

It means this. It means we've got a right to be here, and we've had a right to be here all along. And that we're carrying a torch not only for the first century but for the second and for the third, that they were of a Christian group of great variety, embarrassingly great. One of the writers said that this evidence puts to rest the myth that Christianity followed a single set of beliefs, a single way of meeting, or a single accepted view of orthodoxy. There was plenty of elbow room to be a Christian without orthodoxy looking over you.

Let me tell you one of the saddest things that you discover is that after Constantine came along, all of the depictions, and this is within 30 years after Constantine's death. Alright, so within 30 years after Constantine emerged, within 30 years...this is incredible, the apostasy, the change in people's minds of who the Lord was within 30 years of the rise of Constantine: you have got the Lord Jesus Christ depicted as a sour old man, robed in the emperor's garbs, with great big huge spheroid eyes and a very unhappy look, and he's looking down on you like he's saying, "You're not trying hard enough." That we have a right to be here on the basis of evidence of second and third century Christians; that we have no shame and no apology for the simple way we practice the Christian faith.

Our disdain for peripheral doctrine is grounded in what is real, but the one thing that I would have them tell you, and for you to remind your own heart, is that all of that art and all of those artifacts and all of that evidence is saying that it is coming out of an intense, living relationship of fellowship of believers together. Forgetting all else, that is their message to us.

Now that's it. I promised to take questions on anything except the woman's place in the church. Now, can you please stay on topic? I don't care what it is in church history. We got 10 minutes here, and then I'll be over time. Brother, would you stand and say it really clearly, and I'll try to repeat it if I can hear it.

**Audience:** These three bishops who were found buried together, were they all buried at the same time?

They seem to have been buried in the same place, one right on top of the other. Same time, same place, perhaps even killed. Yes.

**Audience:** What do you say to the liberal who takes essentially the same evidence that we have, and, in fact, that as Christians, we cooked up all these doctrines, such as the virgin birth and the incarnation, at a later date, and that's why you don't find any evidence early on.

I would say, brother, excuse me, I'm sleepy, and I've got to take a nap. My first year in seminary was in an extremely liberal seminary. I doubt there's a more liberal seminary on earth, and they got a hold of my head there for about a week. I sat down and started reading the other view because I wasn't getting it from whoever was teaching me. Man, I had the privilege of taking my other three years in a conservative seminary. You know, those people do not have a critical leg to stand on. And again, as someone so wisely said, every turn of the archaeological spade is putting them to flight, and I can't say anything more than that. Alright. Yes, brother.

**Audience:** Is there anything to support the history...?

I want to introduce you to a book. Now, I want you to know that atheists, sectarianists, and liberals write these books. Most of these men couldn't care less. They're scientists. The name of this book is *The Christianizing of the Roman Empire*. It's a new book by Ramsay MacMullen for you three history buffs out there. It's put out by Yale University Press. They'll give you good help. It's the study of evangelism in the second and third centuries, and they often don't even know what they're talking about.

My impression is that...I'm going to use the word "itinerant". The itinerant Christian worker seems to have survived until about 200 A.D., maybe a little later, and unfortunately, that's the last evidence we have of him. I would not answer on the basis of apostles and prophets and those kinds of words, just say those who "itinerantly moved". As far as the local preaching of the Gospel, I'm going to try to get into that two days from now. Who was proclaiming the gospel locally? Obviously, there were no professionally trained men there, but I think that perhaps one of the great tragedies of the Christian faith, and it's almost never dealt with in anybody's books, is the loss...and I'm going to substitute the word "apostle"; that word gives me hives. I've never liked it. There are 12 apostles. There may be 13, 14, 15, who knows how many there were, but there is a concept that they themselves exemplified, and that, I think, is one of the four or five major elements that are slipping away from the Christian faith in the years that came; we lost the church planter. We lost the concept of the church planter somewhere between 200 and 220 A.D. He seems to have slipped off the stage at that point, and I cannot tell you why. I wish he'd come back just as soon as he can get here, and I hope he hurries. Yes, brother

**Audience:** Gene, do you know anything about the origin of the sign of the fish?

It was one of the not early but middle symbols. It was not the earliest; the earliest symbols were Jonah and the anchor; the dove came a little bit later. The lamb was never depicted slain. He was always depicted at the feet of a caring shepherd. I don't know what was going through these people's heads, but one thing you get is that they are not carrying a guilt trip around with them. And I don't know the origin. I've heard the classical, you know, I think Hollywood made that up. I have never read any early evidence that that's true, and someone may have, but I have never read a scholarly statement on the subject of it being a symbol that Christians identified with. I think we've gotten into a lot of over-dramatization of what happened during the second and third centuries.

"They went out to the old world, preached the gospel, everybody got saved, the empire fell, and up came this great Christian world empire"; phooey. We were holding on by the skin of our teeth when Constantine came along, and I wish to goodness he hadn't come along, and now I'm going to commit heresy here. Can I jump up on something radical here? Thank you very much. I appreciate that word of confidence. My own feelings about Constantine are very poor. We Christians should have and should always remain a persecuted minority. I don't want to be persecuted. I don't have a persecution complex. I mean, we should always have the short end of

the stick. It does not do for Christians to get in control of anything. And we got in control, and we lost it.

Now, here's my radical statement, and I know you're not going to understand me. Why I make statements like this, I do not know. But three people in the back row will understand me. The rest of you will have a fit. There are three people who will appreciate this. I wish we had lost at the Council of Nicaea. I wish the Aryans had won and the Trinitarians had lost. I wish we could have left that thing. First of all, I wish it never been held. As one scholar said, "No first-century Christian could have read that creed and understood what it meant."

Anyway, that's true because it was written in Aristotelian. I wish we Trinitarians had gone out of there, the persecuted ones. I wish that Constantine had gone with the Aryans. I wish he had denied the deity of my Lord. That would have helped a whole lot. We would have had to go, I don't know where, but we could have kept our purity, and he wouldn't have been giving us the taxes that had gone to pagan temples. He would not have built for us a hundred church buildings that turned into cathedrals. He would not have legalized us and then given us the power of the state to kill others who did not agree with us. We should have lost at the Council of Nicaea. That is the Edwardian view. You don't have to accept it. You got another question.

