

Unless you're coming with a specific or different need and how you can meet that need when it's so varied, I don't know, but Lord, that's your business and not ours. And we look forward to your meeting. We open our hearts to you, Lord. You have a Spirit. That Spirit is in me. It's in every brother, every sister in this room. Employ Your Spirit in our spirits. Say that word that'll break forth that revelation, that'll settle that issue that will open that door. And now tonight, I ask for Your grace, Your mercy. I accept Your cleansing, and I anticipate and ask for Your anointing. We're here, Lord, to glorify You. Now, glorify Yourself, oh God, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

See, I got saved the day before my 17th birthday. The day I graduated from college, I went to the seminary. While I was in seminary, I became pastor of a Baptist church. I pastored another Baptist church. I didn't get thrown out of either one of them, barely. I became an evangelist by the time I was 27 years old. I think that's about accurate, maybe 28, 27, I think. I was holding citywide crusades. Not little bitty citywide crusades, but big citywide crusades. Sometimes, with virtually all the evangelical churches in the city participating in those crusades. It was a very fast quick life for me. I think I would like for you to know that because of what I'm about to say that I was never nationally famous as it's sometimes presented, but I was a lot better known than most ministers. And I was certainly a lot better known than almost anybody my age.

I got hungry at that point. I don't know, I don't know where it started, maybe around 28. I was burning up fuel fast. And as I look back on it, I understand it more and more now than I ever did. I'm not normal. I'm not normal. I left all the normal people back there, and they were satisfied, and they didn't get hungry. And a few did, but they didn't go after teeth and claws. I did. I traveled America and I traveled a good part of this world looking for some simple answers. No big mysterious thing. You know, I never looked for power. I don't think I've ever particularly wanted fame. If I have, it's been so long ago that I've forgotten it. I never wanted miracles. Never have sought after miracles. Never have been impressed of these stories about you hear about that cloud over Russia and it broke into four parts and one part of it went this way and then another part went that way and it was seen by the Eskimos and the Laplanders and it hovered over Afghanistan, and Gorbachev saw it and fell down on his face and you know those kind of stories, you know, his wild spooky stories. I never have been entranced by that, and I hear a new one every day. I know if you are a Christian and you have been anywhere except maybe in jail for the last 5 years, you will surely know what I'm talking about. I never was impressed by that. I think my needs and desires were just as simple as they could be. I wanted to know the Lord Jesus Christ better. That was all there was to it. Personally, face-to-face, intimately. And again, I am beginning to realize that's not normal. I guess I'm a little old to be figuring this out. Wouldn't you think? Most of us seem to be happy where we were, where I was then, most were. Well, a little bit further. Those who were there were happy and content to be where they were and got a little further. And those that got that far were content to be there. Most of this stuff boils down to a lot of talk and no experience.

Now, I pick on Pentecostals, but not as much as I love to pick on Baptists. Pentecostals are probably the only people living on this earth who seem to have some profession of a personal

experience with the Lord. They speak in tongues and have a lot of fun, and this and that and the other. And it is with tongues. And you take the tongues away from them, they've got nothing to live. A few really good songs, a little worship, and they're happy.

Well, I wasn't happy with that. I wasn't looking for anything spectacular. I will tell you where I made my big mistake, folks. One time, I read the Bible. That's my big mistake. I read through the New Testament, and I didn't see power, and I didn't see the world being saved. I didn't see big movements, and I didn't see this desire to get back to healing. The fourfold, sixfold, tenfold, and twentyfold restoration of the gifts, I didn't see any of that. I didn't discover the prosperity gospel that time I read the Bible. I hope that little lady in the back row knows I'm being facetious. Actually, I've read it more than once. I've read it twice.

I'm astounded that there are not more Christians who want to know the Lord better. I think this week I'm astounded. I came home today astounded. Either that or you sure aren't talking much about your needs or your desires, or maybe you can't identify them. And I'm going to say this, maybe us preachers, whoever we are, I don't feel like I am one, but whoever we are, we're not identifying for you. And maybe we're preaching you into the ground. We're telling you all your needs, but we're not doing anything about them.

