

OpenTheo

Into Babylon



Some Assembly Required - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the characteristics of the early Christian church and its evolution over time. He touches on topics such as communion, evangelism, apostolic succession, and the development of clergy and leadership within the church. He notes the differences between the early, primitive assembly in Jerusalem and the modern-day Roman Catholic Church, sharing insights on the shifts in spiritual experience and symbolism that have occurred over time. Ultimately, he challenges listeners to think critically about church leadership and to consider the importance of service to others.

Transcript

Last time, I sought to summarize some of the characteristics of the primitive apostolic assembly in Jerusalem immediately after Pentecost because we have a description of those assemblies twice given to us in the early chapters of the book of Acts. Apparently, Luke thought it was significant that he not only described the life and gatherings of the Christians in the early days in Acts chapter 2, but seemingly, redundantly, he did the same at the end of Acts chapter 4, just to make sure we hadn't missed it, or maybe so that we realize that this was not just something that happened immediately after Pentecost and then was quickly abandoned as sort of a bad idea, but to show that the church continued, at least for some time, in the character characteristics that we read about there immediately after Pentecost. And last time, we talked about some of the things that we find in Acts that cause us to reflect on the difference between the practices of the modern institutional churches and the early apostolic congregation of which we read there.

Among other things, they didn't meet weekly, they met daily. They did not meet in church buildings. They didn't have church buildings.

They met in homes and they met in public places like the temple, which was a public access facility. They did not invest money in buildings and therefore, the money that they had was used to help the poor. When they got together, we don't find them getting together for entertainment purposes.

We find them getting together for the purpose of mutual edification. We find that Luke tells us that daily they got together and their meetings were characterized by breaking bread, which probably means meals together, although the term can refer to simply taking communion together. But we know from the early days of the church, from what the New Testament tells us and much of what's in the early Christian fathers' writings, that communion, as we call it today, usually was practiced in conjunction with a full meal.

And so they got together daily and they broke bread together, they prayed, they sat under the apostles' teaching and they fellowshiped. Those are the things they did on a daily basis together. Finances were not handled in the way they typically are these days.

I received a call from a listener today on the radio. In fact, it was a listener in Lewiston who listens on the internet. And he told me, he said a church that he knows of in Washington State has just committed to a \$7 million new building project.

And so the pastor is now teaching that the people are obligated to tithe 23% of their income to the church so they can cover the expenses. They argued this on the basis of the Old Testament practice of, as some people interpret Leviticus, multiple tithes that the Jews had to give. And so now they're saying that the church needs that.

And so we have tithing or passing the plate or urging to give is a part of modern church financing. In those days, there were no overhead costs to the church. The ministers were not paid.

That is, I shouldn't say they weren't paid. They were supported but they were not salaried. So the church organization didn't have to write a check to the ministers.

There was no overhead cost in that respect. And they didn't have any building to maintain. So all the money that was needed was to help the poor members of the church.

And as we read last time, those who were rich, those who had extra land or houses or whatever, simply sold them as the needs arose, not spontaneously necessarily at the time of their conversion. There's no evidence in the New Testament that they had to sell their property or that it was a condition of being in the early church that people had to liquidate their assets and give them to the apostles to distribute. It's not that kind of communalism that we read of there.

But rather, as anyone had need, those who had houses and lands were selling them and bringing the money to the apostles for distribution to the poor. And that's how the church's needs were financed. It's interesting they interpreted the church's financial needs differently than most modern churches do because the needs of the church were simply the needs of people.

People's needs, not the needs of an institution. Church growth was accomplished, again, not by psychological and sociological gimmicks, but it was accomplished by the church being the church, the people of God being the people of God, living out their life visibly as a new order and an alternative society. And of course the apostles and other gifted preachers, no doubt, like Stephen and Philip, who are not apostles, were out preaching the gospel in the streets.

The early Christian meetings were not evangelistic services. As far as we know, they never had altar calls. We never read of an altar call in the Bible.

We do read, however, of people being saved on a daily basis. The Lord was adding to the church daily, such as were being saved. But they were not being saved necessarily by coming to church and hearing the preacher preach the gospel to them.

In the church, the apostles were teaching the disciples. It says the disciples were sitting daily under the apostles' teaching. Well, what were they teaching them? Probably what Jesus told them to teach them.

In Matthew 28, just before Jesus left, Jesus said, Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And He said, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. So the apostles were given the commission by Christ Himself to teach those that they led to the Lord to observe all things that Jesus commanded.

That takes a while to do. Making disciples is a lengthy process. And so, apparently, the apostles were teaching on a daily basis the believers to do everything Jesus said.

People were getting saved because the apostles spent the rest of their time outside talking to unbelievers. And so the evangelism was done outside the church meeting. And the church grew rather rapidly.

Three thousand were saved the first day. And a couple thousand more a few days later on a single day from the result of one sermon. You see, you don't need a lot of gimmicks to make the church grow if you have that kind of anointing in your preachers.

If you've got preachers who can preach a sermon and three thousand people get saved, you don't need to devote everything in the church meeting to reaching the few unsaved people that may have wandered in. And you can use the church gathering to do what church gatherings are for. Edify the body of Christ and teach and disciple the Christians.

That's what the gatherings were for. The result was that great grace was upon them all, we found, and they had favor with all the people. And, of course, God was adding to the church daily, such as should be said.

Now, that's what it was like then. And as you can tell just from a survey of those

characteristics of the early church, we can see it's not that way very often now. Now, there are situations where those kinds of things go on, but they're not very common.

And what we usually think of as church is really something very different. And most things we consider, most things I brought out are different now. And I'd like to talk about how we got here from there, because there is a process of declension that we read about in not not in the scriptures, because, of course, by the time the apostles died and scriptures were complete, these things had not yet happened.

But in church history and we can see what began to happen and we can see where they began to neglect some of what the scripture taught originally. Now, I'd like to talk to you about how the move of God in the first century became embalmed and institutionalized in the second, third, fourth, and fifth centuries and has remained so pretty much to this day, with the exception of occasional brush fire revivals that have occurred during church history. God has had his movement still.

You see, the church, the institutional church became very dead and very oppressive and very legalistic and very traditional and very unscriptural in many respects. And from time to time, there would be groups that would spring up within even in the medieval times from the Roman Catholic Church was the only church that was legal. These groups would spring up and start having meetings in homes and start studying the Bible if they were fortunate enough to get a copy of it and start living like Jesus.

There were groups like the Paulicians. There were groups like, by the way, the Paulicians apparently were just followers of Paul's teaching, but they were branded as heretics. And the very first person who was ever martyred as a heretic by the church was the founder of the Paulicians.

And he was simply a man who wanted to just follow what Paul had said in the scriptures. Actually, some of his writings were found in the 1800s, fairly recently, and his writings were very orthodox. But in his day, he was executed in the fourth century as a heretic.

So the church that had been the persecuted church in the book of Acts now became the persecuting monster, the harlot, we might say. The new Jerusalem became the new Babylon. And so how did the church get into Babylon? It would be good for us to find that out.

Well, when the apostles were on earth planting churches and overseeing the churches, one of the things that Paul in particular did, we don't know whether the other apostles did this or not, was very commonly he appointed elders in the churches. We'll have more to say about elders in a later talk. I'm going to talk specifically a whole session about elders sometime here in the future.

But we do not have reason to believe that there were elders in every church, although

Titus was told by Paul to appoint elders in every church. But of course, that means within the island of Crete where Titus was, not every church in the world. And we do know that after Paul and Barnabas made their first missionary journey outward from Antioch up into Galatia and Pisidia, that on their way back toward Antioch, they retraced their steps and went back to the churches that they just found some weeks earlier and appointed elders in those.

But we do know of other churches that apparently did not have elders appointed, though they did have leaders. The Thessalonian church, according to 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 12, had brothers that were laborers and who taught, but we don't have any evidence that they were called elders in that church at that point. Even in John's later letters, like 3 John, he mentions diatrophies as a man in the church who liked to have a preeminence.

He's not said to be an elder. And there's another man named Demetrius who John said you ought to follow his example, though he's not said to be an elder. But these guys were obviously prominent leaders in the church, one a good leader and one a bad leader, but apparently not holding office as elders.

A good example of leadership where there was no appointed eldership, in addition to what I've mentioned, would be seen in 1 Corinthians chapter 16. 1 Corinthians 16, verses 15 and 16, Paul says to the church of Corinth, I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, that is, of southern Greece, it was the first family to be converted by Paul. And he says, and that they have devoted themselves, the King James says, addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.

