

Okay, everybody listen. This afternoon, the brothers and sisters from Chicago have put together a treat for you. They're going to put on a play, *Me, My, Mine*, tomorrow afternoon. At what time? Three o'clock. Three o'clock. And be there. But whatever else happens to you the rest of your life, you be here Saturday afternoon to watch them perform an incredible feat. They are going to put on this book back here, *Turkeys and Eagles*, which was just recently written by four people with Peter Lord's name on it—*Turkeys and Eagles*—and you don't want to miss this. It is a classic, trust me, everybody. And nobody here has seen it. Nobody but the actors have seen it. Nobody. And this will be the first production. From here, it goes to Broadway. Alright, I've never been—I don't think I've ever been—in a conference, but I put on the suit for the first meeting, and I don't know why I do that. I think it's just so you'll know I have couth. So now you've seen my couth, and I'm going to be uncouth right here.

I always read a verse of Scripture out of the Bible, just like everybody else does, but I'm just not going to do it right now. I'm just feeling real free, and I'm not going to do that. Now, here's what I want to say to you. We're going to have two conferences this weekend. In the first three meetings, I'm going to speak on one subject, and then I'm going to turn. I'm going to speak on one subject tonight, tomorrow morning, tomorrow night, and then beginning Saturday morning, I'm going to speak on another one. So, we're going to pack a lot in this weekend; you will definitely get your money's worth. I'm going to talk on the church for the first three meetings, then I'm going to talk about Christ for the rest of the meetings. So, we're going to talk about Christ and the church—only I'm going to make it the church and then Christ. I have a very specific burden in both cases, and this is what they are. I really wish to talk to these saints right here from Chicago about the church, because you have touched something, and I want you to understand what you've touched, who you are, and where you are going. Then, when we talk about Christ, I want to talk to all of you about knowing Him better. And it will be very introductory, but it will be introductory with a purpose. We're going somewhere with it. Alright, I am here with a deliberate purpose, and this matter of speaking of Christ...I don't like conferences that just inspire people, and they go home and there's nothing there. I try to never speak anything that cannot be made an experience in your life. Unfortunately, that cannot just be done in a weekend, but it can be done. So, when we talk about Christ, we will be talking experientially. I'll lift it.

Now I'll talk to you about the church—no, I don't—I'm going to try to speak to you without using that word. It'll slip out every once in a while, because every time we use that word, we see something. Every time we use the word "church," you know, you get a certain picture in your mind, and there's nothing we can do about it. It's a steeple. It's a minister. It's a choir. It's everything it ought not to be. I want to talk to you about the fellowship of the believer, the community of the saints, the fellowship of the redeemed, the *koinonia* of the brethren. I want to talk to you about a spiritual community. A spiritual community. That's what I really want to talk to you about. And I want you to just lay aside all other concepts for a moment.

And by the way, I don't know where all of you folks are from, and I don't know why you're here. And let me just say a word of caution here: you must all understand that I am a radical and that I am half crazy. And never, never make the mistake of assuming that I am normal. I am not normal. And I am a radical. And if you are a traditional Christian—with no offense in mind—nonetheless, I will speak radically. I will speak way over on the left side, and then I'll move way, way over on the right side, but I will never be in the traditional position. Now, that doesn't mean that I am abnormal or unusual; I'm just radical. And I'm sure you've met many, many radical people in your day. So, you'll feel right at home.

I would say since about the year 380—in fact, I would even say about the year 368—when a gentleman by the name of Priscillian was executed, beheaded in Belgium. The first Christian ever killed by other Christians because of doctrinal differences; they cut his head off. And I think history would side with Priscilla and not with the organized church of that day. Since that time, there has been something that has existed on this earth - very small, but always present - and no one has ever been able to exactly describe it. It doesn't always follow the same form or expression, but it's always been there. And I'm going to call that tonight the spiritual community. The spiritual community of the believers. The spiritual community of the redeemed. I can't tell you exactly what I mean by that, but they've always been given names that reflected that flavor of a spiritual community. Or they have taken that name, usually given it.

I can tell you that most believers...first of all, we are all the same in the Lord's sight. There are no special Christians. There are no special Christians. We're just redeemed. But these people, almost without exception, have sensed some sort of a call. They have been restless, and they have been heart-hungry to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think it always starts there. First, they get hungry to know the Lord. Then that hunger to know Christ drives them to—and I'll use this word—to community. And if you will pick up your church history book and read it, you'll discover somebody who has a passion for Christ, and you will always find him being driven toward this community. He has a restlessness in his life, looking for, like Abraham, a city. And this has been true in just about every generation that has ever existed. Maybe some, no, but in every century, for certain.

Now, they're not connected to one another. They have no singular, definable purpose. Perhaps the greatest single common denominator among them is that heart-hunger for Christ that then drives them to a heart-hunger for the spiritual community of the believer. A coming together with one another. And when that coming together happens—generally speaking, very generally speaking, there is something that happens to them that transcends what usually happens when people gather on Sunday morning. It transcends a worship service. And it becomes a way of life. It becomes a society within itself, and I don't mean just society; I mean a civilization, a town, a community. I'm using the word *town* out of place here. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not talking about a Winona Lake that was founded to be a Christian town, I believe by Billy Sunday, if I'm not incorrect here. Does anybody want to tell me if that's true or not? That is more or less true.

No, I am speaking of a spiritual matter here. Something happens. And here are some characteristics that I want you to keep in mind, would you? One: it's simple. It's simple, usually outside of any predictable ritual, outside of a dominating hierarchy. Sometimes it's had what you might call a clergy, but the walls tend to break down between laity and hierarchy. Simplicity. It is not movement-orientated. I want you to understand this because in our day and age, we're getting cheated in this community business. Because since 1820, we can go from 368 to 1820—from about 1820, we picked up an awful lot of bad habits among Christians who have stepped outside of the traditional way of meeting. And one of the things that has impelled so many Christians in the last 150 years has been a movement mentality that is not necessary. And you'll hear it all the time. "Oh, but it will become a movement." It doesn't have to. The church witnesses—it did not always become a movement. No. It is not a movement. It is something that happens within the hearts of a bunch of people. And I believe the day will come when it will lay off this business of "movement."

