I am a Christian outside the institutional church, and I have been since nineteen sixty-three. We are rare, so you don't really know what to think of us, whether we're fish or fowl. You know, generally speaking, they're only heretics and people in the institutional church, but historically, for the last seventeen hundred years, there have always been small groups of Christians who aren't part of the institutional church. About a hundred years after we die, we get quoted, embraced, accepted as the godly brothers who, you know, way back there and all that stuff. This has been going on for seventeen hundred years,

What I'm going to do tonight has purpose. So let me try to explain something to you. The purpose of this conference really is to get you to leave the institutional church. To come into something that is utterly, totally, radically new beyond your imagination. Unlike anything you've ever seen, heard, or dreamed of. Now, there are Christians here in this room whom I work with, or these other brothers work with, and you ought to seek them out and ask them what it looks like. It's just not like anything you've ever seen or heard of before.

There are churches that have no clergy and have no designated leaders, and yet they are rip snorters, and they are people just exactly like you. They have no minister and no one leading them, but that's not all. If you try to imagine one of their meetings, you'll miss. For one thing, no two meetings are alike, and sometimes you can come into a meeting and can't even identify it as what you would call a church meeting. It would just not fit in there at all. We will live, we will witness, we will die, but in every generation there is always a light to the Church of Jesus Christ as she ought to be.

I want to talk to you as a layman about why you're in the mess you're in, and the mess we are all in, and help you to realize that it's all right to depart from where you are. I'm giving you permission tonight to leave something you want to leave anyway.

The subject under discussion is Understanding the Mind of the Clergy. I think I'll repeat that. Understanding the Mind of the Clergy. So we'll just get started here. I don't want to sound negative toward clergy, and you might think I really am, but I'm trying not to. Now let me explain to you why I'm not. First, I am an ordained Southern Baptist minister and a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. I hold a bachelor's degree in theology and a master's degree in theology from Southwestern, but my first year of seminary, my postgraduate, post-college work, was done in Europe. In fact, it was done in Zurich, at the very center of the Anabaptist movement, the Re-baptizers.

I suppose that once you pull out of the organized church, you really do want to throw some stones. There is that period of time when you get free, and you get your eyes open, and you realize how short-changed you've been, and I think we've all passed through that who've gone out. Every once in a while, I'll speak to you as a clergyman, but I'm not. I gave it up for Lent. I want you to understand that we got saved and we got called, and we just went into the system and we never questioned it. We weren't evil; we just did what was being done, and we didn't question it.

While I'm speaking of that, I have never met a man who professes to be called by God to the ministry and, on the day he was called, felt he was being called to be a pastor. Would you like me to run that by again? I have never met a man who, on the day he felt called to the ministry, felt that he was called to be a pastor. Not a one…and yet we became pastors. I seriously doubt that God, here we go, you ready, ever called anybody to be a pastor.

Now, here's our problem. Things we do without thinking, and keep in mind the minister. Let me show you some things that we do and never question; it never crosses our minds. Here's one right here. (grabs his collar) What is that doing around my neck? You don't know, and I don't know. It serves no utilitarian purpose. Okay, I want to show you a shoe. There's a heel right there. Nobody knows why they put heels on shoes. It throws your back out and gives you a backache for the rest of your life, but it's there.

You don't know, when you put on a suit, why you got all those buttons right there. What earthly good is a tie? But you put on a tie, and you have a collar, and those buttons are right there. Your whole life is surrounded by things you take for granted and do, and you never question them, and so does the minister.

Why do we wear Northern European clothes instead of Southern European clothes? When this conference is over, I'll go home, head straight to my closet, put on a bathrobe, and get really comfortable. Well, that was Southern European clothing for a thousand years, but somewhere in the world of fashion we switched to Northern European clothing and fashioned our clothing after animal skin. Do you know that? Our trouser legs and our shirt sleeves. We'd be a lot more comfortable if we wore what the Romans wore, but we do it without questioning.

So anything I say tonight, I don't want you to be too hard on the clergy. Let me be too hard on the clergy. We don't know. We ministers, we don't know. We fall into this. Nonetheless, I want you to understand how the clergy's mind works. First, I've already said, we feel like we have been called to the ministry, but we haven't been called to the pastorate, and I doubt that any of us ever have or ever will be. It is the worst job in the world. It is a living hell because it's against nature.

I want to give an illustration now, and I'll give one later about the castle priest.

