

Innate, natural, organic, and biologically impossible to stop. Just like your nose on your face, it just grows there by nature. There is not pattern; there is the organic.

I am going to give the Hebrew religion a little problem here for a minute. You'll forgive me, please, but I'm shooting at everybody else. I might as well shoot at the Jews. Right now, we are just so interested in Russia and Israel. I don't know why we're so fascinated with those few places, but we go back to the Holy Lands, and I went there when I was 19. I have kept up with the archaeology of that land, and I know its traditions. I know what people are speaking of, but without realizing it, we get the idea in our heads that so much of our Christian faith is traced back to the Hebrew religion.

I beg to differ with that. That's a far-out statement, but my faith has its roots not in the Hebrew religion, but in the Godhead. Well, but He became a Jew, Gene. Yes, I know he became a Jew, but long before he was a Jew, He was God. Long before He was a Jew, He was. He existed. He had personality. He had thought. He had a habitat. He had a place where He lived. He had ways of thinking and conceptualizing. He had a mission; He came to earth to do it. His culture did not hinder that, nor did it greatly influence it. He was against his culture.

Even though He had given the Hebrew faith, and it reflected much of his mind, He still appeared and brought the mind of God...and He brought more than the mind of God. He brought the experience of the Godhead. When He walked on this earth, He also walked in the heavens at the same time. When He walked on this earth, He had the ideas and thoughts that He had in an eternal, eternity past - call it, in our terms, billions of years, and that doesn't really work- but an eternity past experience in the Godhead. That's what He brought.

His idea of gathering twelve men together with Him was not Hebrew. It reflected something that happened to Him in the Godhead. When He spoke of spirit, truth, and reality, He was speaking of something from another realm, not something He had picked up in the Hebrew religion. The Hebrew religion was not guiding Him; He gave that religion, and it had elements that reflected His mind, but now He brought His mind to this earth.

I do not take away from the Hebrew faith, but it's not our origin; it's not our headwaters. God is our headwaters. Christ, the eternal Christ, the Christ of the Trinity, the eternal, everlasting Christ who came and became a man in the form of human flesh, in the likeness of human flesh, that one spoke from past experience. The twelve apostles touched that eternal past thing, and what you see happening in Israel, in Judea, in Galilee, reflects what happened in Him, in God.

Does the Bible not call Him an apostle? Does the Bible not call Him the founder of our faith? Does it not call Him the foundation of our faith? The cornerstone of our faith? And the top stone of our faith? The building in which we are in? He's everything of our faith.

I want to go back to this thing, apostle. He, Jesus Christ, is the author of the first church. He raised up the first church ever raised up on this planet, and He began anew. This is the establishment...we're talking about how to meet...this is the establishment of that, a radical break. We don't go to the synagogue to find the roots of the Godhead's fellowship, or how the Godhead met. We don't go to the temple to find the roots of how the Godhead fellowshiped and how the Godhead met. The first church that ever existed existed in the fellowship of the body of the

Godhead. There is the origin of the church. He brought that to the dusty roads of Galilee with twelve men, in personal, informal fellowship around Him.

He was the source of that fellowship. It was Christ. It was not singing. It was not worship. It was not theology. It was not teaching. It was not a mission. It was not a movement. It was not a motive. It was not a vision. It was Him. They were possessed with Him, and they learned that church life gathered around the Lord Jesus Christ and nowhere else. They learned how to meet around Him. They learned how to fellowship around Him. It wasn't singing...it was Christ. It wasn't worship...it was Christ. It wasn't ritual...it was Christ.

He gave to them an element, a chip, out of the Godhead's fellowship. That's what they touched on the dusty roads of Galilee, and in living rooms where they sat around, listened to him talk, asked Him questions, and fell asleep on his breast.

It was totally informal. It was utterly without ritual...and it was Christ. That was the church he founded. It was the first...no, the second church; the first was the Godhead. The second one was this embryonic experience in Galilee and Judea. And until you can get obsessed with that, possessed with that, enamored with that, drunk on that, driven by that, you and I are both wasting our time here.

