

This is Gene Edwards, and this is the Organic Church, and I'm hoping that this recording will be listened to twice. First, by whoever has this CD, and the other, by whoever you might gather around it. I'm faced with a rather difficult challenge here, and that's to convince you that the organic church is more New Testament than the New Testament church; that the organic church is what really did happen in the first century and should be happening today. For instance, maybe we can begin there.

At the time the very concept of the organic church was taking place, there was no such thing as a single passage of NT Scripture in existence. Paul set the pattern on his first journey and on his second journey, and yes, even on his third journey, of how a church is to be raised up. And yet the very first book he ever penned was Galatians, which was after the first four churches he raised up. Then he didn't come in there with a New Testament, putting this verse and that verse together. So that's my first point, and here's the second one.

I don't know how familiar you are with the history of the first century, but the manuscripts, another word for that was the Codex, they didn't just suddenly come into existence - 27 books, all sewn together, and everyone standing around reading them. It was a very slow process; in fact, it was a process so slow that sometimes it's frightening to even tell people what it was. So, I will gamble just a little bit and say that it was probably not until the 400s, in fact, at least 397, when the entire concept of a bound New Testament began to emerge. Certainly, there was nothing in the very first century that would even come close to being called a New Testament as we know it. It was still being written, still being considered, still being appreciated, but it took until after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in August of the year 70 A.D. before the Church of God really woke up to the fact that we should probably start gathering together the writings of the apostles. And again, without any thought of this being how we're going to produce the next church.

Now I'm going to talk to you a little bit about just what did happen on Paul's first journey and his second journey, and yes, on his third journey, so that you can get the organic nature of the church. Actually, this comes down to a very simple question: Is the church a machine? We put the parts together and turn it on, and it suddenly works. Is it a "put this and this and this and this and this together, and this and this and this and make it work?" And that makes a church, and that makes a New Testament church? You know, we don't even need God to pull off something like that. The nature of the church is spiritual. The nature of the church is Christ. The nature of the church is a living creature. And yet somehow, we have the idea of: we'll search the verses in the New Testament, put them all in their proper order, then go and put all of these elements together, and—voila—there's a church. It doesn't...and didn't... happen that way. I want you to join with me here for just a moment in looking at that very, very first piece of Christian literature. Now, whoever penned it, try to remember this was the summer of 50 A.D.: we are at least five years away from the first gospel being written - Mark. Maybe two, three, four, five years after that, before Matthew was written. And then about 62-63 A.D., when Luke was written, and possibly as late as 80 A.D., before John was written.

We've got a book here called Galatians, written in 50 A.D. And it's written to Gentiles. Now, if you walk up to a Gentile in Galatia and start talking to him about Abraham or David or Adam or Moses, he'd look completely blank at you. So, I want you to remember that this was not a piece of literature that got passed around in Israel, and it did not get passed around in Jerusalem or in Judea. It's being passed around in a very obscure part of the Roman Empire, rather untamed, extraordinarily poor, and ignorant. And let's look at it and see what we find.

In one of the first chapters, Paul is trying to clarify and answer some lies that have been told about him by some Jewish people. Ah, wait a minute. This is a letter he wrote to them.... two years after he met them. On the day he met them, they'd never heard of David, or Jesus, or Moses, or Adam, or Abraham. So, let's hope and pray he was a storyteller. And he was. And he had told them the story of Abraham. But that beautiful passage where he said, "I'm so shocked that you have been among you who have seen Jesus Christ graphically, publicly, graphically, as in a drama, crucified." So, he has told them the story of the crucifixion. Be sure, dear child of God, he didn't just tell them about His dying on the cross. All evidence in that book points to the fact that he also told them what happened on that cross—that you will not find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—but which was part of the gospel. And that is: that the world was crucified, and the world system was crucified on that cross. And so was the old man. And so was creation. And so were you. And so also me.

I was crucified upon that cross. And the law was crucified upon that. And Moses' teachings and the observance of the many ordinances and the festivals and holy days—he makes it very clear then and also in Romans and in other of his writings that these were all put to death. And he graphically demonstrated this to these people, and yet later, when some Jews from Jerusalem came and visited them there way up in obscure Galatia, they believed those men. And Paul was really upset. You just keep reading Galatians, and what do you see? Over and over, Paul speaks of the Spirit. So, this we know: he told those Galatians something about Abraham, he told them something about Christ dying on the cross and ending everything, all of creation itself, and everything that was in it, including themselves and sin. These are the things they learned. There's one other thing that they learned, and that is that there's a Spirit—the Spirit who brought them Christ, the Spirit who worked mighty things among them, the Spirit now working in you, the Spirit that is crying out, "Abba, Father," in you.