Now, you've never heard of the castle priest, but every village and town in Europe, every large town, I should say, in Europe, had a castle. Then people lived around it, and there were two priests in the town: one who handled the church, and one who handled the chapel in the castle. Now, this man in the castle was a victim of that castle. He was a priest. He wasn't like the one in the town, though both were more or less caught in it. They had to do all the rituals Rome told them to, but they also had to make everybody in the castle feel good.

They dared not speak out against the sins in the castle because people would stop feeling good, and they would be in all sorts of trouble. We still basically have the castle priest. This is our job. We both are the leaders of the church, and yet we have absolutely no power to change anything. We never even realize or think about that. When I say we, I'm not talking about me, but it fits.

Now, that's just one little thing I want you to understand. The next one is: do you understand that everyone in this room who is a Christian is a Reformed Catholic? Do you know that? All of us, and I'm a Baptist minister, are Reformed Catholics. We are the Catholic Church Reformed. We dropped a lot of stuff, but basically, we're still a Reformed church. Unfortunately, that reform has ended, and people have stopped reforming it. The Episcopalian is a Reformed Catholic; the Presbyterian is a Reformed Catholic; the Baptist is a Reformed Catholic, but he would never admit it. The Pentecostal is a Reformed Baptist, who is a Reformed Catholic. We are Catholics that have been slightly changed.

Now, if you listen to some people, you'll hear them say that we here today, living on this earth right now, owe our lineage to the Jewish synagogue; that's where the church came from. That's not true. We have priests today; they had priests then. All of the paraphernalia, none of it is Hebraic, none of it is Jewish, none of it is Old Testament. Every bit of everything that the Catholic Church was, and we're Reformed Catholics, came straight out of Southern Europe's heathenism. If you find the word priest among us, it comes from the priest in the heathen temples of Italy.

If there's anything else that we have that we use, such as a choir, yes, there were choirs mentioned in the Psalms, but we didn't get them from there. We got our choirs from the heathen temple. That's where we got them. We may not like that, but it is true.

This is what it takes to have a religion. It exists in almost every part of the world. We have reformed this. Would you like to hear this? This will be interesting. This is the origin of our ministers' minds. This is where it came from. Now you might say, "Gene, surely after seventeen hundred years, none of this is still alive today." Folks, the superstitions that we have today are two

thousand years old. There are things we do, such as burning a bonfire on Halloween night. When you have trick-or-treat, you are just dealing in the worst kind of heathenism. There are things in our minds that are still there from our ancestors. This stuff gets passed on to us like mother's milk.

Okay, here's what it takes to have a religion. It takes a language no one can understand. That's one. It takes a ritual that is supervised by the priest. It takes priests. It takes a temple. It takes a costume, and it takes vestal virgins. Now, the Roman Catholics have every one of those. The Episcopalians, who are Catholics who can't speak Latin, have all of these but the Vestal Virgins, but even that they have had in their time. Do you understand that religions have to have a mystery language, and I would add to that a certain mystery about them? I would also say that they rule by fear, and the layman doesn't function.

Now, in the United States of America, there are only two places that you can find all of those at work. One of them is in the Roman Catholic Church; all of them. We reformed the Catholic Church and got rid of the vessel virgins. There was one other thing that the Roman Catholics had: state money, and they still have it in most of Europe. Do you understand what I mean by state money? The government gives them money.

We have gotten rid of the Vestal Virgins. Is there anything else that we have gotten rid of? Can you think of anything that we, Reformed Catholics, have gotten rid of? Think about it. Look at the list. Yes, we've gotten rid of state support. The United States doesn't support churches. That's why preachers talk about money all the time. If you go to Iceland, they never mention money because the state pays them.

The mass? We have it every Sunday morning. Let me talk about that. For fifteen hundred years, there was only one way in this world to have a church meeting. Do you understand that? It never varied, not one word, still hasn't. For five hundred years, the Protestants have had a Sunday morning church service, and it hasn't varied for five hundred years. The slightest variation; for the next five hundred or thousand years, every time you go to a Protestant church, you're gonna be basically going to the same ritual. It doesn't change. It hasn't changed; it can't change; it won't change.

The Pentecostals couldn't change it. Challenge me if you will. Pentecostals today have the same church service as Baptists do. They smile a little bit more and make a little bit more noise. Same ritual. It is the same ritual. There is no difference in the expression of the Church of Jesus Christ, and there ought to be in every city where we gather. It ought to be different. It ought to be different because it should come from God's people. The ritual has been placed upon us. It hasn't been an

organic expression coming from the grassroots. We are totally in control of your life when you walk through that door. You are a part of a ritual.

