

This is Gene Edwards, and I'm speaking to the churches. I hope that every one of you is gathered around listening, and I trust that you all have a *yes* within you. I'm talking to you about what it means to be the church. The other time that I spoke to you, I left out one thing I would like to add. Please listen to it, all of you, very carefully. Church, being the church in her fullness and in all that has been her charter, has things to do. One of the most shocking aspects of the church itself is that from time to time you have to do something to address someone in the church who is absolutely driving you, the church, stark raving mad. And sometimes, of course, that person turns out to be you. That's fine, just the nicest thing in the world, as long as it's not you. I think that that is the great test of a church. There will be several others, but the earliest one will be. The test isn't really on the church; it's on the individual, and the question is always asked, or a statement made: you weren't Christian in what you did.

If I could take you to the graveyards of dead churches that were trying to be born in a home, and they were trying to get away from the institutional church, and we could have visited every one of them. It would take years, even if we stayed only one day; I think if you could resuscitate the bones and listen to them, it would be because people said what you did wasn't Christian. They get their feelings hurt, and they leave. Or they do even worse: they get their feelings hurt and stay.

That's because we have not plumbed the depths of the destruction of our human nature or the fall. We are naive in this area. There is no way in the world for a group of Christians to come together and to get to know one another without you facing the horrific discovery that every person is terribly damaged. Each person is their own person. He has an agenda that nobody else has, and he's going to stay with it. He has an idea of what the church should be, and really doesn't want anybody else to conflict with his idea of what the church should be. There is immorality. There are psychological problems. There's deviousness. I cannot even begin to explain to you.

So as I look to the wholeness of what a church is to be, I look straight into the face of, "What you did was not Christian." The only thing I can reply is that you're probably right. We probably weren't. We probably didn't. But we'll have to stick with one another anyway. I have said this to people: the folks who took care of the problem were doing the best they could. Stand with them. But they weren't doing it right. Well, then you do it and see how good you are at it. You will discover that every problem has a depth and complexity that defies human wisdom or understanding.

All I can say to you is you've been reading too much of the Gospels and not enough of the last pages of the epistles. The Jesus story looks like it's just really beautiful. I think I said to you folks earlier that the only time Jesus Christ ever clearly spoke of the church, He was explaining how to excommunicate someone from the church. Go read it. It's in Matthew. That's all that is about. That's all He talked about:

how to deal with someone in the church who is causing a great problem. Yes, it sounds nasty until you get over to the epistles, and then you find out what's really going on. If you think the depravity of depravity isn't deep, I would recommend you get a flashlight, get under your bed, lock your doors and windows, and turn to Deuteronomy and read the curses and the blessings of God. I'm going to say 15 and 16, but I'm not really sure.

When Moses came down from the mountain, he asked half the children of Israel to stand on one side of the mountain, and one would recite the blessings while the others would recite the curses. If you think human nature has changed one bit, look at the curses that God said would fall upon you if you forsake the commandments of God. They are a better description than anything you have ever read, heard, or seen reported or read about anywhere in the world, and that was 3,000 years ago. It's not like these are things that would happen that had never happened. This is what people were experiencing, even then. So before you say you weren't Christian, get a good look at just how damaged we are.

Now, we live by some standards. One of them is that when you sit down to talk to anyone, you keep in mind that you may someday be the one who has done this very, very same thing. There is no wiggle room for self-righteousness. There is no how horrible you are, how much better we are than you, and what a really great disappointment you are, and I'd be ashamed of myself if I were you. No. As they say, keep in mind your number may come up next—same sin. But I would never commit that sin. Uh-huh. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Absolutely. No, you wouldn't ever. Yes, you will. Especially if you say you're not going to...and that's just the way it goes.

So with this being our second time together, I've asked you, do you want to be a whole church? I keep sitting here looking out into the ether waves. Who is on the other end of this talk? I've got something I want to say to the man who is listening and saying, "Boy, this is really great." I want to lead my people. Well, you may have to blank out the next part. My dear sir, if you've got a little home group and you're teaching the Bible to them and you're telling them how wonderful Jesus is, you will never have the church this side of the day. You're doing all the functioning, and you're not allowing the church to grow. Any real work of God will be a work to get you to work yourself out of the work.

Little things like getting up and leaving a meeting, like having a meeting and then telling everybody, next week you're going to meet, and I'm not going to be here. Those are little things. I'll be a week off, but here's all we're going to do. You're going to sing, you're going to testify, you're going to share. You have to get people started doing that because they haven't opened their mouths in 1,800 years. Have you even thought in such terms? Those are the small, little, rudimentary aspects of raising up the church the way she ought to be. I defy you to find in the New Testament a church where one man stood around, sat around, knelt around, hung from the roof, and did nothing else but teach the Bible to a group of people. It's not

the New Testament. It's not scriptural.