That is, ministry means service. They're devoted to serving Christians, serving the saints. That you also submit to such and to everyone who works and labors with us.

Now, notice he didn't say submit to the elders as if there's some group of appointed men that you submit to as sort of a council. Rather, he says, here's a family in your midst, the household of Stephanas, check them out. They are just devoted to serving people.

Submit to people like that. And anyone else like that. In other words, there was recognized older brothers and sisters in the church, older Christians, who were examples and who, especially the older brothers, apparently provided teaching to the congregation.

And sometimes these were eventually appointed to the elders. So, occasionally we read of the appointment of elders. Sometimes we read simply of men who are to be submitted to.

They're good folks. Submit to people like that, Paul says. He doesn't indicate that they hold office or that you submit to them because they hold an office.

You submit to them because they're addicted to service, because they love to serve. But anyway, this appointment of elders by Paul changed very rapidly after the death of the apostles. One of the earliest evidences of this we have from the literature that has survived from the early churches, the letters of Ignatius, who was the bishop of Antioch in the early part of the second century.

Antioch is the very church, in fact, where Paul and Barnabas were sent out from. It had been Paul's home church and his base of operations. But after Paul was dead and the other apostles were dead, sometime after, in fact, in the early second century, there was a bishop in that church named Ignatius.

And he was martyred in Rome. He was captured in Antioch and deported to Rome where he was martyred. And in route to Rome, he wrote seven letters which have survived.

I brought a book, if any of you are interested. I'm not going to read from it. The Apostolic Fathers contains the letters of Ignatius and some of the other very early Christian literature after the apostolic times.

But Ignatius' letter, basically in all of his letters, he exhorted the churches to submit to the bishop. Now, it's rather interesting. He speaks about the bishop of the church as if there's only one.

In Paul's day, there was never a church to our knowledge that had only one bishop. Because the word bishops in Paul's writings is used interchangeably with the word elders. And you never read of any church in the Bible that had one elder or one bishop.

Rather, every church had elders slash bishops. But something had happened. There was the mono episcopate, as it came to be called.

That's based on the Greek word for bishop, episkopos. Mono, episkopos, means one bishop. And that apparently, that development occurred shortly after the apostles were dead when their bodies were barely cool in the ground.

No doubt, simply because human nature is to have one leader. Now, the apostles never appointed one leader, but even in the church of Jerusalem, when they gathered in Acts 15 to decide the matter of circumcision, they had the Jerusalem council. Although Paul and Peter and all the apostles were there, yet we see very prominently James, who was not even one of the twelve, but rather the Lord's brother.

He's the outspoken one there. He's the one who seems to be the spokesman for the council. How he came to be such, we are never told.

But after that point in Acts, it seems that the church of Jerusalem always looked to James as sort of the spokesman guy. And even Paul, although James was not one of the twelve, Paul, in speaking of James in Galatians chapter 1, spoke of James as one of the apostles.

When he said that he had come to Jerusalem after fourteen years to see Peter, he said, but he says, other of the apostles saw I none except James, the Lord's brother.

Notice he said, I saw no other apostles except James. He included James as an apostle, though James had never been selected by Jesus as an apostle for the simple reason that he wasn't a believer when Jesus was on the earth. He became a believer when Jesus rose from the dead.

But James became very much the spokesman. There's never any indication that anyone was required to submit to James as if he was like the pastor of the church. He was an apostle, not a pastor.

But he wasn't the only apostle. Peter was in that church. And Jesus had said something that many have interpreted to say that Peter would be the rock upon which the church would be built.

And yet, although Peter was in the church of Jerusalem, James was more prominent. In fact, when Peter was arrested by Herod and put in jail and an angel sprang him in Acts chapter 12, Peter went to a prayer meeting in the middle of the night and said, I'm leaving town. Go tell the brethren and tell James that I'm OK.

So it's like he wanted the church to know. So he said, tell James. It's very clear that although James never held a position appointed by God or the other apostles, as we can tell, of political importance over the church, yet he was one that apparently his leadership and his, I don't know, his saintliness impressed everybody.

And so he was often given the opportunity to speak for the church. And that's often the case. I've certainly been in small churches where they didn't have very many men who were leaders.

And among those who were leaders, there were one or two who seemed to be just the ones who most naturally would be the ones who'd kind of speak for the group. This would not mean that they were in authority over the group, but simply that the group, you know, was made up of men who were, more of them were more reticent to speak than these, and these would speak up. Well, that's how it is in any group of leaders I've ever been in or seen.

And I suppose that after the apostles were dead, it just became natural for whoever was the most vocal of the bishops or the vocal of the elders in the church to simply become the preacher. In fact, some churches might have had very few qualified men. Remember, they didn't have Bibles back then.

We sometimes think, well, after the apostles were dead, they had the writings of the apostles. Well, some churches had some of them, but they were never gathered into what we call the New Testament until the year, well, 397 A.D., almost the year 400,

before all of the 27 books of our New Testament were even considered part of the New Testament. So, I mean, for the first centuries of the church, not only did they not have the collected decision as to which books of the New Testament belonged in it, but who had a copy? You know, they didn't have printing presses.

They didn't have Bible bookstores in those days. Those few copies of the Old Testament around were usually chained to the pulpit in the synagogue. And, you know, a lot of the churches just didn't have much scripture, and therefore didn't have very many people in the church who were literate in scripture.

Very different situation than now, and so it would be very natural, I would think, if there was a man there who knew the scriptures and had, you know, had access to a copy or had sat under the apostles or something, and knew more than most, that they'd say, well, you teach us every Sunday. You know, you teach us when we get together, because you know more than we do. And by stages, apparently, this person became the mono episcopate, the singular bishop.

And by the time of Ignatius, which is not very long after the apostles, about 110 A.D., when he wrote his letters, he writes to each of these seven churches as if each church has one bishop, and he tells them each to submit to the bishop. In what respect? Well, he said marriages could not be performed, baptisms could not be performed, communion could not be celebrated without the bishop present. Now, his reason he gives is not, basically, he doesn't claim that the apostles had set up this kind of authoritarian system in the church.

What he says is there was, the churches were torn by division, and the solution to the division problem that Ignatius suggested was, everybody just submit to the bishop, and everyone will be happy. You know, everyone will be together, and what? Just submit to the bishop. That's sort of a carnal way to bring about unity in a situation where there's disunity.

It's very common for a pastor these days to be appalled by the disunity in the church, and you know, just, he'll make a decree, we're going to have unity in this church, that means everyone does what I say. Well, I mean, that's one way to get unity, but there are better ways that are more spiritual. To just decide that this guy, whoever he may be, is going to be the one that we're all going to obey what he says, is not anything Jesus established, because Jesus actually called people to be followers of himself.

And Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11, 3, that the head of every man is Christ. Christ was always referred to as the Lord, which doesn't seem strange to our ears, because we live 2,000 years after this practice was initiated, and we're accustomed to hearing Jesus called Lord. Lord Jesus, the Lord, Jesus is Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have to remember the word Lord wasn't a religious term, principally, in the days

when Jesus began to be called Lord. The word Lord in the Greek means an owner, a master, a slave owner. The Caesars required people to call them Lord, because all their subjects were considered to be their slaves, and they were the owner.

And so, when they said Jesus is Lord, that meant that Jesus is my owner. I'm his slave. He's the one who gives me instructions.

I follow him. Eventually, however, because of the disunity that arose in the church, after the apostles were gone, especially, apparently, the expedient of choice to end divisive factions in the church is simply, see that guy there? Everyone submit to him. He's Lord, as far as you're concerned.

He's your head now. Whatever he says, do it. Now, you know, Paul wrote letters to churches that had problems with divisions.

The Corinthian church had problems with divisions, and so did some of the other churches he wrote to. I believe the Roman church did, when he wrote the book of Romans. There's evidence of it.

But we never find Paul saying, okay, we've got problems with division here. Let's settle it by everyone submitting to this one man here. Never did that.

In fact, in the church of Rome, for example, there were apparently divisions among the Jewish and the Gentile converts in the church. And some of those divisions were over religious practices. According to Romans 14, some in the church, probably the Jewish believers, were keeping a Sabbath day and keeping kosher diet and so forth.

And then others in the church, which were probably the Gentile believers, were not keeping a kosher diet, and were not keeping a holy day, according to Paul. Now, Paul didn't say, well, listen, I can see there's some problems here between you. I mean, there were problems between them, because he had to say, you who don't keep a kosher diet, stop despising those who do.