Do we have a mysterious language? You only have to go to a seminary and sit around for five minutes, and we talk in languages you don't understand. We're as bad or worse than doctors, but we lower ourselves to talk to you in ordinary English. Do we have a costume? What, eighty or eighty-five percent of the ministers in America have a coat and tie on anytime you see them anywhere. Some ministers have never been seen without a coat and tie except by their wife, not even their children.

Yes, we have a costume, we have a language, but that's not all. I want to talk to you about the fear element. The heathen priest; let's talk about Rome. We could talk about Greece; we could talk about Rome; it doesn't matter, but Rome's easy to imagine. Some of you have been there. Push it back two thousand years. The people were terrified of those folks because they had the powers of the gods in their hands, and they would threaten them. Now I know that you've never been threatened by your minister, have you? We have the power of God on our tongue and the power of a book in our hands; it's black, and you are afraid of us. I'm talking to you about the mind of the clergy, a mind that shouldn't exist in the Christian family.

Well, what else was on that list? We have temples. What else do we have? I'm gonna tell you something else we've got that all of these folks have got. We have Piety. To back up your fear of us, we have piety. I'm going to take dead aim at piety here in a few minutes, but I just wanted to tell you that we have piety, and also we have a really weird way of talking, too, and it's even weirder when we pray. We are “other than” you. We are separate from you. You are unclean.

One thing is certain; we will not and cannot reform “reformed” Catholicism. There isn't a minister in this world today who can change the present situation. It can't be done. Now there are several levels of that. One of them is that people won't let him. The second one is that he doesn't want to, or he can't because his people won't let him. Another one is that he wouldn't know what to do if he were told to change. He would simply invent a slight variation of what he already has. We, ministers, aren't equipped to change, and to end the reform of the Catholic Church.

We have neither the imagination nor the equipment, and most of us have neither the desire. Every once in a while, a preacher will come along who will try, and he usually ends up with a nervous breakdown, or he hurts God's people in terrible ways trying to get them to change. But one thing is certain: if he does try to change, there is one sword he will reach for that absolutely can't work. He reaches for the power of preaching, and preaching cannot change the situation.

Now, let me tell you something else about us. All this gets masked, M-A-S-K-E-D, by us because we cannot see what we cannot see; we cannot realize what we cannot change; we have a blindfold over our eyes, and that is the boldness with which we preach. That blinds us to our sterility. Does that make any sense to you at all? Well, I tell you, when you have gotten up there and preached for ninety minutes, and you're walking on your trouser legs. You're not gonna be able to speak a whisper before Thursday, and you are sweating all over and the water's spilling out over your shoes, and you go home, and you say, "Honey, I preached the word today, and I was bold."

No, you weren't, because you have no power to change what's going on. They will still be sitting in that chair next week, and you will still be preaching in that pulpit the next week. One of the first thoughts I ever had that brought me out of the organized church was that there were no 747s then, but there were 707s, and I just had this little imaginative thought in my mind. Here is this 707 with all these powerful engines that can do so many marvelous things, but the wheels are all set in concrete, and we pull those throttles back, and it roars and roars and roars, but it doesn't go. If it were to break out of that concrete, we would discover it had square wheels.

It can't go anywhere, saints. There's a pulpit, and there are pews, and that's the way it was, and that's the way it is, and that's the way it's going to be forever and forever, world without end. You don't reform reformation; you can't change the situation. You have to start over…totally, and I mean in ways so radical they boggle the imagination. I'm not speaking theologically; I am speaking about practice, because our practice is utterly, totally wrong. We're not gonna get there from here. It's just that simple.

Do you know what we are least qualified to do in this whole world? We don't have any idea how to get you to function. And you know something else? You don't know how to function either. There is nothing more terrifying than putting about twenty people in a room and saying goodbye. They all look at one another; the first thing they hope and pray is that somebody'll take leadership real fast. In my world, we don't let anybody take leadership. You're gonna sit there until you function.

It's gonna be your church. It's not gonna be a pastor's church; it's not gonna be a clergyman's church. If you were to take the average minister and ask him to get his people to function, you realize he can only think in terms of a pulpit, pews, and chairs facing him. If he tried, it would end in an unmitigated disaster.

