

Evangelists Responsibility to Local Church

by Tony Miano

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being part of a local church and submitting to its leadership, and warns against the dangers of nomadism in the evangelism community.

Duration: 1:01:09

Scripture: Acts 6:2-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Hebrews 13:7, Hebrews 13:17, 1 John 2:18

Topics: "Submission"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the topic of biblical evangelism and the use of the law in sharing the message of Christ. The speaker shares their personal experience of being introduced to biblical evangelism and feeling isolated among their Christian friends and family. They discuss the importance of distributing tracks, engaging in conversations with strangers, and preaching in the open air. The sermon also touches on the biblical concept of speaking in tongues and prophesying, emphasizing the importance of orderly proclamation of God's truth.

Transcript

Okay. It is a pleasure to be with you. It's about the third or fourth time I've been out to the East Coast in the last year.

First time was to Baltimore in February of last year, and found myself stranded in Baltimore for about three or four days because they had the worst blizzard in 100 years while I was there. Mike Stockwell, we dug out his car, found a tire for it, he drove me up to JFK to get me out of the kill zone down there in Baltimore so I could fly home. Went back to Baltimore in June and they had an earthquake that morning before I arrived.

So I was a little hesitant about coming back to the East Coast, and so Mark Spence and I flew out here. You're trying to fill the extra today. Mark Spence and I flew out here yesterday and saw rain like we don't usually see in Southern California.

The running joke with some of my evangelist friends is that whenever Tony comes to the East Coast, he brings the wrath of God with him. But it's a beautiful day today. Open your Bibles, if you will, to 1 John Chapter 2. 1 John Chapter 2. I've been told I have about 50 minutes.

I make no guarantees. Now, this passage that we're going to start by reading this morning, we'll set the tone for the rest of the message, although I'm not going to really spend any time in this passage. But as is so often the case, the Word of God preaches way better than the preacher opening the Word of God.

So, 1 John Chapter 2, beginning in verse 18. God's Word tells us this, and I'm reading out of the English Standard Version for those of you who are wondering. Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come.

Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He made to us, eternal life.

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you, but the anointing that you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him. The Word of God.

Now the message for this hour is entitled The Evangelist's Biblical Responsibility to the Local Church. Now, those of you who are brand new to biblical evangelism may sit through this message and in part wonder, why am I hearing this? What does this have to do to me? None of this applies to me. Well, I want to let you know that someday it might.

And I hope that what I share with you will remain in your heart, in your mind, will resonate with you when the time comes for you to be tempted in the way that so many of our brothers and sisters in the evangelism community have been tempted. Now, thinking about specific individuals and groups was unavoidable as I was preparing this message for this morning, because inevitably I have to draw from my own experiences and the testimonies I've heard from some of the people in this room and other evangelists around the country to prepare this message. But this message is more about an issue that is plaguing Christ's church and particularly the evangelism community than it is about groups and individuals who are by their own words and deeds, the carriers of the plague.

And the issue is nomadism. Now, you've probably never heard of that word before because I'm pretty sure I made it up. You take the word nomad, N-O-M-A-D, add an ism to it and you have nomadism.

Now, the people group in question is what I refer to as nomadic tribes of evangelists. Now, a nomad, according to the dictionary, is a member of a group of people that have no fixed home and they move according to the seasons from place to place. They are a person with no fixed residence who simply roams about.

In a word, they are a wanderer. Now, these tribes, and I don't use the word tribe in a disparaging way, these tribes are comprised of professing Christians, both true and false converts, who are led by men and women who do not have a church home. And if they do have a church home, they're only connected to the church in a very superficial way.

And they don't submit to the membership process if a membership process exists in their particular faith community. And they stay just far enough away, just far enough out of reach of the leadership of the local church so that they can avoid submitting to their authority. Hang in there, brother.

I'm gonna try to keep you awake. Now, members of these tribes, not necessarily all members, they tend to follow the tribe's leaders and behavior toward and thinking about the local church. However, the leader thinks about the local church, so do the people that this particular leader gathers around them.

And before long, they begin to see the tribe, the group, the evangelism team as their church. Now, while these tribes are not limited to Christians who are passionate about street evangelism and the open air proclamation of the gospel for the purposes of our time here this morning, that's the group I'm going to focus on because that is in part why you are all here. And I think it's important in the onset that we make a distinction between nomads and itinerants in the street evangelism community.

And the primary difference is the nomadic evangelists and the itinerant evangelists, the primary difference is that the nomad has no attachment to the local church where the itinerant goes from place to place under the covering of a local church. And a couple of examples of itinerant evangelists immediately come to mind. One is my dear brother, Mike Stockwell, who's with us this morning, and another is an equally dear brother named Robert Gray.