And those of you who do, stop judging those who don't. In other words, there's some judging and despising going on. There's some divisive moods here over these different practices.

What did Paul say to them? Paul said, okay, listen, we'll clear this up right now. I'm just going to declare this is the one thing we'll all do. Everyone keep a kosher diet, or everyone don't keep a kosher diet.

No, what did he say? He said, let everyone be persuaded in his own mind, and don't judge one another about it. You see, the division in the church is not a problem arising from different opinions. It's a problem that arises from judging one another because they have different opinions.

You see, a person could keep a holy day, and another person in the same congregation could say, well, I just esteem every day alike. Well, there's a difference of opinion there. Well, there may be a difference of opinion.

It doesn't have to be disunity. Only immaturity causes disunity. And that's what Paul said to the church in Corinth.

He said in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, he says, when I came among you, I couldn't speak unto you as unto mature. I just speak unto you as unto babes in Christ, as carnal. Because you're saying, I'm a Paul, and I'm of Cephas, and I'm of Apollos.

As long as you're saying that, are you not carnal and as babes, he said. Now, it is immaturity in one's spirituality that causes divisions. I've known pastors who really got upset because someone in their group got into something that their group didn't normally do.

Typically, in the 70s, I often encountered Baptists where people began to speak in tongues in their church. And the pastors got very upset and decided that they couldn't do that there, and that's fine. As far as I'm concerned, they can make their own decision what they're going to do if they're going to be the boss.

I'd rather see a church where Jesus is the boss, but if the pastor is going to be the boss, he can make his own rules. But when the Bible says, forbid not to speak in tongues, and yet, he says, well, you can't do it here. I often ask pastors why they don't allow speaking in tongues in their church.

Now, I am not an advocate of speaking in tongues in the church. I want you to know that in case you're wondering. I have never in my life spoken in tongues in the church.

And frankly, I just go to church where people don't speak in tongues in the church. I like it much better. It's easier.

It's so embarrassing when someone speaks in tongues and no one interprets. And then you think, okay, what's the elder going to do now, you know? I just as soon go somewhere where they didn't do it at all. But the fact is, these pastors often would say, well, we don't allow it because it causes divisions in the church.

Now, I don't believe it does. I don't believe that practice causes divisions. I think what causes divisions is people's attitude toward the practice.

Because I know people who do and I know people who don't speak in tongues. And I know people of both categories who don't have any division between them. The issue is not a divisive issue.

It's the personalities that are divisive. So when Paul addressed a church that had division

in it, because there were differences of opinion. Some keep one day, some don't keep it one day.

Some people eat only herbs, some eat all things. Well, Paul didn't say, okay, let's now settle this. I'll make a decree and everyone's got to do just this one thing that I say.

And that'll settle this division problem. He said, here's how we settle the division problem. Stop judging one another and let everyone do what he's convinced before the Lord to do in his own mind.

He that eats, he eats unto the Lord. He that eats not, eats not unto the Lord. Whether he eats or drinks, he's the Lord.

And that's his business between him and the Lord. In Paul's mind, it was not... When there's division in the church, you don't solve it by setting up some kind of a demagogue there. Everyone do whatever he says and that'll settle the division problem.

But that's how they resorted to doing it after Paul was gone. And so Ignatius in his letters in the year 110 A.D. wrote to seven churches and said, divisions exist, listen, this is an easy solution. Everyone submit to the bishop.

No one can teach, no one can get married, no one can take communion, no one can get baptized unless the bishop's there, he said. Well, that was to my mind a very major step down into what we now have in the institutionalization of the church. Because what I call the institutionalization of the church has more to do with the authority structure and mentality of the church than it has to do with anything else.

Though there are other factors, we'll talk about that. So Ignatius was the first problem there. He was a good man.

He died a martyr. I'm not trying to say these guys were bad guys. I'm just saying we all make mistakes.

If someone 2,000 years from now wanted to point to all the damage I caused in the church, they could find a lot more mistakes that I've made than I can find that Ignatius made. I'm sure he didn't make that many, but his own instructions may well have reflected the mood of the whole time. It may not be he that was instituting this thing.

It may be that that's how the churches were generally thinking. In any case, a little later, at the end of the second century, a man named Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John, was a very influential writer. Many of his writings have survived.

He was a very important teacher in the early church. And among other things, he taught apostolic succession and the supremacy of the Roman church. Now, this was the end of

the second century.

Now, if you don't know what's meant by apostolic succession or the supremacy of the Roman church, I'll just quickly tell you, because that's where it came in. It really didn't become official with Irenaeus, but he began to introduce it in his writings. It became official later on, around the year 400 with Augustine of Hippo.

But the apostolic succession, you should be aware of this doctrine, because it's still taught very adamantly by the Roman Catholic church. And if you know Roman Catholics, they believe this, at least if they're educated Roman Catholics, and they know the views of the church, they believe this. The belief of the Roman Catholic church on this is this, that the apostles in their lifetime appointed bishops.

And when the apostles died, a new generation of apostles replaced them, successors, apostolic succession. Peter, when he died, left a man in his position. They believed Peter was the bishop of Rome, which there's no biblical evidence that he ever was, but the Roman Catholic church insists that Peter was the first bishop of Rome.

And so when Peter died, the next bishop of Rome was the next Peter, as far as authority is concerned. They say Peter was the head of the church, which I always thought Jesus was, but anyway, he's the rock, they say, that the church was built on. So his successor in Rome is the bishop.

There was the next apostle, Peter. And then after he died, the third guy was the next apostle, Peter. And in Rome, there's always an apostle, Peter.

The bishop of Rome is always the apostle Peter, as far as the Roman Catholic church is called. Now, we're not talking about reincarnation. We're just talking about whoever is in that position holds the office that Peter held, and therefore has the authority over the whole church worldwide that is presumed by the Roman Catholic church that Peter exercised.

Now, all the other apostles are represented by their successors who were bishops of other churches, allegedly. So the Roman Catholic teaching, and this is important to know, because there are some Protestant groups that get into some variety of this, too. The Roman Catholic teaching of apostolic succession is this, that in every generation, there was somebody who was the bishop of Rome who had the same authority Peter had, or that they think he had, and all the other bishops of the churches were like the other apostles, what they call the College of Bishops, is like the other 11 apostles besides Peter.

And so even to this day, there are apostles in the Roman Catholic church. Now, this is important to the Roman Catholic church and for the unity of the church for this reason. The apostles appointed bishops, and therefore, whoever are the successors to the

apostles are the ones who have the apostolic authority to appoint bishops, and the bishops appoint priests over the churches.

Now, this developed after Irenaeus' time. Actually, it was Augustine who really made all this institutionalized and official, but Irenaeus taught it as something he believed was true, that the apostolic succession from Peter and the apostles was passed on down. And of course, you have to realize the ramifications of this.

If that is true, then the only true God-ordained leadership of any church is that which is apostolically appointed, which would mean to the Roman Catholics, the pope in Rome is the Peter of today, and the other bishops of the Roman church are the other apostles. And what they appoint as bishops are God's appointed bishops. And the priests are appointed by the bishops, so that you have to go to a Roman Catholic church or you're going to a church that doesn't have God-ordained leadership, so they claim.

That's the doctrine of apostolic succession. Upon what do they base this idea of apostolic succession? Not much, but they do have in Acts chapter 1, the story of how Peter himself suggested in Acts chapter 1 that Judas should be replaced. Remember, Judas had died.

And he said, you know, we've only got 11 of us now, we need to bring that number up to 12, and so we need to find one that God has chosen to replace Judas. And so they replaced Judas with Matthias. Now, it is said by the Roman Catholic theology that this was a case of apostolic succession.

Judas died, so they appointed another successor to Judas. Well, that's true. However, we read in Acts chapter 12 that another apostle died.

James, the son of Zebedee, was executed. They didn't replace him. They didn't find a successor for him.

And the reason is because an apostle who dies faithfully holds office perpetually. In the city of the New Jerusalem, the 12 foundation stones are the 12 apostles of the Lamb. They don't need to be replaced.

The foundation only needs to be laid once. The church is laid on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And therefore, we don't need the apostles to be replaced generation after generation, and we don't have any evidence that the early church thought so either.

Judas defected from the apostolate, and therefore his seat was occupied by a successor. No other apostle defected, and therefore no other apostle needed to be replaced. They hold their apostolic function in the church forever.