You ask one of the apostles, what is the church? They hardly even understood the concept...but they understood sitting around with the Lord and fellowshiping with Him. In some way, on the day of Pentecost, they broadened that fellowship to three thousand people. It started with three: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It enlarged to twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. How many are there? Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Actually, of course, you know it's larger than that. There were probably around one hundred, one hundred fifty people around him, and they were all touching the Life of God.

I'm telling you, I've already said everything I want to say for the rest of this meeting. Element: it takes a church planter, and it takes a church planter who will leave. He is itinerant by nature, and that's what Jesus Christ was. And by the way, He left physically, and everything became internal, and all of the elements are there. As I grow older, I marvel at what the Lord did when he chose those twelve men.

May I get off the subject here at the very beginning and tell you that I'm learning something, and this is what I'm learning, and that is that I want you all to listen to this because this is understanding for me that's new. I don't really get a whole lot of new insight as I go along in life. My commitments, visions, and understanding will be clearer, but I missed one thing.

Recent psychological studies and sociological studies of individuals have proven something. I don't like what I'm about to tell you, but it's turning out to be the absolute truth: leadership is genetic. Boy, I hate to say that. That just galls me. It's genetic. You got it, you got it. You ain't, you ain't.

My brother said to me, but Gene, when we get saved, is there not a divine genetic? I think there is, because I don't feel like I was ever a leader, but I am learning that leadership in the church is a very, very rare thing. And I can tell you, there's another symmetry behind it: everybody thinks he's one of those rare things... and he wants to be made one of those people.

I want you to know something. I don't know why you people are sitting in this room watching me and listening to me. I have no idea why. I don't feel like a leader, but I have faced it, and it's taken me years, and I am still wrestling with it every day. I don't like leaders; my brother was a leader, and he only had one follower, and he was by protest. But, oh, he was a leader. He wasn't a leader; he was a demagogue. He was an outright dictator, and he led me, and man, I fought every inch of it. I don't like leaders.

I marvel at God's choosing of twelve men who can lead, and they are rare. I'm increasingly driven to believe that in one lifetime on this earth, we will rarely see more than ten, fifteen, or maybe twenty church planters in a century, all nations combined. I may be off a hundred. I may be off one hundred, but I don't think so. If I'm off one hundred, it's one hundred, one hundred twenty. I haven't found them. Do you want me to tell you all the church planters I know who have risen on this earth in this century? I can name them quickly. Watchman Nee, Bakht Singh, and Prem Pradhan. They are the only three I am absolutely certain of, and that's in this century.

What about these guys who started these movements? Uh-huh. That's my whole point. A church planter will not start a movement. He's humbler than that. No matter how arrogant he looks, he's humbler than that. I have been able to count seventeen in the first century, and that was, by the planet's population, an all-time high. There are not many of them.

The church of Jesus Christ is suffering from their absence, and the church of Jesus Christ is suffering from the lack of people seeing the desperate need for them. I'm telling you, I don't want to tell you this. I wish I could give you a simple way of talking about this. I started this conference by saying that what we're going to talk about may take one hundred to two hundred years. I don't want to repeat that. It may take that long before we see this take root. Until we get back to the concept of church planters, we won't get anywhere, saints.

And I have to say to you that a church planter is itinerant. He will not stay in one place. If he does, he'll goof up everything. He'll mess up everything. He's rare. I want to say he ought to be followed, but boy, I tell you, most of the men who fly under the flag of apostle or church planter are just frightening people, people who will destroy your life. They are usually leaders, but they are going to have a movement. They are arrogant men who will start a movement. Jesus Christ turned over the world and left; He turned over everything to twelve men. And their concept of the church of Jesus Christ at a meeting was Jesus Christ and them sitting around with Him, fellowshiping with Him. That was their concept.

The concept of worship was not there. The concept, particularly of sharing, was not there. The concept of preaching was not there. The concept of Christ was the main thing on their minds. Can you please grab hold of that? Twelve men could do what He did. I used to think He just took the common, but Jesus Christ looked into those men's lives and found a kind of leadership that rarely emerges on this earth. He worked with those men. He broke them. He broke their natures, and then He used them.