Well, they had a hard time being what you are because they didn't have a New Testament for most of the first century. If you'll read a little book by me, you'll find out that an abundance of Scripture didn't even show up for 200 years. So you're barking up the wrong tree, and besides that, you're teaching the Bible; you're not teaching Jesus. And it's not going to work if you can tell God's people all day long, all week long, all month long, all year long, what they're supposed to do, and they cannot do it. You might as well read the Ten Commandments and the entire 633 laws of Moses and tell them to obey every one of them and never break them under penalty of eternal destruction. To tell people they can live the Christian life—there's only one Christian in the universe who lived the Christian life, and that's something we'd better find out fast. By the way, who is He? The Trinity. He's really good at living the Christian life, and nobody else can do it.

So with that, I'm going to read you a list, and we'll start it. I keep looking at my list here and thinking, what's the first thing, Gene? What's really the first thing? And it's not on this list. The first thing is a man: a man on fire gathers a group of Christians around him, presents the Lord Jesus Christ in pure glory, and then tells God's people how to know Him, touch Him, live with Him, and walk with Him. A book cannot do that adequately. I just recently wrote a book entitled *Living Close to God (When You're Not Good at It)*. I've given it away to probably about two dozen people by now, and I haven't heard a single report that it has taken root in their lives. At the end of the book, I even said a book is very inadequate. Somebody has to live. Somebody has to point. Somebody's got to lead. Somebody's got to show us how. And that needs to be somebody who knows not just the Bible, but the Lord.

Well, shouldn't he know the Bible? It's a byproduct of knowing the Lord, folks. The Lord teaches the Book; the Book doesn't teach the Lord. The Book opens itself to revelations we cannot comprehend by getting to know the Lord. I repeat something I said to you recently. On the Emmaus Road, Jesus opened Scripture; it was not Scripture that opened Jesus. This is something we've utterly lost.

Okay, here's my list. Please react as I go. Interestingly, I list first meetings, and there's a lot to be said about meetings. Why would you put that first? Because we can lead someone to the Lord Jesus Christ tomorrow and bring them in here, and if they don't see a resonating display of Christ, they won't come back. Our meetings have to be high, beautiful, and expressive. Now I'm speaking to a small group of people here, and this group of people in this room must learn how to have a meeting. That meeting has to be with life. You're not meeting for yourselves when you're doing outreach; you're meeting for other people coming through that door. And you are extending yourself to their needs. You cannot have a dead meeting. It will not work. Everything about it has to be new. You're going to have to give yourself, really give yourself, concentrating on that meeting and functioning in that meeting.

I recall the statement that a pastor of a large church, I think it was, I don't know, St. Louis, Missouri, I think, and he said, every Sunday morning for the invitation we sing *Just as I Am Without One Plea*. Several times people asked him, same song every Sunday at the end of the meeting, why can't we sing something else? He responded, "That song is not for you." It's for the people in the room who need to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the first one is a meeting, and there's a lot to it. Now, if we were to learn a great deal about the way of meeting, and if some of it sounded mechanical, then let me tell you something. I said earlier, we haven't functioned in 1,800 years. Do you have any idea how long that's been, that you're out of the habit of functioning? You're 1,800 years without functioning. I don't hesitate one bit to say the next meeting we have, you're going to do this, you're going to do this, you're going to do this, and do this. And then you know what happens? You do it. Somebody else says, hey, that's not bad. I've got something to say, too. You have to, some way, let the tongue out of the cage. It's been in there a long, long time. Perhaps more than anything else here, we have to look straight down the lion's mouth of meetings.

The second one, I'll go ahead and read the rest of them. Maybe you'd like to say which one you think is most important. There's got to be ministry. Ministry from the Word of God. Evangelism. Somebody's got to know how to lead people to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now listen to this next one very carefully. Some brothers or sisters will teach, preach, and explain what baptism means. I don't care what your gender is. It doesn't matter what your gender is. We are too small to be picky. Someone has to explain what baptism means when we baptize. Somebody else, or that same person, better know just about everything that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ knows about baptism.

The next one is...I'm going to borrow a term from the institutional church because I don't know any other one. It's called follow-up. This is probably the hardest part of this whole list. You baptize someone, and they're really excited. They need to be visited. They should be given books to read. If they don't read, and most people do not read, then a video, or maybe it's going to be one person talking to another person. And it needs to be very rich and very practical. In that respect, within the matter of baptism, there has to be what is buried there. Why does it go into death, and what comes up out of that water? One person goes in; another person comes out.