**Audience:** Are there other spaces, such as Duro Europa?

Well, I think it'll keep coming as long as they keep digging. It's not static. It's still happening. A lot more recent things have been coming out of Egypt. I think you would enjoy this book. I did a timeline. Have y'all...is it over in the bookstore? Now, treat that with reverence, whether you get it or not. That's probably the best timeline; I say this in all Texas humility. That is probably the best timeline ever assembled for the early church before Constantine, because it's the only one that incorporates recent archaeological evidence in the far-right column, and a whole bunch of Christians worked really hard on it. We got that thing copied just before the conference and got it up here. There are 150 copies of it. If you are a history buff, you will enjoy that, and you'll see all these bishops, bishop this and pope that. Don't pay attention to that stuff. Just call him a local elder, would you? If you have to get that religious, pay attention to what's happening in this far-right corner of the recent archaeological information coming up, which is combating all of this other interpretation.

Sister, there are four "house churches" that have been excavated so far. This is interesting. The Roman school of archaeology said that there was an early Christian church under every cathedral in Rome. They listed all the earliest buildings that Constantine built, and they said you'll find under them church buildings where all of these revered events took place. Recently, because there is a growing evangelical Christian archaeological study of non-Bible lands, non-Rome, they came and challenged that, and went back to those buildings. Listen to this: not one of the ancient Constantinian buildings...not one of them...had a church under it, a pre-Constantinian church. It was either virgin land, a cemetery, or a marketplace. Not one of them had a house under it. No

church houses there. Church buildings were invented out of the dark medieval mind of Constantine. They did not exist, per se, previous to him.

Yeah, question, anybody, anything. I'm not against church buildings. I'm just again...Yes, sir.

(Can't understand the question) Absolutely none whatsoever. That is all, either pre-Christian or pre-second century. Yes. Oh, this book is called *Ante Pacem*. Do you all understand what a Pacem means? It means "before the peace." The peace of Constantine: after the Bible and before Constantine came along. It was written by a man named Snyder. It's from Mercer University and is titled *Anti Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine*, by Graydon Snyder. Please let me say a word about it tomorrow. I need to because there are a couple of qualifications here. You evangelicals need to be careful when you read this, unless I explain a couple of things.

(Can't understand the question) You see, you get up here, and you start making radical statements, and somebody starts...I could not be more content with the word of God, the New Testament...you cannot find anybody in this world more committed to the Scripture and or its inspiration than I am. I believe in its dynamic, verbal, veracity, inspiration, and I believe in what's that word we're kicking around these days? I believe in inherency. I want you all to know this business of where we got our Bible is ridiculous. I think the only real major debate that ever happened over the first century writings was whether or not to put First and Second Clement in there, and that was all. I'm very content with it. I'll tell you what I'm so mad about, I could spit fire. I am burning mad at the way the epistles are arranged, and I am so angry with the way Martin Luther arranged the epistles in the New Testament. I get downright neurotic, and I will explain to you why later. Alright, you have another question. Yes, brother.

**Audience:** What archaeological journals are these things coming out in for us?

You know most of this information is new, most of it is in German and French, and it's not even being published in journals. You'll find it in maybe five or ten books total. Don't waste your money buying them. Just get *Ante Pacem*. Spend your 20 bucks or 30 bucks if you have to buy it yourself. And read it and go easy on...you know, everybody who writes a book has got one screwball idea that he's propagating. Absolutely everybody...except me.

I'll go ahead and tell you, and then we'll quit. He gets in here on something called the special dead and the meal of the dead. I called him up and asked him about this. He and one other man are the only two people in the world who believe this. They're trying to propagate this doctrine based on their interpretation of the words diamond, demon, and death. The words demon, diamond, and death all come from the same root. He's so far out to lunch, and the reason he's so far out to lunch is that so many Christian meetings were in cemeteries. He felt there had to be some relationship, and he built this whole explanation.

He ought to come to my town, where we were outlawed from meeting, and where we had no place we could meet legally. We never met anywhere for over two or three weeks, and the police came

and told us to go somewhere else. We met anywhere we could: in cemeteries, in parks, out, on the ocean side, and a couple of times in the ocean. We met in garages, we met in living rooms and bedrooms, wherever we could find a place to meet. Those brothers and sisters were taking full advantage of these beautiful, long, manicured cemeteries, and this guy needs to go to Rome and visit some of the beautiful, well-preserved cemeteries around the catacombs. Yes, brother.

**Audience:** A moment ago, you made a comment about your view of church buildings. Can you elaborate on that?

I wish every church building on earth would burn down. (laughter) Oh, I don't find any problem whatsoever with Christians having to go out and buy a building to meet in because we just did that last week. But to make it look like something...to call it a church, to make it look like a church building, is really asking for trouble. I don't know if anybody is doing that. We're going to take the building we've got. We're going to make the biggest living room in Portland, Maine. We'll make that thing into one big beautiful comfortable living room, and we're going to meet in it.

By the way, don't miss tomorrow. Let me advertise here for a minute. I'm going to tell you where all of our Protestant...I'm not going to pick on the Catholics... I'm going to tell you where all of our Protestant traditions and practices came from. And I hope it makes you wiggle. But do me a favor, will you? Don't go home and start a war. You're just an ugly person if you go do that. I'm speaking to you individually to help you open up to the world around you right now and the influences at play.

I am not doing anything radical to the Christian faith. I'm doing something radical to your practices and the way you think about the Christian practice of getting together, meeting, and so on. One other thing I will close on: you may not know this. I know I look 120, but Stephen is actually older than I am. And you're not going to believe this, and you're really going to think I'm joking, but Lance is older than us. I think Lance is two months older than I am, and he has learned so much in those two months, it's just incredible. And if I ever say anything that in any way contradicts these brothers, be sure I am young Elihu, who does not know what he is talking about, and believe those brothers.

I am seeking to give you grounds. I guess the truth of the matter is that my heart is with those of you under 30 who will get to pick up this torch one of these days. I want you, first of all, to know you have a right to be here. An unapologetic right to be here. And secondly, we have a lot of territory that still needs to be taken. We haven't taken it all. You have plenty of room, brother, to take, and you have plenty of liberty to take it in. I suppose that more than anyone else, I am addressing you folks. Now, to you two or three old pickle-sucking troublemakers back there who are going to go home and say, "Gene said that we should burn down all the church buildings..." No, you need to see a good Christian counselor and get your hostility checked. I gave the quote about the Lord being the one who came and delivered us, and at the same time gave us the agency of the church for that deliverance from the society and the structure around us.