I had a friend, a dear friend. He is a leader in the largest Protestant denomination in America, and he was speaking to me from within that denomination. He said, "Gene, many of us within our own denomination have the feeling that the day of—listen to this—the day of denominationalism has peaked and passed. And we are also seeing, and he was very positive about this, the decline of Sunday school, and we believe we will see it rescind." Now, that's pretty radical stuff there, folks—coming from a Southern Baptist. And those are holy things among Southern Baptists: the denomination and its structure, and Sunday school. I remember Harry Truman said, "There are two things I found out since I've been president. One of them is, never criticize Marines and never criticize J. Edgar Hoover." And I would say as a Christian, there's one thing that you never do, and that's never say anything unkind about Sunday school. It's sacrosanct.

And yet here they were, saying that. I think in another hundred years—and forgive me, those of you who think the Lord's going to come back tomorrow, that's fine—but we will see a great declension of much that seems so embedded today. That spiritual community cannot be forced off the pages of church history. She won't go. She's just always there, regardless of men, movements, or political situations. She reasserts herself because she is part of the divine expression within the nature, which the Lord Himself puts in us, on the day we are saved. Hey, don't sit there and look at me like that. Now, you had your mouths open a few minutes ago. Say something to me. Say amen. Thank you, New Zealand. Can you folks say amen? Oh, you can go. Okay, great. Then talk to me. Thank you, brother.

Let me tell you something else. She's rare. She's rare. This community of the believers is rare. I get letters all the time from folks who say, Gene, there are three of us meeting in Kalamazoo, in Kokamonga, in Hickory Creek, in Podunk. And down in Texas, we have towns like Jot Em Down, Mule Shoe, and Possum Trot. Those are all towns in Texas. "At some little place, won't you come, please, and help us have—" and I look at that letter, and I think, centuries have gone by in which nations have never seen even one witness to that spiritual community. Whole nations, with a century or more going by without so much as one place

where that community was expressed. Perhaps in another nation, many places—or some—but she's always been rare. And she will stay and remain rare.

I have the feeling that if we were to graph this thing, the population of Christendom at any given time, and the percentage of people that were experiencing the spiritual community of the believer, that in every century the percentage would be about the same. Can you follow that? Did you follow that? If there are 10 million people, there's this number of people in that experience. And if there are 100 million, the percentage remains about the same. And in fact, it may be that the percentage right now is about as low as it's ever been. Certainly, within the Anglo-Saxon world, it is at a very precarious point.

She's always been there. She's always been a witness to God, to angels, to principalities, to powers. She is not a movement. She does not tend to be sectarian. She cares more for the other believer than she does for a doctrine. Say, "Praise the Lord." She cares more for fellowship than she does for differences. She cares more for this divine thing that happens between people than she does for outward rituals. She cares for encounter with the Lord among other people more than she does any kind of outward union. But she has always been rare, and I will say she is almost totally the exclusive territory of those who have a heart to know the Lord and are then driven, are driven to have a heart to know the Lord with others.

Now I'm going to tell you one other thing about this lady. And that is, she's very fragile. And she's fragile because she doesn't have anything in this world holding her up that usually holds up believers today. She is fragile. Now let me explain to you. I call them friends, those whom I'm about to mention now, and they call me a friend. Nonetheless, I'm going to say something here. You do it for me. Name a really fiery, ongoing, interdenominational, non-profit, tax-exempt, interdenominational religious organization today. Give me one. Alright, we have Youth With a Mission. I've heard that. Give me another one. We won't pick on anybody, huh? I'm sorry? Maranatha? Never heard of it. Must be a little one. Let's take one of the big ones. Yes. Campus Crusade. And Youth for Christ. Youth for Christ is headquartered near here somewhere. No, it's over in Carol Springs.

Something's impelling these people. They have an organizational structure, and they have a definable purpose. It's evangelizing. It's the campus. It's the youth. It's world evangelism. There's something holding that thing together besides structure; it is a common goal and vision. Baptists are being held together—I speak for Southern Baptists—by the cooperative program, baptism, once saved always saved, and the annuity program of the retirement program of the preachers. That's what's holding that thing together. And I will pick on Baptists because I am one.

She's got nothing holding her up. This is not exactly correct, but let me say it. She has no purpose. She doesn't get up out of bed one day and say, "The Lord's coming back tomorrow! We've got to work like crazy!" She doesn't get out of bed one day and say, "The world's going to hell! We've got to save everybody!" She doesn't get up and say, "Oh, God is great! We're going to prosper now and show the world that God pours millions of dollars on

Christians!" I just threw that one in, in case of... She isn't driven by the seven ages of dispensation or the seventy weeks of Daniel. She is not driven by premillennial dispensationalism. What else do we find ourselves driven by? Help me here a little bit. Can you? Come on, talk to me. A building program can always hold a church together or a people together. I'm sorry? Healing can hold us together. Alright. Miracles. Signs and wonders. Prayer. Alright, what else? All these things. And now, boy, you know, some of this stuff is very dear to many of our hearts. Unfortunately, we can't get together on which one is the dearest. You say the second coming, I say evangelism, and you say prayer, and here we go. But she doesn't have any of these things holding her up.