What went into that tomb? Somebody needs to tell the convert that your flesh went into that tomb. Your old species went into that tomb. I'm sorry, into that grave, yeah. And creation went in there. The devil goes in there. The fallen angels go in there. More than anything else, your self-life goes in there. Your relationship to the world and the world system goes in there. And that's what you are burying that day.

And you're leaving the life you had behind you. If you've got drugs or if I were a Baptist, I'd say you're giving up dancing. And whatever controls your life goes in the grave. What comes out? Ellis, how much comes out of that grave? All of Jesus Christ. We counted once what came out of that. Where did we stop counting? All of Jesus Christ. All that Christ is. I'll take that.

Okay, now then I'm coming to the next one. Make sure I'm not missing anything here. Then there's the follow-up that comes after that—oh, just talking about ministry. I told you we are going to make sure we have something to do for the next ten years. Ten years. I'm speaking about ten years' worth of ministry. We may have to—there's a certain brother in this room who could probably do a great job of ministering if we just would put an amplifier in front of his mouth, a megaphone that would increase his volume a great deal. Do you not agree with me, folks? I've been told it can't be done.

Okay. Do you mind? Is there anyone in this room that minds a woman ministering to the church? Anybody got a problem with this? Anybody? Anybody? Anybody out there got a problem with this? Pentecostals have been getting by with it for a hundred years now, and they're doing really...they've trumped the Baptists and everybody else in the world, too, Catholics and so forth. I was told when I was moving around the Pentecostal circus...circles... they said a new church was being born every day...and twice on Sunday. I don't mind either. But do keep in mind that a sister speaking is not a brother. They have a totally different approach to things. And she should always be armed with a box of Kleenex right beside her all the time she's speaking.

Alright, the next one. It has been greatly neglected. Family. I think I said to you in our last meeting, out of every 100 people in the church, and there are 50 married people, how many of those 50 marriages are in trouble? I think somebody volunteered 60. Do you recall what you guessed? How many are in trouble? Anybody want to say? Forty? I don't know, but I can say this. At some time or other, every one of them is in trouble. Every one of them. And do you know something else? The tragedy is that everyone thinks they're the only ones having problems this severe. Therefore, they get divorced or other things. I don't know why God invented the marriage of two separate species from two different worlds. Marriage might be a good idea, but He could at least land them on the same planet. They say that a chimpanzee has 90% of human DNA. Well, they ought to check out the female and the male, and I bet the DNA that separates them is something like 80%.

So for every one of you in every church, you need to accept a simple fact. Marriage is a disaster. A living disaster. Walking, breathing disaster. So we have a self-righteous person back here in the back row who says, "Not in our marriage." Wait a while. Just wait a while. The cards are stacked against a good marriage. How many cards? All of them that have ever been printed. That's how many are stacked

against you.

So I'm going to say to you that someone in the church must take charge of helping with marriages. Who would that be? I was just about to say some books need to be read, and somebody has come out with some colossal DVDs that will probably still be good 100 years from now because they deal with the basics. If you could ask any marriage counselor who's been counseling, say, for 30 years, he could probably tell you exactly what's going to be coming through the door of any couple. It would come down to about 10 or 15 things. But let me tell you what really walks through that door: fallen humanity walks through that door.

Some books to read. Some videos to watch. But a question that should be asked of every person, whether or not we have the nerve to do it, is a different matter. You're here in this fellowship. You're going to have problems. Do you mind if someone comes and helps you over the hard spots, the hard places? And you know, I don't care what that person answers. I will tell you the truth. The true answer is no. Don't mess with my marriage. The best thing is for that person to seek help on their own. This is the thing we need to say to someone: You are going to have problems. Seek out someone. But in the name of sanity, don't pick out the person you figure is going to agree with you the most. If we have the word eldership, we should go to people who are not just elders in age, but elders in maturity.

What about coming to me? Let's tell you exactly what will happen if you come to me, whether you be an individual or a couple. We're going to block off three hours. There's nothing I hate worse than having a really good Christian counselor—I haven't found one yet—but a really good Christian counselor. You make an appointment; it's for 50 minutes, and just as you're beginning to get somewhere, all right, finally, see you next week—eighty dollars as you walk out the door. See you in two weeks. I'm going on vacation. I'll see you maybe in three weeks. In the meantime, you work on that.