And now we are seeing things spiritual that are the foundation of those first four Galatian churches. Learning to hear a calling God who dwells in each one of them and dwells in them corporately. And upon this, those people were built as a body of believers. Paul talked to them about caring for one another. When he was gone, he talked to them about not becoming legalistic, about not listening to some of the gospel. Some of this he wrote in the letter, but some of this he said while he was with them. Stay with me for just a moment. Read Galatians. Look at it and ask yourself, ask yourself again and again, I'm a Gentile. I'm in a town. I've never heard of Jesus. I don't even know where Israel is. Man, I haven't even heard of Israel. A man walks in, talks to me about salvation. I believe; something inside of

me happens. That's the Spirit. And Paul addresses them and says, That's the Spirit. You're feeling something. You're sensing something. Something new is going on. That's the very Spirit of Jesus Christ working in you.

And he tells them stories. Tells them that they have died in Christ. And they get so excited. And they hug one another, and they take care of one another. Now here's the funny part. That first church was in Pisidia Antioch; he was there for about five months. The second church he went to was called Iconium, and he stayed there for about five months. We would have to figure in walking time for the apostles. After that, Lystra was not very long and was almost stoned to death. And then Derbe, he was either there six or seven months, or he was only there three or four weeks. It's really hard to say. That's it.

He then went back to Pisidian Antioch and ordained some elders, and then went to Iconium and ordained some elders, stayed a few days, strengthened each one of the churches, went back to Lystra—where he was an outlaw—and had to sneak into town. It's not at all sure that he even got back to Derbe. But he bids them all goodwill and takes off. No New Testament. Gentiles who know nothing about Christ. There is no Bible. There is no church building. There is no pastor. There is no songbook. Five months - that's from a dead start.

That was a New Testament church; what I boldly declare was organic. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean, it was natural. I mean, it's organic—almost exactly like the instincts we're born with. We're told that two of our strongest instincts, even in the cradle, are fear of falling and fear of loud noises. And we're born; every one of us is born that way. There is a church instinct. These people said goodbye to those two apostles, and they had the Spirit. And they had Abba Father. And they had one another. And they had meetings where they shared with one another and cared for one another, and out of that grew an organic expression of Christ that we now call the *Ekklesia*. And they didn't hear from Paul again, until Paul heard that some Jews had come in and tried to change their gospel and to cut with a knife the male, telling them they could not be saved. And when Paul heard about this, he was mortified. Paul didn't come back at first; he sent a letter first. And here are four churches, each that had been left alone in a heathen land, with nobody around them, no one to help them, and the pastor had not developed, because the development of the pastor didn't come until the Reformation. Nobody's sitting in pews listening to preachers. These are people—and that's all they are—taking care of one another.

Now, here's the astonishing thing. You have four churches on the brink of total destruction, and he doesn't mention the elders he ordained. He goes straight to the people, and he talks to them, and he has a great deal to say to them and tells them what to do...without referring to elders.

And now, I was a 29-year-old man when I went to the New Testament to learn some of these things. I took a year off as an evangelist, by the way. That was a long, long time ago. We were driving 1955 or 1958 cars; if you've seen one, you'll get some idea of just how long ago that was. Now, I said to myself, "*Can anybody do this? Can you walk into a situation where no one*

knows—everyone knows nothing, no one knows anything—and a church be raised up?” Now, is that a New Testament church or an organic church? It is New Testament in that it happened in the New Testament era, and that it was recorded later in what we do call the New Testament, and the record is there, but it was long before we had a New Testament. And I’m telling you that the Holy Spirit in them allowed them to survive. And I could not help but wonder, *now Gene, if you ever did that, Gene, you wouldn't be able to say, Get in the Bible, get in the Word, get in the Word, get in the Word, get in the Scripture, get into the New Testament; there wouldn't be any for them. And I kept asking myself, “How could it be done?”* And I went back to Galatians again and again, and there was one thing that I was convinced of, and that is: the church is a spiritual being.

Now, do you ever ask me if I tried it? Yes, I've tried it 20 or 25 times. It may be that I'm the only person on this earth who ever did try it. I had an incredible burden, and that burden was that God's people function, and that we do not sit in pews week after week and listen to sermons preached that really go from hither to thither and yon, all the way from A to Z, and from this planet to five others. We never know what's coming next when we go into a church building to hear.