How many of you are Christian workers? You're pastors, ministers, Christian workers. You know it. There's no question about it. May I see your hand? I'd like to know how many there are among us. There's one, two, three, four, five, six. There are two down here. I know at least seven, eight, nine. We got a lady back there. Ten. At the end of the meeting, I'd like to speak with you first before the mob sets in. I know people are so curious about anything they can get their hands on at a conference. I'd like for you to pick one of these up. I'll tell you what it is a little later, at the end of the meeting. After you've gotten it, the rest of you can fight over what's left.

This afternoon, I titled this "Our Christian Practices Aren't." I think the best way to do this is to begin with Constantine's arrival in Rome. Someone said today they didn't even know who he was. So, I'll tell the story and get into our Christian practices from that. I do want you to know that I have been working on this message for...at least since I was 17 years old. I have spent my life, or a little part of it, rummaging through old books trying to find lots of things, but perhaps one of my greatest interests is: where do we get all this stuff we do? At what point in time in history did it really, truly begin? And today will be the very first time that I put all of this into one message. It should prove to be interesting. There's one little lady out here today who will walk out and say, "Well, if those things are where all those things came from, then probably there's no Santa Claus." And go out of here with all sorts of doubts about whatever. I would not profess myself to be a scholar, but brothers and sisters, I think I know where the faith once delivered came from. These are pretty much our Protestant Christian traditions. This is pretty much the story of where we got most of our trappings. There are a few others I consider most of them insignificant.

The story begins with a battle in 313 between Constantine and his alien invading army, who came in against a man he considered a usurper of the throne in the city of Rome. They fought around a bridge, and Constantine won. The very next day, Constantine issued a decree that Christians would no longer be persecuted. For a time, he shared the control of the Roman Empire with another gentleman who had the eastern section. He gained full power around 323-324 AD. In between was the Edict of Milan, or Milano, in which Christians were allowed total and absolute freedom, and the Christian religion was officially made one of the many religions recognized by the department of religion within the many departments of the Roman Empire. I guess you would call it the Department of State.

What happened, beginning in the year 323 to the year 327, ought to be in a book about that big. Those five years are incredible. I cannot imagine any five years in all of human history that have so much stuffed into them, and they were the turning point. I would say they were the years that decided and took away our simplicity in Christ and began giving us something wholly new, a hybrid, and I will try to explain that.

Do you know the word syncretism? The syncretic. You know what that means? Well, I'm going to give you a word here today. I'm going to stretch the meaning of it. It basically means smorgasbord. You choose a little this, little that, little this, a little that, and bring it together. I would press the definition and say syncretism, or the syncretic, in this case today, is the taking of something that

is a Christian element, something that is a pagan element, and when the two come together, what comes out is neither that which used to be the pagan element or that which used to be the Christian element, but you come out with something literally totally new. Did that make sense? One of the things that we will discover in the modern sermon is a “syncretism.” It is the blending of two things—something Christian, something pagan. And out of it came the modern-day sermon and many other things. In fact, nearly everything in my notes is syncretic. They are a combination of pagan and Christian, and yet they kept the Christian name.

Now it was these five years that turned. Here's what happened. Just within a very short time, this Constantine, who professed to be a Christian, one of the great debates in Christian history, perhaps the greatest of all, was whether Constantine was a Christian and if so, what made him one, and how Christian he was. He called for the council of Nicaea; he literally chaired that thing, he sat in the front, and called the speakers up front. This is one of the things he did.

In the year 323 or 324, he went over to the town of Byzantium, not much more than a village at the isthmus of Istanbul, the isthmus of Byzantine, or the isthmus of Constantinople. All I can tell you is that if you stand on one side of the bridge, you're in the western world. If you go across that bridge, you're in the eastern world. One side's the Orient, one side's the West. He walked out onto the peninsula; he walked several miles, dragging a spear. The peninsula was shaped like this. You see my V? He walked out to here, stood there, and he dragged his spear across to here. He said, "Build a wall there." Well, he was way out miles from the city of Byzantium, and he said, "Now I want a city, a new city built in this territory, and it will be the capital of the entire Roman Empire, straddling the east and the west. And the coffers, the coffers of the temples of the Roman Empire, were pillaged, and a lot of other things were pillaged for the gold and the resources in order to build this incredible new city. This is another thing he did. He built “Metropolitus” Constantine: Constantinople.

Well, he also called for an incalculable number of buildings for Christians to meet in. He singlehandedly created the “church building”, which was later to be known as the church. As far as I can find in the literature of antiquity, the first human being ever to call a building a church was Chrysostom, who was a contemporary of that age. *That would be something like calling your wife a skyscraper to call a building the church of Jesus Christ.*

Well, he called for the building of church buildings in sacred places in the city of Rome and several non-sacred places; just build them. One was to be over a section of a cemetery on the side of a hill. The cemetery was called the “Vaticanus”; you can figure out the rest of that story and why it was built. Another building that was later to be called St. John of the Lateran. He also called for some other buildings to be built in and around the city of Rome, and he asked in the city of Constantinople... This, to me, offers great insight into Constantine's mind. By the way, Gregory the First, or Gregory the Great, has usually been called the first medieval Christian. I call Constantine the first medieval Christian. That darkness and shadow of paganism and the bringing in of a watered-down Christianity, and the two met in his mind.

And in the city of Constantinople, he decreed the building of many memorable buildings. Some of them were to be pagan temples, in memory of gods, because that's what emperors did. They decreed the erection of buildings in memory of some god that they had felt had delivered them, or given them power, or done something good for them. In these temples, they always tried to have a relic, usually a meteorite or something inexplicable. They felt this was something cast down from Mount Olympus or from the heavens by one of the gods, and they would put it in this building, this temple, and you can figure out from there where relics came from.

He also decreed the building of many buildings for Christians to assemble in, and out of his desire, this medieval mind of his, to give this god who had caused him victory and allowed him to be emperor, he decreed the erection of many Christian buildings so that Christians could meet in that city. And for the first time, this started a trend that lasts till this day, and it's one of the reasons you have a Christian name. He named these buildings after outstanding Christians from the biblical or post-biblical eras, just as he named some of the temples being erected after Apollos, Zeus, Jupiter, Hermes, Mercury, or whoever, or Venus, or whatever. Now, this city was built in its entirety, more or less empty, and was finished in the year 327 AD. The entire congregation of Rome's elite, its government, and its well-to-do moved out of Rome into Constantinople. There, one side of the street would be a pagan temple, and the other a Christian gathering place. So, between 324 and 327, this massive building project began. This is not all.

