

Last night, I spoke about the spiritual community of the believer, seeking not to use the word church so you could better understand what this fellowship of the redeemed really is and ought to be. This is not a good age for the church of Jesus Christ. Her respectability among believers, not among the lost but among the believers, is at an all-time low, and I don't blame her. I don't blame people for that, for on the one hand, she is to be the consuming passion of our lives, on the other hand, the way she expresses herself is really quite boring.

I spoke to you last night about this exceptional thing that goes on throughout church history. This community of the believer: it does not reflect doctrine. Nobody can claim this community of the believers doctrinally. She has come to every movement, and she has been outside of all movements, and she is a place where people have instinctively gone, out of a deep passion to know their Lord, with other believers.

Now I described her a little bit last night. Okay. It's not a caring community. It's not even a community. It's not a relationship. It begins first with Christ. These other things come out of her. She has always been known by titles that signify this relationship with one another and the Lord. I'm telling you that these are the titles the world has given her when the world has looked upon her. Consistently throughout the ages, this community of believers has been called "brethren", "the body of Christ", "the house of God", throughout the ages, not just in our lifetime, "the children of the Lord" or "the children of God", and "brothers and sisters". All of this reflects intimacy, and it does reflect relationship, because this is what the world saw.

I gave the illustration last night for this reason: to help you understand that you cannot create this community. You cannot organize her. You cannot say we're going to have her, and this is the way she will be. She transcends organization, doctrine, and concepts. She's a heart thing, a passion thing. This community, the spiritual community of the believer, is noted by many things, but the most important one...was the illustration of a wagon wheel. At the very center of it is a hub. That hub is Christ. The spokes would represent you and me, and as the spokes get closer to the hub, they get closer to one another. It is impossible for me to describe to you the spiritual community of the believer, other than to say that when a people come together with one thing in their mind, and that is to corporately know the Lord Jesus Christ...corporately know Him, as they touch Him, they grow closer to one another. You cannot reverse that. You cannot say, "Let us love one another, care for one another, live with one another, and we'll get to know the Lord." It doesn't work that way.

I talked a little bit about individuality and individualism. Individualism, that's Texas. Individuality, that's what God gave you when you came out of your mother's womb. That's your personality. Never forfeit that in any fellowship of believers. Don't let people change you in your basic expression. Some of it can be toned down a little bit or jacked up a little bit. But individualism is an insistence on inordinate independence. A community cannot survive with that. All of us have to give in a little bit, and that's really hard on the guy who's a natural leader. Another point that I made last night, for those of you who are new here tonight: the Christian life is not *for you*. I'm

going to go a little further now and say the Christian life cannot be lived by you. Perhaps the hallmark of every age since the first three centuries has been a message delivered to us individually. So much so, I don't know if you can conceptualize the Christian faith any other way.

You go into a building on Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m., sit down, and hear, even within the so-called, well, within the organized church, an individual message. You're not given a "community" message; I'm trying to avoid the words "church" and "corporate"; a community message. And you and I go home, and it becomes instinctive with us. We get the very distinct impression that our relationship is God and me, and we think in those terms almost exclusively. Herein lies why the church suffers so much: we do not think in terms of wholes but in parts. I say to you, dear frustrated Christian, you are never going to be all that happy with your Christian life as an individual, and that's simply because God never intended for you to be a wayfaring wandering pilgrim out looking for God. Our adventure, our exploration of Jesus Christ, was always intended to be community, not individual.

You know, I work with Christians a lot to help them know the Lord better, and I can sit down with people, as in this group here, and talk for a week and say, "You do this, you do that, you do this." I have not got the foggiest idea if they're going to do anything, but when I say, "tomorrow morning at 5:00 a.m." ...that always goes over big...you and you are going to meet together, and you and you are going to meet together. Boy, everything suddenly changes. Then I say, "Now that's going to be Tuesday morning. Wednesday morning, you and you and you and you are going to meet together, and you and you and you and you are going to meet together." I want you to know something: by the end of the week, these people are radiant with the Lord. Then I say to them, "On Saturday night, we're going to have a meeting, and no brothers can share. Only sisters." And suddenly, the sisters all know they're all going to have to talk, something they never get to do in a meeting. You know why? Because the Bible says a woman should not speak in church. Right? Right. Under any circumstances. A woman is never supposed to speak in church. There are no circumstances in which a woman is supposed to speak in church. That's it. End of argument. Three lines down from that...and when she does speak in church, she should have her head covered. You understand? Now you're really clear. Women must never speak in church... and when they do, they must have their heads covered.

(Sarcasm) Now then, I'll explain what a head covering is. The head covering is a hat. That's it. There is no other explanation. It's a hat. End of argument. A head covering is long hair. You understand that? It is not a hat. It's long hair. End of discussion. That's all. No more. Now, are you clear? The head covering is her husband. You understand? It is not hair. It is not a hat. It's her husband, end the argument. Now, are you all perfectly clear? Alright, good. And any man who would foolishly jump into those passages of scripture and try to enforce, probably one of the two most difficult passages in all the New Testament to translate, and jump in there and try to come out with a doctrine...he's half crazy. There is no way to explain that passage and make sense out of it. I don't care what you do, which direction you go; it's going to fall apart. Isn't that wonderful, sisters? So, the sisters come together, and the brothers have to be quiet. They never are, but they

have to be. The sisters share, and suddenly you're dealing with a whole different world. Now it's no longer just talk, and you do this, and you do that. Why? Because the corporate element has been introduced to a body of believers and life is electrified, the meeting is transformed.

