

OpenTheo

What Has Happened To The Church?



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In his message, Steve Gregg highlights the differences between the early Christian church and the modern church. He emphasizes the importance of biblical critique and discusses the structure and practices of early churches, including the frequency and nature of gatherings and finances. The speaker emphasizes that the early Christian church was characterized by a loving community that cared more for people than possessions, promoting a communal heart and unity among church members, even with differing viewpoints or beliefs, and encouraging a reliance on supernatural attestation for believers doing God's work.

Transcript

Okay, we want to talk about what has happened to Christianity and church over the past 2,000 years, and I want to do this by making a comparison between what we know about the early church and what we can observe about modern church, and and see in how many ways it differs, explore why those differences came about, and perhaps make something of a biblical critique that will help us to at least begin to find a way back if that's what you're interested in doing. I say if that's what you're interested in doing, I have to realize that some people are quite happy with church as it is, and frankly some churches are such that there's reason to be happy with them, even though the institutional church is not in principle very much like the early church. Not everything is a disaster.

I think I would say most of it is, but there there are good people, pastors especially, who are humble and who care for their sheep, and who although the church is not set up exactly as it was in the first century, they're still ministering to people, they're feeding the sheep, and they're shepherding the sheep, and people are growing, and that's a good thing. I always prefer, if I have the choice, to do things the way they were done by the Apostles, by the way the early church was while the Apostles were still alive and leading it, because I don't consider that what's happened since then is an improvement. I've talked to people who, of course, defend the changes that have taken place to become what we now have in the institutional church, and they would say well this isn't corruption, this is maturing.

The church has matured. I mean it was the Apostolic Church was an infant church, and you know a lot of things have, the church has expanded itself into new realms and crossed many thresholds into different dimensions and degrees of involvement within itself and so forth, and therefore it's matured. We shouldn't be critical of the fact that the modern church is not exactly like the early church.

Now that sounds like a reasonable suggestion if, in fact, the changes did represent growth and maturity. What it appears to me is the things that Paul said made the Corinthian church carnal and babes are the things that characterize the church today almost as an uncriticized presupposition of what church is supposed to be. In other words, I don't think that by the church becoming more like what Paul called immature and carnal, that we could call that a maturing process in the church.

And whenever there is a new movement, and the church was a new movement in the days of the Apostles, people have to make decisions about how things are gonna be done, how they're gonna address certain issues, how they're gonna solve certain problems, and the Apostles, when the Apostles were around doing that, the church was not a perfect church, but it was set up the way they wanted it to be set up, and it did bear a lot of good fruit. And some things have changed, a lot of things have changed, and the things that have changed sometime have ended up causing the church to not bear at least the same kind of fruit as the Apostles saw it. We have some very, very large churches which look like an advertisement for a successful move of God, and some of them may be.

I'm certainly not here to be gratuitously critical of the institutional church, and certainly not of pastors. God knows that even the pastors in the churches that I think are the worst, most of them have, they're plateful, most of them are overworked, many of them have better motives than others do, and so if I make criticisms of what the church has become and the ways I think it's been damaged by the passing of time, I'm not doing so to say that every pastor or every church would, to the same degree, deserve this kind of analysis, but frankly, even the best churches I've been to generally speaking, most of them, still reflect all the things that characterize institutional church, and which I think are not an improvement over the way things were done by the Apostles. Now Jesus appointed the Apostles to be his, as it were, his replacements on earth, you know, setting things up and promoting the kingdom of God.

I think they did a bang-up job, frankly, in less than 30 years, a movement that started in Jerusalem had reached the entire Roman Empire, largely due to martyrdom of its founders, but they did it, and they had something really good that has stood the test of time, even though it's undergone modifications that I might be critical of, it is still here, and there's still genuine Christians, and there's still a true church. I'm favorable to the church, I want to make that very clear, I believe the church is the body of Christ, I believe the church is the bride of Christ, I believe the church is the community of and the

colony of the kingdom of God on earth, those are all very good things, but I don't equate the word church with what I would call the institutional church. I believe that true church is made up of all people who are truly born again, truly surrendered to Christ, truly acknowledge him as Lord, and have made every effort for that to be reflected in their lives, that they want to obey Christ.

I think everyone like that is a disciple of Jesus, and all the disciples in the world combined, collectively, are the church, the body of Christ. Now, of course, when you go to any institutional church, there are some of those people there. I'm not sure if I've ever been in any institutional church that didn't have some real Christians there.

I believe that real Christians have infiltrated every institution, including the institutional churches, but at the same time, I've never been to an institutional church where I could be very confident that most of the people there were really disciples who had made such a commitment to Christ as I think the real church is characterized by. So let's talk about the church. Jesus said in Matthew 16, 18, as we all know, Peter, you are the rock, and upon this rock I will build my church.

Now, Roman Catholics have thought that means that Peter is somehow the head of the church. Now, it makes it sound like he's the bottom of the church. If the church is built on top of him, he's not on top of it.

Of course, Jesus said to all of his apostles, whoever would be chief among you must be the slave of all, which means that the way up in importance of the church is really the way down to becoming the least and the most servant-minded of the church. Peter and the Apostles did comprise the foundation of the church. It says that in Ephesians chapter 2. It says that the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets.

Christ himself made the chief cornerstone. Peter, in 1 Peter, that was Ephesians 2, but in 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 5, he said that we are like living stones built up into a spiritual house, you know, a holy temple and a holy priesthood. So, the church, that is the people of God, the true people who follow Christ, are like stones that are assembled by God into a growing temple that's a habitation of God through the Spirit, Paul said.

And that is a global phenomenon. Now, like stones being built into a spiritual house, there's got to be some form of assembly. You don't just take a bunch of stones and call that a house.

They have to be assembled in some way. There have to be relationships between them. There have to be, there must be some kind of blueprint which defines how these stones relate to each other in their placement in the walls and so forth.

And that blueprint, I think, is Scripture. And we find that in Scripture, every member, every living stone in the true church has a role to play and has divinely bestowed gifts

that enable them to do those things through the power of the Spirit of God. Now, many of the things that people in New Testament times did through the power of the Spirit can be learned without even possessing the Spirit.

It is, I mean, not everything can be, like raising the dead and things like that. You can't learn that going to college. But you can learn how to organize a group of people by going to college.

You can learn to run a business, which most churches are run like businesses, frankly. Now, even if they're, even churches are more or less pretty good churches, they're corporations. They're 501c3 corporations, which I happen to know because the narrow path is also a 501c3 corporation.

And that means it's a corporation. The narrow path is not a body. The narrow path is a radio program.

But the church is a body. And when Christians gather together for church, it should not be like a corporation. It should be like a body, or like a family.