I was in one of America's best-known evangelical churches. I was speaking, and the pastor said to me, "Gene, let's have one of those kinds of meetings you're talking about." So, I was there for three or four days, and I said, "Fine, that's great." So on Sunday night and Monday night, I prepared, and

Tuesday night and Wednesday night, I prepared the church to have meetings all over their building, but not in the auditorium, in which there would be no clergyman present, and the people would function. I gave them everything they needed. Now, whether it was gonna work or not was a different matter; we'll never know. On Sunday night, in different rooms with twenty or thirty people in rooms - this is a big church building - about ten minutes before the brothers and sisters, the laymen, you, before they went into that room, the pastor and his entire staff panicked. He sent into those rooms to control the meetings, and this is one of the most innovative ministers, probably of the century. No capacity. No capacity in what way? No capacity to trust you.

Well, let's have some ministers who do - it will never happen. We are reformed Catholics. We might get called and voted in, and we might later get voted out, but while we are there, we are in charge, but we won't and can't change what is going on. It simply can't be done. Give it up. Over and over again, we are asked, "Why don't you give this to the Church of Jesus Christ?" Because the wine would spill out; that's why. The Church of Jesus Christ today, in its institutionalized form, already has more accessories hooked onto it than it needs, and it gets some new ones every year as fads come and go.

You know, or maybe you don't know, let me tell you something you don't know. There is virtually no minister who has ever lived, an evangelical minister, but at some time in his ministry, he has doubted that there was such a thing in the New Testament as a pastor. He never told you that, but he did me. We would be hard-pressed to find any evidence of the so-called pastor in the first century. The word pastor - the word pastor, not the function that we know today, but the word pastor - appears once.

Now, play a little game with me for a minute. There's also another person mentioned in Paul's epistles; you may not even know this. He's only mentioned once. One time, no other reference to him. Can you let me see if anybody in this room might…let's try two or three people making guesses here. Elder? Seventeen times…that are Christian. Deacon, four or five times. Evangelists? Only in that Paul said, "Do the work of an evangelist" two times. Teacher? Yes, only once, but the word “to teach” does come up. I've got one that is as naked and as isolated as “pastor” is. Not an apostle - there are probably several hundred references to him. Okay, I got you: an administrator.

Now then, the pastor is a quirk, an accident of something Martin Luther did. He (the modern pastor) starts with Martin Luther. One word, pastor; one word, administrator. Let's say it didn't happen – pastor - and let's say that somebody during those fluid days of the Reformation got up and preached that we had to have administrators, and it was in the Bible right here. Let's say it was

taken up, spread, and became the dominant center of the Christian faith instead of the pastor. Think of all the things we could say about it: Paul was an administrator, Peter was an administrator, and we have to have administrators; we could build a “god” of administrators with no more evidence than we have for a pastor. It was simply a quirk that moved us toward the pastor. You've got him in a verse once, but you can't find him in the story.

Do you understand the difference between an abstract verse with a teaching and the elongated story? Where's the pastor in Ephesus? Where's the pastor in Corinth? Where's the pastor in Jerusalem? Where's the pastor in Antioch? Where is somebody that stands up and preaches? Where is somewhere that everybody sits and listens to him? He doesn't exist. He doesn't exist anywhere in the story.

Next, what frightens me the most, and this has become the twist of the Protestant mind, just like the Pope is the twist of the Roman Catholic mind. The Roman Catholics can find the Pope all over the New Testament. We can find the pastor all over the New Testament. Do you know how we do it? We do it, and it is a twist. We do it by taking a verse and applying it to the modern situation, instead of letting us go and find it in the story as it is and changing the present expression.

All over the world, you pass chapels and churches and say, "This is a New Testament church. Reverend Pastor John Jones." He's not in the story; you can't find him, and one of these days I'm gonna produce a book, and I'm going to say, because we never know what inflation or deflation's gonna do to the dollar, I'll give you one gold coin if you can find a book in the English language in the entire book.

Now remember, there are well over a million Christian books written in this century in theological libraries, and the largest section is the pastor. Do you know that? The pastoral ministry dominates any Christian library in any seminary in the English-speaking world. If you don't know that, you know it now. To my knowledge, there has never been any book written that is an entire book explaining the scriptural foundations for a pastor. I took Southwestern Seminary apart trying to find it. I found a paragraph in a chapter, and that's all I found.

Now then, folks, that leaves you in a quandary. We are embedded in the Christian faith, us ministers, and we are in some ways not only blind, but we blind you to what it was really like back in those years. What are you gonna do about it? I got money in my clothes that says a large number of you are gonna be sitting in church next Sunday listening to a pastor preach. And that's my next point, and that is, it's scary to step out into this world of an organic Christian faith. Are you gonna continue to be a Catholic who gave up Vestal Virgins and state money?