Now, let me put it in one clear sentence: you can never be individually what you can be corporately. You need the spiritual community of the believer. *You need the spiritual community of the believer.*

Alright, was there more last night? Oh, I took away the New Testament from you at this point, didn't I? Actually, all I did was take away the Pauline epistles. You can't have the Pauline epistles. You can have one of them; you can't have the others. I also took Revelation away from you, right? You can keep Philemon because Philemon was written to an individual. Galatians is not for you; it was written to a church. 1 and 2 Thessalonians are not for you; they were written for a church. 1 and 2 Corinthians are not for you; they're written for a church. Romans is not for you; it is written to a church. Ephesians is not for you; it's written to a body of believers. Philippians is not for you; it's written to the body of Christ. Colossians is not written to you; it's for the ekklesia, it's not for an individual. 1 and 2 Timothy are written to church planters, men who plant churches. Titus, same thing. That leaves you Philemon. You can have Philemon. The rest is for the corporate body. We cannot in our day seemingly even conceive in such terms.

Alright, was there anything else? Is this a question, or are you going to add something? Yes, ma'am? The spiritual community of the believer has never been enamored with movement, gifts, evangelism, or purpose. Help me a little bit. Certainly not materialism. Leaders? She's had them, but she's not been enamored with them, right? Alright, programs of any kind; organization, liturgy...that is, ritualistic worship; her center has always been the Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently, she's never had the enemy, the enemy, oh the enemy. When she centers on Jesus Christ and doesn't have all these other things to hold her up, she's very fragile. You're really very fragile. In our day and age, when we really are so independent, so incredibly independent...I don't like what's going on here, so I'll go down the street...she's really fragile.

Do you know that there are thoughts you never have? There were thoughts that first-century believers never had. They could not conceive of leaving and going down the street. They did not think in terms of individuality in their pursuit of the Lord. If you became a believer in Corinth, you also belong to the body of believers in Corinth. They were inseparable. That was what a Christian was. It's like trying to become a Hare Krishna without the robe and the ponytail. You look at Hare Krishna. If you ever think about becoming a Harry Krishna, you don't say, "Hm, I think I'll become one of those, but I'll leave the robe and the ponytail off and the shaved head." Do you understand what I'm saying? You know, if you're going to become a Hare Krishna, you're going to get a robe, you're going to shave your head with this little knot of hair in the back, and you're going to beg for money in the airport.

Well, this whole thing was tied up the same way with a Christian. The community and the Christian were inseparable. That is not true today, unfortunately. Let me give you an idea of what I mean by thoughts we've never had. I am not worried tonight about where my son is. It's a thought that has

never crossed my mind. Now, can you guess why? I don't have a son. It's incredible how little I've worried about that boy. I have never once worried about my son, not for a moment. Isn't that unbelievable? Well, let me give you an example of something that has never crossed your mind. Having two courthouses in one city. Now, that's never crossed your mind. Is that not true? The policeman stops you. You say, "Forget you—wrong courthouse. You can't arrest me. I do all my business with the other courthouse." You never had a thought like that. He stops you; you're in trouble. We got one courthouse. No choices. Well, that's the way of the first-century Christian walk. He didn't have any choices. It was the body or nothing. The attachment to Christ was community. It was corporate. It was multiple. It was not individualistic. Boy, that would be hard on a bunch of Texans, wouldn't it? Say amen. It would be. Do you know that I've read an awful lot of second and third-century Christian literature? I can find no reference to two groups of Christians in a city until the year 290 AD.

If I could say anything to any of you tonight, it would be that in your pursuit of Christ, there is always the hope of, and there's always the sight of, the spiritual community of the believers. Alright, that's pretty well what I said last night. You got anything else you want to add here? Anything? Yes, ma'am. Oh, yeah. You like that, huh? I did a lot of confession of sin last night. Would you like to hear it again? You like that? Let one honest man speak here for a moment. Let me speak honestly, whether I'm honest or not. I don't like to pray. I don't like to pray. Leave me to myself, and I will not pray. In fact, I've given up most of what most of us call prayer pretty well. With rare exception, it has gone by the board. Just because someone tells me that's prayer doesn't mean it is. You cannot prove to me that's what prayer was in the first century. There ought to be an organic expression that comes out of me that is not dull.

Well, I also gave another one: I don't like going to church either. I really mean that. I'm not kidding one bit. I find...I'm sorry, folks, those of you who really love going to your church. I can barely stand to go to church. You know how bad it is. How bad is it? I've been to church twice in the last 25 years. And you know when the second one was? It was about three weeks ago. I went to pay homage to some of the finest Christians who ever lived. They will tie the first-century believers, if not exceed them in devotion and commitment, and, by the way, they were a spiritual community of believers. They were born in Germany. Their story is almost unparalleled in church history.