And so it's really hard to do church the way we read about it in the New Testament while those structures are in place. And while I'm always an advocate for doing things the way the Apostles did them, I realize that there's some people here, and certainly many pastors, don't know if we have any pastors here, that find themselves unable to find a congregation that does things the way the Apostles did it. And they're making the best of an imperfect situation.

And they're doing pretty good. They can still be bearing fruit. They can still be winning souls.

They can still be making disciples, even if they're not doing it the way the Apostles did. But if they're not doing it the way the Apostles did, we have to ask, who decided to change that and why? And what has been the result? Has it been an improvement over what the Apostles did? Or has something been lost by human beings coming up with new traditions about things? That's certainly a question worth asking. And after I talk about this, if you say, well, I still, you know, I like my church.

I have good friends, good relationships. I like the pastor's preaching. It's all good.

You know, we're growing. I'm not going to try to talk you out of it. But I do think Christians should be aware of the ways in which the churches you're likely to encounter in modern times, what they lack in terms of what the New Testament Church possessed under the leadership of the Apostles.

That's my motive for talking about this. Let's talk about what we do know about the primitive assemblies of the early church. And we can look at Acts chapter 2 and the

other early chapters of Acts to see really how they did things.

Now, we could say, but they did things not, they weren't very thought out. They were kind of spontaneous. They're going to surprise by 3,000 converts in one day, and suddenly there was a church to manage, and they just did it as they knew to do it.

But, you know, now that we've had more time to look at it and analyze, we think, oh, there's more efficient ways to do it. I'm not one of those who says that. I think the Apostles were led by the Holy Spirit probably more than any other church leaders in any time in history.

And even though they did have to kind of scramble sometimes, I mean, for example, some of the systems they had set up they had to modify, like when the Gentile widows were being neglected, and they had to assign some guys to look into that. But we can see in general what they thought of as normative, right from the very beginning, in terms of the Christian community. And so I want to answer, ask and answer certain questions.

Here's the questions I want to ask, and when we answer these questions, we can ask, how do modern churches do this? I'm not going to answer that right now. We'll come to that later on. First question, how did they gather? How often, that is.

How often did they get together? We know how often people get together now, usually once a week, and sometimes there's big disputes over whether you're supposed to do it on Sunday or Saturday, among certain types of people, as if a weekly gathering was somehow dictated in the New Testament, and as if they met on a weekly basis. But how often did they gather? Where did they gather? We know where churches usually gather now, big buildings that have big mortgages, or sometimes they manage to pay them off as they go, and they don't have a mortgage, but they still have a big structure to maintain. And sometimes maybe that's done out of necessity, we'll explore that.

But how often did they gather? Where did they gather? What did they do in their meetings? Anyone who's been raised in the church like me knows pretty much the drill for a Sunday morning service. You've got an opening prayer, you've got some singing, you've got announcements, maybe a little more singing, you've got maybe the choir will sing, and then we've got a sermon, and in the kind of churches I was raised in, an altar call, and then a closing prayer or benediction. That's virtually, I mean I've been in churches, all kinds of churches, because I haven't been in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

They do things a bit different, I know, but frankly the Protestant churches I've been in, of many stripes, they all do things kind of the same way. And okay, so what did they do in the Bible times at their churches? How were their finances done? When you don't have a corporation, how do you handle corporate finances? I mean, think about it, if you don't

have a 501c3 or some other kind of corporate entity, how does a group of people own a building? Who owns it? Well, if it's owned by a private party, great. Where I'm speaking tomorrow in Albany, it's a church building, but it's owned by some private guys who bought the building, and it's not really run like a regular church, I don't think.

I don't know what it does when I'm not here, but it's owned by some individuals, not a corporation. But when you've got, you know, hundreds of people coming to a big building, it's not very often the case that that building is held by a private owner who's just volunteering to let the gather and be there. Usually there's a corporation so that no one person is responsible for everything, and they run it like any corporation runs a building that they own.

That's not what they did in the early church. Where did they meet? How did they do their finances? How is the church growth accomplished, and what were the results of their practices, and how do they compare with ours? Well, those are the questions I want to ask. So let's first of all ask, how often did they gather? Well, we have some direct statements about that.

Again, our friends in the Seventh-day Adventist movement would say, well, we're commanded to meet on Saturday, Sabbath, and most churches will say, well, no, this Sabbath is Sunday now, which is, of course, not a biblical statement, but they say that therefore the church meets on Sunday. And so the debate is, what day of the week is the church supposed to get together? Well, what day of the week did the early church get together? Well, that's pretty easy to answer. If you go to Acts chapter 2 and verse 46, it says, so continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

Now, it says they ate their food with gladness. It doesn't mean, you know, all of them who were eating the same meals they were eating before they were Christians, now they're just happier while they're eating their dinners. No, they're talking about eating together, and we'll say more about that when we talk about what they did when they got together.

And, of course, I've been in many institutional churches that they do eat together, that after every Sunday service they actually have a big potluck. I think it's a really good thing. I think eating is a big part of Christian gatherings in the New Testament.

In fact, they had what they called the agape feast, which was at least once a week. It might have been every time they got together, which is, I mean, in some cases they got together daily. I know during the Jesus movement, which is a revival that took place when I was a teenager, we went to church every day, every night.

We wanted to hear the Bible taught every night of the week. And then during the day, we wanted to get together with each other and talk about the Bible some more, talk

about the things of God, and tell other people of Jesus. I mean, it was a daily church.

It's like there wasn't anything, there wasn't a reprieve from the influence of the Word of God being reinforced through teaching and stuff every day. That sounds like maybe what they did back then. Of course, that happens during revivals.

During revivals, and they certainly had one in the book of Acts, and the one I was fortunate to see in the Jesus movement, had these encounters. When people are revived, they're excited, they're hungry for the Word of God, they want to be with other Christians, they want to worship together. It's like a thrill.

And when the revival dies down, it's not so much a thrill, it becomes sort of an obligation. And then the question is, how often do we have to meet? Not how often do we get to meet, how often are we required to meet? Can we get away with it on Sundays only? Maybe Sunday and Wednesday? Well, during a revival, that's not the way people think about it. Now, we might say we can't blame us that we don't have a revival.

I'd love to have one. We just don't have one. I even pray for it.

So don't blame me that we don't have a revival. But on the other hand, maybe if we did things the way they did, it would create an environment where revival was more common. Now, I'm realistic.

We went to church every night of the week in the Jesus movement because we were all unmarried young people who didn't have jobs. A bunch of hippies. And I got married younger than most of my friends.

I got married when I was 19 and had a kid by the time I was 21. But I was a teacher, so I still went to, I was still teaching nine times a week places. But people who aren't teachers are not obligated to be those things.