When I was a young man on my way to Europe for the first time, I was 19 years old, and there was a gentleman on board the ship who gave me a piece of advice. He said, "Gene, if I didn't have an enemy in the world, I'd go make some." They drive you. They drive you. They give you drive. Many Christian movements have an enemy. The enemy. Oh, the enemy. Oh, the enemy. What is the enemy? The Democrats are the enemy. Eastern religions are the enemy. If you're Methodist, Baptists would be the enemy. It's true. Baptist, Methodist. This used to be a hundred years ago. The enemy for a Baptist was a Methodist. You may not know that, but it is absolutely true. The enemy sometimes is the devil. He's just around here. Whoa. Enemy.

She is simple. And it's not the second coming. And it's not evangelizing the world. It's not a worldwide movement. It's not "We are it." She's got very little holding her up. Brothers and sisters, very few times in church history have men and women dared to simply make Jesus Christ their real center. Now you're going to have to all understand me. Please understand me, but she is really fragile because she doesn't even make Scripture her center. She makes Jesus Christ her center. I know it's very dangerous to say that to Christians because they'll say immediately, "Yeah, but how are you going to know the Lord outside of Scripture?" And you can do that. You can do that. Thank you, sister. Say that a little louder. Amen. Yes, you can, because He lives within you. He really lives within you, and you can know Him personally. You're driven by nothing but the Lord, and therefore, you are fragile, and for that reason, this spiritual community, by the way, pops up everywhere frequently. She just doesn't live very long because someone either interposes those things, or she simply doesn't know the Lord well enough to know Him for a long time.

So, the knowledge of Christ within this community—and now I'm coming to those of you who are taking notes—all that was introductory. Here's the main point: Jesus Christ has got to be her center in reality and experience. Now say, "Praise the Lord." Say it in front of me. He has to be her center, and this cannot be doctrine or talk, brothers and sisters. It cannot be praise. It cannot be worship; praise of Him and worship of him. I have had people tell me throughout many, many years that tongues meant a great deal to them, and then it wore out. And then they started bluffing. Now, there are many of you who have never bluffed...but some Pentecostals bluff. Some Charismatics bluff. But I've heard a new one recently. There has been, in the last 10 years, a great deal of emphasis placed on worship. And boy, it's

beautiful. It's really beautiful. But I am beginning to hear Christians say, "I got where I was bluffing." Do you understand what I'm saying? But they didn't mean it. It was getting rocked.

Listen, I have known that Christ was the center of my life, the center of my fellowship, and the center of this union, or oneness, or whatever you choose to call it—this *koinonia* —but sometimes you overlook something.

And just recently, Tim and Tony... and where's the other one? And Roy, there you are. I overlooked you. Excuse me. Yeah, I saw the teeth and then I recognized you (laughter)... praise the Lord. I learned something recently, brothers. When you get in the mess we're in Portland, say amen, and you have to just drop everything, and you got down—we got down—out of necessity - to just the Lord, and then I had an experience I'd never had before. And that was: worship and singing and praising does not bring me to Christ.

Christ. The knowledge, the experience, the encounter with Him causes me to praise and to worship and rejoice. And believe it or not, I'm confessing here to you: that was a fine line I overlooked. I think in my unconscious mind, I've always seen worship and praise as bringing me to Christ. And I discovered in those simple, simple, simple, simple little meetings we are having—which are just turning our lives inside out (say amen, Tim)—that it is Christ who leads us to all things. How can I impress it upon you? That it is your Lord, and when that well of knowing Him runs dry, the clock starts ticking. It's a matter of time. Things are going to fall apart one way or the other. And we don't know that. And when it does fall apart, someone is always there to analyze it and say, "Well, if old Joe Schnucks hadn't joined us, this wouldn't have happened. We had something really glorious going there." Or, "If we hadn't gotten off on the prosperity gospel." Or, "If we hadn't gotten off on authority and shepherding." Help me here. Help me. Where have you been shot in the foot? Or the head? What got you, brother? What sank your ship?

Can somebody help me with some more here? Let's make a list. Discipleship, huh? Someone left? Okay. You got anything else? What are some of the biggies that sink her? Or the authority of what? Name it and claim it. Okay. Intercession. Okay. Which sounds so wonderful. I mean, who could fault intercession? And you know, this business of the church is amateur hour. It really is. It's amateur hour. I watch people chasing some of the dumbest stuff, really. And some young kid—or some old man—he gets one little...we have a saying down in Texas: "He gets something stuck in his craw." Now, if you don't raise chickens, you don't know what I'm talking about, but a chicken has a craw, right here, and he gets something stuck in it—and you have to get that thing out. Usually a rock. He gets something stuck in his craw, and he sees something, and he goes to seed on it. And again, forgive all my analogies here, but he overemphasizes it.

You don't move off of Christ. And I think that's what makes her so rare. And perhaps the thing that makes her the rarest of all: so few of us have the foggiest idea of how to know Him. *We don't know how to know Him*. Now, can I get some genuine, honest amens here? We don't know how to know Him. Then I would say that ought to be our first and foremost task:

to know how to actually encounter this Living Lord. I'm going to keep on talking to you about the church for a while, but we have got to move to this business of knowing Him.

Brother Alex, Brother Stan, dear sisters and brothers from Chicago, there has to be the input of Christ. It just has to be. It doesn't take an overwhelming Pentecost. There's just got to be an inflow of your Lord. And the humblest of us are the best, when we can say: "Show me how to know Him better. Show me how to know Him at all. Show me how to know Him better."

And it is *Him*—and it is not *things about Him*. You can study about your Lord, and study about your Lord, and study about your Lord. And you can know all the facts in the world about your Lord. And you can know so much about Scripture—and hardly know Him at all. I'm going to really risk it here. We have a tendency to replace the encounter of Christ with a great deal of knowledge of Scripture. And my own impression is that we get meaner and meaner the more we know the Scripture without knowing *Him* the same way. And I was discussing this with someone—can I venture that out in this? I'd like to chase that for a minute. Can I chase that for a minute? Is that okay? Because there's a seminary located right here in this town, and I'm a graduate of one of those things. I got more degrees than a thermometer.