Well, the church needs to extend help to families. Now, this is not all I have to say about this. I'm just touching on every one of these, and I'm listening to all of you. I want all of you to listen. I've got something else I want to mention here. Man, I have mentioned this to you folks earlier, but we're doing this in a very tight circle here and healing in the church. And this time I'm going to share my feelings. I'm speaking now to the church right here. Let's say you've got some dread disease, and the doctors told you you've got two years to live. In the meantime, we've got a bottle of poison here we want you to take every day. I think you all identify with that. There's a lot of awful stuff they're sending you.

Do not come to me and say, "Pray for my diseases," and expect me to pray for you. I have a sign that says, "I will pray for your infirmities, but you will have to do what I tell you to do." And I absolutely

will not compromise on that. Within a few feet of this building—and I'm saying this knowing the angels are listening, but my views are not Pentecostal—within a few feet of this building, a man came down with lung cancer. I was inquired of, not asked, what's your feeling about this? Would you go pray for this man with lung cancer? I said, has he stopped smoking? And they said, no. I said, well, I won't go. I would walk in and say, will you quit smoking right here, right now, this day, completely cold turkey, in the presence of fasting and praying and the Lord's people taking care of you to get through the next ten days? If he says yes, I will do that. But if he says no, I will say, then I will not pray for you. But Gene, that's cruel. That's awful. God might heal him. I don't question that one bit, but I have a feeling that he's going to come back needing to be re-healed from the same disease. It's just like marriage. Are you willing to be helped?

You heard me say recently in the matter of healing, I stand with Paul of Tarsus. I heal. He said, I heal people. There are signs and wonders. Oh, by the way, I also have a full-time medical doctor (Luke) who follows me wherever I go. I think that the people of the first century had greater problems with nutrition than we do, had worse diseases than we've got, and sanitary conditions must have been horrible. So I'm speaking against myself when I say, you want to be healed? Then let's find out what it is. Let's let the doctors tell us, and whatever they tell you to do, do. But if there are other things you can do, are you willing to do them? If you are, and you really mean it, then we will put our hands on you, pray for you, and not stop until you are healed; we will keep looking for more and more things.

I have sent help to so many dear friends of mine by mail and by phone, hoping they would respond. Yet everyone says, "I want to be healed," but they want it like a light switch. I want it free. I want it now. I want it complete and total. Then go to a Pentecostal preacher and let him pray for you. Do not expect to see him again as long as you live, and he won't care whether you live or not because he won't even know your name. But we are a community, and we are the church. We've got resources nobody else in this world has. We've got the church in a living, breathing reality. We will pray for...and we will practice...healing the saints. The church will decide how to do that. But here in this place, for as long as I am present, I will pray for... You know that 98% of all the things you go to the doctor for, you're going to get well anyway. Mainly, you need to be reassured it's not some dread Chinese or Eskimo disease that nobody else has ever had. The other 2%, sometimes we get healed, or mostly we die.

We'll face any disease there is. I mean every one of them. There's one person I will not pray for. And you might as well know this. Someone with a severed spine, and I'm going to tell you why. In all of human history, I've never heard of a completely severed spine being healed. I'm talking about a total cut of the spinal column, the spine itself. My faith fizzles out there. It may happen someday. It may have happened somewhere, but that's the only place my faith doesn't go. I'm prepared to believe anything in this world can be healed. I've got real good reasons for that. I've got two. I'm living, breathing proof of

it, and I have seen living, breathing proof of it.

This week, friends came to visit us whom I hadn't seen in 25 years. His name is Don. I think what Don did was one of the most beautiful things a Christian can do. He knew his business. He was diagnosed with liver cancer. It got into his lungs. It got into his intestines. His stomach was removed. Most of it was removed. It kept growing. He said, I never once asked God to heal me. I just kept telling Him, "I want Your will, and I know You're sovereign." We talked on the phone, and I did not pray for him. He didn't ask me to, and I didn't. He took a few treatments of chemo, which doesn't ever cure anybody of anything, and there are exceptions, I know. Well, you know, he's real skinny because he has almost no stomach to have. But his doctor told him one day, "You are cancer-free. You won the lottery." A lot of other people were praying for him. I didn't want to be taken out of that arena. I stood with Don and what he wanted. Probably one of the simplest things in this world you can ask somebody who's sick is what he wants, what he wants to ask for.

I think that I'm going to mention one other thing. In times past, I have been very conscientious about adding new songs to the songbook. Many of them I wrote myself. By the way, I like my songs, and I'm going to tell you why. Because they don't say I got saved and I'm going to go to heaven. I don't think you can find a song like that. Most of the songs I have written are jubilant, and the rest of them are on the cross, which is not an easy thing to write about. I'm going to do my best to spend more time with the songs, but that means we've got to have a songbook. I'm sending this to some brothers in another country that have a funny accent, so let me talk to them. I'm not going to tell you the name of the man I want to talk to, but he bears the name of the first man who had a name.