Both of these men are very, very godly men. There may be other itinerant evangelists in the room, I just don't know you, but these two men that I know, they've devoted their entire lives to the public proclamation of the gospel. They literally travel around the world to preach the gospel in the open air, but they do so with the prayerful support and the accountability of their home churches, of their local churches.

The nomadic evangelist has no such accountability and connection to the local church. Now, before we get into exactly what nomadism is, I think it's important that I share with you some personal background, which will include some of my own experiences in and with nomadism. And I'm gonna attempt then to put forth a simple and relatively brief ecclesiology, a study of the church proper, which will include the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the structure of the local church, and the responsibility of every Christian to submit to the authorities given by God both inside and outside the church.

And in order to make a case, for lack of a better word, against these nomadic tribes of evangelists, I first have to establish a biblical foundation for calling these nomads out and calling them back to the local church. And then we'll try to wrap things up by addressing a couple of the common objections or arguments in favor of, or reasons for, nomadism, and then hopefully present some practical and biblical answers to those arguments. Now, how many of you, this has already gone over your heads and you're still shaking your head wondering why you're here? Hang in there.

Now, I've been a Christian for about 23 years and I was introduced to biblical evangelism probably only about six years ago. And when God opened my eyes to the biblical use of the law in evangelism, as well as the biblical way to present Christ and Him crucified, I found myself virtually alone amongst my Christian friends and my Christian family. I could already see people nodding their heads.

And when I talked about distributing tracts, when I talked about walking up to a stranger and engaging them in conversation, and certainly when I talked about standing up on a box of all things and opening my mouth and preaching in the open air, my fellow Christians looked at me very kindly, but at the same time as if I had two heads, three eyes, and four arms. And as if I was speaking an entirely different language. Sound familiar to anybody? Uh-huh, yeah.

Maybe like you, I quickly became frustrated. I made the common mistake that other new converts to biblical evangelism often make. And although it took me more than 15 years to come to the realization that there is indeed a biblical way to engage in evangelism, I expected the Christians around me to get it immediately.

And while the Lord allowed me to undergo a process that lasted years, literally years before the light bulb went on in my head, so to speak, I expected others to come to the evangelism light with a quick flip of the switch. It was an unreasonable and frankly, it was an immature expectation on my part. I was wrong.

And if you're thinking that way right now, take it from one who's made the mistake. You are wrong. You're wrong.

One day, and I don't remember how, I heard of an organization that networked like-minded evangelists. And I joined and I was soon introduced to other Christians in my area who like me were part of a growing club. The name of which, like the club itself, was completely new to me.

They called it Club Frustration. How many of you have ever heard that term? Club Frustration. Okay, a few of you.

All right. The name of the club expressed the sentiments of its members towards the local church, specifically towards their own church. The members of Club Frustration were frustrated with their church's lack of desire to reach the lost with the gospel.

They were frustrated. They were tired with weak gospel preaching coming from the pulpit. They were tired of answering questions from other questions.

Maybe you've heard some of these before. Is that kind of evangelism really effective? How many people do you see coming to faith in Christ and doing it that way? Don't you think going it that way is a bit judgmental? You're not becoming one of those hellfire preachers, are you? I don't know if I want our church to be characterized as one of those churches that produces crazy zealots. Can you tone it down just a bit? Some of the church members are actually seeing you out there and it's making everybody nervous.

And so on. Sound familiar? The giggles in the room tells me it's familiar to some of you. Now, for the record, while it took a while for my pastor to come on board and I did many, many things early on that I thought would help my pastor get on board, which in effect would drive my pastor away because I was making all kinds of mistakes left and right.

I was placing unbiblical expectations upon my pastors and elders and the members of my church. I was a bull in a china shop and it wasn't pretty. But while it took my pastor a while to get on board, my pastor never discouraged me from hitting the streets.

And now my pastor is one of my biggest advocates, one of the biggest advocates I know as far as pastors regarding biblical evangelism. He exhorts our church on a regular basis to step out of their comfort zone and to reach a loss with the gospel. And he faithfully proclaims the law and the gospel from his pulpit.

And not long ago, the elders of our church laid hands on me and called me to the office of evangelist in our church, which is something that a lot of churches don't do. So I am in a very good place. Back to club frustration.

Misery truly loves company. And I found that the more time I spent on the streets, the more time I spent with other Christians whose frustration I shared, the less time I spent with my church family. And over time, I found it easy to justify the mindset because of the eternal importance of reaching the lost with the gospel.

No one's going to argue with that. At least no Christian should. And I began to see my fellowship with other evangelists on the streets as in some ways a substitute for my fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ in my church.

Before long, I was leading a team of evangelists and the work of evangelism became all consuming. And I was becoming a nomad. Some of us talk about forming our own church, one that would emphasize biblical evangelism in ways that other churches don't.