I'm assuming most of you here are seeking something a little more real. I'm going to make that assumption, and I do not intend to leave you having heard a bunch of messages from which you go home and say that was really good. It becomes an absolute habit with the Christian faith. A conference, with a bunch of sermons, it's really good, you go home. I tell you what I'm mad at right now, more than anything else on earth. You know what I'm mad at? I am mad at sermons. I get off at sermons. (You are a troublemaker. You get your wife out of here. See her. She's in trouble already. - laughter)

Well, okay, first, we have established that I'm not normal. When I got to know the Lord, I stopped preaching, packed my suitcase, and took off all over America looking for somebody who could tell me I know the Lord better. And then I crossed the Pacific Ocean, looking, bag in hand, asking hundreds of questions, studying history, and reading all the books of all the people who were supposed to know the Lord well. But unfortunately, I also knew history. And I probably should give you a little bit of a review tonight or this week about the background of the deeper Christian life that this has been known for the last 1700 years. And I'll capsule it in one sentence. There had been precious little of it. And I looked and I looked until I got some satisfaction, and I got a little bit more. And I don't consider myself a great Christian. I don't even consider myself a good Christian. I don't even feel like I know the Lord very well, but looking around, man, I know a lot more than most folks do.

Now you understand I don't talk like this all the time. I told you before I got up that I am just really bearing my heart, and I hope this doesn't bother anyone. I don't understand why we don't want to know the Lord better, and I don't understand why we do some of the things we do to hinder knowing the Lord. And I know that virtually everybody in here is a layman. So, if you're a non-

ordained, non-practicing preacher, you work for a living, or you're a housewife or something like that, you know you're not a preacher or whatever those things are, would you raise your hand? Okay, fine. You are the most long-suffering people on this earth. I can't imagine why you put up with us. We preach you into the ground week after week after week. We tell you all these things you ought to do and ought to be, and then we say, "Now, let us pray." We sing the doxology, and we go home. And you walk out of there with a blind stagger, not knowing what to do, and you don't ever complain, and I am amazed at you.

Brother, you're going to be one of those troublemakers, too, aren't you? Your name is Frank. Where are you from, Frank? Louisiana, Oh, Louisiana. I'm going to make you a promise that when I get through talking up here in front, I'm going to come around of this thing and I'm going to talk to you about practical ways of knowing the Lord and that seems so natural and relevant and so sane to me that I take that as a fact of nature that that is my responsibility. But I'm standing up here tonight, frustrated, feeling as sane and as natural as that seems to be, it is virtually nonexistent. All we do is preach at you and preach and preach. And when we get through that, we preach again, and you pay us to torment you. I'm going to come back to sermons in a minute, but you'll hear my next frustration. Are you with me here? Or Oh, you would. I'm not worried about you. I'm worried about these sweet little ladies who just came in here from some quiet little Quaker church or someplace like that. The Quakers are not in the sermons; I shouldn't have said a Quaker, should I? All right, here it is. Here's one here. Here's one.

I've been wondering about this ever since I was a kid. I got saved, and I was in a Baptist church, and we used to pray for revival, or we prayed for revival. That was wonderful. Okay. Sometimes we even saw a little bit of it. Got to the seminary. Lord, give us power. Lord, do this. Lord, we were a bunch of hot-hearted young men. We pray for this or that and the other. And then I began to pick up on this new one, or maybe it was there all the time, but this one really got crystal clear. What we need is bold men, men like the old prophets, men who get up and declare and rebuke and exhort. Men who are bold men. We don't have any bold men anymore, and then we get down on our knees and pray, "Lord, move on our spirits and break our hearts and convict us of the things that ought not to be and change things and do it, Lord, in this week and our lives and in this conference."

So, sometimes I was one of the speakers in one of those conferences, and here I come out of this prayer meeting with all these preachers, and they've been preaching, praying this, and praying this, and praying this, and I thought, well, praise the Lord tonight, maybe the Lord will answer the prayer. Man, I step down from the pulpit. Meetings ended. Here they come. One throws a net over me. Another one's got a fire extinguisher. Another one's got a rope, another one's got a chain, another one's got a ball and chain. And it's, "Oh, oh, Gene. Gene, you'll upset people. Don't do that." Or "You're being negative, brother. You're being negative."