May the Lord forgive me. I got saved when I was seventeen. I was preaching at eighteen before I ever 'surrendered to preach'; that's what Baptists do. By the time I was twenty years old, I was living in Europe, and I had a fellow named Knut Kweister. He was an Austrian. The seminary gave

us a car to use on weekends, and we went out, and we started Baptist churches in southern Germany. That's what I was doing at the grand old age of nineteen. When I became a pastor at twenty-one, I went out, opened doors to abandoned church buildings while I was pastoring, and went from farmhouse to farmhouse in East Texas, gathering people who used to belong to abandoned churches and starting those churches over again.

When I was twenty-four, I won a contest: \$1,000 or a trip to Hawaii. I gave the money to Campus Crusade for Christ. I gave it to Bill Bright, who was a dear friend of mine. At the age of twenty-four, I won a nationwide contest, first place, on how to evangelize the world in one generation, and it was on the concept of church planters...and I didn't even know it. I didn't use that term. I've been driven by it almost from the day I was saved. I've been at one job my whole life; I haven't changed it.

I meet young brothers and young students, and every once in a while, a sister who wants to be a church planter. I ask you two questions. How big is your library, and how long can you stay gone from your wife? The library is usually about four books long, and they can stay away from their wife about three days. Well, forget it, buddy. Until you can live in the fires of perdition and eat it for supper, eat it for breakfast, eat it before breakfast; if you can take unmitigated persecution, misunderstanding, rumors, and betrayals and everything else, if you can walk out and say goodbye to your wife for three to six months, and if your whole body, soul, and spirit is consumed with Christ and his church, then maybe, maybe that is your call.

I meet a man at least once a week who wants to be an apostle...and now I'm using the word church planter because I don't like the word apostle, and I'm not comfortable with it, and I don't even believe it fits. That's a first-century thing, but those men's main job was planting churches, and that's what Jesus Christ did. That's what he did for a living. He planted churches. He planted one, and that was in the hearts of twelve men. Then those twelve men planted a church, and then they left that church. Actually, the church left them. In that one rare case, the church left them. They stayed hiding in Jerusalem, standing for some principle, I suppose. The church left them, but the church was without them.

Again, the divine principle: it's not a pattern, it's not human, it's not an organization. It's not a concept. It's the way divine life operates naturally, like human life grows a nose on your face. There is a world of difference. Until you begin to pray for, until you ask God to raise up again church planters, we're stuck on how to meet. We're not going to have those meetings. You and I are going to sit here and suffer till the end of time. Those men have got to know what they're doing, and one of the things they do is leave.

Those churches, those people left the apostles and went out into Judea. Here is the most important thing I can say to you tonight: those churches had a period of time when they had no leaders. The reason you can't meet in your group, and never will successfully, is because you began with leaders.

I have never quoted this man before. Ronald Reagan recently said something quite interesting. He said all the other constitutions of the world start "we the government." Only America's Constitution starts "We the People." That's the way the Church of the Living God has got to be born: we the

people. It's got to belong to her. It doesn't belong to the apostle. There's no church in the New Testament, "The Church of the Apostle Paul." It's the church of the saints, the church of Christ, the church of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the church of the holy ones. Only they own it. It's not elders. It's not apostles. It's people, and a church has got to be born without leaders, and she's got to have leaders...later...but the church has got to feel that she has a franchise on the meetings. The franchise does not belong to the pastor. It does not belong to the apostle or the elder. It belongs to God's people. Until we have that, we get nowhere. You are the church, and the church belongs to you.

In the beginning, that can get very, very confusing. Somebody goes, well, what are you doing here then? The church belongs to us. We're going to follow nobody but Jesus. Boy, you'd better follow the church planter, or you're headed for nowhere. You are headed for nowhere for one simple reason: you don't know how to be the church. You don't know how to meet. You're not going to learn, and you're going to die. I have a standing bet that no group of Christians, no matter how glorious they started or how wonderful they think they're going to make it, will make it three years without some outside help.

It has to be with a divinely ordained church planter. That church planter has got to leave. That's divinely ordained. That church has got to have a time without leaders. That's divinely ordained. You don't start the church without leaders; you'll die. Don't be so doggone idealistic. You'll never get anywhere. You begin with the church planter; he leaves. Now we got two problems. We ain't got no church planters. And we ain't got nobody who'll leave. They all stay, doggone their hides. Say amen. They ask you to support them all the rest of their days, now and forever, world without end.