And we would grow the church from those who we saw receive Christ from our street evangelism efforts. We were going to reinvent the wheel in Southern California and we were going to show other churches how it's done. Well, fortunately, by God's grace, all of us realized that we were either already in God-glorifying Christ-centered churches or there were such churches nearby we could attend.

Some left their churches where the gospel was not being preached. And I'll say this again later on this afternoon. Let me say it now.

If you are in a church right now where the gospel is not biblically and faithfully preached, you are not in a church. You are in a social club for professing believers. Leave! You're not in a church.

But if you are in a church where the gospel is proclaimed, you owe it to the church to stay. And we'll talk more about that. We'll talk more about that later.

Some left their churches where the gospel wasn't preached and they found churches where the gospel was faithfully proclaimed. Others of us determined to submit to the leaders of our churches where the gospel was being preached and to continue to bring biblical evangelism to our church families. And by God's grace, we avoided becoming a tribe of nomadic evangelists.

Now in my present capacity at Living Waters, I interact and communicate with hundreds, if not thousands of Christian evangelists all over the world. And it's a joy to have that honor and privilege to do that. And I've had the great honor and privilege of having a small part in getting to train some of my brothers and sisters in Christ how to hit the streets and share the gospel.

And many of them are now leading their own teams within the framework of their local churches. But sadly, so much interaction, with having so much interaction with the evangelism community, I've seen what I believe is a growing number of nomadic tribes in evangelism. And literally within the last week, I have had brought to my attention such tribes from literally the four corners of the United States.

And sadder still is the reality that some of these nomadic tribes have moved or are moving away from biblical Christianity and are ascribing to heretical doctrines such as Pelagianism and Opentheism and others. And I believe when Christians make the move toward nomadism and begin the doctrinal slide from orthodoxy to heresy, such movement can be attributed to several behaviors and beliefs. And here are a few.

A low view of the local church. That's one. A refusal to submit to biblical authority and accountability.

Seeing themselves as in no need for teachers. And the errant and arrogant belief that they have received from God the ability to infallibly discern who is saved and who is lost. They see themselves as designated by God to separate the tares from the wheat when God Himself, Jesus Christ said, we'll leave that to the angels later on.

And it's interesting to note that those who hold to the last belief mentioned seem quick to judge as apostate and unsaved those who dare to question their beliefs and practices. You know, if you ask a man under whose authority does he place himself or to whom in his life does he answer and he says, I answer to God, let it be known that he is not telling you the truth. He's not.

For a godly man places himself under the godly authority of the leadership of the local church, God's church. The man who refuses to submit to the authority of godly leadership refuses to submit to the authority of God in their life because God has given a framework for us to follow and it is the local church. There are buildings called churches but the church, the body of Christ is not a structure.

For the born again follower of Jesus Christ, corporate worship often occurs in a church building like a beautiful building like we're in today. However, God glorifying Christ-centered corporate worship can likewise take place in a living room, in a public park, in an office building, in a basement by candlelight, in a jungle by campfire and in a prison cell. That being said, church is not where Christians go and it is not what Christians do.

Church is who Christians are. The body of Christ. But while the church is not a structure, the church, the body of Christ according to God's word most certainly is structured.

It's not a structure, it's not a building, but it is structured. It has organization. There is only one head of the church and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16, 18, and I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And contrary to what the Roman Catholic church believes, the church of Christ was not built upon the fallible apostle Peter and his made up lineage. The church of Christ was built upon the solid granite foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He alone is the head of the church. Ephesians 1, 22 and 23, and He put all things under His feet and gave Him His head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all and in all. Jesus Christ is the head of His body and the body in this earthly realm is His church.

Ephesians 5, 23, for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body and is Himself its Savior. Colossians 1, 15 to 18, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him.

And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.

Scripture leaves no doubt who is the head of the church and it is not sinful man, whether apostle, popish figure, or self-anointed street preacher. It is Jesus Christ, the Lord. And God, according to His word and according to His sovereign will, has provided a structure under His headship.

Scripture is clear. Acts 2, 42 and 47, And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to their numbers day by day those who were being saved. Those who would be the first among many coming to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

The early church recognized both the wisdom and the authority of the apostles. The apostles were the human leaders within the framework of Christ's body. Acts 4, 34 to 37, There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or households sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each one as any had need.

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native to Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. The apostles, the first leaders of the church, had the authority to collect from and distribute to the body of Christ financial resources and other resources. Christians like Barnabas recognized and submitted to the apostles' authority.

Others did not. Acts 5, 1 and 2, But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge, he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. The apostles, as the leaders of the church, had the authority to discipline members of the church.