Now listen, I am not a negative person; I am not. Now I know what people mean by negative, that's some sour puss or who stands up there just attacking anything and everything and

declaring the world's going to hell and this and that. He's against everything on earth, and he sits down and he calls that boldness, but he doesn't have any solutions. Or maybe he takes a verse of scripture out of something. My position has been and will forever be. I will never attack anything specific. I'm not going to go after the Catholics. I'm not going after the Methodists or the Baptists. But I will speak on general problems that we have with all my heart. And I will almost never do it from the viewpoint of Scripture, and perhaps this is a unique thing on my part. I will not do it from the viewpoint of scripture; I will almost always do it historically.

Now, there's a reason for that. You can prove anything with the Bible. You have a much harder time moving history around. History is pretty well solidified. They didn't break it up into verses and chapters so that you can pull a little word out here and a little word out of the third century and something out of the fifth century and something out of the 10th century to prove it. I've stayed within history. And last of all, I never jumped anything until I knew I had something better to replace it with. Never, never will, never have. I have never preached beyond my experience. There have been a few occasions in my life when I felt it was necessary to speak beyond my experience, but when I did it, I did it and said so. But I have not preached beyond my experience, and I have not preached without a solution, but I am standing here absolutely convinced that when you hear people say what we need is bold preachers and prophets like the Old Testament prophets, and what we need, you know, is to tear down and shake and move, forget it. Brothers, I don't think somebody out there praying those prayers doesn't mean that.

Now, I'm a southern gentleman. I'm one of the most gracious people you will ever know. I am not a negative person, but there are some things that need to be removed from our lives. They are just horrendous, and they're standing there like boulders in the middle of the road. And I'm not made like to stand up here and preach around them or ignore them or think that they're going to go away, especially if they're standing between us and knowing the Lord better. Now, you only hear a few of them, yeah.

What are you going to do when I start getting tomatoes up here? Are you still going to be really bold? And when they carry me out of here, you're still going to be really bold. Okay, alright. Now, watch what I said. I said I will not attack it unless there's a solution. And I'll not attack it except on the basis of history.

Now, one of the things I've already brought up a few minutes ago, I am so ticked off about sermons right now, I am full right up to here with sermons. Sermons are not Christian. They have no background in the Christian faith. Now, before you fall off your chair, what they did in the first century and what happened after the 4th century are two different things. In the fourth century, something changed. There was a blending of the New Testament prophet, evangelist, church planter, whatever you want to call some of those men, and the different things they did. You get up to about the 4th century and a little past Constantine, there comes a vocabulary with it, which we got out of the New Testament. But coming over here out of left field is something that was a large part of the pagan world. The movie stars of that day were the orators, and there was a school

of oration that was probably more complex than anything that any man studies today in making speeches. They spent lifetimes studying the art of how to speak.

After the Greeks were defeated, and they were so attached to their orators, they would actually gather in coliseums, and they would present a show; they couldn't fight the Romans. They had been defeated, and they were conquered. They would present a hypothetical situation, and then they would have three or four of the great orators of that city come out and debate this thing, and make speeches on it, and the crowds would go wild. It was an art form. And those two things met in about the fourth century. They met in about four or five men who honed this thing together. They were Greek pagan orators, and when they converted, they picked up the Bible and began to be orators of it. Until that time, preaching was sporadic. It was to meet specific needs. It was to build a local congregation and get out of there. It was for the purpose of handling problems and emergencies. It was not an art form, and it wasn't something that God's people were subjected to every Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m., now and forever, world without end.

The concept of a human being standing in a pulpit and preaching every Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. emerged out of the Reformation 400 years ago. And since that time, God's poor people have been subjected to that again and again and again. And what I'm ticked off about is that it doesn't ever go anywhere. This week it's David and Goliath. Next week, it's Paul on his third trip. And the next week it's King Saul. And the next week it's Samson. And the next week it's something out of the life of Jesus. And next week it's the second coming. And you're just getting entertained. And it goes back into the history of entertainment through oration.