I was sitting here between the meetings, talking to some brothers about why some brothers said we tried to change. Well, I hate to be blunt, and forgive me, I am not suggesting that you end your group; I'm suggesting you go home and start over again, but I am telling you that's not the best way. The best way is to begin with a church planter, but I'm talking pure theory, pure unadulterated theory. I'm talking about that which we should pray for.

And you Americans, doggone you, you need to pray for something else, and that is to get some of this democracy out of your bloodstream. There is such a driving concept among Americans: I ain't going to follow nobody. Who do you think you are? You're cutting off; you're just destroying the church. You need a church planter. He needs to get out of there, or you need to leave him. You've got to have a time when there are no leaders and the church understands that the meetings are totally her responsibility and she's got to carry them. Then you can have your elders, and then you can have whatever else comes: the gifts and all that stuff that you Pentecostals chase after all the time. You don't need the recovery of the gifts; you need the recovery of the centrality of Jesus Christ. The gifts will come organically.

You're trying to have a nose and a foot and a leg and an arm before you have a baby. You're trying to have a tongue and a mouth and an ear and an eye before you have a child. The gifts come after the church. The church only needs one gift, and that's the gift of the church planter. He gives the church...and the church has the church... and the church grows and matures, and it will produce

gifted men with gifts. The earliest churches had only two things: apostles and people. There wasn't anything else.

I tell you, I know you all are following me perfectly, but you all will - excuse me, I'm an old man now. I get frustrated. You walk out the door, and you forget. I'm telling you, you're working in an untenable situation. I'm supposed to say all this at the end of this message, but I haven't even made my point yet. I'm going to say it to you now.

Here are the kinds of churches we've got on this earth. We've got churches led by a multiplicity of priests; that's Roman Catholic. We have Protestant churches led by pastors. Then you've got churches outside the organized church. What you've got there is either a one-shot apostle or what I would call an elders' church. What we generally had was a young man who was a member of a group outside the organized church. He got very, very hurt. He had some years of resting...this is very generalized...and then later, he started a little informal group. You join it, and he's not a pastor. Actually, he has the gift of eldership, but he does not have the gift of church planting. Maybe he still has a job, but all he can do is raise up one little church.

Now, I'm going to put it this way. He can't leave his wife for six months. He's not obsessed. If you please, he's not possessed. He's perfectly happy to have an informal gathering of Christians in his or somebody else's home, running 20, 30, 40, or 50 in the church; that won't turn the world upside down, saints. I thank God for it. Most of us are in the elders' churches or one-shot apostles. You understand what I mean by that? They can raise up one church. That's it. Maybe in a lifetime, they'll raise up two, but they're not madmen.

I'm telling you, we've got to have madmen. The apostle is the...I'm sorry, forgive me. I don't mean that word. I don't like that word, and I don't believe in that word. The church planter is the one thing that fights the matrix. He is the one thing that stands against the culture. He stands against your natural lethargy. He opposes all that you are. Most of you in this room have a home. You have a job. You have a home, you have a job, you have a family, and you're going to live in a town for the rest of your life.

He can't sit still for five minutes. He opposes culture, and he changes everything every week or two. He comes in...and y'all hate to see him come. He comes in with all his mad ideas, and he's hollering, and he's screaming, and he's telling you this, and he's telling you that, talking real radical. He helps you, and then he leaves. While he's there, he tells you that young men should never marry and young women should never marry. So, he's a nut. He's a stark raving screwball. He's a nuttier than a fruitcake. His name is Paul of Tarsus. He defies the second law of thermodynamics. He doesn't believe all things should wind down, cool off, and come to a dead standstill.

God put him on this earth for that purpose, and you've got to have him. Otherwise, you end up with an elders' church. I love them. I thank God for them. There must be thousands of them across the face of this earth, but they're one reason our meetings stink. You who are those kind, and I hope I don't offend you, those of you listening to this recording, I'm sorry, but I cannot be faithful to Scripture without saying this: you are in as untenable a situation as a pastor is. A pastor has no Scripture right to exist; neither do you. But then, we don't have any church planters either, do we?