His mama, his mother, who carried the name Empress, was named Helen. Now that's not my wife; that's Constantine's mother. She went on what I would suppose would be the first Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Lands. Word was sent to the Christians in Jerusalem, "Mama's coming." And word was sent to the Christians in Bethlehem, "Mama's coming." And she came in, I believe, in a convoy of 10 ships. Constantine said, "When she gets there, I want you to locate the place where Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected and also the place where He was born." Well, now, if I had been a Christian receiving a document with the name "Constantine" at the bottom and the seal of the Roman Emperor, no matter who I was or what, I would be sure to find the site of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And whether they did or did not, I do not know. I would value Lance's opinion on that. I do know that they found this old, abandoned temple, or the ruins of it, for Apollos, I believe it was, and they said it was under this temple. Here's the sacred place where He was crucified, and here He was resurrected. There was also a grotto in Bethlehem. Anyway, when she got there, I mean, this is an interesting story, and if anybody can help me get one little piece of it, I'd appreciate it. It is called the fastest message ever sent in antiquity.

Constantine decreed that a big pile of brush would be piled up every few miles from the city of Jerusalem all the way to the city of Rome. Now, that is one incredible distance. When the man at this pile of brush would see the fire lit at that one, he would light that one, and so on it would go. The announcement would come by way of a fire burning all the way to the city of Rome, indicating that the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and birth of the Lord Jesus had been located there. What I want to know is, did he go up through Yugoslavia and down through the Alps and across the

boot, or did he do it with barges across that strip between what we would call Yugoslavia and Italy? If anybody can ever tell me that, I wish you would. I've never heard of it. I don't even know if it's known.

Anyway, now I want you to remember, please, can you imagine that just a few days, a few years before in the year 313, Christians were having their eyes gouged out and thrown in prison and being crucified, and here it is the year 327. Now, that's only a period of how many years? 14 years. When that fire, that last pile of brush, was lit and it was seen on one of the hills of Rome, the entire population of the city poured out of the city, rejoicing, shouting, and dancing in the street that the crucifixion, birth, and resurrection place of the Lord Jesus Christ had been discovered. Fastest message ever delivered in antiquity: delivered just in a matter of a few hours. Well, he then decreed that a building would be built over it, which was called the grotto in Bethlehem. It's called the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. All of these buildings in Rome, in Constantinople, around the city of Rome, in some of the places, I believe in Naples, and some of the others, and in the holy lands, all of them were erected within a period of three years.

Now, the impact this had on the empire and Christianity is incalculable. It can't be explained. It can't be understood. I've spent an awful lot of time reading an awful lot of books trying to understand that period because so much changed during that period. I find it difficult to assimilate it and to comprehend how it took place, and I still ask many questions. But I'm going to give you one other thing that I think played a major part in the shock waves this created throughout the entire Roman Empire. Now, you're dealing with a population of 75 million, if Gibbons was correct, and I don't know if he was. Nobody knows how many people were in the Roman Empire. 75 million people - if 5% of those people were Christian, somebody tell me how much that is. Four million Christians. Three and a half...somebody said four million Christians. Around four million Christians in the entire Roman Empire, and suddenly this whole thing is turned upside down, you've got a Christian emperor. He doesn't know what that really means, but if there was one thing that I think caused the enormous influence it had, it was that.

Can you imagine a future president of the United States building a new capital in Kansas, and as he leaves the White House, Washington will continue to have major influence, just a little town in Kansas where the Congress is going to meet, and the president's going to live? As he walks out of the White House, he gives the White House to Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell or the Cardinals in Chicago or, even more so, and I hope you'll understand what I'm trying to communicate here, you turn it over to the leader of the Hare Krishnas. What an impact that would have on this country, and our president had nothing like the influence, the all-godlike position of the emperor. He turned his palace over to Sylvester, the leading churchman in the city of Rome. In the year 327, when he left Rome for the last time, he had 10 more years to live. He would die near Constantinople 10 years later. It was these shock waves that caused something to happen; what you might call the evangelization of the world. Now, I could spend three or four days telling you what happened during this period. It just goes on and on. You pick up a little bit here and a little bit there. It needs to be put together very definitely because I'm telling you, brothers and sisters, in 70 years from

that time, the change has become so radical. I'm talking about the year 327, and within 70 years of that day, things have become so radically changed that they cannot be comprehended. By 380, about 50 years later, Priscillian had his head cut off because someone disagreed with him doctrinally. *A Christian killed a Christian over a peripheral doctrine*. How could that happen so quickly? It is enormous.

I'm going to try to explain something to you here. Imagine my artwork here, my graph. This is the elite of the Roman Empire, the movers and the shakers, the government, the imperial people, and the wealthy. Then there's this and that and the middle class and the priests and all of those pagan priests and all that. Then here are the nice, you know, illiterate people and the slaves and so forth. The Christian faith entered the Roman Empire down here, a pure thing or fairly pure, and it began to work its way up, not intentionally particularly through the Strata, and it went too quickly. I wish it hadn't gotten to the imperial level so fast, frankly. Probably, Empress Helen was the one who did it; his mother. Now that only this little yeast leaven has reached a small area of this great mass of people, but in some way, it has gotten all the way up to the top, really quickly. It has not permeated the entire base down here, just a little, and then made a string, hair-like, to the top.

Now, after 327 AD, it will start to go down, from the top. Can you follow that? The first group to undergo Post-Constantinian conversions was the elite, and they did so because it was propitious. It was to your advantage to do it. They were figuring that out quickly. I mean, the temples were being shut down. The gold was being taken out. Tax money was being turned over to Christians. Bishops who were now rising out of nowhere were being given the right to stand in judgment, make decisions, and conduct trials. Money, what we would call millions of dollars or billions of dollars, was being poured into these new buildings. People were getting paid, but this didn't happen very much...not like we used to preach long ago that they bought the Christians, but some people were paid to encourage others to become Christians. A large part of even the elite did not convert to Christianity, but a good hunk of it did, and it began percolating down like Reagan's "re-economics". You know, you heard the trickle-down theory. It began to trickle back down, but as it did, it picked up the pagan mind. It became syncretic. It was a combination of superstition, Christianity, true Christian faith, paganism, and who knows how many other cultural and social elements. By the time it got down to the illiterate, you could call it crystal pagan.