I'm not going to sit up here and take three or four hours to tell you this. Please trust me. This thing started 400 years ago in the Protestant tradition, based upon the oratorical skills that had stayed within the Christian faith that had come to us through the orators of paganism. You know, when I got to the seminary, by the way, I'm a seminary graduate. And by the way, I'll tell you something else, I am better educated than most men that I meet in the ministry. They got out of the seminary, and they started to stop looking, and they stopped breathing, and I know this doesn't sound modest, and I know, Lord, I'm supposed to be humble, but those guys don't know anything. And that's something else I'm ticked off about. They don't know their business. They have simply become people who do a little thing every week. They preach and they pat old ladies on their hands and visit them and bury them when they're dead, and all of those things, and that's about the end of it. And we know as ministers in a pulpit that we don't, we watch what we say because we're there, we're salaried. You give us a check, and man, you get outside of that and you're in big trouble. Oh, we do have some ministers here then, do we? Oh, I'm not going to ask. I'd better not now. Let me get off. We might get off on another subject, and I'll come back, find out how many ministers we got.

Saints, hear me. You come into some Christian gathering, and you want to get to know the Lord, and you hear a sermon on prayer, and you ought to pray, and you ought to pray, and you get so guilty. You ought to pray. Pray. You ought to pray. Brothers and sisters, go stand, go sing, go

out, and you have to shake his hand at the door when it's over with. That was a great sermon, preacher. We really enjoyed that. The next Sunday it's going to be tithing, and the next week it's going to be baptism, and the next week it's going to be something else. Where do we come to grips with the issues that are ripping our spirits to pieces, and why are we so hungry? And who's going to teach us something? The eternal, everlasting sermon. Say it again. It goes on and on, over and over. It never ends.

Now we sit and we listen, and we listen, and we listen, and we go home. I don't understand why you have not had a nervous breakdown. Now then, I'm going to say to you that I hope to turn your prayer life upside down before this week's over. Now, I can't make you go home and give up sermons, but I told you where they came from. Give me three hours, and I could still talk about the exact evolution of how this sermon came to us. It had nothing to do with first, second, or third-century Christianity. It emerged in the fourth. It is an art form covered in ritual. We hear it; we can't get to anything. Everything's boxed off from us. I hope, and my goodness, I hope to crack through everything you do about praying.

Now then, this is my next frustration. What the Deeper Christian Life Conference is for and about. I've been listening to Christians pray by the beaucoups, and I'm just like this. Right now, I am. I'm just like this. I think if I hear another Christian pray, I go screwy. Here comes Christian praying; he's going at about 100 miles an hour. Oh Lord Jesus, we think, and he's just going as fast as he can. He's just, I'm sorry I can't talk like that. And I'm listening and I'm thinking, "Brother, do you know the Lord?" Oh, I know you're saved, but do you know the Lord? And another brother, right beside him, he's praying (strange sounds), and on he goes. And I look at him and I listen, and I think to myself, "You sure you know the Lord?" And then there's this third brother, and he's intimidated by those two brothers. And here's his prayer. And this is the typical Christian prayer. Here he goes. "Lord, we thank you, Lord, that you have Lord given us this Lord this day Lord to pray you Lord for every Lord everything you've given for to us and Lord we are so grateful for this conference Lord and we pray that you'll make us Lord really openhearted Lord to hear this message tonight Lord." And poor Lord, you know he's just up there, worn out. I just know he is wherever he is, so here we got one brother running at a million miles, and we got another one shouting at him, and we got another every four seconds repeating His name.

And I stand back, and I have to ask, I can't help it, I'm a human being. This is my business. I have to ask myself, have you ever in your whole life touched your Lord in personal fellowship? I have to ask that because it will change you. You, I don't think you pray that way. Maybe you will. Maybe you will. Maybe I am utterly wrong here, but I don't think you will. Everything about what I hear being prayed, not everything, but an awful lot of it, is a reflection of an unchanged form that I've heard ever since the day I got saved. Where is the intimacy? Where is "I know the one I'm talking to and He knows me; we've spent a lot of time together." Then I get in a prayer meeting. There's one of these kinds of prayer meetings where everybody's in a circle and prays. I don't mean to be sacrilegious, but it's downright funny to me. It's just downright funny.