Let's take this young kid. Let's take this 18-year-old kid named Gene Edwards. How's that? Here's this 18-year-old kid. He comes into this seminary that is very Bible-centered. Well, let me tell you about this 18-year-old kid. He doesn't know *nothing* about God. There is nothing that makes him sanctified or holy. He comes in there saved and rejoicing in his initial redemptive experience. He comes in and spends four years at this institution learning the Bible. Now, forgive me, but it is possible for him to go through the front door and go out the back door at the end of four years and accumulate an enormous wealth of information, the lack of which you cannot imagine. And throughout all those four years going through, he's told: "The Bible, the Bible, the Bible, the Bible!" And nothing happens inside. And yet he walks out of there saying, "Bible."

Can you follow me? Now, without his realizing it, he is so convinced—Bible—that he is very, very insecure when anything else comes in his way, such as the knowledge and experience of his Lord, because he has now attached to this, he went in Joe Schmo, he came out Reverend Schmo. No, it's really true. It's really true. I went in at 18 years old. I want to be clear. I was a college graduate at 18. I'm not talking about a Bible school. I'm talking about a seminary. And I went through that thing. I was a young, seedy kid who just thought of being called *Reverend*. But at the end of four years, I was like these guys walking up and down to the hospital. They put this thing around their neck. They're a first-year medical student, and somebody comes up and says, "Doctor, I'm dying." And when you come out of there, you are Holy Joe. It is "Reverend this" and "Reverend that." And you're burying the dead, and you're marrying the young couples, and you're really wondering if their children are going to be legitimate—because you don't feel a whole lot different. And you're praying for the sick, and you're really counseling—spiritual terms all over the place. But through that process of

going through those doors, very little happened to you deep internally. And you get very, very, very defensive about Scripture. And you can kill in defense of it.

Now, I'm not telling you something secret or hidden. And I think most men who have later come to be overwhelmed *by Him* will turn back and testify that this was what was happening to them. And I think it is basically the testimony of the Pharisee who finds Christ, and very few probably did. We think of one in particular. And from that day on, he was impelled by Christ.

When I was 29 years old—and I had had one packed life—I made a very simple decision. Boy, it was revolutionary: that I wanted to be a Christian more than I wanted to be a minister. I wanted—let me explain that—I wanted to know Him. And I was willing to say, "I don't know You very well, Lord. And I have power, and I have all the success or achievement a man of 29 could ever hope to want. I don't know you very well, Lord." And I laid it down to find Him—intimately, personally. And when I did—and when I did—I began not only seeking one thing, but two. One was Him, and the other one was the community of those who wish to know Him. And that's what you begin looking for. You begin looking for those who also want to know Him. And you don't care a hoot nor a holler what that man's doctrines are, or what that woman believes. If they want to know Him, you want to know them. Praise the Lord. Amen. Hallelujah. I'm so glad you did that. Thank you so much. That means a great deal to me.

A Quaker gave an illustration that was perfect. He had a wheel, and he said—seeking to explain this thing I'm discussing with you—at the center of that wagon wheel is the hub. And here are the spokes that move toward the hub. And you will notice that as the spokes move toward the hub, they also draw closer to one another. It just happens that way. You can't prevent it. Now, he said, if you take that hub to be Christ, and those spokes to be the redeemed—the saints, the believers—as they move further and further toward Christ, they automatically are drawn more and more toward one another.

Dear brothers and sisters, our unity lies not simply in saying "Christ," but in the experience and knowledge of Him. In laying down the sectarian walls, that which denominates you from me and me from you. But it isn't even the laying down of them, because that really doesn't accomplish a lot, but it is *Him*. And when you touch *Him*, and when *I* touch *Him*, and when we touch the glory that is *Him*—something happens between us that is automatic and organic. It just happens. Now, if at that moment you will slip that little thing that says, "Aha! Now that we've got to know one another, let me explain to you why you must believe in the pre-millennial, post-tribulation rapture, and I shan't be happy until you see what I have seen..." If we can just for one precious moment lay that other thing down—whatever it is—then there comes this glorious intimacy, this divine encounter between spirits. This, for the first time, the knowing of one another.

Again, I think it was the Quaker who said: "No man knows another believer until he knows that believer spirit to spirit." Spirit to spirit. What happens when that happens? You really

get to know somebody, like you've known them all your life. Yes, like you've known them all your life. Exactly, brother. And I don't know if you understand this or not, but race dissolves. Nationalities dissolve. Political feelings dissolve. But—you may not know this—there is also, and this is almost never mentioned... I want you to be impressed with this: Time and space dissolve. The deeper you plunge into this, the more profound grows your unity with those who've come before, and a sense for those who will come after. You begin to understand that you belong to a long, rich heritage—an incredible witness to Christ. And truly, if you plunge into that thing—whatever it is—you will become so keenly aware of those who came before, and you will seek to draw something of their witness into your own lives, and you will care. You will trust me. Believe me. You will begin caring for the year 2020. No, I'm not going to be alive in 2020, and I want you to know, I care. I care about what's going to happen then. If the Lord has not come, I wish to know and believe in my heart and soul that that community is going to exist on this earth. And frankly, I don't care where. I'm not an American when it comes to that. I don't care where. And I figure probably Africa, but I want to be sure it happens. And I am driven by that. And when I pick up my pen to write, I write to you. I often write to me. I write to you, but I write to a brother who's not even born yet. I'm hoping he'll pick up a book, because very few people have ever written to Christians within this community. Throughout church history, the literature is almost nonexistent. It's all written to the structured church. I hope someone picks up a book, 40 to 50 years from now—100 years from now—and reads the story of the early church, and says, "I'm not crazy," and has a witness from an age gone by.