So I don't know what to say to solve this problem, but I'm going to present to you the problem. That's what this message is all about: the problem. The problem is we don't have any church planters. Let me go through this really quickly.

The apostles later went out and visited those churches. I don't know how they met, and I don't really care. I know that there was an awesome dynamic there, but I know those 12 men - those 12 men - their central message was Jesus Christ. It was not theology, worship, or meetings. They were restless men. They traveled their whole lives. They could not stay in one place. They were driven men. They were mad. They were not like ordinary people. And this way of talking is new to me. It's taken me living this long to recognize the fact that most Christians, you standing in this room, sitting in this room, like to live where you do, and you're going to enjoy living there.

I'm conceding that for the first time in my life. A few of you would be willing to move around once or twice or three times in your life, and then you'd come back later and get really mad and say, "Well, I had a home in that town. You told me to go to that other." So, you know, you're up to two or three moves. Those guys were like that. Peter dragged his wife along, but he did go.

Now, in Paul of Tarsus and Barnabas, what's the pattern? For a time, the churches have no leaders. Paul and Barnabas go into a city as church planters. They are itinerant men. You understand they're itinerant? They're moving constantly. They go into town, stay a while, and leave. They do not ordain elders. Don't read Scripture that way; that is unfair to Scripture. They do not choose elders. Those churches have no elders. Those churches have nothing but an apostle, and he's missing.

The meetings become theirs after a time in which that church planter planted, built, and showed those people what to do. Later, there are elders. And there are few men living today, or who have ever lived, who are willing to walk away from the church and leave it without leadership, because their ministry cannot produce in a short time what a church needs to be left alone. They don't have a gospel that'll handle a situation like that. They went into four churches; they left four churches. They came back and ordained elders, but by then you couldn't take those meetings away from God's people.

Do you understand what I am saying to you? That those people were addicted to being in charge of their own meetings. Get this and get it clear. The meetings belonged to God's people. If there were 50 elders in that church, it wouldn't matter. The meetings belong to Christ and God's people, and that's where they belong, and that's how a church is to be planted. Until we do this, this business of how to meet is dead in the water.

Now, I'm not going to tell you what to do when you go home. Still, I am telling you the highest way and the best way and God's way and the way that was born, not in Israel in the Hebrew faith, and not in the methods of men, but born in the Godhead and born out in Galilee with Christ and the Twelve, and then exemplified by Barnabas and Paul, and Paul and Silas, and Timothy and Titus, and Secundus and Tychicus and Trophimus and Gaius and Aristarchus. And I got one more: Epaphroditus.

Those men bore it out—a consistent but divine, heavenly pattern. A church: leave it. Let it become the possessor of the meetings...and then...the elders. You can't take the meetings away from God's people once they've got them. That was the pattern of the first-century church, and that's why it could

have incredible variety. That's why it did not need clergy, and that's why ordinary and even sometimes illiterate men and women could lead those churches. Because the churches—the cutting edge of the churches' experience—belong to us, and the meetings are ours.

I'm going to add one other element. We'll come back to this. I still think I'm dealing with a mindset here that has to be cracked open. You're still thinking of a place where you go and meet...and that will never work. The church isn't a place you go to meet. Before you have meetings, you've got to have a church planter, and before you can ever have church life, you've got to understand that church life includes community. That means living out of one another's lives, living with one another in one way or another. The church is not a gathering; the church is a people. It is a community. You do not need meetings when a church is a community. You don't have to have them. The church is first a community, not a gathering.

I'm going to close by talking about the word *ecclesia*, and we're all going to rush out of here really quickly. The word *ecclesia* is misunderstood. When we go back to the etymology of that word, I don't know. The first time it was used in written language, someone stood in a court square and called the people out for a gathering. Then they took that thing, and they've stuffed that down our throats, theologians, for hundreds of years: the church is the “called-out ones.” That is a bunch of foolishness.

That's the word's etymology; that's not how the word was used in the first century. The emphasis isn't on the “called-out”; it's on *the gathering*. And the gathering had a special meaning, and that meaning was not gathering to meet; it was the reassembling of Christ. It was the assembling, the putting together, the erector set being put together, the assembling together of Jesus Christ. Now you say, “Gene, that's too much.” That's right. So I'll say it again. It is the assembling together of His physical body that's left on this earth.