Boy, the things you hear; we'll get up at 6:30 in the morning, and we'll pray together, and we'll seek the Lord, and it's "Aunt Nana's got a cut finger," and "Uncle George is not here yet," and "Aunt Suzy's got a cold" and we're having our prayer request. I'm not down on prayer requests, but I'm tired of hearing Christians having nothing but prayer requests.

Now I want to say something else, and that is all of our prayers are, I don't know how to say this, futuristic, it's always "Lord we need you so much please give us such and such, and Lord we need you so much give us such and such, and the next day maybe He gave it maybe He didn't but the next day we're back Lord the church of God is so needy. Lord, meet its needs, Lord send a ..." Everything's out there somewhere; everything is futuristic. Where is the present encounter with Him? Are y'all going to let me keep going here? I don't mean to be negative. It's taken me 37 years in the ministry to blow my stack tonight. Will somebody please tell all these brothers and sisters this is not the way we usually start a conference? I appreciate that witness. I wonder if I can get two witnesses now. Alright, you're a witness to it.

I'm disturbed about something else. I didn't expect this to happen in my lifetime, I just didn't. I have probably read a lot, if not most of the Christian literature written by no matter who it was in the centuries in the past, and most of it was really poor, but a lot of those dear people got in real big trouble over what they did right, even if it was poor because it was not according to Hoyle. It was not the perceived way you were supposed to be in that day, and they really caught it, and you read those people, and you begin to just love them and care for them. Sometimes you want to say, "Hey, listen. I wish you'd stop being that way and teaching some of these weird things you are," but man, their hearts are wonderful. And sometimes their personal testimony with the Lord is so wonderful. And these people are not well-received. And we're talking 1700 years, folks, but there are several little things you can see running through their words. You can see their hearts break; you can feel their tears.

One of the things they talk about is the enormous intellectualism of their day of knowing God by up here or knowing God just, you know, just what you can dig out, memorizing a verse. Knowing God by ink and pen and memory and study. Now they had a way of saying unkind things about them, for which the world and the church, in its gratitude to them for awakening them to this need, burned them at the stake, threw them in prison, sold them into slavery, threw their bodies to the lions, or, later, they simply took them out and killed them. I cannot believe my own age after we've been through the reformation and we are evangelicals and we preach a born-again experience, an evangelical experience of you don't know the Lord and one day you get saved and you do know Him. But there's this mammoth thing rolling up here on us that I cannot believe. I wouldn't have believed in 10,000 years that we've ever come to the evangelical faith, and that is this, I hope I don't offend anyone with this, but I'm running scared right now, and that is that God was so living when He lived before creation and then He was in the garden and He was really close to Adam and then there was after that the fall but He spoke to Moses, Noah, and He spoke to Abraham and He spoke to all of these prophets and there were men who met Him and then Jesus

came and Jesus Christ walked around with the Father inside Him, fellowshiping with Him. That's in the Bible, by the way.

And here He is having a living experience with Him, and here then, are the men who come after Him with this living experience they have. They're reporting a living experience. And then they write letters, and they write inspired literature; they write the New Testament. And then we get the New Testament, and now we are told that God has ceased having fellowship with us, that He has ceased speaking to us, that He no longer personally speaks to us any longer. He only speaks to us through the written word, and that you cannot know Jesus Christ outside of the Bible. And a brother said to someone who was teaching this, "What about an indwelling Lord?" And he got a classical answer. You want to hear this answer? "The only way that we can know that we have an indwelling Lord, the only way we can know is because the Bible tells us."

Now, if this were a little bitty thing coming up, that would be okay, but this thing's taking the day, and I'm finding Christians all over this my country who are getting to the point they are afraid to touch their Lord. They are afraid they're going to do something wrong if they do anything except read the Bible and know about Him from there to here.

Now then, again, if brothers and sisters wish to believe that and teach it, great, but I'd like to say that Jiminy Crickets, I believe he can be known a little bit in here too, that we can fellowship with him and know him and touch him. I really believe that on the basis of firsthand testimony and the testimony of believers throughout the ages, every age.

Now then, I think I'm winding down. Can I do one more? How about two more? Let me do this really quickly because I'm not going to have a chance to do it any other time. This is the word of God. This is the New Testament; we're New Testament believers. I stopped in a town just a few minutes ago, pulled up to the sign. Here was the sign: Upstairs, New Testament Baptist Church. New Testament Baptist Church. New Testament Baptist Church. That's interesting. I didn't know that Baptists could be New Testament Baptists. I know you're saying, "Well, Gene, you're being negative." Just give me a little room here tonight, will you? I need a little room.

