Someone asked here how to begin moving into a deeper walk with Jesus Christ. I think what I want to tell you tonight is that, with the rare exception of a few people, you cannot and you will not. You will probably end up getting into the Bible, or you will begin helping some organization, or you'll die in the desert. I don't think anything relevant abroad in this world today will bring you into a deeper Christian walk that will remain permanent. I don't believe that exists.

Now, I don't know who has gotten a hold of you. I don't know how much you have been indoctrinated with certain concepts, but before I go any further, I want to remind you that I have a master's degree in theology, and that I am a preacher. I know the ministry from A to Z. I know how the ministry thinks. I know how it operates. I know how it works. I know the grooves that all the men's minds are in. You take a needle and put it on a record, and it hits a certain groove, and that's how it is within the ministry. It's going to come down to about three or four possible different grooves. I will repeat that: I don't believe there is anything abroad on this land; I don't believe there's anything abroad in any other nation in the world that's going to help you know the Lord better. I'm going to try to prove that point tonight.

Do you have any idea how shallow, insipid, asinine, supercilious, inane, and downright boring prayer is? Now, if you are shocked by what I just said, remember I'm from South Texas. You made me what I am. I wouldn't pray the way Christians and the denominations pray for anything in the world. I mean it. I'd start all over again if I were you. I believe some preachers think that if you get down on your knees and pray a long time on a concrete floor, that's what will put you in good standing with God and forgive you for all those sins that didn't get forgiven somewhere else.

Let me tell you something. I wrote this in a book. I think a lot of people think that if they go to church every Sunday, it is so boring and so horrible that, nonetheless, whatever you sin that week, by the very act of going, God forgives you for it. I come back to what I just said: I don't know of anything abroad in the land. It is too supercilious, too shallow, too inane, too old. It's just dressed up in a new costume, and some preacher just discovered it, and he's getting you enthusiastic about it. It'll last somewhere between six months and four years; that happens to be what Christianity is today.

I don't think there's any way in this world you're going to find anything in the traditional churches that will let you even remotely get to know the Lord better. Nothing. I want to repeat that real slow. *Nothing.* I am very, very grateful, and I really wish this weren't recorded, but let's go ahead and do it, because I have no criticism of this. Did you ever see 60,000 men singing in a stadium? Oh, that is an incredible sight. How many of you have been in one of the big PromiseKeepers rallies? Isn't that

glorious? I mean, just…mind-boggling. I'd take anybody I knew who wasn't saved to one of those, and I'd know I'd have a good chance of seeing them saved.

Do you know, though, as glorious as that is, by the incredible numbers of it, it's basically a reproduction of a Sunday morning church service. You come in, you layman, you sit, you're told what to do, you hear the preacher, you give money, you go home. What have you done besides singing and looking? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Except you've had the joy of seeing many people saved, and that's wonderful. It always has been and always will be.

As long as ministry dominates, we'll get nowhere. As long as you sit, we'll get nowhere. I don't care if you see the dead raised. Eventually, you'll get tired of seeing the dead raised. If you see a short leg lengthening, you'll get tired of watching legs grow. You are still a spectator. You are still an instrument of our ministries. You, lowly layman, are out there to back us and make us. Eventually, whatever it is we cook up, we'll become boring, and we'll keep wrecking a lot of our lives.

I tell you, the best thing in the world to do is get into one of those hypnotic trances, go to church on Sunday morning, and stare, having no idea what on earth is going on. Go home. Make sure your children get in Sunday school so they can learn not to kill, murder, commit adultery, steal, and whatever else. Then just do that for the rest of your life, and don't move, because if you do, probably what you do is going to be very dangerous and harmful to your spiritual life.

I didn't write a little book entitled *When the Church Was Led by Laymen* for no reason. We are so utterly at sea in the Christian faith. I'm writing a series of books called *The First Century Diaries*. I want to tell you why I'm writing those books. I am writing them to corrupt Christians all over the world. I think there will probably be five, and I want Christians who read all five to be familiar with the entire first-century story. When you get to the fifth one and you close it, you will say, oh, that's not what we do. In fact, nothing I just read is remotely similar to what we do. Rebuilding the first-century story is about the most dangerous thing you can do, because it just…present-day Christianity doesn't wash.