People functioning of Christ and caring for one another. It comes down to what you'll read or have read in this book (the Bible), that God has a DNA. The church has a DNA. Leave her alone, and she will be church. She will be *ekklesia*. She will be the body of Christ. She will be building of God. She will be the bride of Christ. She will be assembling, gathering. She will be what she instinctively is, just like if you will feed and clean a baby, and that child is bound to grow up to be a human being, an adult, who becomes their own man or their own woman. You can imagine how excited Christians are when they find out they're going to be left, and it's going to be up to them.

I think I need to say something to you about elders right about here, because there's an elder teaching, and it's just like having a pastor; the elders take over everything, and once more, you're sitting and listening and you're being taught the Bible. And everything is short-circuited right there, right at that very moment. Those churches, all four, had a time when they didn't have elders. Now, today, there is a teaching of eldership, and I'm going to sit right here and tell you that I challenge the right concept of today's eldership teaching; that's because it's authoritarian, it's supervisory, it's like a big hand hanging over a group of people. I don't really think they're elders.

First of all, the greatest single lacking is that they were not chosen by someone outside that city. Elders we have today, especially among non-institutional Christians, started by a man, gets a group together, starts teaching all sorts of things, including submission and authority and head covering, etc.—well, that sure does make his life easy. And then later he ordains the elders, and then he announces that he's one of them. And where's the outsider? Where is this genius of God - the man who comes, builds, and leaves - that the church learns and finds her own natural, organic DNA expression? And the elders are chosen by the Holy Spirit and the outside worker.

Now I'm an old man. And it's true I'm an old man, and I've never seen the righteous bake bread. But I'll tell you something else: I've never seen eldership that was honest, the way it is being taught today, because eventually it becomes a controlling factor and a terrifying experience. And that's not all. Because I'm going to give you our own experience with elders. You ordain a man an elder and call him an elder - he'll sell his soul to be an elder, whereas he might have walked out and left. He might have left the Lord. Who knows what he might have left, but he'll keep it all for the title Elder. My experience? Elders usually don't last very long. Interesting and beautifully, some of them don't want the job very long; they want to just get out of the incredible responsibilities that sometimes fall on them. Others disqualify themselves. About every three years, in a secret ballot, we ask, Who are the ones that you want to lead the church? And I think invariably one gets dropped off, and one or two get added. Someone who just didn't quite come up to it.

I'll guarantee you, if we had ordained that man, laying on the hands in a ceremony, put his name on him, and he was Reverend or Mr. Elder, he'd have still been there. *It is good to desire to be an elder.* Not in our day, it's not, because those elders are there forever. You won't get to replace elders and become one that you desire to be until one of them dies off. I'm saying to you: the church is fluid. I'm telling you: she's a woman. I'm telling you: she's free. I'm telling you: she's beautiful, and more than anything else, she is so unbelievably creative that it boggles my mind.

*Gene, there ought to be a New Testament.* Then let us talk about that for a moment, and I am going to lose you. Some things you should know about your New Testament. One of them is that... by the way, I've just written a book on this subject, I haven't published it yet. A history of the study of the New Testament. Just when we were beginning to get a New Testament - handwritten and volumes of, say, one or two or three or four per province, one or two per big city - the influence of the Roman Catholic Church came in and said that all Bibles should be handwritten, and that's what they had to be—in Latin. And so, for the next thousand years, people literally forgot the original was Greek, and it was forbidden that anybody translate the New Testament into any language but Latin. And by 700 A.D., Latin was a totally dead language. So, we got about nearly a thousand years, even after that, when all manuscripts were in Latin, which very few people could read. God's people never had access to the Scripture.

*Ah, Gene, and what about the Reformation?* Well, wonderful. You could own the New Testament if you were rich. The printing press made it possible for some, but mostly the studying of the New Testament came from public reading, because even then, even though it was ten times cheaper than a handwritten one, it was still expensive. Whoever printed had to print one sheet at a time, let it dry, turn it over, print the other side, and then keep that up until they'd put out a thousand pages—and then figure out a way to collate all that, and then put it in a book. Extremely expensive. I can tell you exactly the year when it became easy for an ordinary person, owning a typical job, to actually buy a New Testament and afford it. 1840; that's in modern times. You could actually sell a New Testament - buy one, for what you could afford.

Someone figured out what it would have cost to have the Wycliffe—handwritten, of course. In 1383, an average person's income - he would have had to save up his entire income: no eating, no home, no blanket, no food, no shelter - and had to save up for 30 years to buy a New Testament. 30 years. And everything was written on vellum. It took 3,000 sheepskins to produce enough vellum or parchment in order to put out one New Testament. And then the New Testament did get printed, and the price dropped—but did not drop far enough for a peasant, not for an ordinary person. 1840.