Peter, a man by the power of the Holy Spirit, judged Ananias guilty of not simply lying to men, but lying to God. And Ananias was immediately sentenced to death by the Holy Spirit. Now, pastor, I'm not suggesting that we do that today.

Three hours later, Peter prophesied the immediate death of Ananias' wife Sapphira for the same sin against God. Acts 6, 2-4, And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty, but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

The apostles had the authority to summon the church family. They had the authority to establish the position of deacon and to appoint qualified men and women to serve in that role. And throughout the book of Acts, it is easy to see that the church, the body of Christ, was structured in such a way to include godly human leadership.

The Apostle Paul's epistles are yet further testimony of the obvious human structure of the church under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. More often than not, Paul would address the recipients of his letters as the church, and not as the church universal, but the local assembly of believers in a given area. In fact, in his opening address to his, in his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul wrote to all the saints in Christ

Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and the deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to the church body, the church is comprised of various leadership roles and offices, Acts 4, 11 to 16. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it equipped when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The text makes it clear regarding the purposes of these offices. These human offices exist for the edification, the maturation, the spiritual protection of born-again followers of Jesus Christ. And in his presentation of these various offices to the church of Ephesus, Paul reaffirms that Jesus Christ is the head of the church with a structure beneath Him in each local assembly.

And in addition to these specific offices within the local church, Paul provides qualifications for elders and overseers and pastors, as well as the qualifications for those men and women who aspire to serve as deacons. Not just anyone could serve in leadership of the local church. Only biblically qualified, prospective pastors and elders and deacons could serve as leaders in the young and growing body of Christ.

And the same holds true today. And one of the clear signs of the unbiblical nature of nomadism is that oftentimes leaders of these nomadic tribes appoint themselves as elders and pastors of the group, forming a church around their self-appointed leadership. They're often young men who themselves are new converts who unbiblically lay hands on themselves or too quickly lay hands on other young zealous men and they start a church.

They are at times what Paul refers to as an arrogant, prideful novice. 1 Timothy 3.6 says, He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Now the Greek word translated as a recent convert in the ESV or as a novice in the King James is neophuton, and it's a compound word.

Neos meaning new and phuo meaning planted. Those who fall prey to the lure of nomadism are often young men who by outward appearances seem to grow very quickly in their faith. They devour scripture.

They're voracious readers and students. They often show great promise and seemingly leave older Christians in the dust when it comes to their ability to retain information and when it comes to their zeal and ability to serve, to preach and to teach. But before long, the pride and arrogance of the old creature begins to affect the growth of the new creature.

They begin to see themselves as better equipped and more gifted than the older men around them and that may very well be true. But when the novice starts to think about such things, even dwell on such things, they sometimes begin to brood about being held back by other leaders, older leaders. In their mind, they're not being given leadership responsibility fast enough and eventually the frustration can lead to the novice setting out on his own with all too often a few burnt bridges left behind.

I did that. Many, many years ago, I did that to a church because I was a novice who was put in leadership too soon. The novice errantly confuses intellectual prowess and spiritual giftedness with spiritual maturity.

Ability and maturity may be parallel spiritual roads, but the ground is not always covered at the same speed. And when spiritual ability overruns spiritual maturity, the novice often runs into trouble and sometimes they become a nomad who answers to no one. And we're seeing a growth of that, unfortunately, in the evangelism community.

Over the years, I've asked Christians, those who serve as street evangelists and those who don't, to whom do they answer? Meaning, to whom are they accountable in their life? And sadly, the answer I sometimes receive comes with a quick and angry retort. Something like this, well, I don't answer to you. I answer to God.

Now, they're correct on both counts. But yet at the same time, the response reveals something very, very troubling. Yes, it's true that the people with whom I speak do not answer to me.

I'm Tony and I'm nobody from nowhere. And yes, it's true that ultimately they answer to God as we all do. But their answer, I believe, indicates they see themselves as responsible to answer to no one but God.

They see themselves as accountable to no one but God. And such a mindset is clearly unbiblical. Yes, the Christian and every person for that matter is ultimately accountable to God.

And every human being will stand and give an account before God for their lives. Scripture leaves no doubt. Matthew 12, 36 to 37, Jesus said with these words, I tell you on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.

Romans 3, 19, now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be accountable to God. Romans 14, 10 to 12, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God for it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

1 Peter 4, 4 and 5, with respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you, but they will give account to him who is ready to judge both the living and the dead. Yes, everyone is accountable to God, but Christians are accountable to other people as well, both inside and outside the church. Matthew 18, 15 to 17, and one of the reasons why nomads keep arm's length away from the church is so that passages like this will not, in their minds, apply to them.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault. Between you and him alone, if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Hebrews 13, 7, remember your leaders.

Those who spoke to you the word of God, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. And just a little further down in the same chapter in verse 17, obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with

joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you.