I have been asked, " What do you feel like God has done or accomplished in this century that's closing out? My answer is, this century looks just like all the rest of them, as far as I'm concerned. Nothing happened. Only two things in the 20th century are worth noting. One is the ecumenical movement; all the modernists and liberals got together and started forming one church. I'm so glad they did that. I think that's just marvelous. Give them a nice graveyard to die in. The other thing is, in the 20th century, we all learned to speak in tongues, and that thing exploded all over the world. It's the only

decent thing that I can think of that happened in the 20th century. Other than the possibility that if you believe that it's of the devil to speak in tongues, then I would say it's the worst thing that happened in the 20th century.

Can you tell me anything else that happened in the 20th century? You want me to play really rough? I'm going to play really rough. One other thing happened in the 20th century, and it was probably the most disastrous event in the last 500 years. We gave almost the entire world the American version of practicing the Christian faith. White people, Americans, left this country, most of us, as missionaries, because we were not satisfied with American Christianity, and we wanted to go to another land and do it better. We went to other lands, and instead of doing it differently and boldly, we went over there and transplanted American Christianity all over this planet. American Christianity now dominates the entire world, and if you please, the American version of Christianity is boring. I'm not talking about doctrine; I'm just talking about the seat of your pants. It's boring. It is incredibly…boring.

Now, if some of you are shocked at what I'm saying, then there are two things you should know about me. First, I'm one of those rare people outside the organized church. Perhaps the only difference between most brothers outside the organized church and me is that I'm better educated, and therefore I can articulate the situation better than they can. I'm also not dependent on the ministry for my income, and that makes me different…and it makes me dangerous. I'm not afraid of you. You don't vote my salary. You don't sign any checks that are handed to me for me to live on…and I can say what I bloody well please…and I do.

If you're shocked, you need to understand that there are Christians throughout church history who are outside the organized church, and we have always taught this way. We have a historical place in church history; we have a right to exist, and we have always been small in number. In fact, when I, at the age of 30, left the organized church, to my knowledge, on the day I left, I did not know another Christian in the world outside the organized church. Not one. That has changed in my lifetime, but we are still small.

We who are seeking to push the church beyond this 500-year captivity and boredom have made very little progress, and we will continue to do so for as long as we live on this earth. It's bigger than we are, and I'm going to tell you something else: you pretty much have to be called out of the organized church. If you have not been, please don't be disturbed. If you can really get up in the morning and put on that tie, and put on all that makeup Sunday morning, yell and scream at your wife, your husband, and your kids, get in your car and make a mad dash down to church, get your kids into Sunday school,

you have sinned more getting to church than you've done all week long. If you can sit down on that pew, and I really hope for your sake it's padded, and you can sit there and even understand anything that man is saying, and you're content with that, then I beg you, literally, in the name of my Lord, to stay there because you don't want to get outside of that. If you're comfortable there, be comfortable there.

You just about have to be called out. You have to come to the day, and this doesn't happen to a lot of Christians, when you absolutely cannot abide going to church anymore. You can't stand it. I will tell you, my impression is that among the best Christians in America are people who don't go to church. I think of all the kids in Cleveland, Texas, I used to go to church with every Sunday morning; to my knowledge, none of them go now. Of course, a lot of them are dead. Who, other than a handful, a scrap full of people who started out going to church at 14 and 15, are still sitting there at sixty? They just don't do that. There are about five or ten in any good-sized church. They quit. How many of the kids in Sunday school you went to school with today are going to church? Are you going to church? Just how much longer do you think you can stand going to church? Think about it in terms of another 15 years.

This is reality. Compare it to…forget the church in the first century; just compare it with Jesus' life on this earth. Man, here was someone who was reeling, dealing, and shaking things up, and it was out in the fields and in homes, and He was against Pharisees and religious people, and He declared war on ritual and all of that. Now we are back in a building, and we're just grinding out Sunday morning—same thing week after week. I'm telling you that as hungry as you are to know the Lord Jesus Christ, you're not going to get anywhere. You're not going to get anywhere, and if you get something, it's going to fizzle…because you're not in the right incubator.