Okay, now I'm going to enlighten you some more. I want to talk to you about what it's like to be in seminary. Lands alive, I walked into that place, and everybody was doing this…so I learned to do this (walking around with their hands folded.) And I learned this - I learned to do this. Boy, you can't imagine what's in there, did you? I learned to do this (walk around with a Bible under his arm). And I learned to do this (talk in a deep voice). And I learned to be pious, and I learned to pray piously…and heavenly. I did. I really did.

Boy, I tell you, it was hard sitting there the first year. Then I finally got sucked into this. You sit up there on Seminary Hill for all this time, and pretty soon you, you've changed, and you're doing this stuff. We took no class that made us pious; we learned it from one another. There was no course, sermon, or lecture that made us spiritual. No lecture, no course we took, no sermon we heard, no book we read gave us any insight into knowing Jesus Christ intimately. None.

That's true of every seminary on this planet, and the reason is simple: our professors didn't know, and their professors didn't know, and their professors didn't know, and the people in the eighteen hundreds didn't know, and the seventeen hundreds didn't know, and the sixteen hundreds didn't know, and the fifteen hundreds sure enough didn't know because they were living in the afterglow of the dark ages, and the only thing that preceded them were the Roman Catholics, and they didn't know and don't know anything about the spiritual depths of the Lord Jesus Christ. None. Period. That's all. Now you might say, "But Gene, my pastor is so spiritual." To which I give one wonderful Texas answer. Bull. Oh, but Gene, he's so holy. Bull. I am one of those people. It was never taught to us. Never. We didn't get to know our Lord well, and the reason is that it doesn't exist in the Christian family.

After the third century, something called Neoplatonism grew in the Roman Catholic Church, which eventually ended up with the monks and a few really devout laymen and laywomen. And it is in the teachings and the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church that only a few people - and they use a term - can know union with God, but only after a lifetime of seeking and much suffering, which is given to them by God as a grace. So there was a small bunch of people in the Roman Catholic Church who spent hours, days, weeks, months chanting and living before the Lord, trying to come into something Neoplatonists called “union with God.” There was contemplation, meditation, and union. Those are the three major steps.

Martin Luther said, "We, the Lutherans, will never allow Roman Catholic mysticism within our midst." Listen to what he said. *The intellect is the seat of the spirit*. When I was in seminary, we were told, over and over again, "You are here because you must be able to give a rational view of

your faith." I was taught intellectually. Then, wherein, Gene, did you get so inspired in Southwestern Seminary? I got inspired in the same place you did, and I got my spiritual nourishment in the same place you did: from some red-hot sermons.

I am prepared to venture this out: even though you may pray every day and read your Bible every day, I am prepared to say most of us don't have a personal, living, breathing, dynamic fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of us get our inspiration from sermons, from men like me.

I don't think you ever heard that. And speaking in tongues, for the Pentecostals. God loves them; they're like blondes; they have more fun. And you went to a conference, and you were there a week, and the preachers preached, and they perspired, and they preached glory. You walked out of there ten feet above the ground, came home and said, "My life has been changed," and it was because you got inspired by sermons; it wasn't because you had a living relationship with your Lord.

That's the situation in the “Reformed Catholic Church,” and that's the way it's gonna stay. We aren't prepared to teach you how to know the Lord. We, ministers, cannot teach you how to know the Lord. We can threaten you with prayer - you ought to pray every day. You gotta read your Bible every day, and you better go to church every Sunday, because don't do what some do, the forsaking of this, the, the, whatever. If it weren't for that verse in Hebrews, I think every church in the world would probably shut down…and you have been threatened with this all your life.

Well, I got one that will counteract it: when you come together, let everyone have a song or a prayer, and let you stand up and speak one at a time instead of three or four of you at a time. Now put that in a church gathering. That's your Magna Carta, your right to function as a member of the body of Christ in the gatherings, and there are no ministers who know how to do that because they are in charge, and your pews are just like they are tonight, standing up here looking at me.

Okay, that's enough. I have a point. We need a revolution, and that revolution has got to be Jesus Christ. We, as ministers, weren't founded on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ when we were in seminary. In fact, the truth is that we were mostly centered on sermons and inspirational messages. That's what kept us going through three or four years. And because we don't know Jesus Christ well, Christ can't be centered in our meetings and in our messages. Therefore, we get off on every kind of subject on this earth…and you get browbeaten.