There's community. There's the church planter; there's community; and there's the body of Christ. Then you begin thinking in terms of gathering and meetings. Until we see these things, we'll always lead with gatherings and meetings, and it's going to sink the ship every time. Brothers and sisters, tomorrow morning, we will talk about the nature of the church, and we will begin to see why we must gather, but before we see why we must gather, we've got to see what she is. And that's what we're going to talk about in the morning.

You want to hear what a healer was? Probably a brother or sister in the church who really had a compassionate heart, who did lay their hands on people to heal them, and if they didn't get healed, kept on taking care of them anyway, and nurturing them, and trying to do other things that would help them get well. That's a church healer. Probably couldn't read and couldn't write. Didn't have a tent. Didn't give invitations. Didn't take up offerings—just some brother who probably sold fish in the marketplace.

Pastor...pastor-teacher...probably someone who could read and write. Someone with a natural ability to care for people and give them counsel. Somebody you naturally turn to when you have a need. Someone who could also, from time to time, bring a word of teaching in the gatherings in a very simple way. Some local brother who meets the needs of people who need someone to sit down, love them, care for them, guide them, and give them guidance.

You want another one? I think the apostle is very clear because he really takes center stage in the New Testament. There's no question he is center stage. He is the main character from Acts on.

Prophet - I think anybody, when the church was young, who could speak, who could share anything, was considered a prophet. I think any time anybody spoke, that was considered foretelling prophecy. I don't know of anybody but Agabus who had the gift of telling the future. He was the original Pentecostal. He had drama. He was extra-local. He traveled. He was a different kind of creature. He was a true Old Testament prophet in the New Testament, and therefore the New Testament must have had a few of those people.

But I'll tell you this: I don't think he was standing up saying, "You should marry him, and you should marry her, and I have a word from the Lord that you should move tomorrow." Too many prophecies today, my brother, driving people crazy. The young people are destroyed by it because they're really... "I had a prophecy set over me when I just got saved. It was such and such." This little boy is now 30 years old, 10 years later, and he's still trying to live it out, and obviously, it doesn't fit.

Some guys asked me what I thought about tongues and interpretations in the meeting. I don't know. Some say it was the ability to interpret another language. I don't know. I can only tell you this: whatever it is, it's for doing at home. I am absolutely certain of that. That is so clear in Scripture; it's to be done at home, and if you do it at home, it won't bother me a bit. If you let a meeting be carried away from it, you are making the mistake of the Corinthians. I don't know how we ever came up with any other interpretation of that passage.

I think we all need to understand this: all the gifts operated in Jesus Christ, and none of us will ever have that privilege. He is the gifts of the church, in fact. He is not the operation of the gifts; He is the gift. He is the gifts given to the church. He is the gift, the giver, and the gift. But their understanding of church was not teaching or theology or healing any more than it was rebuking Pharisees. They found that very interesting. You can tell that they did, but their enjoyment was the Lord. What drew them was Himself: He, the Man, the Lord, the God.

Was God in the Reformation? Is God in the Charismatic Movement? I am not a steward of the Reformation, nor am I a steward of the Pentecostal Movement, the charismatic movement, which, by the way, has been one of the largest things ever to happen in church history. In a hundred years, it has probably influenced Christianity as much as anything ever has.

Can I dare say those things were not of the Lord? No, I live today, and I'm a steward of today. I cannot go back to Azusa Street and Smith Wigglesworth and be a steward of the mess they made. I will tell you that the charismatic movement got off on the wrong foot, and I am shocked that they have never taken steps to do anything about it. It was born with some horrible flaws. The same thing is true of Fundamentalism, which is also a recent movement. It still carries the character and nature of its founders: a very raspy, hard lack of compassion. I am steward of my day.

Now I would say the Lord is in it; I really would. No, I would definitely say that. I think in each situation, you get something, and then we throw in the rest. When all these customs came, what they left out was unbelievable. For instance, when they came to the New Testament, they arranged it the

way Luther arranged it. They saw that as a book to straighten out the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. At no time did any of the Reformers ever attempt to build a model of the first-century church, or even to understand what happened in the first century. They took verses and passages and dealt with them.