Okay, let me talk about the New Testament. Here is a New Testament church. You walk in the back. On the outside, it's the front, but when you get inside of it, it's the back. So, you never know what to call it. So, outside's the front, inside's the back. If somebody can ever clarify that for me, I'm done. You're inside it, and somebody says Go back there and somebody 5ft away on the outside says, "This is the front. Go in there." Alright, I'm walking in the back/front, I'm walking in from outside in, and I'm in and entering a New Testament church, and I see the beautiful stained-glass windows and the pews, and I see the aisle and the pulpit. I see the choir and I see the preacher preaching the word of God. He's a recent graduate of a seminary. Everybody stands; they got their little bulletin. You know, when those bulletins are done, we get our wives to type them on Saturday night, early Sunday morning. We crank them out on a little mimeograph machine that doesn't work very well. We hand-fold those things and get them over to the ushers just before the meeting, don't we? That's it. That's exactly what we do, and we invent those things. Were you ever inspired when

you invented one of those, brother? And we hand these things out, and here you come in, the long-suffering Christian, and you got this thing, and you're walking into this New Testament church, and you're going to have three songs and a prayer, two songs, and another prayer, one more song, and then an offering. And we're going to pass a plate right under your nose to make you just as guilty as possible. But you have a way around that, you just put in a penny. And then right before that, we had the announcements, or right after we had the announcements, and one more special, and we get up to preach. We're still a New Testament church.

Now, this is what we're doing. We're locked into a little ritual; at the end of the sermon, if we're Baptist, we give an invitation. If we're Methodist, we don't. Everybody goes home. They shake the hands of the preacher when you go out, and that's it. Go home, eat lunch. By the way, this does not include the New Testament way that you got to church. You had to fight with your kids trying to get their clothes on. They said they didn't like those high-starch shirts, and your husband and you had a real stem-winder when you got in the car because you were running late, and your husband blamed it on you, and you blamed it on your husband. And you got to church about as unreligious as two humans who could step out of an automobile, but you did go into a New Testament church, for the Bible is the center of the word of God. It's the word of God, and we've got to be New Testament and get back to a New Testament church. You got the picture? Okay.

The building, please, I know my facts. The concept of church building did not exist on this planet until the year 324 AD, when Constantine commissioned approximately 15 buildings to be built. He was a new Christian; he happened to be the emperor of an empire. And they were not called churches then. They were called St. John's of the Lateran, the Bethlehem grotto, and the place of the holy Sepulcher, and came to be called church. The first person ever to call a building the church, as far as literature, that I can find, was John Chrisomotum in about 370 AD. That is easily 300 years after the first century church. All the shovels being turned over by archaeologists said, "We met in homes." Previous to that, we met in homes. We met in homes. We met in cemeteries. And we met in rented halls.

Now, let's go inside this very New Testament church building. The stained-glass windows were given to us by Bishop Suger in the year 1200 in the city of St. Denis, France, the building of the first Gothic Cathedral, which is where you got your staple, too. That's when it came. The pews are more interesting. When Constantine built those buildings for Christians to assemble, he forgot to put benches in them. Christians came in and didn't know what to do; I suspect they sat down on the cold marble slabs. Probably some Greek priest, Roman priest, pagan priest turned Christian told them to get up and stand up. They couldn't sit down on the floor there.

And so today, the Eastern Orthodox Church never has a chair in its buildings. Did you know it? They have to stand through the entire meeting. And that's why the Eastern Orthodox Church never grew. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, were good Italians, and anybody would tell that they were, bought in their benches so they could sit down. In the year 1540, the

Protestants took over Saxony and a lot of other places. They did it very religiously. It was a great revival brought on by the sword. It was about that time that the chair was invented. I know that's hard to believe, but it was almost contemporary with it. They put some backs on those things. So now we have a New Testament church building with New Testament-stained glass windows with New Testament pews. The choir never existed until the year 400 AD, and it was taken right out of the pagan temples of Rome, specifically.