Audience: Well, you've just talked all about these other churches and other teachers and said we can't get to know anything from the organized church. Maybe you're right, and that's not what I'm questioning, but why can we trust you, and why aren't you just another prepackaged idea that's something new?

Well, we'll cancel the meeting and go home. I'll repeat her question. Who in the world do you think you are, Gene Edwards? I'll tell you why because my wife is the greatest skeptic who ever lived. She's…you know the story about the fellow who said I was my greatest critic, and then I got married. The greatest critic I have on this earth is my wife. She's more skeptical of me than anybody on earth ever will be…and she actually trusts me. I cannot answer that question. I really cannot. I'm looking out over a sea of people who've been desperately hurt by trying something, but I can tell you something

you'd never have tried. That's a church without a pastor and a church without elders, where you are responsible for every meeting. The direction…it's yours.

If I don't say anything else, then just let me say this. I think most of you know my testimony. I sat down at 30 in Tyler, Texas, and did something that destroyed my life. I wrote out the entire first-century story. I strongly believe two things. One of them is that you need help to get started, and I have proved that, I guess, for 35 years, because groups that try it without it fall on their faces. Do you know why they fall on their faces…why you fall on your face when you try to have a group? Because you and everybody in that group are despicable.

Self-willed, determined to get your way, ready to slaughter anybody in that group who does not agree with you. Let me tell you something, saints: getting up out of the Sunday morning church service and walking into a home doesn't cure anything. Sitting down and studying the Bible doesn't cure anything. You're just moving sin from one place to another…Maybe I should say the fallen, corrupt, murderous nature of man from one place to another.

Herein is the point I will be making in the next few hours if this young lady here will let me. (laughter) It is within the body of Jesus Christ alone that we have any hope of any kind, and I'm not talking about church on Sunday morning. I mean a functioning body of people. I also have to tell you that it includes the cross of Jesus Christ working in your life with a bunch of other people. That involves a lot of time spent with the Lord, which you will do, and you'll have fun at it. It also means a lot of tears and a lot of dying. It also means more joy and freedom than you've ever known. It also means that nobody, including me, is looking over your shoulder to see what you're doing.

It is the most exciting thing in the world…and the worst. Someone said, " It's terrible, but it's a wonderful kind of terrible. I think that's the best description I've ever known of church life. It's real. I mean, this is where reality really is. You're living with a group of people, and there is absolutely nobody there but you to take responsibility for what's going on. We have no understanding whatsoever.

Now I'm going to start the conference. I'd like you to listen real carefully next Sunday to anybody who's ministering. It doesn't matter who it is or what their background is; from the Quakers on up or down. The minister will open the Scripture and begin by saying, "Now we're going to read Galatians 1 or Galatians 2." Now, let us read this passage. Paul said this, and he meant this. Now, how can that become relevant to your life? You're sitting there taking notes or thinking, " This is really good. How

can it become relevant to your life?' My answer is: it cannot become relevant to your life. Nothing in Galatians will, in the long run, become relevant to your life.

Maybe today...maybe this week the pastor will say something that helps you feel good or helps you through a crisis, and you'll thank God forever, and you'll thank your pastor forever as well, as you should, but I'm speaking of the long haul. Nothing in Galatians applies to your life on the long haul. Now, Gene, why would you say that? The reason is simple. It wasn't written to an individual. Nothing in Galatians is addressed to an individual. Everything in Galatians is written to a corporate body of people.

(speaking in a pastorate voice) Now you'll hear a message on 1 Corinthians. I might as well do Thessalonians. I'll do it in the proper order, not in the order it's arranged in the New Testament. Somebody in a Bible class…I don't want to pick on preachers or pastors. I want to pick on everybody. I want to pick on just about everybody breathing air on this planet who ministers in any way. Brother and sister, wake up; it wasn't written to an individual, and this thought has not crossed our minds. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul says such and such and so and so and so. How can that be relevant to your life? It is not and cannot be, except on a short-term basis.