Whatever it was, it would change the course of Christianity forever. That trickle-down took at least 150 years. Probably took until about 500 AD. There were many people still confessing to being pagans in the light of an awful lot of opposition, including military torture, threats, being made second-class citizens, and so on. Now, very quickly, and having left out multitudes of interesting things that I wish I had time to tell you, that's what happened.

Now, I'd like to stop here and talk about some of the things we picked up on the way. Good night. I'll never get through this message. I need six weeks, I do. I've already covered the church buildings a little bit. Let me talk about Constantinople and other such places. Most of the Christian buildings built at that time were along the line of the Basilica. A few were in temple architecture. None of

them exist. The Basilica was basically a government building, often an auditorium. It became the Christian church building. It later became known as Byzantine architecture. The word basilica comes originally from the word bath, and its architecture drew on the Roman baths in the city of Rome. You can still see them where the Romans went to take their baths; they took that basic architectural structure and built auditoriums, and then built church buildings out of them. So, when you think of orgies in the Roman baths, remember that those were later Christian architecture. I just wanted to throw that in.

I want to say something as an aside here. Have you ever heard of colonial architecture? You have, haven't you? There's a Baptist church down the street here somewhere. We passed it at night, coming in. I said, "Honey, that's a Baptist church. That's colonial architecture. I can tell." Sure enough, it was Baptist as we passed the sign. There's no such thing as colonial architecture. Back when British imperialists came to the south and wanted to show how wealthy they were, they asked architects to build them Greek temples to live in, and that became what is called "colonial". But in fact, every time you see those colonnades, those columns holding up the front of a Baptist church, remember that that came from the Parthenon in Athens, a Greek temple.

I think that I'm just poking fun at Christian architecture in general. We ought not to have it. It ought not to really exist. Byzantine architecture held sway until the construction of St. Denys and the Gothic cathedral in the city of Saint Deny around 1200, after which Gothic architecture has been used in every Christian building ever built. You go to a little country church, and there's that steeple, and they have got nothing in the world but a translucent glass or something. It all harkens back to France and St. Denys.

Now then, here is the story as best I can put it together. I think this is correct. Can you imagine the city of Constantinople opening, and Christians who had been meeting in homes walking into this big building? Well, the pagan temples always had rituals with people standing, and they didn't have anything inside these buildings. Christians who were meeting in homes walked in and looked around, but there was no place to sit. I guess they sat down on the cold floor. I don't know, but someone along the way told them to stand up. It was irreverent to sit down on a living room floor anymore. So, they stood up, as it was a pagan practice in temples, and if any of you are Greek Orthodox, 1700 years later, you are still standing throughout your entire 2 and 1/2-hour service. No wonder the Eastern Orthodox Church can't grow.

Well, back in Italy, you take these nice, happy Italians. They walked into these empty buildings, and they weren't about to do this, so they brought in benches, and so the pew was born. The Christian Protestants sat down in these little benches, and Luther used to preach for a couple of hours. About that time, the chair was invented, and somebody got the idea, let's make one long chair. So, they put a back to it, and lo and behold, the Protestant Pew was born, and that's how you got all those things. Are you following me? That's where it came from. Within 50 years of Constantine, there was a building built in virtually every place, every village, every town, every city where Christians gathered. They were built mostly with tax money from the Roman Empire,

at the decree of Constantine and his sons. By the way, one of the great tragedies that came out of Helen's visit to the Holy Lands was that Christianity was made the state religion of the Holy Lands, and Judaism was outlawed at that time, and it's an apology we'll be making till the day the Lord Jesus comes.

Let me talk to you about the pulpit. I want you to know exactly where it came from because this gets really fascinating. Greek temples had something called an "ambo". It was a place where the priests could stand at the end of the ritual and make announcements. Yes, Kenny, they had announcements even among the heathen. He would stand there and make a proclamation, or say something, or make an announcement to the gathered people after they had slaughtered whatever they slaughtered and offered whatever it was they offered. Well, they brought these ambos into these buildings. Now, exactly how it went from there, I do not know, but I have to change the subject now and talk to you just for a moment about something else.

In the city auditoriums, in the civic buildings, and in the amphitheaters, there were two things. One was a reader. It sat over here, and the orator, before he would speak to an auditorium, would come and read his texts here, then walk to the middle of the building, where there was a chair, and sit in it and speak. I do not know where it was, but somewhere along the line, when Christians began getting into these buildings, they had two readers. One in the middle or on that side from which announcements were made or sermons were preached, and on this side, scripture would be read. Later, it became the fad to take one of those, if not both of them, and stick them up on a high pillar on the church on the side. If you have ever been to Europe, you've seen them, haven't you? After the service, the priest would walk onto the thing and make his announcements.

Well, when Martin Luther came along, he tore down the sanctum, this thing up here. He had the sanctum torn out, the Lord's supper table removed, whatever the Catholics call it, and he built his stands. Actually, they were called scapels at the time. The reader is over here, and the place where he would stand is over here. They were literally, I believe, taken down in some cases from the pillars and put in the front. Their origin reaches back to the pagan orator, the reader, the little chair they sat in, and the ambo in the temple where the priest of pagan rituals made their announcements. I want you to remember that the next time some Baptist preacher stands up and says, "*And we stand behind the sacred desk to proclaim the word of God.*" Their origins are in paganism.

The choir came a little bit later, probably around 400 AD. I want to remind you again, I said this earlier, because we use the same vocabulary, the same words. We think somewhere solemn men took these things from the Jewish people. Brothers and sisters, we're in Rome, in gentile territory, in a city that had moved further away from the gospel already than any of the other churches anywhere in the Roman Empire or outside of the Roman Empire. Around 400 AD, the chanting that was done - it was the popular music of that day, if you can imagine it, to chant - it came out of the pagan temples, and was moved into the Christian buildings/meeting places. Because there had been choirs, they moved the choir back here behind the sanctum, and they put them there, and they sang songs according to the popular tunes of that day. And they weren't songs, they were

chants, and they went like this...sounded like an Indian war chant. It was no less than Ambrose who probably stultified this thing and made it the Christian way of singing for the next 1700 years.

It was Gregory the Great in the year 500 that took the Latin, took the chants, took the mystical union of the chanting and the incantations of the pagan temples, and his crystal pagan mind... Truly, he was medieval... he brought these things together into a ritual for Christians to observe. He created the Roman Catholic Mass, and it hasn't changed in 1700 years. Isn't that disgraceful? Isn't that a total lack of imagination? Isn't that horrible? Say so. Terrible. Well, you Protestants have been stuck with one way of meeting for 400 years. *Why don't you change?* They're simply 1300 years ahead of you because they got here first.