Are you familiar? Have you ever heard of the Moravians? The Moravians. They came to America and went out into the wilderness. So, I think 60 miles from the nearest settlement, today it's called Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. They started a little town called Bethlehem, and the Indians attacked them, and the British attacked them. They were hated and despised because everybody understood they were not Protestants in the traditional sense. They figured they must be Catholics. So, they were hung with the title of Catholics in a world that would have fled the Catholic Church, our world. Talked about, rumored about, and they just stood there and were an example of depth, dedication, and experience of Christ. I walked through what they call "God's Acre". It is one acre of a cemetery where their people are born and are buried. One of the most impressive things is that almost no one lived past 40. I walked around from tombstone to tombstone. I've been studying

these people since I was a kid, but I've never had the privilege of being there. I went all over that cemetery weeping, just weeping, weeping over those beautiful little stones they had commemorating some of the greatest Christians who ever lived, and they lived on our continent. That was in the 1720s...1740s.

And it was 11 a.m., and I went to a Moravian church meeting. It was as bad as a Baptist church. Oh, it was so bad. I sat there and thought about how they used to have meetings that lasted five hours, sometimes six, sometimes seven, sometimes 10. They didn't want to go home, and when they went home, home was Bethlehem. Every person in that town was a Moravian Christian, and they divided the community into two groups: those who earn money and those who serve the Lord. It was always 50/50, and then they'd swap. 50% would work, and the other 50% would serve the Lord, and then they'd swap again. That's why they shook the world...and they did. They were the only evangelical Protestant missionaries on earth until about 1800, and they went everywhere. The stories are incredible. Their deaths: they counted it all loss for Christ.

I would ask Moravians before and after the meeting what's so-and-so. They didn't know anything about their heritage. The meeting... I'll tell you how bad it was. The next day, I sat down with one of the great Moravians, and I mean great in his position today. He didn't know me. I didn't know him. He had pastored that church for 20 or 30 years. He was now retired. He taught in the Moravian Seminary. We sat there and discussed the past. I asked why the meetings didn't last 10 hours and five hours. He doesn't know. He has spent most of his life raising Moravian churches. That really meant a lot to me. Those are rare people even in the denomination. That's a hard job.

He leaned across his desk and said to me...now, he was not in the meeting I was just in...he leaned across the desk and said to me, "What did you think of our Sunday morning church service?" And I felt the hole that I was about to fall into. Well, mama didn't raise no idiots. Maybe some morons, but no idiots. I said to him, "Well, I will speak generally, not of Moravians, but I consider following the same ritual for 500 years and never changing it stupid." Then I said, "I do not understand why anybody would sit through a church service." And he said, "I agree with you 100%." He said, "You know, he said, "I'm not surprised so few people go to church. I am absolutely amazed that so many do." I got somebody on my side. Now, that's a minister, an ordained minister. He's spent nearly 50 years in the ministry, and that's his view of present-day Moravians. So, I said to you last night, the church of Jesus Christ is not a place you meet on Sunday morning. She is, in fact, a way of life that consumes you day and night. She is from a community. She is not a place you report to one hour per week. She is your consuming life.

Now I want to go a little further this evening and, if I may, drive home to you what this spiritual community of the believer really is. I hope this will come across to you. By the way, this is a new point. This is not in last night's point. Someone with great insight called the ekklesia...listen to this term...a colony from heaven. *A colony from heaven*. Imagine the earth more or less in the hands of the enemy, the world, organization, civilization, whatever, and imagine another realm, and if you please, another species. Don't think of heaven so much; think of another sphere. You

can't get there in a rocket ship. No matter how far you go, you have to go through a door between two realms. And imagine that this glorious place is filled with all sorts of things, including God in Christ. Imagine that a small group of them comes to this planet and establishes a little colony meant to reflect the spirit and nature of the other realm. Are you following me? That is the church.

If that vision could obsess us, I tell you frankly, every church building on this earth would be forever vacant starting next Sunday. I wish to drive that point home if I may. You know what the word "colony" means? Do you know what the British still refer to us as? Do you know what they do with great derision? Well, now let us hear from the colonies. President Reagan will come speak to us, the colonies. Well, listen, listen. The British came over here after a few of the pilgrims had cleared the way, and they would build a town with architecture like that in England and set up stores that looked like those in England. Then they would fill it with English products, and the ship would arrive, and the women would be able to put on the latest British fashions. And a newcomer would step off the ship, step into the town of Philadelphia, and he would look around, and he would see something that reminded him of a town in Great Britain. Are you following me? In fact, a town like Philadelphia was built as a replica, a tiny miniature replica of Great Britain, so that you could feel at home there if you were British.

The Romans did exactly the same thing. Take Galatia, one of the most forsaken parts of the Roman Empire. They moved into a town called Pisidian Antioch, and they leveled downtown. They came in there with their soldiers and their slaves and their architects. They built a downtown that was a tiny replica of the Roman Forum, the main marketplace, the center of the city of Rome, filled it with its merchandise, brought in its coins, brought in its people, brought in its language, brought in its clothing, brought in its schools, brought in its literature, brought in its amp theaters, brought in its plays, and brought in its culture. When a Roman left Rome and came there, he felt like he was going to some forsaken place, but he could step into Pisidian Antioch and say, "Well, in this wretched hole, at least I can feel the atmosphere and the sense of Rome."