Are you following me all? Because there was a place called Thessalonica, in which a group of probably 30 to 75, maybe 100 Christians, more like 50 probably, were being persecuted in that town. They were all meeting together. They had no pastor. They met in a home, which is somewhat irrelevant, but let's keep it informal. They were in a home. They had no leaders whatsoever other than the man who planted the church, and he left them. He left them for a long time. It was relevant. 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians are relevant…to a people…on the long haul. It is relevant to you only momentarily.

That's 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians. So now we've come to 1 and 2 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians. Again. Such and such and so on and so on in this passage. How can that be relevant to your life? You came to church on Sunday morning because you wanted to hear what could help you. You have written a question: "Where do we begin to move…how do we move toward knowing the Lord?" And we go to church on Sunday morning to know that. Even the pastor does not understand a corporate endeavor with Christ. He leans over the pulpit and says to you, how can this be made relevant to your life? And the answer is, it cannot, except on a very temporary basis. It is relevant only in the long haul to a body of people, because 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians were not written to you or to me; they were written to a body of believers.

I want to go a little bit further, and I want to talk to you just for a second about you and your New Testament. Now then, I made a statement somewhere in Phoenix, Arizona, and some brother just really got upset. I mean, we're not talking about upset here, folks. We're talking really upset.

I'm going to confess to you my relationship to the New Testament. How's that? Okay? I'm 17 years old. I have a New Testament that just came out. I can put it in my pocket. It's called the Revised Standard Version. It was the first New Testament to come out in 400 years, except the King James, and I liked it. By the way, I've never studied the King James. I still don't know how to speak King James English, and my prayers don't do much for God because I've never prayed to God in it. I wish I still had it. I could pass it around to you. I underlined this, and I underlined that. I wrote little notes here and little notes there.

Let me tell you what I did. When I came to 1 Thessalonians, I read it; I didn't have the foggiest idea of what that book was about, but I can tell you this. As I read it, a verse went "Whoopee" to me, and I underlined it. Right? Then I went a little bit further, and I underlined that. Then I went a little bit further, and I underlined that one. Then I had about six or eight or ten underlines in 1 Thessalonians, and then I read the whole New Testament. It was all marked up. About every fifth verse, something made me go, "Whoopee." I had no idea what the other four verses were talking about.

Then I went to the seminary. It's interesting that when I got into a New Testament class with a man who would read Greek backward, he basically taught and preached to us. He preached on those same verses…the "Whoopee" verses and skipped the boring verses that didn't have any relevance to us whatsoever. So I came out of the seminary knowing the same thing I did when I went in at17 years old: look for the "Whoopee" verses and preach on them.

Are you following me? Can you understand? When you open the New Testament and read 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, aren't you kind of looking for the whoopee verses? The things that will bless you, comfort you, and help you. Sometimes you will read it, break down in tears, and the Lord will touch you. It is absolutely marvelous, but you're still just going through, looking at that thing. It's not much more, forgive me, but it's not much more than a Ouija board to you. He's looking for some guidance. It is as though the heavens are turned to brass, and one little thought can't get through to earth: 1 Corinthians was written to a body of believers. 1 Corinthians is written to a functioning body of believers who had no one running the place. Paul was writing to them because they were so messed up. After all, Paul was not there.

He finally went there and helped them a little, and all that help started more problems, so he had to write 2 Corinthians. But isn't it wonderful that Paul of Tarsus, who planted that church, could leave? Isn't it wonderful that they had problems? Isn't it wonderful that he could write them a letter? Isn't it wonderful he could go back to them? Isn't it wonderful that he left again, leaving those people to find their way together in Christ? Isn't it wonderful that Apollos, a real dingbat, comes in with his oratory and really gets all the Greeks stirred up? Isn't it wonderful that the church survived Apollos, the world's first reverend?

Isn't it wonderful that Peter, a Jew, came and preached there? And Peter…I just talked about the Greeks: Peter was a Jew, and there were Jews in Corinth. Isn't it wonderful that Peter could come and preach? Isn't it wonderful? All those Jews said, " No, it's miracles, it's miracles, it's miracles." And the Greeks said, " No, it's knowledge, it's knowledge, it's knowledge."