Now, of course, this is very important to think about, this apostolic succession thing, because when you think about it, what constitutes a valid church? There are people in

this valley who think that our fellowship is not a valid church, and they're entitled to think so, but I wonder really on what basis they make that judgment. I think that a lot of people say that a group is not a valid church unless they have a valid pastor or elders. In other words, many people define a valid church in terms of church government or leadership.

However, that's a strange criterion to use, since there were churches that Paul established with Barnabas that didn't have elders or pastors or whatever, until Paul and Barnabas came back and appointed them, but the churches existed for some time before there were appointed leaders. They were churches, so a valid church can't be defined in terms of whether it has these leaders or not, because they were churches before the leaders were appointed. The idea that many people have is that there's got to be some God-ordained authority over an organization, or else it isn't a valid church.

And this is largely because of the developments that came up after Ignatius and Irenaeus and some of these guys, and things that are part of the mentality of what most Westerners believe it means to be in church, or in a church. In the New Testament, we have no evidence that Jesus defined a church in terms of who the leaders were, or whether there were leaders. Jesus was the leader.

Jesus is the shepherd, and there's one flock. They're all his sheep. There are leaders of various kinds, some of them official, some non-official, but Jesus is the real leader, and Jesus said, where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I. So there's official leadership.

Where two or three gather in Jesus' name, there's a leader, and it's Jesus himself. I don't know why you'd ask for any more than that. But you see, as long as you're thinking we need a human leader, or leaders, or else we're not a valid church, the next question is, well, how do we know which human leaders are really God's chosen human leaders? I mean, in this valley, there's got to be, I've never counted, probably, I imagine 20, 30 churches, I guess.

Someone may have counted them up. I don't know. I'm guessing, let's say 20 churches, to be conservative.

Well, all of them have leaders. Which leaders of which churches are God's appointed leaders? Well, that'd be a hard call to make, wouldn't it? I mean, the people in a given church would probably say, well, their pastor certainly would be a God-appointed leader, or else they'd go somewhere else, probably. But they might not think that the leader of another church down the street is a God-appointed leader.

After all, what if he tried to tell them what they should believe or do? Well, they'd ignore him. They don't believe he's God's appointed leader to them. And so the question arises, well, if I want to be in church in a way that pleases God, and I need to be in a church that

has a God-appointed leader, then I have to find out which church has the leaders that God appointed.

Well, there the Roman Catholics have got us beat like crazy. Because they've got the leaders in their churches that are appointed by the apostles, the living apostles today, as far as they're concerned. That's what apostolic succession suggests.

And if you have to be in a church that has an indisputably God-ordained leader, then the Roman Catholic Church has one of the best arguments going. But it's not a biblical argument, and it's not a true argument, and therefore it's not really a good argument at all. The fact of the matter is, the Bible does not define church in terms of whether you have this kind of leader, or that kind of leader, or any leader at all.

Now, I'm not saying the Bible doesn't acknowledge there are leaders in the church. It does. But the church is never defined in terms of having leaders.

It's defined in terms of two or more gathering in Jesus' name, and Jesus is there. That's what defines a valid congregation. Now, that began to change, of course, with the teaching of apostolic succession, and also the primacy of the Church of Rome.

The idea was that the Roman Church had been established by Peter. Again, something the Bible does not confirm, and is probably not true. But the Catholic Church believes, and apparently even Irenaeus believed, that Peter established the Roman Church, and because of that, it is a church that all the other churches need to listen to.

Now, it was never taught in Irenaeus' day that the other church had to submit to the bishop of the Church of Rome. That developed later, and that, of course, became the papacy, the pope. But Irenaeus had the beginnings of that.

Another important leader who really contributed to the institutionalization and destruction of the church was Cyprian. He was an Alexandrian bishop, as I recall, and he was in the middle of the third century. So that would be in the 200s, middle of the 200s.

And he taught several things that had never been taught before. One, he taught there was no salvation outside of the church, and he meant the institutional church. The church, he says, which is ruled by bishops through apostolic succession.

So we have this Roman Catholic teaching already there in the middle of the third century by Cyprian. Now, the Roman Catholic Church won't say it quite that way today. They did throughout all the Middle Ages.

All the popes of the Middle Ages said, and they said it without apology, anyone in order to be saved must be subject to me, the pope. But now, since the Vatican II Council, they've softened their language, I think, to reach out to us a little more and make us feel a little less put off. But they now call us separated brethren.

If we are true believers in Christ, but we don't belong to the Roman Catholic fold, the language that is now used is separated brethren, and they actually believe we can be saved without being part of the Roman Catholic Church. The way that Vatican II says it, and this is as much nonsense as Vatican I, which said we were lost, but they say that if we are ignorant of the fact that the Roman Catholic Church is the true church of history by God, but we love Jesus, we can be saved because our ignorance absolves us from our non-involvement in the Catholic Church. But if we know that it's the right institution, and we don't get involved, then we're going to hell because we're not in it.

Anyway, Cyprian was the first, at least the first that we have writings surviving for, who taught that there's no salvation outside the church, and that the church is an organization headed up by bishops that hold their office through apostolic succession. He also taught that Peter's association with Rome gives it preeminence over the other churches. And here he did something that others did not do.

He indicated that the leaders of the individual churches had priestly functions. Now, when a Roman Catholic or an Episcopal minister is called a priest, I don't know if you know exactly what that means. A lot of people don't.

They think, are you a priest, a minister, a pastor? What are you? I mean, like all these things are identical in meaning. The word priest has a meaning that pastor and elder and minister don't have at all. The word priest refers to in religions that have priests, like Judaism, or like pagan religions do too, but Christianity doesn't, not this kind of priest.

In religions that are what we call sacerdotal, sacerdotal means priestly, they have a priest who is a mediator between the ordinary people and God. Typically, in every religion that has priests, the priest is the one who offers sacrifices. The Jewish priest offered animal sacrifices on the altar.

The pagan priest did the same thing. And in the Roman Catholic Church, the priest offered the sacrifice of the Mass every Sunday for the people. Every morning, actually.

You take the Mass every day if you're a Roman Catholic. And the priest's role is to be there as an intermediary. He offers the blood of Jesus again and the body of Jesus again on behalf of us ordinary types, if we happen to be going there.

And he's the one who can do it. And you see, if you don't go to the Roman Catholic Church, you don't have the priest doing this for you. And he's the priest who's appointed by the bishop who's appointed by the modern apostles.

And therefore, if you go to some other church, you're missing out on the body and the blood of Christ, according to Roman Catholicism, because you need a priest to offer this sacrifice on your behalf. Now, there's nothing of that in the New Testament, not a line of it. Of course, everyone knows that one of the things that Martin Luther reintroduced that

had been much covered over for over a thousand years in his day was the priesthood of the believer, that everyone's a priest, according to Scripture.

The Bible says that in Revelation 5.10, it says that Christ has redeemed us from every nation, kindred, and tongue, has made us a kingdom of priests, a kingdom comprised of priests. And it says in 1 Peter 2 that we are living stones built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ Jesus. We are a royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests, and there are no priests over us or between us and God.

Paul said to Timothy that there's one God and one mediator between God and man. That's it. And that's Jesus.

There are no mediatorial ministers. You see, the bishop in Ignatius' day, he was an authority in the church, but he wasn't a mediator between the people and God. They still had their own relationship with Jesus, but they just couldn't do some of the churchy things officially without the bishop there to make sure everything was kosher.

But later it got to the point where the leader of the church was not just an overseer or a teacher or a minister. He was a priest. He stood between the people and God.

They have to make their confession to the priest. The priest has to offer the sacrifices. Now it was Cyprian who first taught that the leaders of the churches were priests, which is, of course, not only nonsense, but it's dangerous nonsense.

It certainly is not biblical at all. Now, the guy who is really considered to be the father of Roman Catholic theology is also a guy who is really respected by a lot of Protestants, and that is Augustine of Hippo. Augustine was the... well, he was a monk, and he was a very godly man in many respects.

In fact, many people really admire Augustine for his devotional writings and his passion for God. But he also was the most influential theologian of all church history. Many would say he was more influential than the apostle Paul, because today there are more Christians that believe what Augustine wrote than believe what Paul wrote.

And that includes Roman Catholics and Protestants. Actually, John Calvin and Martin Luther both were Augustinians in their theology. And most Protestants really appreciate Augustine, at least those who hold either Lutheran or Calvinist views, because Augustine is the one who invented those views.

Well, maybe he didn't invent them. That's a little harsh. Some think Paul invented them, but I don't find them in Paul's writings, but I find them in Augustine's.