The church of Jesus Christ is not native to this planet. Someone has said she is "shot through with eternity." She is not native to this planet. You know where she really came from? She didn't start at Pentecost. The church of Jesus Christ really represents... ultimately... tracing her back to her roots. She reflects the fellowship of the Godhead. The fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. That is a divine fellowship. The church of Jesus Christ begins in the same place. When you got saved, you became a partaker of... Will you finish that with me? A partaker of the divine nature. Say it again. *A partaker of the divine nature*. That was written by Simon Peter, if you please, the brother who started the church in Jerusalem. We become partakers of the divine nature and begin in a fellowship with Him, and then enlarge that fellowship with one another. That is the spiritual community of the believer. Our roots are in another realm; if you please, our origins are in another species. If you can understand that God is not a human, He is a different species. He took on the form of human flesh upon this earth, but within Him was God, and He continued His fellowship with the Father. He was a "miniature" of heaven. Heaven, the realm of God, the kingdom, the

place, the sphere of God was in Him, and the fellowship was there, and all the ekklesia was an extension of that divine fellowship.

The Lord could have walked into the community of believers. Forgive me for using that term; I know it's not scriptural, but I'm trying to get you to see something. He could have walked into the spiritual community of the believers in Jerusalem and seen all those people meeting in homes, fellowshiping with one another, fellowshiping in here. He would have said, "It's like coming back home again. This reminds Me of the throne of God. This reminds Me of where I came from. This reminds me of where I spent millions and millions...who knows how long...of years or eternities in my Father."

Brothers and sisters, when Christ is the center and the experience, the real experience of the body of believers, you have touched the other realm. Here's the church. She looks back and sees her origins in the Godhead. She sees her sense, her feelings, her experience in the Godhead. She knows that the basic nature and expression of her is back there. She looks forward to the day when she'll no longer be a colony, and that door will break down, and the two realms will join, and she will no longer be some little colony from heaven. She will be totally and absolutely a part of the real living whole.

Sometime in my past, I don't know when, I went to a banquet in Houston, Texas. Now I am a country boy, and Houston was almost forbidden territory as a young man, and all my country ways were very conscious to me, and I knew I was somebody who didn't have any cooth. We were at this big banquet, and the waiters came out in their dinner jackets; I believe this is correct, it was a long time ago, and put a plate down in front of every one of us. Now, do you know what was on that plate? A big plate, and there on it was a little bitty bone about that big. That seemed very strange to me. Have any of you ever had that happen to you? This I was really up in high cotton that day, wasn't I?

Everybody picked it up and started eating it. A little bitty piece of meat on it. Well, I later found out why they gave us this. Does anybody know? It is to stimulate and prepare your gastric juices ahead of the meal about to be served, to get your appetite whetted and all the right juices flowing. If it had been a tomato, different enzymes would have flowed, vegetable enzymes, but this lets the stomach know to get ready for something really super special. That was called *a foretaste*. You understand? That was a foretaste. Now that's the definition of a foretaste. I'm going to tell you another definition of a foretaste. You want to hear it? *The church of the living God*. That is the definition of a foretaste.

She is shot full of the eternal. In that community, in that spiritual community, when men and women encounter the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a touching of that which has been in the Godhead, and it is a foretaste of what will be for you and for me for all future eternity. Brother, your tongue ought to be hanging out. Give me, Lord, this foretaste of that realm. That is exactly what this spiritual community is, and that's why she's never driven by doctrine. She's never driven by movement. She's never driven by causes nor enemies, not even by purpose, other than to satisfy

Him and to find satisfaction in Him. If you had asked a first-century believer, what is the church? He would have described pretty much what I would have described: a heavenly experience outside the heavens, an unearthly encounter on the earth, a non-material, spiritual encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, among others of the redeemed here on this earth. That is what the community of the believers really is, and anything else is toothpaste. Now say, "Praise the Lord." Don't sit there.

Oh, that God would put this in us and burn it in our being. Will you allow me a moment to commit not heresy, radicalism? Commit radicalism. That's going to be a brand-new crime. It's never been done. I'm going to commit radicalism. We Baptists have a saying: anytime you do two things twice in a row, it becomes a New Testament doctrine. Can you follow that? We're that tradition-prone. Have you ever wondered why we have collars on our shirts? You never have. You never really have. Have you ever wondered why we have heels on our shoes? You've never wondered. You never have wondered. You've never even questioned why we have sleeves on our shirts, and yet all of it has a history. Why do we put on uncomfortable clothes? The shirt comes unfortunately because of the domination of Northern European fashion, which came from the killing of an animal, and you put on the animal's clothes. That's where men get their clothing shape. Too bad, Southern Europe's fashions didn't win out; we could wear a nice loose toga and really be cool and comfortable, but we can't do that.

The heel was put on our shoe. It started with horses, believe it or not, and saddles so that the foot wouldn't go through the stirrup. Now it is a fashion, and it is the scourge of your back. And if you stop wearing heels, you may get over your backache. In fact, if you go barefoot, you'll be a lot better off, but you never thought about that. Never occurred to you. Why do we wear a tie? Why are there buttons on the sleeves of a coat? You've never wondered why those little buttons were there. Would you like to hear why? Is anybody interested? I'm going to tell you why. Alright. You never thought about why the little buttons are there?" Well, I don't know where it was; I don't know if it was in Germany, under the Habsburgs, in Russia, or in Great Britain. All I know is that somewhere there were these uniformed palace guards, and they were standing in detention, and when winter came, and their noses started running, they would go like that, and the queen got tired of that. She said I don't see that happen anymore. She made them cover their entire sleeves with buttons. It started a fashion, and today, that much of it is still left.