Do you ever remember reading, "Eye has not seen, or ear heard, and you think, isn't that wonderful? Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard…listen, he was boiling mad when he said that. The eye looking at miracles hasn't seen. Nor the ear heard Apollos preaching great things. Nor has it entered into the man the deep things of Christ. Not what you see in the way of miracles; it's not what you hear in the way of knowledge; *it is an indwelling Lord.*

A free-swinging bunch of people who are having the craziest time in the world in meetings, and Paul said, " It's all right if three people talk at the same time. Just let one talk, and if the other one wants to start talking, let the first one be quiet until the second one finishes." I have been in meetings. I have been in meetings where a brother would stand up to speak, and someone else would speak- a sister or a brother, either one. That person would get interrupted, and a third person would speak. These two were waiting. Someone else would interrupt that person, and that had to process all the way back to the first person—one of the most beautiful things in the world. I'm sure y'all did this last Sunday morning at church.

Now, I said I was going to bring a message on the three chapters that most affect the Christian life. Believe it or not, I graduated from seminary before I found out that Romans 6, 7, and 8 were THE passages in the New Testament. Now, I know you're all thinking I'm about to really tell you something. You all kind of get in your Bibles. You've shifted a little bit. Here it comes. Yes, here it comes; I'm going to give it to you right between the eyes: the book of Romans was not written to you. Romans 6, 7, and 8, the great passages, and you can be there with it forever; Romans 6, 7, and 8 were not written for you, and the relevance of Romans 6 will help you only momentarily as an individual.

Romans 6 was written to a body of people.

Romans 7 was written to an individual. It's I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, all the way through. It describes each of us as individuals as we journey toward Romans 8, which isn't relevant to your life except for a short time because it is written to a body of people. I don't know if you've ever heard about Romans 6. Let me tell you, for the people who know the Word of God, Romans 6 is really powerful. They can teach it to you, and I'll tell you again: I don't care who that man is, where he is, what radio station he's on, or what book he's written…He has missed the point.

As he opens Romans 6 and says to you, "You should reckon yourself dead; dead to sin and alive to Jesus Christ." And it is true, my dear brother, and it is true, my dear sister, that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, you were in Him, and you died. I mean you died dead, and sin came out with its little lantern looking for you, and sin could not find you. That's true. In God's eyes, you are dead.

Now…you rose from the dead, and sin can't find you, but the strangest thing in the world is that when Paul went to write this passage, and he said, "As sin may no longer have dominion over you," he also said, "The law would no longer have dominion over you." He put the law in the same category as sin. Which is shocking; we're talking about the law of Moses. You want to hear something else really strange? He was writing the Gentiles, and yet he brings up the law.

Let me show you something, folks. Something that everybody forgot. It's called Romans 16. Have you ever read it? You don't have to look. You see that? That's who this book was written to. Their names are there. They are a church. They're a body of believers. You know where they're meeting? They're meeting in Priscilla's home, in the southern part of Rome, Italy, right near the Tiber River. That's where they're meeting, and this was written to a body of people. It wasn't written to you…and Romans 6 is irrelevant to you long-term.

It is glorious that I have been crucified with Christ, but Paul never said once that you have been crucified with Christ or that you've been raised from the dead. I'm going to repeat that slowly so that you can be shocked. Paul never said to you that you have been crucified with Christ, and you have risen from the dead with Him, and therefore sin no longer has dominion over you. Let me tell you something. I've been through Romans 6, and I can jump up and down and thank God; I hang a lot of my life on Romans 6, but I missed a point as a young man, just about the time I left the organized church. You want to know what the point is? It's as simple as it can be.

Nobody ever told you this. At least 41 times, Paul addresses Romans 6 in the plural. I'm going to

repeat that. Romans 6 has 23 verses; there are an absolute minimum of 41 references that are plural. In fact, that's being strict. Except for four references, virtually every reference in there is a "we" or a "you plural." Do you understand what I am saying? Let me repeat myself. Romans 6 is irrelevant to you as an individual on the long haul. Romans 6 applies to a body of believers for the long haul…and only a body of believers.

It is not you who reckons yourself dead. It is not you, the individual…yes, it is, but no, it isn't…who has been crucified with Christ and has died to sin and has risen from the grave and is dead not only to sin but to the law. This was written for an entire whole…please hear this…for an entire body of believers meeting together in Priscilla's home to say, "We have been crucified with Christ. We have died to sin. We have risen with Him. Sin no longer has enslaved us, and we are dead to the law."