You could take a man from outer space and bring him down to earth, and on Sunday morning, take him to a Baptist church, a Methodist church, a Presbyterian church, and a Lutheran church, and let him go to all four worship meetings, and he would not be able to distinguish them whatsoever, and no difference in his eyes. If you've been a Baptist all your life, you can tell there's a little difference, and Presbyterians do something a little different. But essentially, our way of meeting was born in Wittenberg around 1530, and it has not changed since that day. Brothers and sisters, the Christian faith is in the throes of death, and has been for 400 years, in what has got to be one of the most horrible inventions mankind ever perpetrated upon the human race. And that's the Sunday morning worship service. Say amen, whether you believe it or not. (laughter) We are dying from a lack of imagination.

The stained-glass window, by the way, came in approximately the year 1200 in the city of Saint Denys, and it came straight out of the writings of Plato. In fact, it was justified in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. It was blessed by Bernard of Clairvaux in the building of the Gothic Cathedral in St. Denys by a man named Bishop Suger. It is essentially a Platonic concept of "the all," and church buildings are built on the Neoplatonic philosophy that they exist to create "awe" in the heart of man. Hence, we have the high domes. Hence, we have the great steeple pointing as a finger up to God, showing men from which cometh their creator and their supply, to which I have one word to answer. Burp. I don't know if you understand this or not, but there has to be a philosophical reasoning behind all architecture, behind everything we do as Christians. I sat in seminary, and I got it all, and every bit of it is justified by tradition, usually by Neoplatonic interpretation. It is not in any way Christian. It has its roots in this syncretism of the 300s and the 400s.

Let me say this: most of our traditions come from what I would call a 90-year period. If we could graft it, I would graft it like this. Here's the first century. We are picking up traditions, human traditions, as we go along. You get to see us getting a few traditions as we go along. You come to the year 324, and wow, and for about 50 years, we're picking them up. That's where most of them came from. Then you get it some more, a few here and a few more there, and then you come to the year about 1520, and the chart jumps up again, and it stops. It comes back down, probably around 1570 or so, and then it goes along. We've been picking them up like this all along, but the two

great eras of Christian traditions, which have absolutely nothing to do with the Christian faith, we picked up during that time.

Gene, what difference does it make? Well, I have a question to ask. My question is not, "Where did we get these traditions?" "Why did we get these traditions?" My question is not even, "Where did these traditions come from?" My question is not even, "Why do we keep these traditions?" My question is not even, "Why do we never ask where these things come from?" My question is, "*How is it that the Christian mind of the 20th century can open all of the New Testament, study it for 50 years, know every word of it, memorize it, preach it, and never once see the tremendous conflict between 20th-century Christianity and the first-century faith?*" Therein lies a basic part of our problem. The question is: how can we process these things, and never even think about them? This worries me, and it fascinates me too.

Ministerial garb and getting dressed on Sunday morning. This is really vague. I think we could probably trace it back to Sylvester, Damasco?, Constantine, and maybe even the Council of Nicaea. Eusebius provides a graphic description of Constantine's arrival at the Council of Nicaea. He must have been dressed literally covered in gold, silver, and purple. They were awestruck. Now, strangely enough, he was also awestruck. He went along, feeling the gouged-out eyes and the lost fingers, and he wept at the Christians standing there and what had happened to them under the persecution of Diocletian. But I think there were some men in that room who were really fascinated with the way he dressed, and also the priests, the pagan priests, had their particular kind of dress. It seems right around the time of Sylvester or Damasco...by the way, if and when the emperor ever made an appearance, you got out your, may I quote, "Sunday best." You cleaned up your town, and you put on your best clothes. Either Sylvester or Damasco, or someone right along that line, when the emperor left, began to wear the robes of purple, and others began to put on ministerial garb. With that, in some way I do not understand, came the concept of dressing up to go to church, which I think is the second-worst thing ever perpetrated on Christian believers in all of Christian history. Say, "Amen."

I've already told you where the Sunday morning church service came from. Remember? Okay. Now, I'm going to stop preaching and go into "meddling". This was easy to take; you haven't heard anything yet. Now, we see syncretism. We see combinations, and something comes out of it that's neither fish nor fowl nor vapor nor smoke. Let me see if I can explain why we get preached to so much. Let me see why, if I can explain to you why you are a big ear and I am a big tongue, and never the twain shall change. All you do is listen, and all I do is talk. All you do is listen. All I do is talk. Nothing ever happens.

Let's go to the movie stars of the Greco-Roman world. They were the movie stars of that day. They were the orators. You cannot imagine their place in Greco-Roman society. They were the adulation of society. They were the movie stars. They were the people you walked up to and said, "Please sign, give me your autograph." They were some...they were just that. They were the heroes of their

day. Now I want to tell you something else. I want to talk to you about the philosopher, the pagan philosopher, and the priest, and now we are going to start getting really uncomfortable.

I am a pagan, see, and I am 70 years old, and I am about to die. Are you with me? Now the man that they will call in to comfort me at my deathbed will be either a philosopher, an orator, or both. One who is a philosopher orator; if there is only one, they will bring in a philosopher. Now, for some strange reason, they never invited the pagan priest in. They invited the philosopher, paid him for his services, and he would walk in, take the person's hand, pat it gently, and talk to them about the goodness of life, their time here on earth, and the joy...I'm not exaggerating, folks, you've got to believe me, this is history, I didn't make this up...the joys that wait before them in heaven, and then the old boy would die. A day or two later, they'd bury him, or maybe they buried him the same day he died; I suppose that's what they did. Whenever they buried him, either this philosopher or an orator would be brought in to orate over him, to bring an oration over him. Brothers and sisters, there is a book of funeral sermons from the age of paganism—the most frequently used and the best orations that an orator or philosopher could bring over the dead. I have never read it, but I've read excerpts from it. It will singe your hair. I have said the same things word for word, and so has just about any other preacher worth his salt.

I'll come back to that in a minute. I want to take just a second now before I go any further. I want you to understand the world they're living in... this age. The priest...the pagan priests...are referred to, I'm not making this up. I didn't know this until I dug it out. The priesthood of paganism, the thousands and tens of thousands of them, were called clergy.