The tie. Why in the world would we wrap a noose around our necks? No man has ever been comfortable in one of those. The tie started as a dinner napkin that covered the whole front of the coat. Have you ever thought about that? Never wondered, never challenged. It's time we came out against neck ties. Here we are hung with that thing for hundreds of years. Why do we have lapels on coats? I didn't know this until just recently. You can understand when it's explained to you because you have sometimes done it yourself on a cold day. Among poor people, there were cold, medium, and warm, but there was only one coat, and they had these huge things over on this side that would button over to this side. Then they take this side and lap it over to that side. Then they could button it back up, and it would be open again. They could even pull it back further as the weather got warmer. Today it's left as a lapel. I have no idea what this is doing here. I don't know

how it got there, or why it's still there. Well, you put your pen in it, Gene. Yeah, but I got suspicious about this thing. I bet there's a story behind it. We could all come into a revolt. We could get rid of our collars, our lapels, our ties, the buttons on our coats. We could have much more practical clothing, and we have never once thought about it.

Now then, I'm going to shift the scenery, and I'm going to do this really quickly. You do so many church things that you think are New Testament. In fact, everything you do in church is a tradition that's probably not over 500 years old. And if it is, it's not over 1700 years old. There is virtually no practice in modern-day Christianity within what is called the church...I know of nothing with its roots in the first century. You want to hear them real quick? Alright, you're just really...you're just into this. You want me to do that, don't you, brother? Yeah, but you don't get the hate mail that I get. I'll write the book; let's put your name on it.

I've never tried to do this quickly; I don't know if it'll even mean anything to you. You ready to go here? Pulpits came from pulpits of pagan temples in Rome. They were called ambos. Ambos, that's correct. They came over into our faith through pagan temples. Church buildings were given to us by Constantine in the year 323. They had never existed previously. The choir came directly to us from the pagan temples during the days of Constantine. The pews came to us as an Italian invention, when Constantine built these enormous buildings all over the Roman Empire in "praise of the Lord". There were no chairs in them, and they had been meeting in living rooms, and those Italians brought in benches to sit in. In Constantinople, the Greeks refused to bring in benches, and did you know that today the Eastern Orthodox Church stands throughout its two-hour services? And the Italians, thank goodness for the Italians, they brought in benches. The chair was invented about the time of Martin Luther. I know that sounds incredible, but nobody ever thought about putting anything to lean up against. And so, the Protestants put a back on their benches and gave us the pew, and that's where we got the pew.

Now, I'm going to give you one you're not going to believe. Do you believe that the preaching of the word of God has been with us from the beginning? Brothers and sisters, there is a difference between the preaching of the word of God and a Sunday morning sermon. The sermon is not native to the Christian faith. It was given to us by one John Chrysostom in about the latter part of the 300s. He was a great pagan Roman orator who converted, invented Aristotelian oratory, and turned it into an Aristotelian sermon. An introduction, a conclusion with several points, and illustrations. That is a sermon; the very thing that I was taught in the seminary 30 miles over the road here, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was and is the ancient Greek rhetoric and Roman rhetoric style of delivery. The sermon came to us from the Greco-Roman tradition, the great tradition of oratory. They were the toys, the playthings of high Roman Greek society. They literally would fill up amphitheaters, and they would step out to the middle and deliver this magnificent oration, and the crowd would go wild.

Let me tell you something. Let me tell you where we got verses in our Bible. The orator would come out to the middle of the stage and stand on a little box. He would be handed a robe and put

it on in front of the people. He would undo a scroll or a book and say, "Tonight, my text is from the great Homer poem, the 'Iliad.' Chapter 27, verse 31." Roll it up. Someone would take it away from him. He would speak this verse out of Homer's Iliad, and then he'd bring this great oration, and the crowd would go wild. Are you getting uncomfortable? I'm not downing preaching, but I'm telling you there's a difference between the urgent, emergent, sporadic tradition of first-century prophetic utterance and reporting every Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. to hear a sermon. As one who has had to do this a good part of my life, you don't know how bad it is on my side, either. I'm going to chase that rabbit for a minute.

It's one of the most killing things to the Christian faith. You come in, sit down, and you have nothing to do. This means this is a message. The message is that Christians don't function in a gathering of the body of believers. That's the message you get. Now, the first thing he does is get up and bring some very interesting illustrations. If you can hear this man at all, I mean, maybe you're asleep by now, but if he's really good and he's got your attention, you get this. He immediately creates guilt. We live in an age without humility. We have no humility. He says, "Suddenly, I'm feeling very bad about not being humble." Then he gives us a lot of statistics and data, and we're getting guiltier and guiltier and guiltier.

We haven't moved. This is all internalized. Then he begins to deliver to us a challenge of what we ought to be. Yeah, that's what I ought to be. Humble. Humble. Humble. Then he gives me an inspiring illustration, and I say to myself, "That's what I want to be. That's what I want to be. That's what I want to be." And he delivers a challenge to be this. I say, "Yeah, yeah. Yeah," and then he prays. He runs to the back of the auditorium, and I say, "Pastor, that was a wonderful message." By the time I get to the car, I don't know what he said. I don't; he has not told me how to be humble. He has not told me where to be humble. If he's dead serious about this, why don't we take the next three months to go after this thing tooth and nail within the spiritual community of believers?