I'm going to read just a little of it. If you've got a Bible, you might want to follow this. *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase? May it never be. How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not*…this is going to be a plural. You'll understand why…*do you* (plural) *not know that all of us have been immersed into Christ, having been immersed into His death, that we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life if we have been made one with Jesus Christ in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of the Lord's resurrection.* That's relevant only to a body of people.

The Christian life does not make sense outside of the church of Christ. It is an unworkable, incapable product that cannot work in our lives long-term except within a living, breathing experience of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ…and anything else is cheap.

Now, the world I live in is very, very simple. It's just as simple as it can get. A group of Christians gets together, gets to know the Lord, and has a lot of problems and a lot of glory. Whatever they're in, if they've got one foot in a glue pot or two feet in a glue pot, they look down, and they know the pot's theirs and the glue is theirs. They've got in that mess all on their own. By the way, the foot is in there. It's too. It's a very simple world, but there is something so simple to watch and so beautiful.

Here comes the Christian in the door. This is the brother who's been to the Bible classes, and he's tried everything. He has been told what he is supposed to do as a Christian. I'm going to come back to that in a second. Here he comes; he's tied up in knots. I'm supposed to pray, read my Bible, and tithe…what else am I supposed to do? What do y'all want me to do? What's our standard around here? Please tell me, because I really want to know the Lord better.

Six months later, he doesn't even remember being tied up in locks like that. He's come to peace with the fact that he is a ruinous disaster who has failed to be and live the Christian life, always has, is, and always will. Utterly, totally failed at being a Christian. Now, do you know what taught him that? You did - all the rest of those people gathered. One of the most liberating things in this world is becoming part of a group of Christians and finding out that nobody is doing any better than you—absolutely nobody. Man, I'll tell you, that is the most relaxing thing in this world. Hallelujah and praise the Lord. *Free from the law, oh happy condition. Jesus has bled, and there is remission…free from the law, free from the law.*

Every time anyone stands up and preaches, "This is what you ought to do as a Christian," proves two things: one, he's dumb to say it, and two, you're dumb to believe it. Let me give you the most liberating sentence you'll ever hear as long as you live: you cannot live the Christian life. The very concept of the law is that you're capable of obeying it, and that's the biggest slip in the human mind's mental gyrations.

The law, today, is more or less irrelevant to the Christian, but boy, the Christian standard is alive and breathing in your life. That you, the individual, are to reckon yourself dead, are to go to church, are to tithe, are to do this, are to do that, are to do this…and that's all you've got. Why don't you reckon yourself dead to the Christian standard? If the first-century Gentiles can reckon themselves dead to the laws…613 of those things? I never can remember. 613 laws. Boy, we Christians have got them beat by a thousand at least. Brother and sister, dear Christian, please, everything in me is imploring you to understand. *We* reckon *ourselves* dead, that *we* were plunged into Christ, that *we* have risen from the dead, that *we* walk in the newness of life, that *we* no longer have sin dominating us, that *we* are no longer slaves.

Every use of the word slave in Romans 6 is plural. You yourselves know that you were slaves…not a slave. It is a corporate enslavement; it is a corporate liberation, and it is long-term if it is within the body of Christ. 41 references that are plural. Maybe four that are singular. Whatever riches are in the depths of Romans 6 belong only to a girl of whom you are a member. Thank God that's not Romans 7. Romans 7 is perfect. Romans 7 is me trying to be a Christian. I want to read a little of Romans 7 to you. Let's see if you can hear it a little differently.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters…this is not, "Do you not know, Joe or George?" Brothers and sisters in Romans 16, read their names, meeting in Priscilla's home. Priscilla went to Rome at Paul's request so that there would be a gathering of a body of believers in Rome because all the Christians, they had been Jews, had been pushed out by Claudius. Claudius was dead; Nero had just taken the