They have wife and kids and jobs. One thing I didn't have was a job. And people, let's face it, they're too tired to go to church every night maybe.

But that's a shame because I don't find, I don't understand what too tired to go to church means. Not because I'm so spiritual, but because going to be with the people of God is invigorating for me. I love it.

And of course that might be partly because I have such an opportunity to share when I'm usually, not always, but usually the one teaching. And you know I go on teaching itineraries because don't you ever get tired teaching? No, I get energized teaching. But I also get energized listening to good teaching.

I mean I'm energized to learn things. But I guess I'm just trying to give a slight pass to the modern churches that don't meet every night. Let's face it, the majority of

congregation have other obligations too.

Families, jobs, and things like that. But at least we know this, the early church wanted to get together every day. They weren't forced to.

And even if we can't do it, we should have such a walk with God that we just, and such a hunger for fellowship with true people who are like-minded, that we wish we could do it every night, every day. Anyway, I don't think they had the concept in the early church of a weekly meeting. What day of the week do we have to go to church? No, it's like they were meeting daily.

In Acts chapter 5 and verse 42 it says, And daily in the temple and in every house they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. So daily, again the early church was doing these things daily. Now I kind of gave away from that about that sort of where they'd gather.

Because the same verses that tell us how often they gathered also tells us where. Both of those verses we look at said they gathered daily in the temple and from house to house. And it also says, And they ate their bread with that.

So they were eating with each other house to house too. This is where churches often met. We can see this not just in the early Jerusalem church, we see it in the churches that Paul wrote to.

He writes to the Roman church and says, Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the church that meets in their house. In fact, in Romans chapter 16, although he doesn't say their house that many times, there seem to be five groups of people who are probably households that were fellowship groups in Rome. And we know that, you know, one of them was in the home of Priscilla and Aquila.

Philemon lived in Colossae and there's reference to the church in his house. And so you find in various places the church in people's house. Lydia in Philippi had the church in her house.

It's so nice to have church in a home because it doesn't cost the church anything extra. There's no question about needing a corporation to own the building. Somebody in the church already owns the building or at least rents it.

And they become the host of a group of Christians. So there doesn't need to be any corporation to own it. And that, by the way, that solves a lot of other problems we'll talk about later on that we have in our modern church.

Meeting in homes is not mandatory. They also met in the temple, which in Jerusalem the temple had public gathering areas at anyone's meeting. So Paul, when he was in Corinth, he met in a the school of Tyrannus.

Yeah, I believe it was in Corinth. It could have been in Ephesus. But he first started meeting in synagogues, Jewish synagogues.

And then when they came out of those, he apparently rented or was able to secure the use of a school building and use it. So, I mean, obviously they didn't always meet in homes. But they didn't have buildings of their own, it would appear.

That is to say, church buildings dedicated to their meetings. They did eventually, you know, in the second and third century they did. But the original church didn't see any need for them.

And you know, I say, well, we couldn't put, you know, the people of our church, we couldn't fit them in homes. Not in one home, perhaps. I don't think they fit the 3,000 people who were converted on the day of Pentecost in one house either.

They met in multiple homes. But these homes were not denominationally different from each other. They were all part of the big local family.

They just had meetings from house to house. They met in homes, but maybe not always the same home for the same people. It was like all the Christians in town were the family.

And they got together in smaller groups in order to accommodate them. And usually, usually in homes, but sometimes in the larger meetings too. I would suspect that when they met in the temple, that was the large, probably all of all the local Christians in Jerusalem got together for these larger meetings in the larger venues.

But then they would, church would largely be held in homes. And you know, I saw, there was a revival Jesus People Movement in Australia. I visited and taught back in the early eighties.

And they had about, well, the first time I went there, they had about 300 people. The second time, a year later, they had about 500. They were a bunch of hippies who were all converted.

And, and they had 50 community houses. I mean, these, these 500 people lived in 50 community houses. They had meetings every night in these houses, except about once a week, they had one big meeting and they'd rent an auditorium or something for that, a public access facility so that they, so remember they're all one body in that town, though they're, most of their meetings were in smaller groups.

That's very probably how they did it in the big, big cities in the New Testament. We do read them meeting daily in the temple and in the homes. And that, and that's probably very similar to what they did in Australia when I was there.

What did they do? Well, we have a statement of what they did when they gathered, what they do at their church meetings. In Acts chapter two, now remember these weren't Sunday meetings, these were daily meetings, but Acts two and verse 42, it says, they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, in fellowship and in breaking of bread, that's eating, and in prayers. Now, some of you might say, well, breaking of bread, that's talking about taking communion.

Well, that could well be, that could well be, but from what the early fathers of the church saying, what the apostles wrote, when they took communion, it was at a meal. It was part of a meal. We know that because Paul said in Corinth, when they took communion, they're really messing it up because some people were taking too much food and some were taking too much wine, so that some people were going home hungry.

Apparently that's not supposed to happen when you take communion. It must be a meal if people are expected to go home with their bellies full. And some are going away drunk, which means they weren't drinking a thimble full of grape juice.

Their communion was a meal. Okay, so we'll talk more about that. And that's what they did here.

What they say, continue the apostles teaching. Now we don't have the apostles here. Some people say there are apostles today, but I can't find any.

I mean, I'm not against there being apostles today. I just can't find any. I've been teaching 50 years.

And that whole time I've been in roughly, or seriously, charismatic circles. Youth with a Mission, I've been teaching for 30-something years around the world, every continent, multiple times. And they're very charismatic, more than I am.

But nonetheless, I've never met a real apostle in one of those groups. And I'm thinking, if there are apostles today, where would you find them? If I can teach for 50 years around the whole world, in one of the most charismatic missionary societies around, the ones who actually believe that there are apostles and prophets, and I can't meet anyone that really qualifies. I mean, every church would be in trouble if they had to have an apostle there.

But every church that has a Bible has the apostle's doctrine. And therefore, if you have somebody in the church who can teach the biblical doctrines the apostles wrote, or that Jesus, what Jesus said, which of course was reported by the apostles too, then you've got something like what they had. Not quite the same, because if someone understood what Paul said, if someone misunderstood what Paul said in those days, they could ask him.

If Peter said something controversial, or just unclear, they could ask him because he was there. That's a problem we don't have, a benefit we don't have now, it's a problem we

have, is that we have the apostles teaching, but we don't have them here to clarify it. Well, what do we have? We have the Holy Spirit, but that doesn't solve the problem entirely, because everybody who's got a different opinion says they have the Holy Spirit teaching.