It has desensitized me to the practical application of my faith. I come in, and you can graph it. I go through guilt. I go through challenge. I go through inspiration, and the meeting ends. That's why I go through every Sunday. It's a little internal orgy, and that's all there is to it. Somewhere down in my subconscious, I get the message that this is the Christian faith. I don't know what he's going to preach next Sunday. Good night, what kind of an idea might he come up with next week? There's no continuity. Next Sunday, there's going to be another sermon about something else, and I'm going to go through the same guilt. Yeah, the proposition and then the hope and the inspiration and then the challenge, and it's going to all be done over again, and nothing happens except internally. And the buzzardly thing is that next Sunday, that guy will probably climb up in that pulpit and preach on "boldness." This, forgive me, is not the community of the believers.

Shall I go on? Jim, can I go on? Joe, may I continue? Alright, I have their permission. Okay. It's alright; the rest of you, you're out of luck. These are the people who invited me here. I'm telling you historical facts. It took me a lifetime to find them. Nobody's ever written a book on it. But they are historical facts. Oh, seminaries. How much money has been given, how many professors, and

how many of these... seminaries began on December 13th of 1543. Now, that is 1,500 years removed from the first century, and yet, that's how all men called by God are trained. Nobody has ever questioned whether or not there might be a better way, like a New Testament way, and the strange thing about it is that in those seminaries, we're taught to do nothing except that which is biblical. I doubt there's ever been more than 1/2 of 1% of seminary professors who have ever wondered where seminaries came from. Seminary professors don't know. I looked harder to find the origin of seminaries than for everything else I looked for. I gave up, and one day, finally, I found a man who knew. I went back to those resources, and there it was, and it's an interesting, fascinating, humorous, absolutely unbelievable story. We don't have time for it.

I told you last night where we got the arrangement of the epistles, and this has got to stop. Somebody's got to create a New Testament in which the epistles are put in the correct order, and we can give some idea of church life. Let me tell you something else that's never happened. Nobody has ever told the entire story of the first-century church in its chronological order. There's never been a book on that subject. I challenge you to find it. There is one written by a truly great man (laughter) that covers about 20% of it, and I've got another 80% to go. But when you consider the whole context of the church in the first century, you simply cannot put our practices today into it. You can't do it. It's not there. You can do it with a verse, but you cannot do it with a totalistic context. It can't be done.

Let me see. I don't want to miss any really good ones. Have I not covered most of what we do today? Uh, Sunday schools began in this country by Dwight L. Moody. They began in England by a gentleman about 30 or 40 years earlier, I've forgotten his name. That's almost within the lifetime of people on Earth today. Yet, we have perhaps a half a trillion dollars' worth of money tied up in educational plants, in something called a building given to us by Constantine, with choirs given to us by the pagans, with stained glass windows given to us by a Roman Catholic priest in the 1200s whose name was Suger out of a town called St. Deny, France, with a pulpit that came out of paganism, and seminaries that came out of the reformation and started by the Roman Catholics. You want to hear about 11 o'clock? Why do all Protestant Christians meet at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning? Does anybody know who has not been who did not find this out through me? Okay.

It's because Martin Luther drank beer. That's why you meet at 11:00 am every Sunday morning. He really loved beer, and the Protestants during the beginning of the Reformation met at 5 and 6:00 a.m. in Wittenberg, which became the model of all things Protestant. He loved staying up on Saturday night to talk and drink beer, so he moved that meeting up to 8 a.m., drank a little more beer, and stayed up a little longer, moved it up to 9 a.m., drank a little bit more beer, and talked a little bit later, and moved it up to 10 a.m. And somebody said to him, "Martin, we're running out of Sunday morning mass." He said, "Great. We still have one hour left. We'll move it to 11:00 a.m., and we can still call it morning mass, morning service." That way, he could stay up almost all night long, drinking beer and talking to his friends, and that's where the Sunday morning church service came from at 11:00 a.m. That is a historical fact that any Lutheran scholar can tell you, and it is all over the planet.

I went into the jungles of Thailand and found a group of Christians who had not been seen by white men in 50 years, an entire tribe. I found them in a refugee camp. I was one of the first white men to ever see them. They were Hmung. They came out of Laos and Vietnam, and when I got to them, they had made huts all over this refugee camp; there were 2,000 of them. In the middle of it, they had built one hut a little higher than all the rest of the huts, and they had taken bamboo sticks and driven them into the ground, and taken a bamboo pole and tied it. They had put a table in front of that thing, and at 11 a.m., they met for church. It's in our bloodstream. This is not the community of the believers.

Brothers, I mean, there's a reason for revolution here. Good historical grounds for an out-and-out revolution. I think, I mean this, and you may quote me, but please don't. I think Sunday morning was made to sleep late. I think that we ought to do away with church on Sunday morning. You people are a bunch of radicals yourselves. (laughter) But I come to the final and absolute ends of all things. I come to you tonight to tell you, or to ask you this question. I'm going to list some things and ask: Can you find a passage in the New Testament for Christian funerals? Can you find a passage in the New Testament that calls for praying over and blessing civic activities? Can you find in the New Testament a place for the professional confession of sins to a single individual? No, you can't.

Can you find the Sunday morning sermon? Can you find an individual specifically appointed to visit the sick? One specific individual appointed to teach? Can you find any scriptural grounds whatsoever for a ritualistic marriage ceremony in the New Testament? New Testament Christian practice. Are you with me? Can you find any of that in the Bible? Any of that in the New Testament anywhere? Even the slightest, most remote thought of any of that being somewhere central or even peripheral to the first-century Christian family. I've just described the Protestant pastor to you. The only difference is that he doesn't perform confession of sin; He does counseling.