There is a group of Christians who've influenced my life a great deal, and I have visited several of their places in Europe, but I was never able to go to their main home in America. And that's Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. And just before I started on this trip, there's a clinic in Pennsylvania that treats people with some of my health problems; some, not all. And I went there to get some of the new treatments they have. By the way, they didn't work. And this is in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. And while I was there, I made the first trip I ever made to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Now, many of you may not know this, but Bethlehem was founded by Christians. And I think when it was founded, they were 60 or 70 miles from the nearest next town. It's been called the city in the wilderness. And it was a city, and it was built by a people, a whole city. It was a community of the redeemed. And it was a spiritual community of the redeemed. Today it's a physical town. Then, it was a spiritual as well as a physical thing.

Have you ever heard of the Moravians? Now, please don't quote me as having said "Mormon." I said Moravians. That's a province over somewhere in Germany or something like that. It's behind the Iron Curtain today. My daughter went to Herrnhut and visited there. I've been to Herrnhof, which is on this side of the Iron Curtain. But a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of going to Bethlehem. And there is an acre—one acre of land—which is their cemetery. They will hold their own with the testimony of first-century believers. They were incredible. I'm not even going to tell you about them, but they were the greatest witness to Christ since the Reformation, and even just previous to the Reformation. And they've been a standard to me.

Just to give you one little thing that I was reminded of by someone there when I visited—he reminded me that they always broke the community up into two groups: those who worked to earn money and those who were sent out to preach the gospel. And it was always half and half. One half would serve; the other half would witness. And then after a while, they would switch. And one half would work, and the other half would be sent out—who knows where? All over the Western world. There's never been a witness in modern history like the Moravians. I want you to know I walked all over that one acre. They have the little blocks that identify everyone. The births began about 1715, 1710, 1720... The deaths began about 1740, 1750, 1760... I think the thing that impressed me the most was that there was virtually nobody there who lived past the age of 40–45. They died young. They said, "*We live to work, we work to live.*" Their meetings lasted 5, 6, 7, 8 hours.

I was in the Moravian Church, the largest Moravian Church in the New World, in North or South America. I was there in Bethlehem. The message lasted—on the outside—seven minutes. The whole meeting lasted about 40 minutes. And I couldn't help but think: *My, how the mighty have fallen.* And I would ask the Moravians questions they didn't know the answer to. I asked, "Where was Christian David buried?" They didn't even know who Christian David was. That's like saying you don't know who Paul of Tarsus was. They had lost it. That's okay. I want you to know—for about 50 or 60 years—they were a living light. And I also want you to know—they raised the standard for my heart. And for yours. And I want you to know something else: I belong to those people. And they belong to me. They are mine. And I intend—50, 60 years from now—for someone to turn around and say, "Those people belong to me. And I belong to them."

My point was: in some way, not only race and nations, but even time and space — dissolve. And we feel that we have known them our whole lives. And you know, brother, I love that term. I love that word. And perhaps that sums it up more than anything else. We meet, and we are one, and we know that we have known one another so long. There are no barriers.

Now, that witness has been born in the heart and the life of those who had a hunger to know their Lord. How shall I say this to you? It's not an *it*. It's a *she*. She's a *she*. She's a girl. She is not an organization. She is an organism. It is really difficult to explain this. We have barriers to break down up here about her. We left out something a few minutes ago, brothers and sisters, and that's: We must restore the gifts. Now there is a first-class gimmick if I ever heard of one. Don't throw anything at me, please, but that is really a gimmick. "We have to restore the gifts!" This is the age for restoring the gifts. By the way, that began in 1790. 1790. I'll repeat that: 1790. And every generation since then, somebody's been saying: "*We need to restore the gifts.*" My cow, I didn't know it was that hard. We don't need to restore a gift. We don't need to restore anything. Let me tell you how foolish that is—from a spiritual viewpoint. From spiritual biology, that's like me standing up here and saying: "*We have got to restore the nose.*" And the ear. "Think nose. Pray nose. We have a little baby. May the church all come together and pray it: Have a nose! Oh, have a nose! Oh, have a nose!" And oh, don't forget the ear! "Have an ear!" This is the mind of Aristotle that makes a statement like that—that it is a kind of human being that is a structure, that it is an organization, that it is a

thing that comes up. Listen. You don't have to pray that God be God. You don't have to pray that Christ become Christ.

Do you not understand that she has an organic nature? This thing—of *we've met one another, known one another all of our lives*—is right down at the very heart and soul of this thing. It's part of her nature to be that way. That's been the witness in every age. Moravians once met the United Brethren. The United Brethren once met the Waldensians. And boy, it was, brother, way up in northern France from way down in southern Italy, they never met one another. And they did. And it was WowWee. That's part of her organic nature, and it takes some Baptist preacher like me to step in and say, now wait a minute, we've got to believe. And once they've always saved, we can't believe you can get it and lose it, and then the division comes. But that first spark of contact among simple people who are fat, dumb, and happy and have never been messed with is WowWee. Is it not? Is it not? Is that not the organic expression of that girl? Well, she has an organic...she just happens, and she will just be what she's going to be.

If you've heard me use this illustration before, please forgive me, but it's the best one I've got. In 1965, I made a trip to Japan. And I was on JAL Airlines, and that thing was packed. We had to sit there all the way from Los Angeles to Japan. It was a long night. And everybody was packed in and miserable. And I was sitting there reading Life magazine, and it was in the middle of the night. And there was this article in there about how man would ever travel to other planetary systems and go to explore that which is around other suns, because it takes so long to get there, even at the speed of light. And obviously, the writer had never watched Star Trek. And what was being proposed here was that there be a spaceship constructed that would be filled with embryos, human embryos, and at a certain time, millions of years from now, going at the speed of light, machines would begin letting those embryos develop, and then they would grow to birth. And then there would be machines there and educational materials to teach them basic things about life, and so forth. And the question the writer raised was, if that were true and man were totally removed from his culture, would he fall into family units? And I turned to the gentleman next to me, and we fell into a discussion about this very subject. He turned out to be the chairman of the Department of Sociology at Yale—the perfect person to have this conversation with—and his answer was remarkable. He said it doesn't matter what you do to the human race, it will always form into family units. It is part of its biological genetics.