So frankly, what we have to do a little more than what they had to do is do some exegesis. We have to look at what Paul said, say, some people think he meant that, some people think he meant that. Let's really study this very responsibly, very objectively, without an agenda, and see if the context and the words he used can be, we can really get to the bottom of what Paul really was saying.

That's, I think, our responsibility, because we need the apostles teaching too. And then for fellowship, of course, it's not really clear what fellowship means in this context. It's, of course, the word *koinonia*, but the word *koinonia*, like the word *koine*, Greek *koine* means common.

Koinonia means sharing in common. So it's not clear whether they're sharing money in common or sharing food in common, or what, probably sharing much of, most of everything in common. I suspect from reading 1 Corinthians and Paul's discussion of the gifts, what they were sharing is their gifts.

You know, someone has a gift of prophecy, they give a prophecy, they share it with the church. Someone has a gift of teaching, they share it with the church. They, you know, they share together in the common resources that God had given the church through the various gifts and so forth, but also material things, we find.

So the fellowship, or they had common life is probably the best way to understand fellowship in this. And then in prayers, group prayer. Now we all pray, but unless you're in a very unusual church, group prayer does not comprise a very large portion of the meetings.

There's prayer. The pastor will pray at the beginning, he'll pray at the end, and you might even, you know, have a situation where there's some time system, let's all pray together, or any prayer request. But usually it's not a major part of most church services.

I could be wrong. I've been to one home church where they take about half their meeting with prayer, which is a healthy thing. I think the one reason our country is in the shape it's in is because the church, which is fairly, has fairly high representation in this country as Christians, pretty big percentage of evangelical Christians in this country, more than anywhere in Europe, for example.

I think it's that we haven't prayed effectively or enough. And I think it's because we're very individualistic. I mean, if you get up and pray two hours or one hour every morning, I doubt that most of you do.

I have to say I don't. I sometimes resolve to. I many times resolve to.

I get up and after a half hour or maybe even less sometimes I don't remember. And my mind's like, what am I going to do today? And so I'm just confessing my own carnality here. I just I believe in prayer.

I really do believe in prayer. I believe it's the most powerful thing God has given us. And and yet the devil opposes our prayer lives a great deal.

I do find when I'm praying with other people, it's easier to stay focused. And if that if praying with other people went an hour long, as long as you know, there's not a whole bunch of boring prayers, like, you know, my my cousin's best friend's wife stubbed her toe. Lord, please bless them and make them feel better.

I mean, if there's a lot of that kind of stuff, I have to say my mind wanders to things more interesting. But honestly, there's some very important things that need prayer. And you have not because you ask not.

It's interesting that the Lord's prayer that we have, we pray it individually. And churches sometimes pray it from the pulpit and stuff too, but every every pronoun in that every personal pronoun is plural. Give, you know, give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins. It's a collective prayer for the Church of God. And I mean, we we pray it for ourselves and for our family and so forth.

But this making prayer one of the main things that Christians do when they get together collective prayer, focus prayer, I think is something we're reading about them doing. In fact, when Peter was put in prison and he got sprung by the angel to get out of prison, where'd he go? He went to Mary John Mark's mother's house where there's a prayer meeting going on. They were all praying late in the night, in the middle of the night they're praying.

And they probably started early. You know, I think prayer played a much bigger role in the early church meetings than it probably does in most of the churches were from there. And then of course, there was, let's see, doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

Yeah, the breaking of bread. I, most people probably say, well, that's taking communion. Someone say the Eucharist.

It could be. But as I said, in those days, they took communion over a meal together. So they were actually in a table fellowship kind of situation.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of those meetings were just held at the meal table. You know, I don't know that that's the case. They might have had someplace where they said

that what we do at our home church, and I'm not saying that we should do it that way, but just our way of trying to make all these things happen there is we have a time of singing.

Of course, we still follow kind of major, typical pattern of Protestant churches. We have a time of worship, usually goes as much as an hour. And then we have a time of prayer that might go a half hour together.

People share requests and we pray. And then we take a break. We go in the kitchen and we eat.

Of course, people show up a half hour early for me and they eat that half hour. So this is an eating meeting. This is people come a half hour early to eat.

We do the singing, the praying, take a break for more eating. Then we come back to another room where we have a table where we have a Bible study. And then when we close, we eat some more.

And meeting usually ends around one and people are done eating around four years. And some of them are fat, as you might guess. But the truth is, that's not mandatory.

You don't have to eat so much as you get fat. But, you know, eating this, there's just something about eating with people, kind of gets you talking and gets you, you know, casual with each other in a good way. So anyway, that's that those are the things they did.

And I'm not saying that the way our home church does it is the way it should be done, because I'm not sure they did it the way we do it. But we try to at least include the same things that they thought were important to do when they got together. Okay, they gathered, as I said, mostly in homes, sometimes public buildings, in addition to homes.

They did those four things, it says. And how do they handle their finances? Well, initially, they didn't even have deacons to do that. I think modern Protestant churches often have a board of deacons that manage, hopefully manages the finances well.

But the assumption in the early church was that when you become a disciple, you forsake all that you have. That doesn't mean you sell your house and give away your car. But it means that everything you have becomes God's, it becomes Christ's, just like when the apostles, you know, they forsook all to follow Jesus.

When the rich young ruler refused to do so. Peter said, Well, what shall we have we we forsaken everything. And Jesus, well, you'll have such and such, you know, hundredfold blessing and so forth afterwards.

But, but the point is that Peter was recognized as one who had forsaken everything.

That's what you had to do. Jesus said, unless you forsake all that you have, you can't be my disciple.

But Peter lived in a house that he apparently owned. He had he went he still had fishing tackle in his boat, his nets, all the stuff he had, in a sense before he was a Christian, he had a wife and children. He didn't forsake them in the physical sense of walking away from them.

But he had to forsake them to be a disciple, which means he must have reassigned their ownership, in a sense to God, or to Christ. I have a house, but it's really Christ's house. If he wants someone to, if he wants me to show hospitality to somebody, it's that's his choice, not mine.

You know, same thing, my my car, anything I have, it's his. Now, I have to be a steward of it. That means that if somebody who's a reckless driver, someone who I don't know if he has drivers license, wants to buy my car, I have to really think twice before I say yes about that.

Because that might not be a good stewardship of the car, or it might be in certain circumstances, I don't know. But I mean, we really have to use wisdom and stewardship. But the idea is that when we became disciples, we changed over the title of everything we had to Christ.

And that means to God. So that the Bible says if any of them were poor, well he said there weren't any poor, there weren't any poor among them, but there had, well, some who had been poor before they came to the church, but it says no one said that the things he possessed was his own. But as any had need, those who possessed lands and houses and so forth were selling them, it says.