Now, where in the tooth did the modern-day pastor come from? Now, this is going to lay some of you out cold, but he was invented by one Martin Luther in about 1530, and he never existed in the pages of church history before that. This is the story. Here is the story. The Roman Catholic priest had seven duties. Now, he wore a black robe. He was single. He never married. He was a...you can't understand the Roman Catholic Church until you understand single brothers. Thank you, brother. He's a single brother; that's what he is, that's what a Roman Catholic priest is—a single brother, a religious single brother. There's nothing on earth more dangerous than a religious single brother. That's the Roman Catholic Church, and that's an explanation of why she's like she is. It's true.

Now, the priest had seven duties. Now, let me see if I can recount them correctly. One was to teach. Another one was to bury the dead. That is a Roman-Greek tradition. The funeral with a philosophical narration is a Roman-Greek tradition that entered the Christian church in the days of Constantine. I have read Roman funeral orations, and you can't tell them word-for-word...I could substitute the entire message and preach it next Sunday, or next Wednesday, over some dead body,

and you'd never know the difference. It is a Greco-Roman tradition; it has nothing to do with the Christian faith whatsoever—an oration over the dead. Let's see what the first one was. Teach, bury the dead, marry the young; the Roman Catholic priest did this. Hear the confession of sin; blesses the civic...throwing holy water on civic functions. Some more...raise money. Visit the sick. And there's one other; there were seven of them. I usually end up with eight, and I can't remember what the other one was. That was a sacrament, not a duty. It's not one of the seven pastoral...that's what it was called—seven pastoral duties of the priest.

Martin Luther said to take off your robes, and don't you dare hear confession of sin, but bury the dead, bless the civic things, and all the others. They came down to us through the Roman Catholic tradition of the seven pastoral functions of the priest, and the Protestant priest began to assume the pastoral roles of the Roman Catholic priest. So, they began to be called pastors because it was the priest's pastoral role. And God help us; we have created a monstrosity. If you have ever been a pastor, you have no idea the pressure you live under. You are also costumed just like the priest, and boy, you better believe your costume. You'd better not take that costume off.

If next Sunday, every one of the 325,000 Protestant preachers in America walked up into their pulpits in a sports shirt and khakis, there'd be 325,000 Protestant preachers out of work next Sunday night. You are costumed, and don't you ever forget it. And I want you to know - you'd better be there when Aunt Nelly gets sick. When you show up at a Kiwanis or Rotary, they'll always call on you. You lift your voice and say, "Lord, before the drinking and the cussing and the swearing and the dirty jokes start, we pray for Your blessing upon this meeting." We do it.

“Now, team A has met its rival tonight, team B, out on the gridiron, and before they come to kill and massacre one another and bones are broken, Reverend Edwards is going to come and lead us in prayer.” It is a Roman Catholic tradition, most of which finds its roots in the duties of the Greco-Roman philosopher who visited the sick when they were dying and was paid to comfort them, who delivered the orations and all of these things, which fell to the Roman Catholic priest and now are in the pastoral role. Brothers and sisters, forgive me, but it has no grounds in the New Testament. And you know what the most interesting thing about it is? Whether we have admitted it or not, most of us who are ministers and pastors figure it out. You sit down with a pastor, let's say 50 years old, sit down with him in a restaurant and say, "Hey, just how much of what you're doing is really based on the New Testament." And he'll say, "Precious little." But the tragedy, the worst part of it, is he's salaried, and he is subject to your capricious feelings.

This week, I returned to the church, the last church I ever pastored, and a brokenhearted lady told me...this was a dear friend of mine in the church I pastored. She told me they had just lost their pastor because he preached something one lady didn't like, and she got her feelings hurt, and the deacons asked him to leave. Now, where in the name of God and angels and heaven and scripture could you possibly find anything in the Bible to justify that? I'm going to say it again. We have historical grounds for revolution. I have just told you the origin of virtually everything we practice as Protestants—outward forms. There's one last one. The Sunday morning church ritual was

invented by John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, in about 1540 AD. And that's why we go through that same blessed ritual every Sunday morning. Gregory the Great invented the Mass and its ritual in 500 AD., and the Roman Catholics have never changed the form itself. They went from Latin to English, but they never changed the form. We adopted John Calvin's 1540 order of service. You can find it in his handbook, the Reformed Church's Order of Worship, and it is being followed today almost identically in every Protestant church on this earth.

Now I ask you why, and I say to you *that's not the spiritual community of the believers*. That is an interaction between divinity and divinity among a group of people, such as first-century Christians. What is the church? It is a society, a divine society within a secular civilization. Let me see if I can wrap it up. Fish have schools. Sheep have flocks. Cattle have herds. Secular, lost, unredeemed man has civilization. That's the realm in which it lives. Can you name me another one? I found out the other day that blackbirds have...what is that word? They have what? Say it really loudly. Murders. Thank you, brother. Do you know any others? Quails have pods.

The redeemed have the church. Can you follow that? This is our civilization. This is where we live and breathe and move and have our being. It is our morning, our afternoon, and our evening. It is the fellowship of the redeemed. It is a heavenly colony within a world gone mad. It is the church. It is Jerusalem that is walled in for the believer. That's what the church is.