And Calvin himself said they went back to Augustine. And Calvin's successor in Geneva said that the fathers before Augustine didn't hold those views. And, of course, anyone

can prove that to himself by reading the fathers before Augustine.

The Calvinistic views arose with Augustine. And so Protestants like him because of the Calvinistic views that he introduced, but the Roman Catholics like Augustine because he's actually called the father of Roman Catholic theology. Because here's some of the things Augustine taught.

Augustine taught in the fourth century that the church is not a spiritual communion of believers, but it's the visible ecclesiastical organization of Roman Catholicism, outside of which none can be saved, regardless of their personal faith or holiness. In other words, it was no longer a matter of having faith in Christ to be saved or living for Christ. It had to do with being attached to the organization called Catholicism.

And Augustine said outside of that church there's no salvation. Of course, Cyprian had said that earlier. But Augustine said the church actually is this organization.

It is not a spiritual body of believers. That, of course, if you know what I've said earlier, disagrees strongly with anything I believe about what the church is. He also taught that the authority of tradition was to be placed alongside the authority of Scripture in determining practice and doctrine.

That's also now an official position of the Roman Catholic Church, as you may know. If we tell a Protestant that they're guilty of esteeming tradition equal to Scripture, most Protestants will try to deny that this is the case. If you tell a Roman Catholic that they're esteeming tradition as high as the Scripture, most people will say, yeah, what else is new? That's what we're supposed to do.

See, it's the official position of the Roman Catholic Church that tradition of the church is as authoritative as the Scripture itself. That's their position. And it arose with Augustine.

So, by the fourth century, by the year 400 actually, Augustine's writings basically made official what was growing as a sort of a consensus in the church for a few centuries before that. That simple brotherhood of believers that Jesus had established now became an organization with political leaders who, if you didn't go to their organization, you couldn't be saved as far as they were concerned. And it got really scary because even before Augustine's time, the emperor Constantine in 323 was converted.

And he made Christianity a very welcomed influence in Rome. And then a later emperor actually made it the official and mandatory religion of the Roman Empire. And this was in Augustine's time.

So, Augustine's influence was happening at a time where the Roman emperors were now sponsoring the church and making it something that everyone was supposed to be a part of. And from that time on to the present day in Europe, every European nation had a national church. And every person born in those nations were baptized into that national

church.

For over a thousand years, that national church in all of Europe was the Roman Catholic Church. After the Reformation, there were some other national churches. Germany had the Lutherans as a national church and there were others.

But the point is that the church became something very different. And not just different in terms of its size and how many people were in it or anything like that, but different in its definition of itself and what it was and what it was about. And so I'd like to identify and talk about, in light of Scripture, several of the changes that came about in this transition period we just discussed in church history and tell you some things I think are unscriptural about it.

First of all, we find that through this period of transition, the church's journey into Babylon, as we might rightly call it, one of the first things that happened was that simple spiritual brotherhood was replaced by a religio-political machine. In Jesus' day and that of the apostles, everyone who loved God, everyone who loved Jesus, they're just brothers. Yeah, some of them were older brothers.

Some of them knew more than others. Some of them, like the apostles, had been appointed by Christ to go out and plant churches and to set the norms for the church. I mean, they held a unique position in church history.

But the leaders of the churches, other than the apostles, they were just guys who provided an example. Their families were in order. All things about their lives were something to be emulated by the younger Christians.

They knew the word better. They taught the word. And the churches were actually told in the Scripture to submit to the word of God that was taught by these men.

Although these men were not necessarily always given official labels and offices. Sometimes they were, and we're not even sure exactly what the nature of those offices were, but we'll discuss that later. The point is that it was just a family before.

It became a machine within 400 years after the time of Christ. A politically oriented kind of machine. And among the characteristics of that machine, or how it became a machine, there were a couple of things that happened.

One was elders in the days of the apostles who taught and set an example, were replaced by a bishop to whom submission was mandatory for salvation. Now, Paul never established such a thing as that. Even Paul himself, an apostle, never required people to submit to him in order to be saved.

There were many people who didn't submit to Paul, and he never said they weren't saved. I point out last time, Apollos didn't submit to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul said, I

strongly urge Apollos to come to you, but he doesn't want to come right now, so he'll come when he can.

So, Apollos just ignored Paul's urging. But Paul never said, well, this guy's dangerous. Look out, he's not in submission.

He's not under covering. He just said, well, he'll come when he comes. He's at liberty before God to do what he wants to do.

He didn't have to submit to Paul to be saved, much less to some tin horn elder or bishop of some little congregation. That was never mandatory. But within 400 years it was.

You now have a political leader of the church, and everyone's got to submit to him. And boy, is he ever untouchable. I know I appeal a lot, I should say, I illustrate a lot with examples that come from my radio program, because in my actual fellowship with believers, I'm in a group that's to a very large extent like-minded.

But my radio program, I get calls from Christians from all over, and they remind me of what it's like out there. I sometimes forget what it's like in those churches. I mean, I hate to be that way, but I mean, I mentioned the church is now requiring their people to tithe 23 and a third percent of their income so they can pay off their \$7 million church.

I'd like to not be reminded of those things sometimes. That kind of nonsense isn't happening here. Maybe it is on a small scale, I don't know.

But I frequently get callers saying, Do you believe that it's wrong to criticize a pastor because the scripture says, Touch not the Lord's anointed. I've been asked this a lot of times because apparently the caller has taken their pastors to task on something the pastor said, and the pastor or someone in defense of the pastor says, Touch not the Lord's anointed. Well, what is the answer to that? I mean, is this pastor suddenly invulnerable to criticism? Peter wasn't invulnerable to criticism.

Paul rebuked him publicly. Was he touching God's anointed? No, he only spoke to him. The scripture that says, Do not touch God's anointed, is related, it's in the Psalms where it says that God, in the days of Abraham, didn't let kings afflict Abraham when he was in their territory, and he said, Touch not my anointed, neither do my prophets any harm.

Basically, he was saying, Don't molest, don't attack, physically, Abraham. And when David said he wouldn't touch the Lord's anointed, meaning Saul, he was simply saying, I'm not going to throw a spear through the man. Did he ever criticize Saul? You bet.

He wrote some Psalms against Saul. Yeah, he had some things to say about Saul. When people ask me, Is it okay to touch the Lord's anointed? I say, Well, I wouldn't touch him, but you can certainly criticize him.

Anybody who speaks publicly is subject to public criticism. I mean that. Dave Hunt wrote a book many years ago called Seduction of Christianity.

I don't know if any of you read that. But basically in that book he quoted a lot of Christian authors who were saying stuff that was really irresponsible and unbiblical. He took them into task, and his book was a bestseller.

So he got a lot of flack for it. And again and again people were saying, Touch not God's anointed. He was criticizing Cho and Schuller and Richard Foster and people like that who were real popular.

And he was quoting them. Quoting them and saying, This is what they said, this is why it's unbiblical. Now, I didn't agree with everything Dave Hunt said.

I agreed with most of it. But I certainly agreed with his right to take them to task. These men were publishing books.

Some people said to Dave, You should have followed Matthew 18 with those people. Talk to them privately. He said, You know how hard it is to get a personal interview with John Wimber? He says, He doesn't return my calls.

But he says, These people are saying things in public. If anyone says something in public, they stand, and they should understand this. They stand to be publicly critiqued.

If you can't take critiquing, then don't say anything in public. Now, if I told you something in private, between ourselves, I've got this private opinion about such and such, and you went out and broadcasted some heretical thing, that wouldn't be very kind. But all my heretical ideas I'm public with.

I don't mind people critiquing me publicly. The fact is, the leader became untouchable. He became invulnerable.

He became the heavy. He became the head honcho. He became the head of the church, the bishop did, instead of Jesus.

And so, that's how this brotherhood became a religio-political machine. Brothers who were simply older brothers who helped along the younger brothers, became the guys who stood in place of Christ. In fact, one of the bishops of Rome adopted the name for himself, which all the bishops of Rome have since adopted, Vicar of Christ.

Do you know what vicar means? Instead of. Vicar, like the word vicarious. Vicar means instead of.

The vicar of Christ is the title of the pope. He's instead of Christ. You relate to him instead of Christ.

That's what happened within four centuries of the time of Jesus. Someone was there instead of him. It's also what the word antichrist means.

Instead of Christ. Another change that occurred in this was that obedience and love, which in the New Testament times were the marks of true Christianity, and the test of fellowship was if you obey Christ and you love and believe the gospel, these things were replaced by submission to the organization. And in particular, signing on to the creed of the organization.