The songs I gave you at the beginning are mostly opening songs. I gave you a songbook. I think there are four or five of them I put in there that were a little slow or maybe old-fashioned. These are opening songs. They're rousing songs. They're quickening songs. And we need them. Now, because I have nothing else to do (sarcasm), I think I'm going to try to volunteer myself as of today. I haven't listened to Christian music like I used to. I'm not familiar with it. And there are wonderful songs to be... stolen...the melodies. I cannot read music; thank God for those of you who can. You should go ahead and learn Greek and Hebrew while you're at it, because it's very complicated.

Now I want to say this to you, all of you. Give us as many songs as you can, and really good, fast ones. Good ones. You know, one that I think was homegrown here- you can tell me where it is. Was it Fiddler on the Roof? How does that go? I don't know who wrote that, but we could use a lot of songs like that. They're so excellent. I'm going to try to do something. Every time we come to a topic in Scripture, no matter what it is, I'm going to either try to write a poem or a prayer and, if I can, a song, so that we will have something to either read in the meeting, sing in the meeting, or maybe somebody else can put it to words. Something we can read or sing, no matter what subject it is we come about. So we're pressing in

on that 2,000-page hymnbook that will cover virtually any topic we cover in the Scripture.

I'm open to you writing songs. It's scriptural, making melodies, speaking to one another in song. What would that mean to any of you in this room, speaking to one another in psalms or hymns, spiritual songs? Okay. Listen to my words. Speaking to one another in songs. Speaking to one another in songs. Okay. I'm going to go a little bit further and say that someone actually...they don't choose this in the meeting to do this, but know that someone in this room is maybe going through something. You say to that one specific person, why don't you listen to this? "How firm a foundation, His omnipotent, unmovable hand." Read it. Talk about it. Exhort it. Cry over it. Whatever. This comes back to how to meet. So we're discussing songs.

Now, I'm going to meet with you again next Saturday. I will add to this, and then I'm going to start making some of you responsible for these things and start working on it. I left out one: the last one. It will probably be our cornerstone. It will be our signature. It will be what's unique about us, and that's taking three to four or five months to take the Lord's feast once a year. I am saying to you now, and I'm saying this to the other churches, I want you to have at least three months of ministry on the Lord's Feast so that the church will participate in it, and you will hear it.

Why, Gene, this much? Because whatever else you might ever get as long as you live, whether or not you get good ministry or not, if you will take care of what is found in that banquet, the church stands a good chance to stay on course. When He gave us that table, gave us that cup, gave us that wine, gave us that bread, He was demonstrating the length and breadth and height and depth of all there is of Jesus Christ and His eternal purpose. It's all there. So I'm making every person in this room responsible for ministry week after week, month after month, hearing the message of the Lord's Supper. In other words, you'll be soaking in, staggering in, and probably have the blind staggers before it's over with on this banquet of Jesus Christ. This is what's going to keep you alive, and you're going to look forward to it every year. *And it will be a banquet.*

Listen to me very carefully. This is a passage of Scripture. The Lord Jesus said, "This is my blood. Drink it." Then you go a little bit further, and it says, and then after the meal, He said, "This is my body. Eat it." I don't see that it could get any clearer that the taking of the Lord's Supper, banquet, whatever it is, festival, feast, is a coming together to eat a meal that begins with the cup and ends with the bread...and a great deal of ministry that precedes it. A date is established, a banquet room is taken, and this church and any other and all the churches are fed together and fed and fed by the ministry that is on one subject.

Gene, that sounds unbelievable. I don't know. I thought it was a pretty good idea. The Jews have been doing it for 3,000 years. They do their symbol, their shadow, their type, their figure. We do the real thing, and we learn.

Saints, we're going to quit. Those of you who are listening to this recording, what do you want? Do you want the church? If you do, then you're going to know what it means to also go out here and grow, and you're going to take care of whatever the need is. Someone put it very finely, very well: Do you want to add the church to your life, or do you want the church to be your life? If you add the church to your life, that's a totally different situation than the church being your life. I am not and never will be, as long as I live on this earth, strong enough to equal the strength of the body of Christ, and if you can learn that, then you can live it and touch it.

All right. Lord Jesus, we could call upon You, and do now, for wisdom to see all that we lack and cannot understand. We beg You to let us grow into these things and have so much wisdom over it.