1 Thessalonians 5, 12 and 13. We ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work, be at peace among yourselves. And there are others too, if you'd like to write these down.

Titus 1, 9-11. James 5, 19-20. Romans 13, 1-5 talking about submitting to authority outside of the church.

Christians are not accountable to other people in human institutions instead of God or before God. Christians are accountable to other people in human institutions by the word and by the will of God and in obedience to God. So while the argument is valid that the ultimate authority in a Christian's life is God, the arguments become fallacious when the argument is used to defend the unbiblical position that the Christian need not submit to earthly authority either inside or outside the church, authorities instituted by God.

Any Christian who insists they answer to God and to God alone are not living by the parameters that they have set for themselves. For if they truly see themselves as submitting to God's authority in their life, and if they see themselves as answerable to God and as one who is actively obeying Him, then they would willingly submit to the earthly authority God has placed in their life, inside and outside the church. And if they don't do that, they're lying both to themselves and to God, and they're in sin, and they need to repent.

The Christian's accountability before God includes biblical accountability to secular governing authorities, brothers and sisters in Christ, and the leadership of the local church. Yes, there is only one lawgiver and judge. There's only one who's able to save and destroy.

That's not us, that is God. But that being said, the judgment of Almighty God will include how Christians respond and submit to the earthly authority God has placed in their lives. Now, I realize that this is just a brief study of the church, just a simple overview of the church, both the universal church and the local church.

But in order to make the case against nomadism, it's necessary to put forth a biblical representation of the local church and the believer's responsibility and accountability to the church. The dangers of nomadism in the evangelist community are several. And as I previously mentioned, those evangelists that take the unfortunate and biblical step towards nomadism open themselves up to heresy.

Pelagianism, open theism are just a couple of the heresies that seem to be very prevalent among nomads in the Christian evangelist community these days. The reasons are varied, but one reason is, without the covering and accountability of the local church and the church's God-ordained leadership, the nomadic evangelist becomes his only teacher. And you will often hear this from nomads, especially if you dare to bring up the name of one of your favorite teachers.

Oh, I don't read any books. I don't follow any teachers. I only open my Bible and I hear from God.

When he heads down this path, when the nomad heads down this path of error, there is no one to stop or correct him. He surrounds himself with only those who agree with him theologically. And slowly and sadly, but surely the nomad begins to believe his or her own rhetoric.

The fallacious argument that there are no teachers who are faithful to the text of scripture, at least not beyond the teachers in their own small spiritual enclave, or not beyond the image the teacher sees in the

mirror when he wakes up in the morning. Before long, the nomad starts to think of himself or herself as the holder of truth. And everyone else is in error.

Evangelists that take the unfortunate, unbiblical step towards nomadism often become pharisaical and legalistic. They become a law unto themselves. They establish parameters of conduct under the auspices of personal holiness that exceed the parameters given in scripture, resulting in self-righteousness and legalism.

And over time, this may lead the nomad to drift toward other unbiblical teachings like sinless perfectionism, the notion of completed sanctification, this side of heaven, and a works righteousness formula for salvation. The further they go down that slippery slope, the less you will hear them talk about grace and the cross of Jesus Christ. A question? Yes, sir, we're gonna get there.

Yes, you're right. You're absolutely right. That's how cults do get started.

And if the drift continues unabated, the nomad may begin to deny essential Christian doctrines. And we've seen this. We've seen this from men who once faithfully proclaimed the one true gospel, but now they are denying doctrines like the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ or the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Evangelists that take this unfortunate and unbiblical step toward nomadism run the risk of becoming isolationists. The kind of isolationism may also lead the nomad to wrongly judge other Christians and assign other Christians to hell because they don't believe exactly as the nomad believes regarding certain points of doctrine. And if such behavior remains unchecked, this could lead to the formation of cults, like personality cults, or what I call we're the only true church cult.

Cults such as these are typically led by one or more charismatic leaders who convince their followers that they alone rightly divide, understand, and communicate the word of God. And every other teacher is therefore in their mind a false teacher. And such cult leaders also have a tendency to convince their followers that they have received new revelations from God that invariably contradict what the word of God actually says.

Folks, this is happening within the evangelism community. Most recently, I've seen another alarming trend among some nomads, and it is the growth of various forms of neo-Gnosticism. Ancient Gnosticism taught in part that salvation was achieved through special revelatory knowledge of the holy.

Some nomads also believe today that they receive special revelatory knowledge from the Holy Spirit, which gives them the inerrant ability to discern true converts from false converts. They can engage with you in a conversation. You could say hello, and they'll know right off the bat whether or not you're a follower of Christ.