Now, most translations don't say were selling, it's just that they sold them. And you could get the impression that this was kind of what happened when you joined the church, you sell everything, hand it over to the Apostles, let them distribute it like a big communist system. And I don't think that's how we're to understand.

I think later on in the book of Acts, we still see that Mark's mother owned a house. We find that Philemon owned a house, we know that Priscilla owned a house. So it's not like they had to just dump everything in the lap of the Apostles, now I can be a Christian because I've dumped everything.

It's rather that nothing they had could be held on to as if it was their own. They had to treat everything they had as if it really belonged to Christ, and therefore was available to the least of them. And they didn't have a communal system such as communism would be.

A lot of Christians who favor socialism or communism say, well isn't that how the early

church did things? Well, they did this because they had one heart, it says. The whole community was of one heart and one soul, and they didn't consider that the things they had were theirs. You see, there's a communal heart, but there was individual stewardship of possessions.

And it was something they were doing, it says. It says, as any had need, which is probably occasionally, those who had extra were selling them and giving the money over. So it wasn't that there was, in the early church they didn't pay it, they didn't tithe.

At least we have no record of tithing in the early church. Tithing means where you take 10% of your income and give it to the priests or to the temple. Well, there is no temple, there's no physical temple or priests, no special priesthood in the body of Christ.

And therefore, the temple is the whole body. And as there's needs in the body of Christ, in as much as you do it to the least of his brethren, you do it to him. The way you give to God is by giving to his people in need.

And that's what Jesus said to the rich and the ruler. He said, sell what you have and give it to the poor. He didn't say give it to me or give it to my disciples.

He said, sell what you have and give it to the poor and you'll have treasures in heaven. He said the same thing in Luke when he said to the disciples themselves. He said, sell what you have and give alms and provide for yourself bags that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens.

So where do you make your, what Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, don't lay up treasures on earth, but lay up treasures in heaven. Where do you make that deposit? Well, helping the poor. And I want to say something about that because it's, some people get overzealous and they just say, I guess, I guess I better sell everything, give it to, you know, the guy at the bottom of the off ramp.

That is not good stewardship. It's really difficult to give to the poor in this country and know that you're really giving to someone who has any real need that can't be easily supplied by them getting a job or getting, you know, just going to a homeless shelter. I mean, there's so many ways that people who are poor in this country can get by without the church's money, which should be concerned about real poor people.

Remember how Paul told Timothy, you know, anyone who has widows, widowed mothers, you take care of them so that the church does not be burdened with theirs. You know, those were widows indeed and don't have anyone take care of them, the church should take care of them. But the church shouldn't be taking care of needs that there's an easy, other, obvious, responsible someone to take care of them.

And it's very hard to find people in this country who are really poor and can't find some other way of getting out of their poverty. But there are some. There certainly are

disabled people with no families or poor families.

There are people who work hard but just don't make enough wages. They got a lot of kids, they got, you know, problems. I mean, they have a health crisis and, you know, there's all kinds of ways people can have legitimate needs, which even though they're hard-working and godly, they don't have the money on hand for it.

And that's how God provides for his people through other of his people. And of course there's always a lot of real legitimately poor people in other countries. And I have to say that when I give money, most of it I give to ministries that are helping the poor in Haiti or some other, you know, third world country where, you know, there's really horrible poverty, there's no solution except for the gifts of generous people.

Though there's a portion that I give to people I know of here who have genuine needs, working poor or whatever, or disabled. Everyone has to make their own decision about that. But we can see that the needs of the people were not met by government programs in the early church.

They might have been met by relatives, and probably that would be the first line of support to be sought. But where there were widows that didn't have support, we see that for Acts chapter 6 verse 1 that they distributed the goods of the church. They didn't have to pay for any buildings.

That leaves a lot of money to help people who are having trouble with their food on the table. They also, in my opinion, did not have salaries, salaried staff. Now some people will argue with me about that.

In fact, I had a friend here in Oregon, who used to write very upset letters to me because he was a paid salary minister in the area. And from time to time, I don't say it all the time, but when people ask, I would say on the air, I don't believe in salaried clergy. I don't think the early church had salaried clergy.

They had supported clergy. Now that salaried and supported are different. I gladly support missionaries.

I gladly support a Bible teacher or a pastor that is serving God and living off by faith. I mean, either by faith, I don't say that because I need the money. Actually, I'm not doing too bad, so I'm not trying to say anything about me except what my policy has always been.

I went in the ministry 50 years ago and I decided I would never charge. I'd never take a salary. I'd never work for any Christian organization except as a volunteer.

And I wouldn't charge for materials because Jesus said, freely you receive, freely give. So I don't believe. It would hurt my conscience to ever be on salary.

It doesn't hurt my conscience to receive gifts, as I often do in the mail and stuff, where I speak, sometimes there's gifts. But I mean, I do live off of that. I don't have any guaranteed income in my life and I haven't for 50 years.

And I'm not complaining because God's taking very good care of me. But salaried staff, I don't know how to justify because a salary is different than support. If I feel led to help somebody that is in need, a minister who would be in need if he wasn't supported, I'm glad to give it to him.

I mean, I know the ministers are doing real work because I do real work. I mean, it's not not work that I charge for, but it's work. And I appreciate that about people.

But it's one thing to be supported by God because he's your master and you're his servant. On the one hand, or being supported by a corporation because you're its servant and it's your boss. And therefore, you have to keep the boss happy if you want the paychecks to keep coming.

You see, I just, I don't want to criticize pastors who do it differently than me. I really don't. But I don't think the Apostles charged a salary.

I don't think there's anyone in the early church who, every Friday, the Apostles went to the, you know, window and got their paycheck for the week. I don't think Jesus did either. I'm not sure who would have given him his check.

We do read that there were women that supported Jesus and the Apostles. But I'm pretty sure he didn't have a contract labor arrangement with them. Okay, I'll heal this many people, you give me this much money.

Jesus didn't attach any price to his service, neither did the Apostles. They were supported. But it's a world of difference to say, I'm serving God and God will provide.

And he'll probably provide through people, that's how it usually happens. He's not gonna make money, you know, appear on my lawn in the morning like manna. But it's a big difference between that and saying, I'll work for this organization.

I'll minister in the Word of God. I'll do, I'll serve the people. But I expect every Friday this much money for it.

That's being a contract laborer to me. Maybe pastors who do that may not, they may have another way of understanding that. The Bible does say the labor is worthy of his hire.

Paul said, I've ministered you in spiritual things, it's no big thing for me to be ministered back in material things. I understand that. And those are the things the ministers always bring up when they don't like what I say about this.

They also say it's not practical. They say, well, you're on the radio, that's why you can support. I was in the ministry for 25 years before I was ever on the radio.