So now we have a New Testament church building with New Testament pews with a New Testament choir, and this thing that sits up there in the front of your church building was called an ambo. In the pagan temples of Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire, it was a place where the pagan priest made announcements at the end of the pagan meetings. It was brought in by Constantine into the buildings, and they had two of them in there. One was a place to read, and the other was a seat to sit down. The first preachers in church buildings sat down to speak because orators had spoken sitting down. And the sitting down came and stayed until I don't know exactly when some of the priests began to take their pulpits, their ambos, and put them up on arches, and they spoke from there, and then Martin Luther came along. He said, "Clean out the whole front end of this place." And he took the ambo, now called a pulpit, off the pillar, brought it, and stuck it down front, and behold the sacred desk from whence we declare the sacred word of God.

Origins are pagan. We got a pagan choir. We got a pagan pulpit. We got a pagan pew. We got a 12th-century stained-glass window, and we have a fourth-century church building, but we are in the New Testament. The reason we're New Testament is because we have a pastor. The pastoral concept was invented by Martin Luther in the year 1430 in Wittenberg. And I can show you the documents to prove it. There were seven pastoral duties of the Roman Catholic priest. He said, "We're going to change these a little bit; they're going to be seven pastoral duties of the Protestant priest." And they began to be known as the seven pastoral duties, and the word pastor caught on. Do you want to hear about the seven wonderful New Testament duties of the Protestant minister as they were born in Wittenberg? You know all about the funerals that are performed in the New Testament, don't you? You've heard about all the wonderful things, the funerals in the New Testament? You've heard about preachers standing up in front of people who are Christians as dead and preaching at their funerals? The funeral concept came into the Christian faith because the same orators who spoke in Roman courts and coliseums and temples did the same thing. When they were converted to Christ and became Christian preachers, they brought the same orations over the dead, and that's how that got into the Christian faith. It is a pagan thing that our brothers and sisters in the first century and the second century and the third century never did, but today we have a Roman custom of bringing an oration over our dead.

Quickly, the others are visiting the sick. You know where it says in the New Testament that our pastors are supposed to visit the sick, and you little old ladies who insist on the pastor going out, and you know, tapping you on the hand, telling you how sweet and saintly you are, and how much you're loved in the community. You drive me crazy with that demand in my life; please

don't do that. This is a terrible thing to have to do; we really don't want to go visit you. You might as well be told honestly, and it is a concept that has nothing to do with the Bible.

We marry young people. Well, you know how many ministers in the New Testament married the young; it's on every page. They came to us out of the Roman Greco-Roman pagan world, got into the Roman Catholic Church, and we Protestants came along and took it over. So, we visit the ill, we bury the dead, we marry the young, and there are three others, and I never can remember what they are, but they're all clearly centered upon the word of God, just like everything else we're doing is.

Now, you know what disturbs me about that. Oh, one other thing? The thing that really makes us New Testament is because our minister went to the seminary. Here we go. Jesus Christ raised up 12 men by their living with Him. Paul of Tarsus gathered eight men out of the churches he raised up and had them live with him for four years and taught them how to plant churches and live with him, a very godly man he was, I'm told - I read that in the Bible, and that's how they raised up workers. Seminaries were invented on December 13th, 1545, at the Council of Trent and did not exist previously to that. They were brought over from the traditions of the medieval age, in which men were taught, first philosophy, then rhetoric and oration, principles of oration, and then theology, which was a combination of Christian teaching and Greco-Roman philosophy, oh, give me the word, the word is dialectics. And brothers and sisters, will you please look one more time at that wonderful New Testament church?

Now my point is that first-century, second-century, and third-century Christians met in homes. They didn't have pastors. They were 1400 years before that. Oh, the word appears, but it's not what we think of today doing those things. There were men who came in and raised up those churches, but they left, and you functioned. You actually got to participate in the meetings. Now, isn't that an innovative idea? And the elders who were around, those elders did a little bit in the meetings, but they didn't preach you to death in the first, second, and third centuries. The church was primarily an organic expression of a particular area in which people having an enormous daily experience of the Lord Jesus Christ came together and shared with one another the experience they had already had of Him, in a loose, informal, organic atmosphere.