We are monogamous. And all the immorality in the world will never change that. We're a monogamy. The wolf is a monogamy. Eagles are monogamous. They don't just do like dogs do. They have a girl, a female, and a male. What more are monogamous? Huh? Geese? Is that right? Okay, what else? Swans, doves, mate for life. Hawks, mate for life. Anything else in the animal kingdom besides the wolf? It's the only one I know of in the animal kingdom, but I'm not up on this.

Okay. Now, we're just going to be that. It's a part of our genetic code. Do you not understand that the redeemed are put together in community? Knowing Christ, knowing Christ will

automatically, ultimately express these things that we call New Testament offices. Forget the New Testament offices and remember Him. They will come out of her. It's part of her genetic code.

I have a friend named Tom, and their little boy, Matthew, did something. They brought this story to me, and I thought it was classic. Barbara, the mother, takes the eggs, boils them, puts them in the refrigerator, marks an H on them to distinguish them from the eggs that have not been hard-boiled, and the children come in and see the hard-boiled eggs. There's a label on it, they break it open, eat it, close the refrigerator door, and go about their business, and the little H shows them which one is hard-boiled. One day, Matthew opened the refrigerator, and the little boy looked around, saw all those eggs, no H's. He went over to a drawer, pulled out a marking pen, and put an H on that thing. Took the egg out, closed the refrigerator door, and he wrote that thing. And he made an amazing discovery that most Christians have never made. And it is this: that putting a label on something doesn't make it that! Praise the Lord. You got it.

And you, we, this gimmick of we're going to have this non-movement. And oh, brother, what's your gift? Oh, brother, our gifts. And so, we're going to ordain you as a deacon. We're going to make you an elder. Ah, but you're going to be an apostle. Putting a label on you don't make it so, and brothers and sisters, if you'll leave her alone long enough she will genetically organically, it's part of her very biological structure, she will produce these things, and I believe now this is my personal opinion, I'm not selling it strongly, but it is my personal opinion that this thing has been so damaged that we would all be wise to drop all those labels. They have a tendency to destroy men and just let be what is. The labels are not necessary. I see young men who are so ambitious to be super apostles, Super, super apostles. And I'm not sure they'll ever make deacons. In fact, I'm not sure they'll make it back home tonight. And they're either going to be or they're not going to be. I can't make you one. You can't become what you're not. We will be what we're going to be. This is what she is.

Now I've got one more thing to say to you tonight. Did you get that? You got that? She's got divine genes in her. Not just human, but divine genes in her. And let that divinity grow, and these things come out. All of these offices are part of the divine expression. Why labor for a nose? It's going to come for sure. Say Praise the Lord. Amen. One last thing, Chicago, hear me; history, hear me: you're never, never going to know him as well alone as you do within the spiritual community, this place where brothers and sisters commit their lives to one another, not for a day, a weekend, or a week, but for a lifetime. Chicago, saints from Chicago, you've been together for, I understand, 10 years, and nobody ever even knew you were there. You're hiding there under a bushel, and then I stumbled in one day, and there you were, and you look beautiful to me. I'm going to tell you, you look beautiful. You just belong to that little area there in Chicago. You all live near one another, and the fire department, notwithstanding, you're going to be there together. It's an in-house joke, folks.

You don't know how blessed of God you are. You never miss the water till the well runs dry. Oh, oh, I know, I know the mess she is. I know she drives you crazy. I know that Alex is being driven crazy; I know that Alex got those gray hairs, I know where he got every one of them. I'm the only person in my family who is gray-headed. The church gave me every one of those. Yeah, the church of Jesus Christ: this is my scars right here. She is a pain, but when you have her, she is wonderful. And let me just talk about this for a minute. See, you see folks, you don't know how bad off the human race is until you come to community, and then you know, and you find out how bad off all these people are. And they find out how bad off you are. Yeah. Oh, I meet spiritual giants all the time. They are like Lindbergh. You know, they're flying this thing all alone. Oh, you can be anything when you fly it all alone. You look so good. You look so great. And you can bluff. And, you know, I don't like you. I want you to know I don't like you. These people who pretend spirituality. There's not anybody in this world that's living more spiritual than I am. I'm one of the most spiritual people who ever lived, and I stink to high heaven. And for those of you who think I'm serious, please — my point is I meet these bluffers who just, oh brother, oh brother, so good to see you, oh, let us pray, oh Lord, oh.

Listen, you can't fool me. I'm a preacher, and I act natural. Doggone it, I'm going to keep on acting natural. And it costs me. If I were just to put on a little piety, oh, how much more reverently I would be treated. And sometimes I really wish I could be treated a little nicer than I'm treated. I am not kidding you, but it all goes in community saints; it goes, it just plain goes.

One of the things that bothers me about being in a Baptist church is that I sit there, usually in the balcony if I'm forced to it, and I'm sitting up there, and I'm looking over that crowd. Let's say I'm looking down at a thousand people — any thousand people. Now, some of you are going to be shocked at what I have to say, but it only shows how much you need the community of Christ. Look down over the balcony and there, instead of a thousand Baptists and Methodists or heathen, it doesn't matter, and I will tell you what you're going to see. There are a thousand people there. One fourth, statistically, one fourth of the people in that room who are adults have deep, profound drives of sexual perversion. Five kleptomaniacs. 75 compulsive liars. Compulsive liars. Probably 100 alcoholics. 10, 15, or 20 drug addicts. We're talking about Baptists here, folks. We're talking about good old believers. You know this, Alex. I am not telling you anything you do not know.