You know, back around that time, that's when we began saying, *We've got to be New Testament, got to be New Testament, got to be New Testament, get in the Word, get in the Word*. We've got to be New Testament. And they began a movement called the Berean Movement, in which everything they did was based on the Scripture. And I've driven by a lot of churches with a little sign that said *New Testament Church*. There's the building, there's the steeple, open the door, there are the pews, and there's the silent people. A pastor standing up there preaching.

That's not in the New Testament. That's not even remotely near it. I've never seen a New Testament church. *Ah, but we have in this verse, and we believe in that and this and the other*. I have two things to say to you that I wish you would listen to and take to heart. Somewhere around 200 A.D., somebody did a sin. I don't know who he was. Nobody has any idea who he was, but he bound books; that we know. So, somebody would come in with Cicero's books, and he would bind all of Cicero's writings and all of his books into one book. And so, he would put Cicero's longest letter first, and then his next to the longest, right on down stair-step until he got to the smallest one. And that's how you read Cicero. And that's how you would read any writer: Aristotle, Plato, Cicero; it didn't matter. It was the longest letter to the shortest letter.

So, when this bookbinder got to Paul's letters, he took the longest one first, Romans, and stair-stepped it till he got it down to the smallest, which was Philemon. It had nothing to do with chronology, and I'm saying to you, if you are going to have a New Testament church, then I would beg you to read Paul's letters in their chronological order. Well, if you get a pen really quickly, I'll tell you.

Galatians. I Thessalonians. Look where Thessalonians is in your index, it's almost at the end. That's his second letter. II Thessalonians. Third letter. The fourth letter is I Corinthians. And the fifth letter is II Corinthians. And the sixth letter is Romans. It's not the first one. And then there's a gap, and there's Colossians, and Ephesians, and there's Philemon - the little bitty one, which, if you look in your index, is the last one. Then Philippians, and then I Timothy, then Titus, then II Timothy.

Now do that. And then do something else: add the dates. Date for Galatians: 50. First Thessalonians: 51. Second Thessalonians: 52. First Corinthians - big leap - 57. Second Corinthians: 58. Romans: 58. Then a big leap again. Colossians is in 63; so is Ephesians, and

so is Philemon. So is Philippians. And then you jump up to 65 for First Timothy and Titus. Then you go to 68, the year Paul died, for Second Timothy.

Oh, that's interesting, Gene. Well, let me tell you what else to do. Between Galatians and Thessalonians is about a year. You won't find that in your New Testament, but you can find out what happened between Galatians and Thessalonians, the gap there of a year. And when you do, you'll understand Thessalonians. About six to eight months between Thessalonians and Thessalonians. Figure out what that is. And by the way, just about the time that you're doing all of this, you'll discover, looking at Acts, which will be your help and guide to this, and Paul of Tarsus went into a place called Philippi, and he didn't write a letter to them. And there are no Jews there. Why? Because one year earlier, in 49, even before Paul wrote Galatians, Claudius threw all Jews out of Rome. And then you read about that in Acts, when Paul goes to Corinth. Corinth is running over with expatriated Jews. Jews had been forced out of Rome. (Philippi was a Roman colony, and Roman laws applied there)

Now, if you'll just keep on doing that and finding the time between each one of Paul's letters, you'll have a New Testament, and you will discover something else. That's our first need. The first need is to put it in order. The second need is to add dates and the passing of time.

Where have we been all this time with what we call a New Testament church and the teachings of the New Testament? And dear child of God, this is not easy to do, but if Paul's letters are in absolute chaos in our New Testament, and they are, Romans is not his first letter.... By the way, I used to hold seminars, and I taught revolutionary Bible study, and I was shocked to discover something. Because Acts ends with Paul in Rome, you turn the page, and the next page says the book of Romans. Everybody in the room thought that that was the continuation of the story, Paul in Rome and Romans. That's where Acts went, to the book of Romans, because Acts ended in Rome. I was appalled. There were pastors and Bible teachers in that room who did not know that Paul's letter to the Romans was not supposed to come next. In fact, Paul's letter to Rome is written in about Acts 23. It was written after First Corinthians and Second Corinthians. Did you know you can go to Acts 15:40, point to it, and say, "Right here is where Paul wrote Galatians"? And go to Romans, Acts 23, and say, "Right here, this is where Paul wrote Romans."