And I was an unknown guy, but I still trusted God and he provided for me. I had to live in poverty a lot of the time, that's okay. Jesus, Paul said, having food and clothing, we shall with these things be content.

So if a minister who's serving God as Paul did or any other, I think has to be prepared to live on whatever God provides and not make demands that it's, you know, that they get so much back. That's me. I tell this story in one of my recent books, my second book on the Empire of the Risen Son, but there's a pastor in our town, a pastor of a very large church.

And when I moved to town, I met with him in his office and he was talking with me just to become acquainted with him. And he told me that his church had had a split a few years earlier and they'd lost so many people and so much money that they had to fire a significant part of their large staff. And I asked him if he would think me rude to tell him what I would have done in his situation and he welcomed it.

I don't know if he was glad that he did, but he was polite enough to welcome it. I said, well, what I would have done, if I was in your position, here's what I would have done. I would have called all the staff in and told them, you know, we've lost a significant portion of our congregation and therefore a significant part of our income.

We can't support this staff anymore. We do not have the money for your salaries. I can do one of two things.

I can either fire enough of you that I can keep paying those who we retain, or if you feel like God's called you to be here, and if he hasn't, you shouldn't be here anyway, but if you feel like God's called you to be here, we'll let you continue your ministry. We're not going to pull the rug out from under your ministry, but we won't pay you anything. And I myself won't take any pay.

We will have no paid staff. All the way down to the secretaries and the janitors. There is a ministry, a gift of helps, that is just as important as a gift of preaching.

Everyone who serves God should serve for free, and if they can't, you know, if they think, well, where am I getting my money? Well, if you're serving God, the answer should be easy. The laborer is worthy of his hire. If you're laboring for God, God knows how to get the money into your hands that you need.

And I said, if you called your staff here and said, listen, none of you are going to be paid. I'm not going to be paid from now on. We're going to trust God.

We'll let the congregation know that there's been a change. None of you guys are

getting salaries. They're living on faith, and we'll just see which of you God supports.

That's how you will know if God has called you to be here. And if he hasn't, it's certainly much better for you to go somewhere else where he will support you, because he'll want you there, you know. If God wants you doing what you're doing, he'll supply the needs.

Now, that doesn't mean everybody should just quit their job and say, you know, God supply for me. No, most people are supplied their needs by their jobs, because they're doing work that you cannot, that you can, in good conscience, you can accept a paycheck for. But when you're not supposed to charge for the Word of God, a minister who ministers the Word of God should not charge for it.

And I'm not working for this organization, or that church, or that thing. I'm working for God. He knows what my needs are.

And I got that idea, of course, from George Mueller and others. So I read about Marge Young and thought, well, that sounds like a good idea. That way you always know if God's really supporting your ministry or not, meaning he approves of it.

If he doesn't supply for you your needs, then he doesn't approve of your ministry. And you better find what he does approve of. Because I've lived that way for 50 years, so I have to just say, yeah, you have to be poor sometimes, like Paul said.

Sometimes having food and clothing, you have to be content with that. But what's wrong with that? I've never seen why that would be a bad thing. You know, being content is the secret of happiness.

Some people might say, well, you know, I wouldn't be happy with only that much. Well, then shame on you. It says in Hebrews, be content with such things as you have.

And let your life be free of covetousness. So, I mean, the money thing is always a problem in the church if people are doing it for the money. Now, I know there's some paid pastors who aren't doing it for the money.

They'd be a pastor even if there was no money in it. But the church happens to, you know, that's their policy. They'd give a paycheck to the pastor.

But I think even they would be happier. I'm not saying they're doing the wrong thing. I think they'd be even happier if they just said, listen, don't give me a paycheck.

Just put a box in the back and let God provide for me. If I'm serving him, he knows. If I'm serving, if I do what he wants, he knows my needs.

Because frankly, we all know about scandals that have happened to ministers who were on salary and they kept on salary and kept doing these bad things for years before they were discovered. Just think if they'd been trusting God for their finances, he would have

taken them out earlier. I frankly, I really think this was the early church's pattern.

You know, at the end of the first century, there's a book called the Didache, which describes the church practices in the generation of the apostles. It actually tells many ways to know if a person's a false prophet. One of them is if he asks for money, he's a false prophet.

They must have assumed that you don't have to ask for money if you're a true prophet. If you're truly serving God, God must know what your needs are. A lot of people don't really believe enough in their own ministry to do that.

And they're not convinced enough that God cares about their ministry enough to support it. But I can tell you, I'm not, this is not idealistic self for me. This is where the rubber meets the road for me.

That's how I've lived for 50 years and many other before me, including, I think, Jesus and the Apostles. You know, and I'm not them, but I think they set the pattern for ministry as servanthood as opposed to ministry as a job. And again, I realize whenever I say that any ministers who are paid a salary, they feel like I'm condemning them.

No, I'm not. I don't judge another man's servant. That's between them and God.

I'm just saying that's the way I'm pretty sure Jesus lived. I'm pretty sure the Apostles did. That's the way a lot of my heroes have lived and the way I've lived.

So it works. I know it works. I know there is a God.

I know a lot of Christians sometimes have their doubts. Honestly, they would never say they doubt it, but if it comes down to, I don't know where the money's coming from, I just lost my job, you know, just got, you know, just got a health crisis. How are we gonna pay for this? Well, there's a Godism there.

If there's a God, why are you worried about that? I want to tell you, I'm not a man of great faith. I have chosen this way of living because I think it requires me to trust God when I am not naturally inclined to do it. There's been many times I've been worried about my finances because they were pretty sparse at many times, and God would provide just the right moment, the right amount, and so forth.

But even so, another time, it's like the children of Israel and the wilderness, you know. God provides. They should never have another doubt, but you do.

You have your doubts. That's my weakness, and I remember times when I just say, God, I got rent money coming up. There's, I don't have any money in the bank.

I don't have anything. I have kids to support, and I'd be praying like that, and a voice would speak to me, and I suppose it was God's, saying, well, do you have a father? Don't

you? That's really all you have to ask yourself, an answer. If you answer rightly, there's nothing to worry about.

Did you ever hear that old poem? I first heard it when I was in junior high. I really like it. It's very simple based on Jesus' teachings about this.

He said, the poem goes, said the robin to the sparrow, I truly like to know why these anxious human beings rush around and worry so. Said the sparrow to the robin, I think it must be, friend, that they have no heavenly father, such as care for you and me. I mean, if animals could think and know that, you know, they just count on God.

They can't figure out why we don't. Don't we have a father too? Now, I say this mainly to challenge ministers, because I think the early church ministers didn't take a salary, but I think they were supported. They just didn't know how much would come in.

It might make some people feel uncomfortable, but I have to say it's not uncomfortable. Well, it is. Sometimes it is.