There are men and women out there who actually believe that lie. Some of the nomads wrongly justify this belief by misinterpreting 1 Corinthians 14, 23-25. It says, If therefore the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophecy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

You see, some wrongly assert that Paul is teaching in this passage that believers have the ability of discerning the presence of an unbeliever because they have a gift of prophecy according to how they believe the gift is described in the passage, and a more glaring performance of eisegesis on the text would be hard to find. Now, before I continue, hear me, this has nothing at all to do with whether or not some of the spiritual gifts are for today. This has nothing to do with being charismatic or non-charismatic.

This has everything to do with rightly dividing passages of Scripture. Okay? In this brief but important passage, Paul gives us a picture of two churches. One in which all the members are speaking in tongues in a confused and disorderly manner, and the other in which all members of the church are prophesying, forth-telling, not foretelling.

Forth-telling is the proclamation of known truth. Foretelling is the prediction of things yet to come. Forth-telling, proclaiming the known truth of God's Word one by one in an orderly manner.

And in fact, 1 Corinthians 14, 31 affirms that it is this form of prophecy, forth-telling, in which the church was engaged. It says, for you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all be encouraged. If an unbeliever walks into the spiritual chaos of the first church described, he or she will likely leave thinking everybody in the assembly is nuts.

That's what Paul is saying. But if an unbeliever enters the church while all the members one by one are proclaiming the known truth of God's Word, they experience conviction regarding their sins against God. Paul says that the unbeliever is convicted by all, called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed.

And those nomads who misinterpret this text to support the notion that all true Christians have the ability, even the gifting, to infallibly discern true from false converts, focus on the word all. They focus on the word all instead of the words convicted by and called to account. You see, the conviction and the calling to account the unbeliever experiences is not the result of specially gifted Christians going, Aha! You're an unbeliever! I can tell.

That's not what's happening in this passage. Not at all. Rather, the conviction and the calling to account the unbeliever experiences is the result of the power of God's Word which is sharper than any two-edged sword and able to pierce the heart of men.

What Paul is picturing here is an unbeliever walking into a church where the known truth of God's Word is being heralded and proclaimed by all the members of a church in an orderly manner and hearing the proclamation of the Word that unbeliever is convicted in their heart and their spirit of their own sin. It's not that others are pointing out their sin. It's that the Holy Spirit is pointing out that person's sin in their own heart.

It's not the Christian who has the power to discern who's a true and a false convert. It is the Holy Spirit who is separating bone from marrow and piercing that person's heart. That's what's happening in this passage.

The believers in the church don't know with some kind of palm reader-esque or Gnostic-like ability the true condition of the newcomer entering their assembly and as a result, call the unbeliever to account. Now, granted, we can have conversations with people and we can make the judgment that, you know, I don't think this person's saved. I don't think this person's a believer.

You know, I went toe-to-toe with a young man out on Third Street Promenade last weekend. He walked by yelling and trying to hide saying, God doesn't exist. And I called him back with Revelation 21.8. It says that all liars lather apart in a lake of fire and so will cowards! Come back here and talk to me! And he did.

And he was quick to assert his credentials. A recent graduate from a four-year Christian university in our area with a degree in biblical studies. Right.

And he immediately asserted that Jesus is a way to heaven. Would I be wrong if I called that young man to account and said, I don't believe you're saved because Jesus is the only way. Right? Okay.

But to think that we have some type of spiritual gifting to look at a person and discern their entire life to know their heart, even when the word of God says, who can know the heart for it's desperately sick and wicked? Only God truly knows the end result, the true condition of a person's heart. We can discern false converts in our midst, but we're not supposed to run around like weed eaters in the church. I mean, think about it.

I mean, if you have a beautiful... Anyone grow flowers? I can grow cactus because they're very hard to kill. Very, very hard to kill. Okay.

Ma'am, would you go through your beautiful garden to pull out a few weeds with a gas powered, 40 horsepower weed eater? No. Why? Why wouldn't you? Because you'd destroy some of the flowers in the process, right? Trying to get to those weeds. Well, unfortunately, what nomads like to do basically to justify their own self-righteousness and their own belief system is they like to go through churches like a gas powered weed eater and completely violate what the word of God says about separating the tares from the weed.

Yes, we should guard the body of Christ. Yes, pastors should protect their flocks. Yes, evangelists should protect their teams.

Brothers and sisters in Christ should protect one another from being deceived by false converts. But at the same time, we are not the judge and the jury. We are not the ones who determine whether or not a person is saved and whether or not they will go to heaven or whether or not they will go to hell.

Salvation is of the Lord. So is judgment. And so we ought not be going through the church as weed eaters.

