you do that? But the author went on to say, and this is someone who's battling nothing. These are clinical scientists. He goes on to say: a redeemer who has come to deliver them out of the present system that they are in, and he has come to do this by the agency of a Christian faith community. You ought to say praise the Lord to that, and I'm going to interpret what that means. That means that those people saw these happy rejoicing believers in the Lord are rejoicing out of a Savior and a Lord, a triumphant God who has delivered them out of the world by the agency of the local body of believers with whom they live and breathe and have their being and with whom they joy and delight in great rejoicing. Now say amen to that.

Now, alright, now that's the second- and third-century believers. Now, what about the word bishop? We're still being beaten over the head with the word 'bishop'. There was a bishop of this little town and the bishop of that town and the bishop of this town and that town. I predict that sometime in the next 25 years, if the Lord tarries, somebody is going to write a book that's going to blow bishops right out of the water. And if that happens, then what you're going to end up with is a Christian community that has local helpers, local elders with people coming through, half-mad men coming through, preaching the gospel to them, undergirding them, helping them, taking off for parts unknown. And that group of believers, by the way, met in homes, in parks, and in cemeteries. Now you have cemeteries. Well, you have to see a Roman cemetery to appreciate it.

Have you ever seen Forest Lawn in Southern California? You have? Well, that's the kind of cemeteries the Romans built. They made great public parks, and no one seemed to care about the dead. They went out there, and on clear days when it wasn't raining or snowing or whatever, they seemed to have just one great time with one another. Okay, come back to this. I believe that this bishop problem, we have failed to understand that the word bishop is a transliteration, not a translation. In Greek, it's not a transliteration; it is the original word, and so much of this was chiseled and written in original Greek. And that word doesn't say "bishop." That word means "overseer" or "elder," and it could refer to any brother in the church who happened to be an overseer or an elder. And some of them, it would seem, indicate the church was meeting in the homes of these bishops, who also ran a little pottery factory. Sold wine and corn, and that's not the image of a bishop that they're trying to sell us. But here's the fun part. The fun part is they've been digging around in these cemeteries and finding not "bishop" but "bishops." Two, three, and four of them are all buried together in one place. Now, the Roman Catholic Church can't handle that because they're not supposed to be but one bishop per church or diocese. Here you got three or four of those brothers buried together, and what you got is not bishops, but, praise the Lord, a local plurality of elders.

I think that book is coming, and won't that be a needed day? Praise the Lord. Well, brothers and sisters, what does this mean for you and for me? For me, it means that the simplicity of the Christian gospel of the first century was held during the second and third centuries. It only began to cave in around 280, and things do begin to change, and there really are individual bishops, and you actually begin to pick up little evidence of a ritual. I have a theory, and that is that the sweeping periods of persecution time after time had killed off Christian leaders, and the lowest common denominator had to keep emerging to the top with less and less understanding and less spiritual foundation, till by the time 280, 290 the church was in trouble.