But as long as you're content with whatever God provides, and it'll always be enough as long as he wants you to survive. By the way, birds trust God, but sometimes they starve. But not one falls to the ground apart from the will of your father.

Some people starve too, but not apart from the will of your father. All I want is God's will. If all you want is God's will, you won't starve if he wants you alive.

If he doesn't want you alive, don't try to stay around. How easy. I mean, doesn't the Bible teach that? I can think of many scriptures that teach that very plainly.

I can't think of any that refute it. It's just not the way things are done. I think in the early church, the ministers were volunteers.

They got supported because they deserved to be supported. And the poor were supplied from also the rich people in the church who voluntarily, out of love, not out of compulsion, sold extra stuff that they had and helped the poor. As it turns out, it says in Acts that in chapter 42, chapter 4 verses 32 through 20, excuse me, I must have it backward, must be 32 through 35.

I have 25. It says that none of them lacked anything. None of them were poor because they cared about each other.

Not because there was a communist or socialist system that it was imposed on them by some higher authoritative person, but because they had the love of Christ in their heart. Remember what John said, if any of you has this world's good and he sees his brother have need and shuts up his bowels of compassion for him, how does the love of God dwell in him? So anyway, it was a community of love. It was not a business they were

running there.

And how was church growth accomplished? As you read the book of Acts, it was accomplished by the preaching of the gospel. A rather uncompromising gospel, I would say, which I won't go into right now, but I think sometimes the gospel preached today isn't the same gospel they preached. I'm not going to get into that.

There's too many things to talk about there. But the the apostolic gospel was preached and it was backed up with supernatural confirmation. It says at the end of Mark chapter 16 that the apostles, whenever preaching the word and God working with them, confirming the word with signs following.

I believe in signs and wonders. I'm not a big, I'm not a chaser of signs and wonders. I don't have lots of signs and wonders in my ministry.

In fact, I'm not sure I have any. I don't have a gift of working of miracles. There is such gift and the apostles have it and apparently some others besides them have it, according to 1 Corinthians 12.

But I don't think very many people have it. But I do think that where the gospel is preached, if it's preached faithfully, there will be supernatural attestation. If it's only in the supernatural conversion of people you never thought would have ever been saved.

Or if it's in a supernatural love in the hearts of the converts toward each other who were Jew and Gentile haters of each other before that or Arab Jews. I know some Jew and Arab Christians that minister together and so forth. I mean blacks and whites in this country.

Supposedly there's systemic racism in this country. I must live in a fortunate place because I've never encountered it. I know there's racists.

That's not the same thing as systemic racism unless it's the government programs that have now favored minorities. I guess that is systemic racism in a sense. But the point is it doesn't matter what race people are or even if they live in a very racist society.

If they're Christians, they're not racist because you love your neighbor as you love yourself and your neighbor could be any color. They're a person. So anyway the church growth was accomplished by the loving community.

It's interesting in Acts chapter 2 which of course describes the very first converts on the day of Pentecost and how their lives were lived. We've been reading passages from that through this whole time. But it says interestingly it says they were daily praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily those that were being saved.

Because they were living the way we just described, they had favor with all the people.

Why? Because the church wasn't just a group of people who were part of the normal dominant culture and who added Jesus to their life like a postage stamp. Who just added a day of worship into their week and that's the only thing that made them different from everyone else.

They were different in every respect. They didn't care about their possessions. They cared about people.

They didn't, you know, they didn't seem to be doing a lot to entertain themselves. They were getting together fellowship and learn the ways of God and and walk in them and I mean they were they were people with different priorities. They were countercultural and that society of the early Christians was a countercultural society that made an impact.

People thought, you know, that's better. That's better than the culture I'm part of. I'm part of the kingdom of darkness.

They called themselves the kingdom of God. I think God's kingdom is is a better society than the one I'm in. Now that, you know, in other words there was a visible witness that stood behind the verbal witness of the Apostles.

It's interesting that you read in Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 4, it talks about how the disciples lived in the way we've been discussing and then it says, and with great power the Apostles gave testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. A church of 3,000 people only had 12 preachers. Well, and a few others.

I mean mostly it was the Apostles. Stephen and Philip were not Apostles, but most of the people were not evangelists. In a town that size you don't need 3,000 evangelists.

Twelve or fourteen that had the power of God and the backup of a Christian community that was stunning to onlookers, you know, that was enough to reach, you know, all the neighborhoods. I sometimes teach for an organization that has more missionaries out on the field than any other group I know of all over the world and their vision is to just get as many young people, Christian young people, mobilized out to flood the nations. And I think, you know, in that organization there's some powerfully effective Christian missionaries, but there's also a whole bunch of immature people who just kind of join the organization for adventure and things like that.

And some of them are kind of carnal. Some of them might not even be saved because you only have to go through a short lecture phase and an outreach to be a missionary in that organization. And some of them don't don't even get saved before they're launched.

Most of them do. Most of them are saved, but they're immature. I sometimes say, do I want, if I had the choice, would I choose for us to have a hundred thousand missionaries worldwide? Many of them who didn't really know what the real gospel is.

Many of them are not called of God. They don't have the power of God. They're just kids who are excited about going overseas and doing something for Jesus.

I mean, I'm not saying their motives are bad, but that's not who the early church sent out as missionaries. The first missionaries we read about that were actually sent out by a church were Barnabas and Saul, and later Silas. Now these were not very young converts who had a lot of zeal and wanted to put in some time for God before they went off to university education or something.

These were the best leaders the church had. They were the most experienced, the most mature, the most anointed, the most obviously called by the Holy Spirit. They sent them out.

Now I'd much rather have, let's say, a few hundred or maybe a thousand or so people like the Apostle Paul flooding the nations than a hundred thousand people who, I'm not even sure why they're there. That's just me, but that's how I see it. I think that that's how the early church was different than us.

I just want to real quickly go over this. How did that change? It changed the way things do change when people start getting ideas that aren't part of what Jesus or the Apostles said. Now, for example, Ignatius, just in the year 110 or 115 AD, he wrote seven letters.

He was a martyr. He was being taken from his home church where he was in a mission. He was taken to Rome to be fed to the lions, and while he was being transported, he wrote seven letters to seven churches, as it turns out.

And in each of them, he was concerned about the unity of the churches, that there was division. His solution? Let everyone be supervised by the bishop. Everyone do exactly what the bishop says.

You can't have a baptism without the bishop there. You can't take communion without the bishop there. You can't have a marriage without the bishop.

The bishop has to be there to keep everyone in line. Now, how did Paul handle divisions that were in the church? Let's say the Church of Rome. Some were saying they could eat all things.