Sadly, because many nomadic neo-gnostics refuse to submit to the authority of leaders in a local assembly and arrogantly delude themselves into believing they are able to rightly divide the word of God without the assistance of God gifted and God ordained Bible prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and our teachers, they hear only their own voices. And not from the word of God. And the result is a growing number of men and women, often young, both chronologically and spiritually, who under the auspices of separating for the purpose of personal holiness and for the sake of the purity of the church, instead separate themselves from the only place of spiritual protection provided for believers in this world, the church, the body of Christ.

Now there will be some who hear this message today or later on who will undoubtedly have objections to some of my observations and conclusions. That's okay, I'm over it already. And while there's no way I can anticipate all the arguments against the position I've put forward, I can anticipate at least a couple of them.

One is this. I'm not part of a church because I can't find a church that supports or practices biblical evangelism. Maybe that's some of you here.

And again, if your church is not preaching the biblical gospel, then it's not a church. It's nothing more than a social club for professing Christians, both genuine and professing. And if your church is not preaching the gospel, you are obligated, because of your love for Christ, to leave.

You're obligated to leave. If you're in a church where the gospel is not being preached, you are practicing idolatry because you're hearing something other than the gospel. And you're affirming and supporting that false gospel by staying.

You have to leave. However, if your church is preaching the biblical gospel, then the fact that your church does not presently support biblical evangelism in the manner you prefer is not a sufficient or biblical reason to leave the church. It's not.

Remember, there was a time when you likely didn't get it either. Remember? It might be hard to remember, but there was a day, right? Ten years before the light bulb went on for me, I picked up a book by Ray Comfort called *Militant Evangelism*. I thought it was cool because he had this cheesy drawing of a tank on the front.

And I like things that explode. And I opened that book and I started reading about the law and standing on a box and preaching and telling people about hell. And I saw nothing about friendship evangelism and there were no barbecues.

And I said, this isn't going to work. And I put it down. And for a decade, I did nothing with it.

And one day, I was thinking about the evangelism I was doing or in that time, not doing. And I saw on my bottom shelf a row of dusty books. That's where pastors put all the books they're not going to read on the bottom shelf.

That way, when the person comes in who gave them that book, they will see their book on the shelf. Right, pastor? Amen. Amen.

Can I get a witness? You know, you just can't throw the books away that are gifts, but you know you're not going to read them. So all the good commentaries are at eye level and all the books you'll never read are at the bottom. Well, Ray's books were down there on the bottom shelf.

And I'm sitting there and I'm thinking about evangelism. I said, maybe I'll give that one another shot. And the light bulb went on and I was in tears, weeping, repenting for all of the non-evangelism I had done for years and years and years.

So there were a time where we didn't get it either. Be patient, endure, don't quit, love your pastor, love the leaders of your church, love your brothers and sisters in Christ in your church. Stick it out.

Keep encouraging your leaders and your fellow members to join you in the work. Come alongside your leaders in any way you can without being factious, without being contentious, and without being unsubmitive to the leadership of your church. And pray, and pray that biblical evangelism will eventually come to your church.

If the gospel is being preached, if you have godly leadership in your midst, the fact that they're not open air preaching or handing out the tracts you like or doing evangelism exactly the way you like it is not a biblical reason to leave your church. I challenge you right now to find it in the word of God. You won't.

So let's move on. Second argument is, I'm not involved in a church because there are no biblical churches in my area. I hear this almost daily.

And I don't discount this as a reality. There are not enough good churches. Even in parts of the country where there's a church at every corner, there are not enough good Bible teaching, Bible believing churches in the United States.

There's no doubt about that. Now, this is no doubt a difficult situation. If there's anything more uncomfortable than church shopping, I don't know what it is.

Very, very difficult. But the situation isn't hopeless. There are options.

One option is to travel outside your community and find a biblical church. Look, I don't think that there is any distance, certainly in the United States, too far to travel to find a good church. 25 miles, 50 miles, 100 miles.

Now, before you say it's too far to drive, please take a moment to consider our brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world. In Africa, in Asia, in the Middle East, in South America, who walk sometimes not for hours, but for days through jungles, through deserts, over mountains to get to a hut where they have one candle and one page of the Bible and they worship in whispers so they may not die that night. If you tell me that gas prices are too high for you to travel to go to church, I'm going to laugh at you.

I'll give you a hug, but I'm going to laugh at you and say, get over it. Go find a church. Drive.

Do whatever you have to do. Another option is to do what a few men from India once did. They contacted a large biblical church in Southern California and asked the church to help them establish a biblical church in their part of the country.

And the church put them in touch with a seminary and the church was established in India and those men are now part of a flourishing, Christ-exalting, Bible-believing church. Look, if you're in a part of the United States where there are no biblical churches, call a biblical church and say, HELP! We're alone out here. We need leadership.

We need a pastor. We need a teacher. Send your missionary here before you send them to Guam.

Please. You like that one, huh? Look, in light of the subject matter of this message, I make the next suggestion with a great deal of caution. Another option is to start a church in your area.