Now, I didn't say anything about the creeds. They were developing along the same time. You see, in the early days of the church, I don't believe in the apostles' days that they had creeds.

Now, there could be some difference of opinion about this. There are some passages in Paul's writings that scholars believe are perhaps creeds that Paul is quoting. But we don't know that.

We don't know if he's quoting a creed or if he's just writing it through the Holy Spirit. But we do know this, that the main creed of the early Christians was Jesus is Lord. And anyone who said that and went to his death saying that was considered to be a brother.

And many people did go to their deaths because they said that. And they were considered to be brothers. As I mentioned earlier, some of them believed in keeping Sabbath, some didn't.

Some believed eating kosher was right, some didn't. Some had this or that view of this doctrine and some had another. But if they loved the Lord and they were followers of Christ... Remember that time when James and John came to Jesus in Luke chapter 9 and said, Lord, we saw some people over there casting out demons in your name, but we forbade them to do that because they don't walk with us.

They're not in our church. They're not in our denomination. And Jesus said, don't forbid them because no one can cast a demon out in my name and then quickly turn around and speak evil of me.

In other words, they're okay, they're not talking against us. They're casting out demons in my name, they must be on our side. Leave them alone.

These guys seem kind of like they might be winnable. These guys already are a little disposed toward us. They're using my name.

Let's see if we can bring them into our church and we can then straighten out their doctrine, make sure they're saying everything right. Jesus just said, hey, if they're casting out demons in my name, leave them alone. Let's let them do it.

They're not against us. There's a real freedom that Jesus and his apostles allowed to love the Lord, live for the Lord, and sort of hold opinions as you wanted to. Now, of course, when Jesus was here himself, there was no reason for any Christians to have wrong opinions since Jesus was right there and you could ask him.

But once the apostles were gone, especially, suddenly you've got all kinds of opinions in the church, thousands of opinions and therefore thousands of denominations to go along with each opinion. And that's kind of a shame that people who had different opinions couldn't live in harmony and in unity anymore. Because why? This is why.

Once you have an institutionalized church, an institutional leader, his authority is important to him, if no one else. And his authority is threatened if there's someone in the church who has a different theological opinion than he does, especially if it's an opinion that he's pretty strong on. Maybe an opinion that's a major one that he preaches on a lot.

And someone else in the church... Let's say he teaches Preacher of Rapture and there's someone in the church who doesn't believe in the Preacher of Rapture. Well, that's good enough as long as the person who doesn't believe never says anything about it. But suppose he does.

Then you've got threat to the authority. Why? Because his opinions are not treated as canonical. His opinions are not treated as apostolic.

Now, there are some very good brothers in leadership, very good pastors I've known who are very humble and very secure in the Lord and they haven't minded. I was made an elder in a church in California by a pastor who knew that my theology was different than his on many issues. And yet he had me in the pulpit frequently and he had me teaching all over in the church even though he knew my views were different.

But he was a humble man, he was secure in the Lord and his theological specific points were not so sacrosanct that he didn't think other Christians could think differently. And he was a good man, a good pastor, a very humble man. And there are some like that.

But I've known too many others. I've had so many people come to me and say, I went up to my pastor after a sermon and said, Pastor, you know, you said such and such and I don't think that's what the Bible says. And instead of the pastor saying, Oh, well, thank you for bringing that to my attention, let me show you what I think the Bible says on that, which would have been the right thing for the pastor to do.

The pastor says, Where did you go to Bible college? Who do you think you are to challenge me? I mean, they're almost as bad as medical doctors. And that's because they get as much training as medical doctors nowadays to be what they are. And that's a shame too.

Because Jesus said, I thank you, Father, you've hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Nowadays, that's another change that occurred. I'll get to that in a moment.

Anyway, one of the things that changed in this period of time we've just been discussing was that the spiritual experience of knowing God, being born again, loving God, living in the Spirit of God, that spiritual experience came to be replaced gradually with symbolism. Experience was replaced by symbolism. What symbolism? Well, take in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist replaced conversion. You could be baptized as an infant when you didn't even know the Lord. And you could be a member of the church until the day you die.

And you could take the bread and the wine and you'd be considered in. Because you're in because you're following the symbolic processes. You've got the priesthood there and you've got the organization and you do all the symbolic things.

And all the symbolic rituals that you do replace actually having experience of conversion and the experience of knowing God. Now, by the way, there's still a fair bit of this in Protestant churches. The Reformation came out of Roman Catholicism to a large extent, but it did not come out of Babylon all the way.

And much of the problems that came up actually came up before Roman Catholicism proper was fully developed and remained after the Reformation even in Reformed churches. What we're looking at here, or what I'm hoping to find, is how to get back even closer to the Bible than even the Reformation brought to church. Because not all of us here probably, but many of us have had experiences in churches that have never been Roman Catholic.

And yet they have very many things about them that are still part of this institutionalized crust that came over the move of God as these developments came along. Another change that happened was that spiritual leaders were replaced by professional clergy or priesthood. Now, my emphasis here is on professional.

I don't believe there were clergy of any kind in the early church, what we call clergy. I believe all were brothers. And Jesus said that.

We'll see where he said that in a moment. But the idea that there are two classes of Christians, the clergy and the laity. The layman, that's what most of you people would be called, because you're not full-time preachers.

You're not professionals. You're laymen. But then there's the professionals, the clergy.

The word clergy refers to a professional religionist, a guy who does religion full-time for money. Now, I realize that some of them don't make much money and some of them are

humble and some of them would think of a rather crass description of clergy for me to use that description, but I really can't think of any difference between a clergyman and me or a clergyman and you except that he's a professional religious and does it for money. And he's, well, there's certain things that make him that.

Here's some of the things that now belong to the status of being a clergyman, which you don't find in the old church in the New Testament. First of all, although not all churches require this, there is an assumption in most denominations that to be a pastor, you need specialized training. And that training is academic training.

Now, the disciples, as far as we know, as they walk around with Jesus for three and a half years, we don't have any record of him giving them a course in hermeneutics or homiletics or expository preaching. He taught them how to get along with each other. He taught them how to get along with their enemies.

He taught them how to minister to people, heal the sick, raise the dead, and do that kind of stuff. But I don't ever read of him giving them a theological course. Now, maybe he did and the Gospels just didn't think it was important enough to mention.

If that's the case, then it must not have been important. But it became very important in the later church. Because once you have an institution, you've got to make sure every dot, every I is dotted, every T is crossed, and that everyone is saying everything just right, the same way as our group.

Because you don't want any kind of different doctrine coming up from that which is official. And so, to be an official leader in the church, you have to go through the seminary. And the seminary, of course today, seminary is graduate degree stuff, you know, master's degrees and PhDs.

There are some missions organizations today that will not allow candidates to come in if they don't have at least a master's degree. What a far cry that is from the Christianity of the New Testament. We don't read that Stephen in the New Testament had any special education, but those who debated with him couldn't resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

Because Jesus told the disciples, when they bring you before synagogues, do not premeditate what you shall say in your own defense. For the Spirit of your Father will speak through you, and He'll give you the words to speak. Stephen was not even one of them, wasn't even one of the apostles to whom that was said.

And yet, that was true in his case. As I mentioned, Jesus said this in Matthew 10.25, He said, Father, I thank You that You've hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and You've revealed them unto babes. And you know what? Usually when a revival breaks out within or outside of the institutional church, it's not usually among the

intellectuals.

The intellectuals have been trained what to think and how to think. The common people who don't have the disadvantage of that kind of training sometimes think for themselves. Sometimes they can read the Bible and actually see what it says instead of what the grid is or what their seminary training gave them.

It tells them what it's supposed to be read to mean. And believe me, I'm not exaggerating. Because although I don't have any seminary training, I read books by theologians.

I have to hold my nose some of the time while I'm doing it, but I still do. And there are some good theologians that I've gained a lot from. There are some that are dry as a bone.

And I read them out of interest. I love them. I'm an information junkie.

But I don't consider that the information I gain from reading them in any sense qualifies me to preach the gospel or teach the Word of God. In some cases, my understanding is challenged or improved or enlightened a little bit by a theologian's work. I mean, not uncommonly do I learn something from them.

But I started in the ministry when I was a teenager. I hadn't read one theologian. All I knew was the Lord.

And I don't think my ministry is any better now than it was when I was 16. It just has more clutter, more information. But as far as God using it, I don't think that there's any more anointing or any more blessing on my ministry today than there was when I was 16.