One other thing I want to say again: she's your inheritance, and there's somebody down in here, something down in here, in you, that drives you to her. The more you seek Him, the more you will be driven to long for her. I have watched this in all the testimony of the church throughout the ages. The more a Christian moves toward Christ, whether in the Roman Catholic Church or elsewhere, the more they will long for the spiritual community of believers, until it becomes a white-hot passion. I must warn you, you always get in trouble when you say...your "innards" say, "I've got to find the fellowship of the redeemed. I have to go back to the first things...not to an organization, not to a ritual, not to a doctrine, not to a belief, but a way of life that has come out of a head-on encounter with Christ." The church is the organic expression of the spiritual experience of a group of believers. That's what she is.

This is not the message I had intended to create tonight. You know, I hope the Lord gets inside of you and just bugs the daylights out of you. I long for the day. I'm not mad at anybody. I really, really, honestly carry this so lightly. Have you ever been to France? You can drive up to almost any town, and its outer edges are very modern. The further you move in, the more it feels like a timeline. The further you move into the downtown city, the older it gets. And right in the very center, you'll find a great cathedral. Oh boy, built back in the days when they bled whole towns almost out of existence to build those things. You know what they are today? They are museums. They are civic museums. They are places where tour guides take you through and tell you about them. Praise the Lord.

I have a dream. I have a dream. 300 years from now, church buildings will have been turned into quaint restaurants. I do. I do. I have a dream: shopping malls, educational plants. I have a dream

that God will deliver all men of God called from being pastors. When the church of Jesus Christ visits the sick, when we have given up the funeral to rejoice over or weep over the passing of a brother and a sister, when the sacraments are handed out by a sister, any sister, if you please, any old sister. When the bread and the cup are just passed. When Christians are back in living rooms where they belong, where they came from, and back in cemeteries where they met, and go to hotels to have their big meetings, and return to the parks for fellowships and picnics. I have a dream that, when seminaries have become libraries or museum pieces, and, as in the first century, the church planter will raise up the Christian worker as Jesus did and as Paul did. And the seminary has become a great library where you can check into a dormitory, spend a week reading books, then check out again and go back to the business of having church planters raise up workers.

I see the day when we don't pray over football games anymore or civic meetings, so that they know we don't do that anymore. I look forward to the day, a dream, when some of God's people, just a few of them who minister, do what Paul did, and that's work for a living. And those who don't, and that's wonderful, live by the "un-hinted for" gifts of God's people. When every non-denominational parachurch organization, non-denominational tax-exempt organization has ceased to exist because the community of the believer has gotten back to doing and being what she is: the centrality of all believers. When all care and love and concern, all help, all healing, all love, all passion and compassion are expressed within a body of believers. That does not have to disrupt one Christian doctrine being taught today. That's true. Not one doctrine we believe as believers has to change for these things to happen. Not one. For these things to go, it's just a matter of letting go of traditions.

I have a dream of a day when Jesus Christ looks down out of heaven and says, "Isn't she beautiful? Isn't she gorgeous? She's beautiful. She's not a knock-kneed, freckled-faced, and snuggle-toothed anymore. She's beautiful. She has made herself ready. I think I'll go and get her and bring her to myself for my glory and make myself once more one with her. Personally, I'm not speaking for the Lord, but He made me in His image. I wouldn't come back to earth and pick this thing up. I really wouldn't. I wanted to marry a beautiful girl. I married the prettiest girl I ever laid eyes on. Boy, she was gorgeous. I can't see my Lord coming back for this.

Brothers and sisters, if we can have a reformation in the 1500s, we will have a revolution sometime in the next hundred years, when we simply give up the complex and return to the simple. When we have finally stopped being sectarian with one another, love one another, and receive one another, because Jesus received us. When we have stopped throwing up walls of doctrine and the community of believers is what it has always been, a beautiful, nonsectarian, openhearted fellowship of the redeemed. Praise the Lord. *I hope the Lord obsesses you with her.*

In the morning, I'm going to talk to you about her divine nature and your place in that. Now that I've finished, I want to know if you have any questions, so I don't leave anyone unclear.

Audience: In light of the situation the church is in today and its commitment to community, would you suggest staying where you're at now?

I believe all Christians should stay in the organized church. I believe all Christians...I'm dead serious... all Christians should stick to the church's traditional practices. Period...*unless your insides drive you out*. Unless you get down to the point that you're going to die if you stay. You ought to leave by calling and by revelation. Otherwise, you'll stay where you are because it's dangerous out there. It is dangerous, and it's hard, and it's sad, and it's all those things. You ought to be driven out. In other words, you stay in.

And I want to say something else. Whether you're in or you're out, all of us ought to be obligated to a commitment to treat everyone in and out as though we were all within that same spiritual community. Never draw a blind or a barrier; there should be no elitism in the church. I am not better...I am not better than a brother who is in a Sunday-morning mass at a Roman Catholic church. I am not better than that man. He is holy and righteous in the eyes of God. I am not better than that man...in no way. In fact, I'm under greater judgment than he is. I am. And that's frightening. I should be humbled by that. I have nothing to be proud of. And if I do what the master has told me to do, of what do I boast? Stay in, unless the Lord just drives you crazy. And that should come by revelation and probably internal agony. Is that satisfactory, brother? Thank you for asking the question.