throne. He was 16 years old. The city of Rome had opened again, and Paul wanted to make sure it wasn't a Jewish church that started in a Gentile city. He asked Priscilla to go there. He asked the 29 people listed in Romans 16 to go there, and they began meeting in her home.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters, who are meeting in Priscilla's? For I speak to those who know the Christian standard, that the Christian standard has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives. I'm going to skip down here. *The Christian standard is over you. If the Christian standard dies, you're free to marry another." If the Christian standard dies, you're free to marry Jesus Christ.* Now, which do you want to do? Live the Christian life or be married to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Gene, if we remove all law in the Christian life, will we not all be going out here whooping and hollering and doing all sorts of sinful things? Well, if you were a Baptist preacher from the stripe I came from, you'd sure believe that. Brothers and sisters, there's nothing on earth I'd rather do than to stand up in front of you and say you're free from every law and every standard that exists on this earth today. You're free to do anything on earth you want to.

Okay, then what shall we say? That you're free, except in these three areas? If you do them, you're going to go to hell? If there's one thing left that we're not freed from, you do that one, and you're in big trouble. You are free from all standards and all law. Paul said that very clearly in Romans, and he said it in Galatians, and I know some of you are about to have a duck.

Gene, you really can't be serious. Hey, saint, get free. What do you think the word saint means? It means holy one. You are a holy one, and there is nothing like getting free from the demands that have been placed upon you as a Christian, and free from thinking that you can live the Christian life because you cannot live the Christian life. That's the territory of Jesus Christ and Him alone. That is the territory of glory, the glory of the Son of God, and you will not be given the privilege of becoming an arrogant Christian because you succeeded in living the Christian life. God doesn't allow it.

You are free from all law, and the freer you get is not more sin that you will do; the freer you get, the more you'll fall in love with your Lord. You know another reason why? It's because in the body of Christ, it's different. As an individual trying to live the Christian life, it is exactly the same thing as a Jew trying to live the Jewish commandments. All you can think about is all those things you ought to be doing, all the things you can't do or shouldn't do. That's all you think about.

I've given this illustration; I'll give it the rest of my life. You're walking down Fifth Avenue, all those beautiful glass windows. You look in and see sable and mink coats. You come to one window that

says, “Do not throw a brick through this window.” Now, Fifth Avenue is five blocks long; there are several hundred window panes. Which one’s the most apt to get a brick thrown through the door?

Brothers and sisters, the longer you learn the things you ought to do as a Christian, that you must do, the more miserable you will be. If you have not learned that, then you have not learned the first step in Christian humility. The very thought that you could live the Christian life — that’s divine territory, my dear friend. His alone. Then what shall we do? We shall fall in love with Him, and we shall be free. That’s Romans 7. It’s I, I, I, and if you would, tonight or tomorrow, sit down and reread that whole thing. Every time it says law, say Christian standard, and you will discover why you’re having some of the struggles you have.

I have just covered two passages, two chapters. We’ll cover chapter 8 tomorrow. You may not know it, but we just covered two of the three chapters we talked about. If there’s anything on earth I would have you understand, it is this: You might as well bail out of being a Christian if you think that doing it this way is the way we do it in the 21st century. Gosh, dog, another whole century to mess up.

Sit in that pew, and every time the pastor says to love somebody or to pray or to read your Bible or whatever, you sit there and say, “I can’t do that. My Lord can do that. I am free from that.” “But Gene, then it won’t get done.” Oh yeah. You have no idea what it’s like when you end up with an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ; what that man can do. And another thing is, you will also lower your standards of what you are and how great you are and who you are in the body of Christ because of all these other pitiful Christian infidels you’re running around with.

The most beautiful thing in this world is being able to go (deep sigh), and it comes back to these simple things: we love one another… but the responsibility of loving one another does not exist. It is a spontaneous result of having fallen in love with Christ. You can’t help but hug everybody and care for each other within the body of Christ. All of this other stuff is a tensile, artificial contraption to fulfill some verses. Brothers and sisters, we find fulfillment only within the body of Christ. We find fulfillment within the body of Christ. We find relevance to the Christian life…it isn’t anywhere else.