We are all, to some extent, captured by the day we live in, unless we decide to take wings, fly outside our own matrix, and stand somewhere else. Those men did not. They dealt with the errors and problems of their day in that emergent, urgent situation. Our problem was that we deified what they did. I think that if there's anything I'm going to be trying to say to you this weekend, it is that the Church of Jesus Christ needs to be extremely creative, imaginative, and innovative, especially in this thing of meeting.

I want to talk to you this morning about the nature of the church, and the first thing I'd like to say is that the church is not meeting, and let's get this really nailed down because it drives us. We're going to have church. We're going to have meetings. Church is not meetings. Church meets, but it's not meetings. The church isn't something that happens on Sunday morning. There's some way we could depart from that. It's so difficult to get past that concept. The church is more fun than Campus Crusade for Christ, InterVarsity, and Youth With a Mission. I'm sad in my heart, sad that the church, among ministers, pastors, preachers, and theologians, is almost nothing anymore. All the good things are somewhere else.

Let me tie this together in one simple sentence. People don't like the church. Unbelievers don't like it, and Christians don't like it. How incredibly sad. Then what is she? Let's think in first-century terms, or in terms other than our present-day surroundings. She is divine. That's what she is, and if you take that away from her, you don't have anything. If you do not give her a constant flow of divinity, you are starving her to death. She lives on divinity. She lives and feeds upon divine life, just as Christ lived on the life of His Father: "Without My Father, I can do nothing." The church can rise and say, "Without Christ, I am nothing."

She is first divine, and more than anything else, you have to say she's got to have an inflow of spiritual life. So, whoever is a leader, his first or her first responsibility is to bring a flow of the divine into our lives and to show us how, on our own, to bring this flow of life into us. You know, Ephesians speaks of building up the church. The prophets, the evangelists, and so forth build the church up so that she, in turn, might edify herself and build herself up.

This is that same thing again. You're constantly seeking to work yourself out of a job. The worker's purpose is to work himself out of a job. To give it back to the church. To give it back to the church. To give it back to the church. Give the church back to Christ. You begin building from that viewpoint. I say to anybody in this room who feels called to do anything, your purpose is to give the church an ability to operate without the gifted ones, not for the gifted ones to dominate her.

Now, I used to live in Tyler, Texas. I used to be a member of a church there. That church had two ministers, I think, and I may get a little off here, but I don't think so. I think one of them was a pastor there for 30 years, and the next one, his son-in-law, was pastor there for another 30 years. Now, that's without any criticism, but that's two men, 60 years, and I often thought if they had

walked out, either one of them, at the end of their ministry and said, "Now I've done it long enough, you take over," what would they have done the next Sunday morning? Well, the church would have fallen apart if it could not have called another minister. If somehow they had been forced to abandon all leaders and report into that place on Sunday morning, they would not have known what to do. If they'd attempted something, in four or five weeks, most of them would have gone off and joined Second Baptist or Trinity Baptist or Calvary Baptist or Tabernacle Baptist somewhere. Thirty years' worth of work, and it was all just preaching at, and preaching at, and preaching at. The church still could not function on its own.

I have to give you Christ in such a way that you can know Him and encounter Him without any workers present or any gifted ones present. Her nature, her taproot, is divinity touching the divine. Now, if that's speaking in tongues, then speak in tongues, but that's the only thing I can think of. It's not singing. It's not praising. It's not worship. I am speaking of touching your own Lord and receiving from Him His life and nature into you in such a way that you can come and report an actual living experience. The latter part of the 20th century happened to you at a particular place at a particular time, and you walk in and report it: that God is alive, you have met Him, and this is your report. My job is to bring you to that.

At one point in my life as a young man, I made a very simple commitment. I acknowledged a very simple fact. I acknowledged it for myself. I want to acknowledge it for all Christian workers, virtually all of us. We don't have the foggiest idea how to tell you how to know the Lord, either individually or corporately. If I could pick up five ministers, bring them in here, and say, "Your only job is to show these people how to encounter Christ individually and corporately," I know they'd crack open a book on prayer and teach it to you. But if you keep saying, "Give me a handle, give me a handle, give me a handle," I think eventually you'd drive them out of the room. Our seminaries don't teach it. Hey, saints, it's never been well known in the last 1,700 years. There have never been many people who could point us to Christ and how to know Him well. It never exists in abundance.