Now here's what I want you to get clear on: I have just told you about the well-adjusted ones. Oh, you ain't heard nothing yet. The blamer. I don't know how he does it. I've been watching this guy for years, and he can make you feel guilty within five seconds of meeting him. Do you know who I'm talking about? The blamer. The dictator. The dictator. Let's see, I got me blamer, I got me dictator on, I've got the follower, and then and then there's the, uh, you know, this this this leader, he's got dot every i, cross every t, and then there's this sweet little person who says, "Let's just love one another. Why do we have to have problems? You're always having problems around here. I'm going to leave because there are problems." And then there's the person: I love him most of all. Oh, he is the bane of my life.

This is the devout Christian. If you're here, please don't ever get into my life circle. Oh. Oh, Gene, I want to know the Lord. He arrives one day with his suitcases. Oh, I want to know the Lord. Oh, so? He's so...you just fall in love with the guy. He's got a heart for the Lord. And he follows the Lord. And everything, he's just got a heart for the Lord. Everything is just right, and he's just exactly what you hope for. And then when he's been there about ten years, one day something happens to his life that he doesn't enjoy, and he stands up on his feet and says, "I've never had a mind of my own. Everything I've ever done, I've been following you. The only problem I've got in my life is your fault, not mine." He has wanted to shirk — I didn't know this; he looked perfectly normal to me — he's wanted to shirk responsibility. And then when something didn't go right in his life, everybody on earth but him is responsible. You've got 200 of those guys sitting in that audience now.

See, you don't know that. You don't know that, sitting out there in your nice, little, clean, sanitary world. You know what? You know, I'll tell you what you know. You have a Christian friend two houses down. You've got another one four blocks down the street, and you've got another one over here, three blocks down the street. And you have another friend about ten blocks down the street, and you all get together for fellowship because you just can't handle denominational Sunday morning services anymore, and you really love one another, but you have made one simple discovery in life, and that is you have the four most unlucky friends who ever lived. Is that not true? Mary is having a nervous breakdown. And Joseph is going into bankruptcy. George is really strange, and Agnes is thinking about divorcing him. John is materialistic. And Anne breaks down and cries at sunrises, etc. The only people who are normal in the whole group are you and your husband, and you fight all the time.

This is putting it right where it is, my friend. And you know, the four of you, four families of you, tolerate one another, help one another, and so on and so forth, but you really feel like this is the scrubs of God. It ain't so, friend. You probably have three of the most well-adjusted family unit friends in the whole world. You ought to meet most of us. Boy. And you discover this in community. That's what you discover in community. And they discover you. Peevish. Feelings get hurt. Oh, I love the person who always starts every sentence off with, *I'm confused*. This week I sat down in Texas with a brother who I was warned — I was warned that he does this to everybody who comes. He asks the same question. And I sat down with him, and his first words out of his mouth were, *I'm confused*. And he told me all this thing that was going on. Now, he had spiritual men answer his question over and over and over. And I tried — shoot, I'm not spiritual, but I tried, by the way. You know, I gave it the old college try. You know, I have to tell you, before it was over, I was poking fun at him. I figured it was the best thing I could do. He would answer me. I said, "*I know, you're confused*." And he didn't like that. Brothers and sisters, that's a crutch. That's just a crutch.

You've got the signs and wonders people. They are born that way. Did you all hear about that cloud over Russia? Do you know what that thing up there, Mikhail Govichok, stands for? I'll tell all of you signs-and-wonders people something: I've been all over America, and in every town I've been in, somebody has walked up to me and said, "God gave us a word the other day in prophecy that there's going to be a revival starting in our town, and that revival

is going to spread all over the world.” Now listen, there are over 450,000 communities in America, and not every one of them can get that honor. It's impossible. And I'm going to tell you something else. There ain't that many miracles. Then there's a brother who's “mindy.” *Gene, I have a question.* And here he comes. Who knows what that question is going to be? There is no way to know what that question is going to be. This brother? Oh, I tell you, there is no end to what that brother will come up with. He has books and books and books and books. Now, honestly, his brain's going to split wide open. And he wants us all to get together and study the Bible every week for four or five hours together.

And then there is someone else who just wants us to be related. Related. Let's just be related to one another. Let's pray for the sick, the dying, and maybe even the dead. You all come into the church, you do, and there you are. Everyone has a different problem, and every one of you has a different wish. And I don't mind telling you—we're having problems in Portland. Hello Portland. We're having problems. And I've learned a lesson in Portland. We have 62 people who've moved there from every part of the United States of America, and every one of them came with their list. Every one of them came with an agenda. *Gene, this is what I want. Give it to me. And this is what I want. Give it to me.*

Have you ever read *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer? He said the first crisis that comes to a body of believers is the dream wish. Everybody comes in with a dream wish. I rejoiced when I read that to know that someone else had had this problem. Everybody has got a dream wish. And by the way, I can tell you you're just about almost going to have to have some kind of a split somewhere in the beginning. I'm sorry for that, or some kind of falling away or something, or a lot of people moving, because everybody comes in with a dream and a vision, and they look at the guy or guys who are leading, and they say, *I want you to give me what I myself cannot produce.* Do you understand what I'm saying? I want it. I have never been able to produce it, but I've come to this place to see that we have it.