In a few days, I’m going to start doing something that, until you get to book number four of the First Century Diaries, you won’t understand. I’m about to do something Paul did in Ephesus. I’ve waited this long to resolve the greatest riddle of the problems we face as Christians. You may not understand it, but I’ll tell you anyway. When I was 30, it became very evident to me; I didn’t say the Lord showed that; I said it became very relevant to me that we’re not going to have church life on this earth until we

have workers. And we cannot have workers until they grow up in church life.

Now you've got a chicken-and-egg situation here that's unbreakable. I just decided that, by George, that's got to be broken. Someday there's got to be some men trained to be workers who grew up in church life just like everybody else did. That means they're exposed. They're known; not like the ministry - they're known. It means they've bitten the bullet; they knew the cross; they've been crucified. They've been screaming. They've dragged up that hill many times. It means they know church life, that what they're preaching is not a theory. Not a theory, nor a revelation they got yesterday, but a lifelong experience.

Paul of Tarsus went to Ephesus and took with him eight men, all of whom had grown up in church life. He lived with them three years, exactly like Jesus Christ lived with the twelve for three years. He trained them and sent them out as Gentile church planters, just as Jesus sent out the twelve Jewish church planters. There has never been much church life on this earth. Never. And we're not going to spin our wheels going to your little town. Yes, you have three choices. The choices were mentioned in the other question here.

What can you do? Well, you can start your own group if you want to. I'm going to tell you what I think about you. I think you're an arrogant, conceited screwball to think that you are going to start a group of people. I think, brother, all you want to do is make life miserable for about 20 or 30 people meeting in your hall now and teach them the Bible and teach them the Christian law and bang them over the head with a verse if they don't do what you think they ought to do. If you succeed, which I hope you don't, all you'll do is wreck about 20 or 30 adult Christian lives.

We need men who have grown up in the church. Trust me, those are stomped people. They've lived in reality. They know there's not a whole lot they can do when they've worked all day and come to a meeting. They probably won't make many demands, though; that's my point. A verse in Acts indicates that many Christians in the church of Jerusalem came from other towns to be with the twelve. I hate to tell you this, but we're not going to have many workers on this earth. Not the kind that are safe.

You want church life? All it costs you is an arm and a leg and the rest of your life. All it will cost you is about four nails through your feet and hands, and a crown of thorns pressed down on your brow. All it takes is your funeral…and your resurrection. It only takes exposure that will cause you to run down the street screaming, "I didn't want anybody to know this about me." And yes, you'll be a little screwy if you actually get with a group of Christians to do such a crazy thing, but if church life beats in your

heart, then you will have done nothing noble to have moved.

You have these choices. You got the same choices as the people in the wilderness. You can go back to the flesh pots of Egypt. You can stay in the wilderness and die and let the bones bleach your body. I guess you've got another one: you can join some religious group, where you will be very active and excited for four years, but it won't help you for the long haul. They don't have it to give.

I'm going to tell you something. Nowhere except in the body of Christ does it have it to give for a lifetime. That's the only place where the long haul exists. You can head for God's eternal purpose - not some cheap thing that's being peddled - His eternal purpose, which is nothing less than oneness with His bride: to know Him as a people, to know Him, one with Him.

Sometimes that means giving up your job. I don't know of any of the churches I work with, but most of the people had to quit their jobs, sell their homes, and move there. I don't think you ought to do that. I think you ought to go to church every Sunday morning. I think you ought to put $5 in their collection plate when it comes by. I'll tell you something else I think you ought to do: get a sponge pad you can put inside your trousers so you can sit down more comfortably.

I think you ought to go to a Baptist church; that's the worst kind there is. (laughter) They will preach salvation to you every day of your life. They have 5,000 ways to preach a sermon on getting saved. That's all they know. Take John 3:16 away from them, and they wouldn't be able to open their mouths. That's what I think you ought to do…unless the Lord Jesus Christ Himself gives you a revelation that it's a "we" and not a "me," and that His church is central in His life; not yours, but His. And you're not going there to get; you're going there to fulfill.

We're going to dismiss this meeting, and you're going to think about this. Tomorrow morning, we're going to look at the greatest chapter in the epistles, Romans 8. And we're going to see if Romans 8 is for you. "All things work together for *an individual* who loves God." Those is plural, and it was written to a church.