It might even be less. I sometimes fear that. But the fact is, information and knowledge and scholarship has never in the Bible been suggested as an advantage when it comes to being a leader in spiritual things.

David, when he was made king of Israel, didn't have much education. Now, Moses did. I realize Moses was well-educated.

But he had to get re-educated before God could put him in authority. See, he had great education, secular education. But then he had to go and get his seminary training for 40 years in the wilderness.

And his seminary training was leading sheep around, not studying Augustine and those guys. His training was to get humbled and be taught that he was nothing. That's the real qualifications for leadership.

But this change that came about, in order to keep the status quo in the organization,

you've got to make sure everyone's taught to read the Bible the same way as the organization approves. So, they've got to be specially trained because they might not see those things if they read the Bible for themselves. They might not see it for themselves the way the leaders do.

So, you have to indoctrinate. And so, seminary training became a norm. Now, you know, I don't mean to bash Roman Catholics.

It's just that the Roman Catholic Church is that church that dominated the period of time we're talking about and later. One of the things that Roman Catholics often say is that Protestants have so many different doctrines and so many divisions and denominations that it's very clear that it's not safe to let people read the Bible for themselves. You need trained clergy.

That is why, up until the early part of my lifetime, Roman Catholics were not encouraged to read the Bible by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church did not encourage Bible reading. In fact, there were times when they actually would burn their members if they were caught with a Bible.

But, a lot of Roman Catholics got burned because they were studying the Bible on their own. Not in America, but when I was a kid, my Catholic friends were still discouraged by the church officially from reading the Bible. Well, that changed.

And now Catholics sometimes are encouraged to read it. But the reason they gave not to read it is you're not trained. You might not understand it correctly.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard this from Roman Catholic apologists. If the average layman reads the Bible, he won't understand it correctly and he'll be led astray. That's why he needs to leave it to the trained clergy to do the teaching and the interpreting.

Well, that's not what John said in 1 John 2. He says, you have no need that any man teach you, but the anointing which abides in you teaches you all things, and is truth and is no lie. And some of the things the clergy say is a lie, but what the anointing teaches you is no lie. And so this idea that the pastor, the leader, the bishops, they have to be specially trained.

And it is true. The Roman Catholic Church was very wise about this to maintain that it's good to keep people from reading the Bible. They got into big trouble when a monk named Martin Luther read the Bible.

He was one of theirs. But then he ceased to be and they lost a whole lot of countries because of what he did. And it's not surprising that they discouraged people from reading the Bible because it is true.

Without their training, you won't see what they see there. Because it isn't there. You have to be trying to see it.

Okay? Another change that occurred in the spiritual leadership of the church was that a certain prestige began to attach to being a clergyman or a theologian or a churchman, a leader, a bishop, a pope. This was a prestigious position. Now, as I said, that still exists in some Protestant churches.

Some pastors think that it's some kind of a crime if people challenge them or disagree with them or critique them. And I think it's wrong to critique a pastor behind his back if he hasn't said something publicly. But I mean, to critique anyone to his face, no one's above that.

Now, I honestly, I say many, many things. I expect people to disagree with. And I don't mind at all if you come to me and say, I disagree.

I think you're wrong. And here's why I think the Bible says you're wrong. I like people to do that.

I look forward to people doing that. Anyway, in Matthew chapter 23, people don't do that very often with me, but I wish they would rather than do it behind my back. And I don't know that many people are doing that except some of the listeners' radio program.

But in Matthew 23, we see that Jesus never intended that the church have any leaders that command any kind of prestige among their peers. Speaking of the scribes and the Pharisees, he says in verse 6, Matthew 23, verse 6, he says, they loved the best places at the feast. That were the seats of honor.

You ever see these churches have... Or maybe it's more Christian conventions rather than churches where they have the platform and they have all the seats up there for guys who aren't even going to speak, but they're esteemed pastors from the local area, you know. I mean, put them up there on stage because they might be offended if they don't get a place on stage. That I do not understand.

I just never understood that. I mean, maybe if the guy's going to speak, it might be good to have him near the podium, you know. But if he's not even going to speak, he's just one of the dignitaries, you know.

He's just one of the local pastors of one of the larger churches in town. Well, he's a dignitary. He belongs on the platform.

Well, the Pharisees like that too. So, they loved the best seats at the feast and the best seats in the synagogues. And they loved greetings in the marketplace where people say to them, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Do you know what the word Rabbi literally means? Now, most marginal notes in the Bible say it means teacher. Well, yeah, teacher or master. It's basically how it came to be used, basically as a synonym for a religious teacher.

But the word Rabbi literally means My Great One. That's the literal meaning in Hebrew of Rabbi. My Great One.

And these guys were Hebrews. They knew what it meant. And they loved it.

They went in the streets and people called, My Great One, My Great One. Rabbi, Rabbi. You know, I think I may have told you, there was another guy on the radio I used to listen to who... I did tell you this, that someone called up and said, Brother Smith, I have a question for you.

And he said, That's Dr. Smith. The guy had eight earned degrees. He said, I worked hard for these degrees.

I deserve to be called doctor. I wanted to call him and say, Rabbi, Rabbi. But there's a lot of guys who might not say it as bluntly as that guy did.

But I bet a lot of guys who go to school for eight years after they're done with college, they kind of like being called doctor, doctor. But Jesus said, that's not what's supposed to be happening. He says that you do not be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, the Christ.

And you are all just brothers. All. Even the leaders.

You're all just brothers. So, calling him brother, calling him brother, was more biblical than calling him doctor. He said, don't let him call you doctor, or my great one, or Rabbi, or any of that other stuff.

He says, do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your father, he who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers, for one is your teacher, the Christ. But he that is the greatest among you shall be your servant.

So, the prestige associated with the clergy was a development that came along. And by the way, there have always been climbers, you know, guys who wanted to get high positions in some organization. I've often thought that Christian rock musicians are kind of that way in many cases.

Some of them are good musicians. But a lot of early Christian rock musicians, no, not the early ones. The early ones were more anointed.

The ones that came along in the 80's. I always had the impression these were guys who weren't quite good enough to get on the radio in secular music. And so they found their niche.

It's easier to be a big fish in a small pond. And Christian music was a small pond at the time. And some people just got to be a big fish.

And some of them weren't even saved. I mean, some of them were... They were living very immoral lives in many cases. But they were big stars in the Christian music scene because they, again, they weren't good enough to be the best to get airplay in the secular realm, but they could do it in the Christian realm.

So they did. There's people like that, I think, who can't get prestige any other way, but they've grown up in the church and they figured there's a place for me and the son here. And they love to be called rabbi.

And human nature is what it is. You'll find a lot of pride there. There was a guy in one of the churches that John wrote to in 3 John.

A guy named Diotrephes. And in 3 John, verse 9 says, I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Can you imagine that? John the Apostle writes a letter to the church and there's a guy in the church who doesn't receive John the Apostle, the disciple that Jesus loved.

And then notice this, Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words, and not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren and forbids those who wish to putting them out of the church. So, in other words, if John sends some of his brethren along to preach there, Diotrephes won't let the guys in the church, and if any of the people in the church do, he kicks them out of the church. That's someone who loves to have the preeminence.

So, you can see that even in those days, now, we don't have any reason to believe Diotrephes held an office in the church, but he apparently acted like he did. He was, you know, the big boss. And there's guys like that ever since.

The difference is, because he wasn't really the boss, no one had to submit to him. And that's what John says. He goes on and says, Demetrius, he has a good rapport with everyone.

Follow those who do good, and don't follow those who do evil. That's what he said, the guy that's in that epistle. In other words, you've got some good examples in the church, you've got some bad examples.

This Diotrephes, he's a big time bad example. But don't follow his example, follow the good example. There wasn't some kind of group of leaders there that you just do whatever they say.

You've just got to discern between good and bad examples. And follow those who are the good examples, and try not to be like those guys who aren't. Very unpolitical.

Much more relational kind of stuff going on there. Okay, now, another thing that became part of the clergy situation that was not in the New Testament times was salaries. Clergymen got salaries.

And most of them still do. Now, I'm opposed to this. Now, I realize that most pastors are salaried, and I do not criticize them.

I will criticize the practice. I believe they are victims of the practice. I believe that they grew up, as I did and as you did, in a time where it was assumed that clergyman is a profession.

And a professional should be paid like a professional. Right? I mean, after all, they go to school as long as a medical doctor or a lawyer does. They should get paid commensurately.