I'm not sure you understand what I'm saying. You have to be there to understand, but I do want you to know something. You can have access to Jesus Christ in a way that we Reformed Catholics have never dreamed of, that makes speaking in tongues look like toothpaste. If Christ isn't the center,

then boy, do we get off on everything imaginable, and therefore we can't change. If Christ isn't the center and engine of what we're doing, we'll always end up being reform Catholics.

I want to tell you something else. I want to tell you what we think of laymen. Are you ready? What do we ministers think of laymen? Well, first of all, we think we can't leave you alone; you will very definitely do something wrong. We think that our charge on this earth is to get you to sin less. Chew on that a minute. I think that's funny…that I am here on this earth to get you to sin less. That is hilarious.

You remember my mentioning the Castle Priest? Three or four things - one of them is that we're afraid of you. We're afraid of you because you can vote us out. We know you pay our salary, and that makes us cowards from the beginning, even if we don't realize it. We think you have to be constantly supervised. We project upon you that we know things you don't know…and that you cannot know. We can never do anything but see ourselves as leading you. We can't think in terms of working ourselves out of a job. It's not within us to do so. Literally, our task *is* to work ourselves out of a job, and there should be no distinction between layman and minister, and there really isn't.

I'm gonna put you in this boat with the clergyman. We establish the same relationship with one another as the castle priest has with the people who live in the castle. You understand the word symbiotic, don't you? A symbiotic relationship? Is it the bird and the ox that we always have as a symbiotic relationship? The bird sits on top of the cow and eats the flies. That's what he gets out of it. What does the cow get out of it? No flies, so they depend on one another.

Because we can't know the Lord well…and I'm including these worldwide movements to pray. Nothing in this world is more boring than praying, but we're supposed to pray. I doubt we're supposed to pray the way we pray. Folks, I am speaking of a radical relationship to your Lord, intimate and personal and dynamic, and it's yours.

Don't you like to meet a really godly minister who brings glorious messages? Then, don't you really want to get to know him? You've never met anybody as pious as he is, and you know you can never be the Christian he is, right? But you want to get to know him so you can warm your hands at his glow and become a vicarious saint by running around with him.

He, in turn, has a motivation. You want to glow reflectively off of him. You want to follow him because he is so wonderful, and you can't be what he is, and you want God to like you, so if you can't be what he is, you'll at least run around with him and stand in awe of him. Now, let me tell you what he wants out of you. By going around glowing…he wants your money. (laughter) That's one. Number two, he wants you to like him enough that when somebody tries to throw him out of

the church, you'll stand up for him. And yes, he wants to be validated as a holy one. Can you handle this? This is where I'm gonna try to control myself. He doesn't glow. He doesn't glow. He isn't pious. “Well, Gene, you've got to be wrong about the one who is my minister.”

Look, when I was twenty-six years old, I was working with two and three hundred pastors at one time. I might have been twenty-seven, holding citywide crusades. I lived with three thousand ministers for years in the seminary. I've been with friends, seminary graduates, and ministers my whole Christian life, ever since I walked through the seminary doors. We don't glow; it is pretense, pure and simple. It has existed since the priesthood, dating back to heathenism in Greece and Rome. It is what we hold over you. Granted, we do it unconsciously…except for the money part.

I have often said the biggest problem I have in doing the work that I do today is that I don't glow. I'm serious. Let me explain to you what I mean. You don't want to follow or listen to or be with someone who doesn't glow. There's the obvious…he doesn't know the Lord very well. Groucho Marx said, "I would never join a club that would let someone like me in." You don't want to be around a Christian who doesn't glow. This is shameful. In fact, folks, this is downright heathenism.

I sat with two of the better-known ministers in America recently, and two or three other ministers were with him. I catch myself in this kind of situation all the time. We're in a room; it's kind of long like this, typical conversation. One of these brothers was telling us about the sermon he preached last week, and he said, "I know I told my people this, and I told my people that, and I tell you we got this problem, and I told my people such and such." Well, my people just sat out there and listened because it was Sunday morning, and it was 11 a.m. And the other brother said, "I told my people this, and I told my people that…” And in a room about ten feet away was a group of God's precious people sitting there talking to one another, and on this end were we ministers “telling what we told our people last week." You see, we're not like you. They weren't even paying attention to those folks.