Now I've got a good word to say on top of all this mess that I've just described, and that is, when your false face drops. When your religiosity is exposed. When it is really found out that you are pathological. That you are a royal mess. And that you live in a world of royal messes and you're all together in the same boat and it sprung a leak. That, my brothers and sisters, is the spiritual community. And now here's what my word is: Would to God all of us could understand that's what we are, that the self-righteousness would fall away; that we would discover that God's people are infinitely different than one another, and none of us can demand the church be anything, that there is in the center of her a cross, and it's not for 90% of us; we've all got to go there.

Then, the wonderful discovery. You can never know Jesus Christ by yourself as deeply and as real as you can with other Christians. You're never going to know it the way you ought to know it, except within that community. You can't do it. I know Jeanne Guyon did. I know Fenelon did. I know that Francis of Assisi and Saint Therese of Spain, all of these people, Saint John of the Cross, all these folks had these deep, profound personal relationships with the Lord. But you're not Jean Guyon. And you sure are not St. John of the Cross. And you're

not St. Francis of Assisi. You and I are swinging on a cobweb, friend. We are just barely here. And when our false faces fall, we even discover we don't like to pray. And we don't like to witness. And we don't even like to read our Bible sometimes. And for sure, we don't like to go to church on Sunday mornings. That I can bet money on. You know, we don't like Sunday school. And for sure, we sure enough don't like to tithe. And that's the — that's spiritual, that's the spirituality. That's the list of spiritual things: go to church, read your Bible, pray, witness, and that's just about it. Tithing. We don't like doing those. And then we learn that we're undisciplined, but that, within that spiritual community, there's hope and there's help, even for one such as me and even for one such as you. And that we, the least common denominator in the kingdom of God, you and me, you and me, of all people, can get to know the Lord a little, in a way, within that house that belongs to Him, where God is housed. We can get to know Him with one another where we never could on our own. And that's your hope.

I'm telling you, that's your hope. And maybe that's point one of this conference: Your hope is not your individual experience. Your hope is that the community becomes spiritual, that all those eccentricities and problems you have will never find their solution in books—they will be found in the body. That your longing to know Him will never be found alone. And you can't imagine how individualistic the questions that are asked of me are. They are all like spiritual misers wanting to know Christ. Listen, friend, it doesn't work that way. The Christian life was for that spiritual community of the redeemed. It is not for you, the individual. You have no birthright to Christ in the depths as an individual. Now, I'm going to do this really quickly, and then we're going to quit, but hear me. The individualism of the Christian today...it passes understanding. Everything we see, think, and do, even in our church meetings and in church buildings where preachers preach, an individual gospel is preached to us.

The whole concept of the community as the place where we, weaklings spiritually, discover Him together and find our strength in Him together is lost. I want you to understand something. The New Testament isn't yours, and all those precious Bible verses aren't yours. I'm going to take the epistles and the order they're written. The book of Galatians doesn't belong to you, and you can't claim a verse in it. I'm being radical. It was written to four churches in Galatia, not to an individual. And everything in it was aimed corporately. The second two books ever written on this earth that were Christian were 1 and 2 Thessalonians, written to a church. The next books ever written on this earth—long before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written—1 and 2 Corinthians were written to a church, not to you, an individual. You can't say, "*And God promised me in Corinthians...*" He didn't do it. It was to a church. It was to the body in a city, a community of believers. And all you love Romans 8, well, it wasn't for you, and you can't have it, and I'm taking it away from you. (laughter) Romans 8 was written to the church in Rome, and if you'd like to know who they are, read first Romans 16, then read Romans 1, and meet them. Those are the people who are knit together, living together, one with one another, there, committed forever to one another. That's to whom it was written.

Saints in Chicago, it is together. You are to live with one another, fall in love with one another, care for one another, marry one another, yeah, grow old with one another, and bury one another, with Christ as the centrality of your experience. You can't have Ephesians: *Put on the whole armor of God*. I never did like that anyway. Thank God that's not to me. Thank God that's not to me. I can't do that—that helmet's too big, that sword's too heavy, that shield's got holes in it. I don't care how many times a preacher preaches all this stuff to you and tells you this is what you're supposed to do and believe. That's not true. We say in Texas, *that's a bunch of bull*. It is a bunch of bull. Now in Texas, it's okay to say that; up here, it's not. It's all right. You can say it from the pulpit. It's a bunch of bull. It was written for a church to put on the whole armor of God. Not the individual. Say, *Praise the Lord!* That's liberation. Philippians is not to you; that was written to a church. There's not a verse in it for you. Colossians was written to the church in Colossae.

But Gene, what about 1 and 2 Timothy? Ah ha! But your name's not Timothy. And your name's not Titus. But here's what I want you to know: Those three books were written to church planters, and the subject under discussion was how to plant the church and raise her up, and then leave her under the headship of Christ. And you know what? That's all the epistles of Paul except one. And that's Philemon. And it's ten verses long, or eleven or twelve. You can have that. That's great. It's yours. You can have that. Now, the problem is that it's discussing slavery. So, if you're ever made a slave, that book will be for you. All the rest of them are for that church. Oh, to God that you would have your eyes open and see this.

You belong in that community. And you know I said she's rare, and I will tell you without blinking, every one of us has got to go before the Lord and settle our relationship to her. To her. My great-grandma's name was Garcia. I'm really leaning on my great-grandmother tonight. There's Spanish blood in this body, and the rest of its Cajun. I tell you, brothers and sisters in Chicago, treat holy what you have. And this weekend we are here, not to deepen our relationship to one another, not to become more caring or loving, but to know Him better in more ways—more ways—more ways. And the more that spoke drives toward the hub, the more you will notice that you are very, very close to another spoke, headed in the same direction.

Now that's my message to the brothers and sisters in Chicago, Illinois. It is Christ to be your center and your circumference, and He is the wellspring of that spiritual body of believers. It's not doctrines. It's not teachings. It's not concepts. It's not visions. It's not goals. It's not movements. It's not standards. It is your Lord. Know Him. Praise the Lord.