I don't know why we think...where we think the magic happens...that we get called to preach, we get out of the seminary, and somewhere in there, magic took place, and we now know God well. Now, I can move that out of the religious system. Some of you get into a meeting; you get ordained as a deacon. Pretty soon, the guy who's there leaves. Four or five elders run the thing, and then one day you find yourself the one ministering to these people. Ask yourself: stop bluffing. Stop bluffing, brother. Can you really, truly show these people Christ and walk out of this place at the end of a short period of time, and that church go on? Jesus Christ did that. The apostles did that. They did that because they recognized the church as a divine entity, and they showed the church how to hook onto, fasten itself to, that source of divinity.

What is the church? Okay. This is number two. It is therefore... It is therefore... That was number one. This is number two. Therefore, it is the place where Jesus Christ feels comfortable. It is a place where Jesus Christ feels at home. There's only one place that God feels at home, and that's in the Godhead. Christ walked constantly with His Father. The Father had a constant, unbroken fellowship with His Son. The most tragic day in the life of the Father and the Son was the day that fellowship was broken. It only happened once. It only happened for a short, brief time, and it was

so that death might be put away. It was done for a purpose. Brothers and sisters, there is a place where you feel at home and where God feels at home.

If you can see yourself as one who has partaken of divine life, then you have a biological urge for the ecclesia. You have a biological drive within you for the church. You are driven to her. Watch church history: anyone who gets to know the Lord well will soon begin to long for the community of believers. St. Francis of Assisi, Guyon, Fénelon, St. John of the Cross, Therese of Spain - all of those people, once they moved into a living relationship with the Lord, began seeking community. It is a biological urge, and when you touch it, you feel at home.

Do you understand that statement experientially? That when you actually find her, you sit down, and you find rest, and you know you're at home. That is a biological thing. That's not emotion; that's biology. That's spiritual biology, and you'll never be happy outside of her. You won't be content outside of her. That's why many of you, perhaps most of you, are superannuated from going to church on Sunday morning. You can't stand it anymore. Many of you have gone into some really hot meetings. Wow. We golly gee whiz. But I'll bet you that if you stop and remember, a large part of what the church meant to you was what happened outside those meetings, and your fellowship with those was very dear to you.

She is divine, and you feel at home there, and Jesus Christ feels at home there. Now, if you feel at home there, He feels at home there. Now, where would He feel at home? He felt at home in the home of whom? Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He felt at home there. It was a place where He was loved. It was a place where He ate and fellowshiped. That was the closest thing He ever had to home on this earth.

Where did He feel at home? He felt at home with the twelve. He felt at home with God. He felt at home in a relaxed, informal atmosphere with other believers. Write that down, would you? Jesus Christ felt at home in a relaxed, informal atmosphere with other believers. That's where He felt at home. He would have felt at home in the home meetings in Jerusalem after Pentecost. When people were sitting around sharing their Lord Jesus Christ with one another, He would have felt at home.

Would He have felt at home in the first...come on, Gene, pick on the Baptists. You're a Baptist. Would He feel at home walking into a meeting, sitting down in a pew, picking up a book, going to a bulletin, going through a ritual? Would that be home for Him? No. That is contrary to all that we understand of the Godhead, of divine life, of our God.

Listen, your God is not a legalist. Your God is really relaxed about things. A man rebuked me one day when I preached in Texas. I leaned over the pulpit and said, "Lord Jesus," then began to pray. After the meeting, he said, "I could not get anything out of your prayer because you don't pray to Jesus; you pray to the Father." I can see God up in heaven. He's got this great big computer with all these buttons on Him. Here comes Gene's prayer: "Lord Jesus." He pulls the power plug and says, "No, I won't hear you because you prayed in the wrong name." That's not my God. Away with your offerings. Away with your rituals. Let mercy pour down like waters. I have not come to condemn the world. I've come to save the world.