I'm gonna tell you something interesting to me. Have you heard of the movie “2001: A Space Odyssey "? Do you know the name of the computer? HAL 9000 (Hal Lindsey). Well, I have a friend who has the same name as the computer. I haven't seen him in a long time now, but he was with one of the largest Christian parachurch organizations in the world. And there were a few weeks in his life, maybe about four or five months, that he stepped down from the institutional church, and he said to me, you know, Gene, it was so wonderful to walk into a room and sit down and be me. I wasn't looking around the room thinking about money; I wasn't trying to impress people; I wasn't trying to be this person I am not. I was so relaxed and so free. He had written a

book, but it hadn't been published. Once it was published, it became one of the most successful Christian books ever written, and he went back to being a minister who glowed.

I walk into a room, and I'm relaxed. I'm not looking around, and I'm not trying to impress you, but oh, the damning damage of this office when we always have to be on. Folks, Paul of Tarsus was a building contractor, and I keep coming back to this thing: I've never met a minister who was called to be a pastor. I think these men were called by God to do something; I don't know what, but the tradition says, "Pastor." I was mortified the day they told me I had to become a pastor. It had never entered my mind." Listen, folks, I'll tell you what the problem is. The problem is that the problem is so massive, the whole thing has to be abandoned. You can find a problem here, problem here, there, there, there, and it can't be changed, it can't be addressed, it can't be resolved.

That brings me to another thought. We, ministers, have an interesting way of absolving ourselves of our problems. You should get together with us sometimes and be a fly on the wall. We're at a restaurant, and there are eight of us. Every man there will say what the problem is today and what we need today. Every one of them will say it. That's what we do when we get together in a restaurant. We will attack, we will cajole, we will get angry, we will get indignant, we will analyze, we will find the problem, we will point it out, we will analyze it, and when we finish, some way or other, by pointing it out, it absolves us from responsibility.

Saints, I am not happy with this. Every once in a while - and this comes back to something that has to do with you - there has to be born an exception to this whole thing. We can't start there, as the old saying goes; you can't get there from where you're standing right now. You have to go stand someplace else. This problem is absolutely unsolvable.

To give you a simple illustration, I was so awed when I was seventeen, a new Christian. We were Baptist students, and we always invited this gentleman over; he would come up to the pulpit with his Bible. “I would like to read John 17:2 and 3,” and then he would begin speaking, and when he finished, he'd close his Bible and pray. Boy, we worshiped that man. So right after I entered the ministry, I was driving through the city where he was pastor, and I went to his house, knocked on the door, and he came out. First of all, he was in sports clothes, which was, you know, an act of infidelity. He said, "Hi, Gene, come on in." My teeth almost fell out. He's sitting back…you know, he was an ordinary human being. He’s gotta make up his mind. (laughter)

I want to round most of this up by saying a man who is a pastor, who holds that position, cannot lead his people into…he isn't qualified and cannot, and his mind works in a certain way, and when he tries to, he begins doing things that can't work. He isn't qualified. He isn't capable. I stand here

as one of those ministers. All the training we receive, and all that we do, and the way the church is set up today, he cannot give us the Lord, and he cannot give us the church. And that's the summation of it.

I have one other thing I want to say, and you need to understand this: why is it we…one of the reasons why we never even think about you folks having a place in the body of Christ? Why is it we never think that the church belongs only to two people: the church and God's people? That's where ownership lies. Why don't we ever think in terms of literally working ourselves out of a job and leaving town? Did you hear that? Can you imagine a minister who works his way out of a job to the point he can walk out of that city and leave that church? It can't be done. It is inconceivable. Try to conceive of it. What would happen? They'll all come back next Sunday. What would they do? What could they do? It can't be done. *We* do it all the time; we walk out.

Your sermons are getting in the way, and now that brings me to my last point, more or less: when we were in the seminary, we were indoctrinated with something, and you can't imagine how saturated we are with it. Oh, brothers, stand in that pulpit, behind that sacred desk, and preach the word. (in deep preaching voice) Spurgeon turned London on its ear by preaching the Word of God! (laughter) And there was John Chrysostom, who stood in the city of Antioch and fearlessly declared the word of God, and they took him out and killed him because he was faithful to the preaching of the word.

You get that in every message, you get it in every chapel service, you get it in every lecture in Old Testament, New Testament, Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit; it doesn't matter, over and over, preach the word. We get so drunk on believing that preaching the Word of God will solve all problems. A young man was talking to a man who was drunk on preaching the word of God, and he said, "I've got divorces, and I've got people with bad marriages and this, that, and the other. Should I do counseling?" He said, "Of course not. Preach the word, and it'll resolve everything."