Some were saying, no, we can only eat vegetables. Some were saying we should keep a holy day. Others were saying, no, we should keep all these holy days.

Differences of opinion. What did Paul say? Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. There's a lot of negotiables that churches actually divide over, as if they're non-negotiables.

And the one way to maintain unity is to have people love each other and be humble

about their differences, and forbear one another in love, like Paul often said. Another way is to put one guy in charge and say, everyone submit to me. Everyone just do things my way.

I know what's right. Whoever disagrees has got to come into agreement with me. That's what Ignatius suggested.

Now, I mean, I can't blame him for, in his final days of living, wanting to fix the problems in the churches. And division in church is a big problem. But the solution to division is love and humility.

Not put one guy in charge who everyone has to conform to. And that's, frankly, many modern churches have taken that role. We'll have one guy in charge.

He's the CEO. We've got some other guys, maybe the elders, maybe the deacons who are like the board of directors. And we'll make the decisions, and anyone who doesn't agree with us better find another place to do fellowship.

And that's why denominations start. Because somebody's in charge. I mean, there's many mega church pastors, not all, but many, who will put you out of the church if you seriously disagree with them.

And certainly, even small church pastors who are very strongly denominational will say, well, you know, I'm in charge here. You're causing division by having a different point of view. Having a different point of view does not in itself cause division.

Immaturity and divisiveness causes a division. Churches can have people with different points of view without it being divided. You know, I've had many Baptist pastors say to me, well, we don't allow anyone to speak in tongues in this church because it divides the church into haves and have-nots.

Well, there are haves and have-nots in the church. Not necessarily with respect to tongues, maybe with that respect too, but, I mean, James said you have-not because you ask not. There are Christians who don't have what they could.

And if they are in a church with somebody who has something they don't have, instead of being jealous or defensive, why not just say, okay, well, God hasn't led me to go that direction at this point. I'm following Jesus, and when he wants me to, I'll go that way too. He can give me that if he wants to.

In the meantime, we have to fellowship with each other because we're one family. We don't excommunicate people because we don't see things the same way. I've sometimes mentioned on the air, a church I went to in Idaho for a while, it was a very wonderful church, the best I've been in at one time.

It didn't have a name, didn't have official leadership, didn't have a corporation, didn't have any salaries, didn't have a statement of faith. You had to be a Christian, and you had to believe the Bible was the authority. And there were a lot of people there.

Some were Calvinists, some were not. Some were charismatic, some were not. Some were Anabaptists, some were not.

Some were Reformed, some were Dispensational. But they all were there because they had some things in common. They loved the Lord, they believed the word of God was, the Scripture is the word of God, and that's not it.

And they were brothers and sisters, they treated each other like brothers and sisters. Were there arguments over doctrine? Of course, there should be. I mean, not arguments in the sense, not contentions, not strife, but discussion.

How is iron going to sharpen iron if people who disagree don't talk to each other? Somebody's wrong. Maybe they're both wrong. If two people disagree, somebody's wrong.

They're not both right. And how can that be improved if not by fellowshiping and speaking the truth and love to each other? And you know, maybe that guy will bring me over to his way of thinking. Maybe I'll bring him over to my way of thinking.

Maybe we'll stay the same, but that's not the end of the world. To his own master he stands or falls. Who am I to judge another man's servant? That's what Paul said.

And we can survive it if we're not insecure. If our identity is in being a follower of Christ and not in being a Calvinist or an Arminian or a dispensationist or reformed or something else like that, that's not our identity. If it is, that's wrong.

When Paul said in the Corinth, some were saying, I'm of Paul, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Apollos. He said, what? Is Christ divided? He told us that's carnal. He didn't tell him which group was right.

Well, he did too, actually, because some were saying, I'm of Christ. He says, that's the right group. Because as you weren't baptized in the name of Paul, Paul didn't die for your sins, did he? Well, who did, by the way? Jesus did.

So the ones who were saying, I'm of Christ, which is what they all should have said, they were right. Jesus did die for their sins, all of them. They were all baptized in the name of Jesus, not Paul or Cephas.

But the point is, what about the church people who saw things Paul's way? And the ones who saw things Peter's way or Apollos' way? How are they supposed to get along? I guess they're supposed to love each other. They're not allowed to divide over differences

like that. And Paul didn't even say, come on, you guys, you should all think like me.

There was one group saying, I'm of Paul. He said, why aren't you all of Paul? Because we're all of Christ, and Christ doesn't necessarily have us all at the moment on the same page. We're growing, but we're not all on the same page, so we're going to see some things differently.

What are you going to do about it? Run away from each other so you don't feel uncomfortable? You don't feel insecure? How is it, how's anyone going to learn anything? If you go off and say, okay, you see it that way, I see it that way, you fellowship with people who see it your way, I'll fellowship with people, I'll start a new denomination of people who see it my way. Well, then how's it, we'll be, well, we'll both be living in echo chambers where nothing we could possibly be wrong about is being challenged. I was kind of kicked out of a church, not by the leaders, by some, not by, the leaders actually liked me.

The leaders were disappointed that I was kicked out, but I was kicked out by some very bossy high donors in the congregation. They pressured the elders, and the elders did not kick me out, but I finally said, I know what's going on, I know the pressure, I'll leave. I mean, it was voluntary, but I loved them, and frankly, they always liked me, but I was, I was kicked out because I had a different doctrine than some of these guys had.

They were pretty concerned about it. They were, frankly, they were dispensational and Calvinist, and cessationist, three areas of difference. That didn't bother me about them, but it bothered them about me.

And so, so I had to leave. But the interesting thing is that one of those people came up to my wife and said, why do you guys even come to this church? There's a church down there that sees things your way. Why don't you go there? And, you know, we just couldn't even understand that way of thinking.

What we, we need to go to our own echo chamber so you can stay in your echo chamber. Why can't the whole body be what it's supposed to be? Why can't everyone be brothers and sisters when you have Thanksgiving dinner and you have, you know, family members over, and some are Democrats and some are Republicans, you don't kick any of them out of the family. You discuss it, but maybe you do, or maybe they kick you out.

But it's not supposed to be that way. People weren't always that uptight, and they weren't that uptight in the early church either. Anyway, those are some of the ways that are obviously different.

I had a lot more to say, but I frankly have used up my time for this, so I'm going to keep my promise and give you some time for Q&A. I had a lot more I could say, but frankly what I said is in part what my series called Some Assembly Required on the website. This

is just a little tiny part of what's in that series, so if you want more, including all the things I would have said if I had another hour to do it, you can find those there if you go to thenarrowpath.com and the series Some Assembly Required.

I really think everyone should listen to it, not because it's my series, but because the contents of it I think are badly needed to be heard.