Now, in all of that that I have just said, what we're doing today doesn't bother me one bit. It's okay. That's fine. Just let me have the privilege of telling you where it came from historically, please. And if you have problems with that, please look in your heart and ask yourself if you're not stuck in a rut so bad that it's giving problems to the ongoing of the Lord's kingdom.

Now, that's not my problem either. My problem is really deep. My problem is, and this is a problem I ask myself, and I had to ask myself this when I was 29 years old, knowing all that I've just told you, how can I, how could I do this? And I can't answer this for myself. How is it possible that I, Gene Edwards, can read the New Testament, read this organic living thing, preach it, read it constantly every day of my life, saturate myself in it, and have gone to the seminary for four and a half years studying it? How can I read all about this moving, living thing and find in it a seminary

and raise money for that seminary on the basis of a seminary being in here? How can I preach a funeral and never blink an eye? How can I marry young people? How can I mount that pulpit? How can I put you in rows and tell you to sit there and hush? And if you say anything, you're not decent and you're not ordered. Do you understand what I'm saying? It's not done in decency and order.

How can I, a minister, an ordained minister of the gospel who's supposed to be able to read Hebrew and Greek and know the New Testament backwards and forwards, find all these things in here and never have any problems with this? That's what I don't understand, and that's what really bothers me, and I'm bothered tonight. I'm bothered about the everlasting sermon that gives you no place to participate. I am bothered about this tremendous gap between the New Testament and our ability to see what we do today and find it in the Bible; that really bothers me. The way we pray bothers me. The way we never get to function. And one of the saddest things in this world, one of the saddest things I've ever known is to say to brothers and sisters who are Christians, you have a you got a right to function and tell you how to function and what to do in your functioning and tell you that I'm not going to be in the next meeting, it's yours, and to walk out and see you come in there and stare at one another and not have the foggiest idea what to do. I cry over that. That's sad. Please say amen. That is sad, that puts you in a group together, and you don't even know what to do, and there are so many wonderful things Christians can do together in a meeting if we could just lock the preacher up in the closet.

Now, I'll tell you something else. If you can leave him there for four or five weeks, bring him some soup every once in a while, but if you can leave him alone for, say, six, maybe eight weeks, and just keep on coming back, you will begin to instinctively know what to do. It'll take a little time, but you'll do it. And I'll tell you quite frankly, some of what you'll do will be so tragic because it is so anemic because you don't have a depth to your experience of the Lord. And it gets really pitiful, but if somebody would show you how to know the Lord in a rich, deep, and living way, those little gatherings with a preacher locked in the closet and you with nothing in the ways that guide you in a way of ritual can become probably the most glorious thing you will know about the side of heaven.

Gene, you were being negative. That's right, but I was also being historical. I was also being scriptural whether you've noticed or not. And I intend to help you and the others; help you find some new handles to experience the Lord. Hopefully, and it's a short week, you will have the opportunity to function. And oh, please don't get up and say, "My name's so and so, and I got saved on such and such a day, and I'm really low. I just really feel bad these days, and y'all pray for me."

I hope that when you come to share, it will be out of a personal living experience with the Lord, even if it's really small, really small; nonetheless, it will be there. Share Him. He is, has been, and forever will be the center of our faith. He is the center of our faith, and you have a right to walk with Him daily. You have a right to get together and share Him. And that's what the conference on the deeper Christian life is about, and all these other things I said, it's not about

those, but I vented my frustrations because I really feel, it's just a personal conviction of mine, I really feel that a lot of that, if not most of it, and probably all of it, in fact, every bit of it is standing in the way of our knowing the Lord well and the church of Jesus Christ being a rich and living fellowship.

Now, when you go back home, you go back to your New Testament building, New Testament pews, New Testament pulpit, New Testament choir, and New Testament seminary, and I didn't do that deliberately; that just happened, seminary-trained pastor, and your New Testament Sunday school. But brother, when you do, I trust you'll be able to leave here with a little bit more of a way and ways to know the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to thank you so much for giving me. I needed to do this before I started speaking, because if I didn't, if I hadn't done it, it's going to spill out all week long. Little-bitty dribbles. I really came in here today with a heavy and frustrated heart.