And now I come to my last point. I have never been a preacher who knew anything about the New Testament. Ever. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. Most of the sermons you hear are the grandsons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and a gentleman named Morgan, and I can't remember his first name. What was his name? G. Campbell Morgan, thank you. All I could think of was J. P. Morgan - G. Campbell Morgan and a few other pulpiteers.

When you hear a passage read, and it is preached, it is probably the result of a canned sermon. There is still some exposition being done, but it is always applied to you; it doesn't have anything to do with the first century, and all it does is inspire you or make you miserable, and it has nothing to

do with what the New Testament is talking about. Absolutely nothing, and I am going to prove that before you go to bed tonight. And you don't believe that. We'll come in here tomorrow morning and see if you agree with me. I am a minister, and I'm standing here saying to you that the ministry doesn't understand the New Testament.

I will make this statement; you'll find it on the first sheet of paper that you get. And I know what you're thinking right now: this man's off his rocker. That if you were to memorize the entire New Testament in Greek, the original language, and could quote it backward and forward, you would still have no idea what the New Testament is saying, and I will prove that. We are not preaching the Word of God because we don't have the foggiest idea. We may understand a letter of Paul's a little bit; we may understand a letter of Peter's a little bit, but we don't have the foggiest idea what happened in the first century, and if we don't know what happened in the first century, then we don't understand the New Testament. It doesn't matter how well we can know the Greek.

Now we are drunk on preaching the Word of God to the point that you never experience the living, breathing body of Christ. Is there a place for preaching? For the founding of the church, and for coming back from time to time to edify the people, but they would be a lot better off if you would sit down on the floor and help them practically; let *them* preach the Word of God.

Yeah, there's some ministry, but it's always for the upbuilding of the church in the business of departing, and there isn't any other story in the New Testament. The circuit itinerant preacher was all they had in the first century. They had no consistent local ministry. But I'm gonna come back and say to you, I have never met a minister equipped to preach the Word of God. We preach segments, we preach verses, we preach thoughts, but if you don't know the story, you can't tell anybody what it's really about.

When I left the seminary, I kept teaching myself. One of the biggest mistakes I ever made was sitting down to write out the first-century story and saying, "I never had the foggiest idea what the New Testament was saying." None.

Now then, I will ask you some questions. Remember, I just said that preachers don't know anything about the New Testament. Most of what we preach is sermons, and when we say we preach the Word of God in this church, how do we preach the Word of God? You're talking about preaching sermons somebody else preached, making applications, using an illustration; that's not preaching the Word of God. You couldn't preach the New Testament from the viewpoint of a story as a minister. When you get through, you would have to either lie to yourself or resign, because you don't exist, and neither do your “sermon-optics.” I just invented a word.

The Book of Acts is a history book. It covers a specific period of years, beginning with the year 30 A.D., and opens in Jerusalem. How many years in all does the Book of Acts cover? Here's another one. Were all of Paul's letters written during the span that the Book of Acts covers, or were none of them, or some of them?

Well, Gene, why is it important? Because each one of Paul's letters tells a story. Romans isn't the first book he ever wrote, but it has a story in there, and until you put it in its proper order, you can't know what the story is. If I were to take a history of the world, chop it up, let somebody who can play cards shuffle it, shuffle it and shuffle it, then bind it and put it out to my students to read, would they ever understand history? Certainly not, especially if we said it was the only history book in the world and the only source of true information. Without the story, we cannot understand the letters. Without Christ's gospel being put in its right order, we cannot understand His life.

There's one more thing I would say to you: without an understanding of our Lord, without a revelation of Him, and without a deep walk with Him, the New Testament becomes a book of intellect. *You have a right to know Him*. You have a right to function in the body of Christ. You have a right to glow as these brothers and sisters glowed. You have the right to not hear a whole lot of sermons. You have a right to the riches of the brothers and sisters in the first century.

I think it boils down to this: how hungry are you? I got hungry enough to crawl over cut glass. I left the ministry for three reasons. It was in 1963. I don't know which one was the strongest. This was right after I had written out the entire first-century story. I could answer these questions. I didn't even know then that I could answer them, but I saw the panoramic story, sat back, and said, "This has got nothing to do with what we do today."

Three reasons I left the organized church. One was I was bored stiff as a minister, and I felt nothing but pity for God's people. The second reason was I didn't know my Lord. I didn't mean I wasn't saved; I'm telling you that all I knew of the Lord was what everybody else knew of the Lord—all of us. I knew the best-known ministers in the English-speaking world. I knew them. I sat with them; I was in council with them. None of us knew *Him*. And thirdly, I was dying to know and experience what happened in the first century.