Now, the Roman Empire, at one point, had become unmanageable by provinces. It was managed by provinces. One governor in each province. If it were a peaceful province, the governor would have been sent there by the Senate. If it were a warlike one, not quite pacified, the emperor sent the governor there with an army. But the provinces became too populous and too large, so they divided them into dioceses for governance. This is pre-Christian, or at least it was before the Christians came around. The man who was head of the priesthood, the top priest of all pagan priests, was referred to as the “Pontiff Maximus”. It was the grandson, I believe, of Constantine who gave that up out of love for what he thought was the Christian faith, I guess, and it was immediately accepted by the bishop of Rome at that time. He assumed the title “Pontiff Maximus” and sent bishops throughout the Roman Empire. He sent bishops to churches and archbishops to dioceses. Are you following me? These are the things that are happening now.

Now, let's see if I can explain to you...I think you've already figured out where the funeral comes from... the Christian funeral, that is. I got two last ones now, and this is where it gets funny. I want you to see an orator orating. These are the dolls of the Roman Empire. These men are important. They have studied the ability to speak. Rhetoric is one of the three main subjects studied in school. Rhetoric is the study of the art of speaking. It is ancient. The Romans picked it up from the Greeks. Assemblies like this would be filled with the city's best orators. They would be invited to speak at the Lions Club and the Rotary Club of those days. They would come into an auditorium like this.

They would walk to the platform in a robe, specifically for orators. They would open the poetic books. They would open the scrolls and say... and I know you're not going to believe this... "I am reading from Homer..." Announce which part of Homer? "I am reading from chapter so and so, verse so and so." He would take his text, because he had learned how to, and I'm using their term, "exegete". He would then close his scroll, walk to the front, and sit down, and for one hour, he would spellbind those people with the art and science of oration, clothed in his oratorical garb.

Well, are you with me? One day in the post-Constantinian era, that's after Constantine, three or four or five of the greatest orators of that day, and I'm going to forget the others, and I'm just going to tell you about Chrysostom, bless his heart. I'd like to take that guy and plant him somewhere on an island in the Pacific. I think that man did us about as much damage as any human could. He has been made a hero of all preachers. In the seminary, he was lauded. You don't know how, and I'm going to use the word brainwashed. You don't know how we were brainwashed in the seminary to preach the word of God. You know that medical doctors say that one case, one cure, does not prove a cure. We would hear this one story about how some preacher back in some other parts of the states did something that turned the community around, by preaching *the word fearlessly from the sacred desk*. I'm not demeaning the proclamation of the word of God, but I want you to listen to me. I hope I'm not going to be...I'm not going to be misunderstood.

We were infatuated. We were awed by this thing that we are preachers of the word of God. Sometimes it was called hermeneutics. Sometimes it was called homiletics. In my seminary, it was called Preaching 101, and we were taught Aristotle's...I didn't know it...We were taught Aristotle's view on how to give a speech. We were taught that Demosthenes...the very writings of those men have inseminated themselves into the bloodstream of the Christian faith. We were taught rhetoric without even knowing it. We were taught the best of rhetoric. You have a clear introduction. You have a conclusion. You have three points. You have a poem and a deathbed story, or something like that. We were taught to enunciate and to do this and to do that. I want you to know that I had to give a 15-minute talk with all my peers grading me. They finally took me off the platform after 25 minutes. I made an F across the board. We were taught how to sit on the platform, how to hold our Bible, how to dress, and all of this stuff, which comes directly from the Greek rhetorical tradition. I have read the messages...some of the messages of Chrysostom...and they are so eerily like our own preaching today. It's just downright spooky.

I read a message by him in which he said, "Oh, I am so heartsick, that when I speak before the incomparable beauty of my Lord, you demean the message by standing and applauding me." He was using arrogance and rhetorical conceit to present a false humility. I don't know if you follow that. He was using his oratorical skills to exalt himself by humiliating himself when all of these people were applauding him. He had one of the greatest egos of any man who ever lived. He fed it through oratory, and he's not the last "Chrysostom" who ever lived. Brothers and sisters, you take the Christian prophet, who in turn came from the Jewish prophet. You take the church planter. You take the teacher, whoever he might have been. He spoke in urgency. He spoke in an emergency and for a single purpose: to build the church of the living God.

You see coming up over here, emerging as a man of incredible oratorical skills, a man with all sorts of science and art in the business of words, and you have those two meet, and you come out with something that is neither pagan nor Christian. You come out with a modern-day preacher, and what you come out with is a sermon. Those of you who preach the gospel, I wish you would take this and read it. It is a very clear, though not exhaustive, understanding of how our present-day concept of the sermon came to be. Now listen, folks, if anything has got to go in the restoration of things to come, the sermon has got to go. Neither you nor I nor any other man living can understand how addictive that thing is and how it again and again and again destroys the functioning of the body of Christ. Say something.

Throughout my life, and I am no longer young, I am like Lance. I'm getting older. I'm older than Stephen, and I'm older than Lance because Lance has no wife and Stephen has no children. (laughter) I have watched the power of the sermon destroy life again and again and again. I have watched the living experiences of the body of Christ, submerged in our addiction to preach to you and preach to you and preach to you and preach to you without it ever ending... never ending, never growing. The first-century speaker didn't speak every Sunday pre-functionally. He was not like Pavlov's dogs. 11:30 a.m.: You preach. They preached to build. Then they stopped preaching so that God's people might experience, and when they got through experiencing, if there was a need, they preached again. They preached so the body itself might function, and even function without the preachers present.

My job is to preach myself out of the job of preaching, and I ought to make swift work of it. I consider the sermon to be one of the great curses perpetrated against the Christian faith. Make do with that what you will. You have got to face it, brother. The tradition of it, the way we do it, is not Christian. We ought to still be preaching urgently, emergently, to the basic present need, not to something that always comes with every Christian gathering. You in silence and me talking: this thing has got to be ripped out at its roots. I don't know what cataclysmic work of God that will take because this thing is literally in our bloodstream.

Did you hear me? Did you hear me well? Someone asked a sister here, "When Gene was in California with y'all, did y'all support him?" And she said there were about a hundred of us, all college students or holding ragtag jobs, and we couldn't make ends meet. Gene and Helen were the only two people who worked for a living. They supported all 100 of us. I don't know why I brought that up, except to say, we're going to need some radical young men to come forward who will not do things the old way. Now, someone will probably say to you, I don't believe the practices are important; as long as the Holy Spirit is there in power, it doesn't matter how we meet or what we do. I don't agree with that. I don't think that practice is the heart and soul of our problem, but I believe practice can kill. I believe practice and ritual, and these problems that we've got, like the everlasting eternal sermon, are basic problems that we've got to get past.