Now, a lot of pastors are much more modest, and they go through all school, and they get their doctorate, and they'll settle for a tawdry little salary. But the fact of the matter is the early church did not believe in salaried pastors because Jesus didn't. Jesus, when He sent out the apostles in Matthew 10, in verses 8 through 10, He told them... Well, let me read what He said.

Matthew 10, verses 8 through 10. When He sent out the twelve, He said, Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received.

Freely give. The word freely in the Greek means without charge. You minister without charge.

Jesus said, I didn't charge you for what I taught you. You don't charge them. You do it for free.

Now, He did say this, Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staff, for the worker is worthy of his food. Now, He said, You don't charge, but the worker, and He's talking about them, they are workers, is worthy of his food. Now, what do you do with that? On the one hand, they're supposed to give it for free, but they're worthy of food.

In fact, they're supposed to count on it so much that they don't even take any with them. They figure God will provide. Here's what I understand Him to be saying.

I was talking to a pastor once who was shocked to hear I didn't believe in salaries. I'm full-time minister. I've been in the ministry for 30 years.

I've been full-time for about 20 of those years. I've never accepted a salary, and I don't believe in salaries. I was in a church where the pastor was surprised to learn this, and he says, Well, don't you believe in a supported ministry? I said, You bet I believe in a

supported ministry.

Because I've been supported for, at that time, 10 years by the ministry. But I said, There's a difference between a supported ministry and a salaried ministry. A very big difference.

A salary has to come from an organization. That means the man who receives the salary is an employee of an organization, and he has to please that organization. Furthermore, he's serving that organization on a contractual basis.

I will do what you want me to do, and you will pay me for it. He's not doing it freely. He's charging.

Now, supported ministry is different. The supported minister works for God. He doesn't work for an organization.

The organization he preaches to might throw him out, but he can still work for God because God doesn't throw him out. And God will support him. When Jesus said, The worker is worthy of his food, who were they working for? They were working for God.

I've taken that as the promise of God. If I'm working for God, God always pays his laborers, and he's always paid me. Not from predictable sources, but we've never lacked.

I mean, most of you can come to our house and see we're well provided for. Much better than I ever expected to be. But the fact is, there's a huge difference between the clergy being professionals who get a guaranteed salary for working for the organization.

Because, see, if you get a salary, there's got to be an organization paying that salary. Where else does the salary come from? I mean, if somebody came to me and said, See, if I can underwrite your whole life, and you don't have to join an organization, that would be great, but that doesn't happen very often. And I don't think there are many pastors who had someone do that either.

They're working for an organization. You know what that means? They'd better be careful not to preach anything that displeases those people who write that check. And they'd better be sure they don't say anything that offends the richer members of the church who provide in the offerings for that check to be written to them.

After all, after he's worked at that church for a while, he's got a mortgage to pay off. He's got his kids in Christian school. He's got expenses.

He's got his credit cards run up. And he's dependent on that salary just like any other laborer working for an organization. But if a man's working for God, he doesn't have to please anyone but God.

I love it. I don't have to please anybody except God. And I have to please him because if

I don't, he pays all my bills.

And I have to make sure that I keep my employer happy. But I don't have to keep anybody else happy. And that's the way it was.

The apostles never were salaried. How do you think they lived? Paul said he worked with his hands to help supply his livelihood, but that's because he wasn't married. He could work full time as a tent maker and full time as a minister too, but Peter and the other married apostles all took support.

But they didn't take a salary. They couldn't. They were traveling around.

Who's paying their salary? They were supplied by those who appreciated their ministry, the spontaneous and unpredictable gifts. That's how Jesus lived. After he left the carpenter shop, that's how the apostles lived.

That's how... Well, I was just reading to Steve Basraba from this Apostolic Fathers in the Didache, an early document from the end of the first century. It is instructed in the church that if a minister comes around and asks for money, he's a false prophet. That's what it says.

They didn't believe that a minister who's a real minister would charge money. But that's a very different view than we have today. One other thing, and I'm going to have to quit with this.

One other thing about this is that one thing there couldn't be in the early church that there is now is that in the ministry, in the clergy, there is that same career climbing thing that happens. A guy right out of seminary, he takes whatever assignment he can get in some little struggling church in a backwater rural town. But what he really hopes is that he can take that congregation of 20 and build it up to a congregation of 75.

Because then the leaders in his denomination are going to notice, this guy can perform. This guy can make churches grow. He can get an assignment in a bigger town, in a bigger church, with a bigger salary.

And if he can make that one grow, he can really climb. Now, you might say, Steve, you're mighty cynical. I have been around.

I have many... I've been in ministry myself for many years, and I have many, many friends who are pastors. And they are the ones who complain of this themselves in many cases. One of the pastors I was talking to said that in his denomination, which he thought was one of the better denominations, he said he found out after a short time being a pastor that all they were concerned about was the three Bs.

Bricks, bodies, and bucks. The bricks is the big building, the bodies is the attendance,

and the bucks is the money the church brings in. Those are the measure of success in the ministry.

And if you perform well as a pastor there, you can get an assignment to a bigger place. Eventually, maybe you can get out of the pastor altogether and just get an office job. You know, district administrator.

Doesn't that sound exciting? I can't imagine anyone who has ever been called to preach ever accepting a post called district administrator. Good heavens. How boring.

But, I mean, it's a career move, you know. And there's plenty of people climbing that ladder. But you couldn't climb that ladder in Jesus' day.

You know why? Because Jesus had a totally different view of leadership. In Matthew chapter 20, in verses 25 through 28, Matthew 20, verses 25 through 28, Jesus called them to Himself and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them, yet it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your slave.

And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life for ransom for many. In the early church, you couldn't be a leader unless you were the slave.

The climb was the opposite direction. You had to climb down the ladder. And then you weren't climbing to get some kind of prestige or anything.

You were just trying to be obedient to Jesus. That's all that mattered. And if you weren't, you didn't belong in the leadership anyway.

And what happened here with the institutionalization of the church is that ministry became a career. And subject to all the same dynamics of other careers. Well, I'm going to have to quit here pretty much.

Let me run through real quickly a few things without looking up all the scriptures. Another thing that changed was that church meetings became centralized in sacred buildings. Whereas in the biblical times, they met wherever they wanted to in churches.

I mean, they didn't have churches in public buildings, in homes, whatever. When they started building cathedrals, they became the central places of worship. And then, of course, finances changed.

You had to support the cathedral and the professional clergy. So you have to start hitting up the congregations for collections. They never did that in the early church, except when Paul asked the Gentile churches to take a collection for the Jewish church, for the poor.

Collections in the New Testament were always for poor people. They weren't for buildings and maintenance of pastors and clergymen. But that changed.

From that time on, every professional clergyman has had to pretty much have his hand out to the congregation and say, let's pass the plate again. You know, we've got to cover the building costs. We've got the new Sunday school wing going in.

And besides, I've got my salary to get paid. Now, they may not say it like that, but that's what's going on in their minds. If you think it isn't, you haven't been in their shoes.

And I'm not saying it's on their mind all the time. When things are going well, they don't have to think about it that well. Let the giving go down.

Let them lose a few of the more rich members of the family, and the giving goes way down. You better believe the pastor's thinking, my mortgage, the kid's tuition. You know, what's going to happen here? Better start hitting the congregation up for more tithes.

You know, putting the pinch on the saints, fleecing the sheep, because now we have financial concerns that Jesus never intended the church to have. One other thing, and I'll quit, and that is that eventually, after Constantine, the church sought and obtained sponsorship of the secular government. And that really corrupted things quite a bit.

And the church is never really getting totally away from that, in Europe especially. In America, there's much more separation in that sense. But even so, churches still have, usually seek tax exemptions and things like that.

They want the government to say they're all right. They want the government to give them a break. The early Christians didn't ever consult the government about what they're going to preach or what they're going to do.

They didn't have to put handicapped access into their bathrooms and stuff like that, and parking spaces for the handicapped. Now, I'm not against the handicapped. I'm just saying that the government imposes those rules on churches today.

And the early church, they just did what God wanted them to do and didn't worry about what Caesar or the beast wanted them to do. So, there were some huge steps the church took into Babylon. And next time, I want to talk to you about what I understand the Bible to teach about getting out of Babylon.

I believe there is a way out, and of course, it has to do with going back to things more biblical. Some of the things that I point out about the early church, people just say it's not practical to do it that way. You just can't do that.

And I want to take some of the objections next time that people have to it, but I want to talk about how to get back to a really more biblical church life. Once you recognize

where the steps down were, you kind of have an idea of where the steps back out again are.