And so, what did that leave us? We're going to have a New Testament church? No, that is impossible for us to have a New Testament church. All we can have is a "verse church - that's not "first," that's verse, V-E-R-S-E. That's a "verse" church. Got a verse here...try to imagine that Paul's letters are flat, one-dimensional...ah, let's rearrange Paul's letters. Well, they're a little bumpy there; we can see a little dimension. Then we discover that Paul wrote Galatians—his first letter and first piece of Christian literature ever—in the year 50 at Acts 15:40. And know that the year before that, everybody in the Roman Empire was talking about the fact that in 49, Claudius had thrown the Jews out of Rome. Paul was upset because he wanted to go to Rome, and he was a Jew, and he couldn't. Then he is in Greece. First place he goes to in Greece, there are no Jews in the city of Philippi. Read the story now and see how mad those magistrates are and why they beat Paul and throw him in prison. They

threw him in prison because he was a Jew. They forgot to ask him if he was a Roman citizen. Even Roman citizens had to leave Rome, but Philippi was not Rome, and they had beaten a Roman citizen. This is not good news.

So, we get a little dimension. He goes down to Thessalonica and Berea and then to Corinth, and in Corinth, he writes a letter to Thessalonica, and Thessalonica is having some problems. We understand that, and we begin to get a sense of what the church in Thessalonica was like and what the people there were like. We meet somebody named Aristarchus and Secundus in the city of Thessalonica. I've never heard of Secundus and Aristarchus. Yes, but if you put the times and dates in, you will. And pretty soon, dimension begins to crop up. Suddenly, you realize you just can't grab verses out of everywhere and sew them together; you've got to be tied to the ongoing, flowing story that emerges to you, before you, in three dimensions. And you walk through the first century.

You find out what happened in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and in Corinth, and then realize that Paul left Corinth and did not, after he left them, he did not write them a letter for three years. And in fact, it had been five years since he wrote Second Thessalonians. I say five years; you want to fill in the gap there. What happened in those five years? And again, dimension. Highways. Buildings. People walking. Events happening. Suddenly, things come into focus and in reality.

Gene, I can't follow all that. Well, fortunately, you won't need to very long. There will be a book out entitled *Revolutionary Bible Study*. And all of this will be yours. Now, if you want to go through all of Paul's writings and bring in the dimensions, bring in all of the events, and then go build yourself a New Testament church, have at it, but you're going to find that on his second journey, there were four churches planted: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. And he was in Philippi for about one or two months, Thessalonica for about four or five months, and Berea, maybe only a few weeks, but fortunately, he had someone with him, and he left him there to carry on the foundation in Berea. Then Paul went down to the city of Corinth, and wow, he really backslid this time. Paul was there for 18 months, and every chance he got, he walked away from those churches, and they had the opportunity of being left alone to find their own native expression.

And you can be sure that the church in Berea and the church in Thessalonica didn't look like the church, not at all, like the church in Iconium or Lystra or Derbe. Two different nations, two different cultures, two different languages, far apart, especially if you remember that everybody walked, no matter where they went. Organic. Natural. And all under the underpinning is Christ.

I said this in the book, but I'm going to repeat it: If you open the Bible, let's say the New Testament, and find the New Testament, you're in trouble. If you open the New Testament and find Christ, you're on the right track. Is the New Testament supposed to disclose Scripture? Or is it supposed to disclose Jesus Christ, your Lord? The New Testament - is it there to give you Scripture and Scripture information and scriptural knowledge? Or is it there to reveal Jesus Christ in you?

I raise up a church, and I give them the Lord Jesus Christ. Amazingly, they fall in love with Him, and they fall in love with one another, and they take care of themselves. I'm going for as long as two years without going back or any contact with the church, and then leave it after a few days, weekend conferences, and not coming back for two more. And they are dear saints of God, they're so beautiful, and they're so excited, and the things that are happening are so wonderful. And creativity is unbelievable. And Scripture is not knowledge or something they dig out and demand of one another; Scripture is a door open that reveals Christ before their eyes and Christ within their very being.

Now I realize all that's new to you, but if you're going to get in a boat and paddle it, I would recommend you choose this stream to paddle in. There's so much more.

If you don't know what I mean by the revelation and disclosure of Christ, I recommend a book entitled *Christ Before Creation*, and a recording called *The Centrality, Supremacy, and Preeminence of Jesus Christ in All Things*, and let you see how the Scripture discloses, not the Scripture, but Jesus Christ. And then it's just all a matter of learning how, individually, but even more so corporately, touching Him, knowing Him, experiencing Him, and coming back into that room with everybody excited and delighted as they can be, and sharing with one another the Christ that they have experienced and known on that very day. The organic church is revealed in the New Testament. It is the work of God through the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, and we are putting out a whole world of information here to point you to this way, and if I could, to drive you to this whole new world and realm of understanding our Lord and what the *Ecclesia* is. Thank you. God loves you all.