But now I come to one "yay and amen" greater than the sermon. He is in your blood, and he is in your body, and he is in your gray matter. He is the pastor, and he is not scriptural. There are two

things I could never find. I could never find where the pastor came from, nor where seminaries came from. The only reason I've never spoken about this subject before is that I only found out about both of them this year. And boy, did I get my mind blown. I'll tell you where I found where the modern-day pastor came from. I got it from reading some ancient letters from Anabaptists who had previously been with Martin Luther in Wittenberg, telling the story of their experience there. I would never have known if I hadn't been rummaging through those old manuscripts.

Now, this is the story. I want you to hear it. This is where the pastor came from. Are you still here? Are you still with me? Are you interested? Please be interested. Alright, thank you. Here's what happened. Martin Luther had been a Catholic. Frederick the Wise had kept that man from being burned at the stake, good and proper, and he had just sealed off Saxony with his army. He had the largest army in Europe. He said to Luther, whom he never met...by the way, "Do whatever you want to do." Well, the Catholic churches got emptied. The Catholics fled many places. The Lutheran church was becoming the state religion. Luther had considerable power at this time in the religious world. He was sending people who had become Protestants, a lot of them ex-priests, he was sending them back to these empty church buildings and these empty cathedrals.

Now you and I have always heard of the seven sacraments of the church, haven't we? You've heard of that. You're a good Catholic. Did you, and I did not, that at that time there were seven pastoral duties of the priest - they're almost the same - but there's the sacrament, and the other is the doing of it: the pastoral duties of the priest. I can never remember all seven, so I'll probably leave one or two of them out. One is burying the dead, another is blessing the babies, and another is counseling; in their case, it was the confession. Another was to attend to the proclamation of the Roman Catholic faith through some form of teaching or speaking. And I guess because there are so many of you here, I'm running out of others. Another one was to bless the social functions of that day. And what's another one? To marry, to marry people, and baptism. I don't think this was one of the pastoral duties, as I recall it being listed, but it is one of the sacraments.

Now then, here's what Luther said. He said, "Forget the sacraments and forget the priest's pastoral duties. I will give you seven new pastoral duties." They were not, per se, called pastors at that time. I want you to listen to where they come from, what they basically are. They are marrying, they are funeralizing, and they are visiting the sick. They are blessing community exercises in the community, and they are for us today, Christian counseling. There is the preaching of the word of God, and that other one I can never remember.

Now then, brothers and sisters, out of that developed the work of the Lutheran priest who came to be known as pastor, and these were his functions. And as it grew, the word "pastor" became used everywhere. It has gotten into the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Baptists. Whether the Brethren or not won't admit it, they've got one. I don't know. Well, I guess the Quakers still don't, but it is universal, and I will tell you this, and I'm old enough to tell you. Those of us who leave the religious system, when the church of the Lord is not founded well, or it flounders, somewhere along the line, if you live long enough, you're going to end up with one of those bird dogs.

I want you to listen. Here I am, Gene Edwards, an East Texas pastor. I have to marry young people. You show me that in the Bible, and I'll eat it without salt. I have to preach the funerals of the people. You show me that in the Bible, and I'll eat it all. It's not there, is it? It is a Roman-Greek custom. By the way, I can quote that Greek orator. Do you want to hear him? "Our dear departed friend will look down upon our sad eyes today, and I will weep tears and say, oh, I've gone to a better place, and even now our friend may be looking down upon us from heaven, saying weep, weep, not." Yeah, clap.

The first reference I ever found in so-called Christian literature to the word "heaven" is from an orator preaching a funeral oration. I'm not going to get into that one. That's dynamite. Brothers and sisters, I had to go to the little old ladies, and I had to pat their hands and be nice and sweet to them. I'll tell you why I did, because if I didn't, the church would throw me out. I had to, at 11:30, perfunctorily, to deliver a message, whether or not my wife and I just had a screaming fight with one another or not, regardless of the condition of the church. There were many times I could not go to the back and shake hands with everybody because I was in danger of bodily injury, that's why.

I cannot think of anything, other than the sermon and the Sunday morning church service, that has ever been so untenable and unworkable as the modern-day concept of the pastor, who has to stand up there in the bleachers and breathe a prayer over the football team. "God bless these young men who are about to try to kill themselves." Men who have to preach sermons over people going to hell. Have to go out and pat ladies on the head or on the hand. I have to go out to social functions and bless them. Have to always be dressed up in a coat and tie. Have to forever be preaching a sermon. Brother, if you are a pastor, I would recommend that next Easter season you give it up for Lent. And for those of you who are elders outside the religious system, you may sometimes be a semi-pseudo pastor. Give it up. Preachers, stop sermonizing and start building so the church can function without you.

It's been such a joy, such an honor to be with you here today, but listen, you didn't know this until you walked in this room. Now you know it. I don't care what kind of excuse you give when you walk out that door. You know now, and these things have affected our minds. They have affected the way we read the Scripture; they have profoundly affected the way we do things. You can walk out, and you can open a trap door and say, "I don't agree with everything Gene said." Gene didn't say anything. Gene just presented historical facts to you.

Brother and sister, you have got a rendezvous with God, with your conscience, with a basic thing of honesty. These are not things we always knew. They are not things we always talked about. They're not things we always considered. We often like the heel of the shoe, the tie around our necks, and the sleeve on our shirt. They were there, and we did not think about them, but now you know. We have prayed much for this conference. We have prayed that the Lord would have his way. Brother, that prayer is now toward you: that God would have His way with you. There needs to come a deep, profound shaking, not in our practices but in our minds, that we begin to see again

what those people in the first century had. For they were the first and the world's only religion that this world has ever known that had no clergy, had no temples, had no hierarchy, and were virtually, if not totally, without ritual. The world had never seen it before, and in all the religions born since, the world has never seen it again.

There is something about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, something about the liveliness of the headship of Jesus Christ, that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be able to live and function without leaders, at least for a little time, until elders come. Elders ought to stay out of the way in the functioning of the body of Christ. You have the right to be a part of the gathering of God.

*Let's pray. Lord Jesus, enough said. Now, for every part to deal with the Spirit speaks to each of us, where we are, and tells us where we ought to be. One thing, Lord, make yourself central again in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Deepen our experience with You, our encounters with You, our sight of Your purpose, in other realms and on the earth this day, Lord by Spirit, talk to us about these things. Amen.*