And you say, wait a minute, Tony, you're talking, you talked for a half hour about not starting, these nomads start new churches. Yeah. Start a new church in your area assuming you have a godly men or men on your team who meet the biblical requirements of a pastor or an elder.

That man or men should be examined by the pastors and elders of other churches to determine if your prospective pastor or elders are truly qualified and called by God to lead a new church. All right. Being frustrated with the body of Christ and feeling like starting a church does not constitute a call from God.

Okay. It could be too much mustard on your hoagie and not the Holy Spirit talking to you. It's so very important to add that it should not be the man or men desiring to start a new church who determine whether or not they themselves are qualified to lead a church.

That's what nomads do. They look in the mirror and say, I'm the guy. No one is the best judge of their own character and spiritual qualifications.

I know I'm not. Now, what I'm about to suggest will likely be unpopular, especially among American Christians who have grown so accustomed to the conveniences of church. There's one more option.

If you can't find a biblical church within driving distance of your home and it's not biblical or practical to start a new church in your area, move. What? What? You know how long it took me to build this house, to manicure this yard, to get this job? Yeah, if there's no churches close to you and you can't start one, move. Over the last 100, 150 years, the church in America has moved from a who we are mentality to what we do mentality.

And as a result, the corporate gathering of believers for the purposes of worship, teaching and fellowship has been relegated to merely an aspect of most Christians' lives instead of the central focus of their lives around which all other aspects of life, work, ministry, recreation, etc. revolve, right? In the early days of the church and for many, many centuries, the church, the body of Christ was at the center of a person's life. And everything else they did worked around and networked from that central existence with the body of Christ.

Now, especially here in America, the church is merely one spoke in a multi-spoke wheel and we're just spinning and spinning and spinning and we do the best we can to stay connected with the church because it's one thing we do in life instead of the central purpose for our existence here on earth as followers of Christ. Now, those, nomadism among Christians evangelists is indeed a very serious problem and it may not be as widespread as I fear it is. I mean, I've been looking at this closely now for a couple of years, watching it, seeing the carnage being wrought by nomads among my brothers and sisters in Christ and quite frankly, it ticks me off.

But I believe it is an increasing problem. Spreading like a cancer within the church. I believe that nomadism among particularly evangelists in the Christian community is a tool of Satan to try to destroy the church of Christ.

And I do believe that there are some men and women involved in nomadism who are hell-bent on doing just that. And I also believe that there are men and women involved in nomadism who don't realize that they're being used in that way. Those with whom I've spoken who have insisted that they only answer to God and who could rightly be categorized as a Christian nomad tend to be the same people who typically never see themselves as doing anything wrong or as ever being wrong about anything that they believe and the ramifications for that kind of mindset is frightening.

And if you find yourself in the category of the nomadic street evangelist, please bring yourself under the biblical godly leadership of a local church as soon as you can because you are in sin. You are in willful disobedience to God. Please put yourself under godly leadership.

Know the body of Christ which is segmented into local assemblies is not perfect but it is the only model for biblical leadership and accountability the Christian has in this life. The word of God is true. And if you see

yourself as one who only answers to God in this life again, you're wrong.

You're wrong in the sense that God has made provision for the accountability of his people through the biblical leadership of the local church. Ephesians 5 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Hebrews 13 17 Again, obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. My friends, refusing to submit to godly biblical leadership is symptomatic of pride, arrogance, and quite possibly evidence that you yourself are unregenerate. You may be suffering from the very same deadly spiritual condition of which you are so very quick to accuse other Christians of suffering and that is false conversion.

On the other hand, submitting to godly biblical leadership even when one does not agree with that leadership on every fine point is evidence of humility, a fruit of the Spirit. For the Christian submitting to other Christians, whether peers or leaders, is one way the Christian shows reverence for Christ. And if as some insist, they insist they answer only to God, then they will keep his word.

And submit to the authority of an accountability to the local church, which the Lord has given for the good of his people. The local body of Christ exists because God loves his children. And if you refuse to be part of a local assembly, if you refuse to submit to the authority of a local assembly, you do not love his children.

And you quite possibly do not love God either. And if there are nomads here, I beg you, not by the power vested in me, but by the power of the word of God, to repent. If you insist that you love God and keep his commandments, if you insist you love your neighbor as yourself, yet you have separated yourself from his church, repent.

You are deluding yourself and playing the part of the hypocrite. It may be you who one day hears the Lord say, I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. I don't want that for you.

I don't want that for anyone. Even the nomads who make me so angry this day. I want to see them back in the church.

I want to see them repent. I want to see them grow in their faith in Christ. I want them, I want to see them used by God in glorious, amazing ways for the furtherance of the gospel.

But if they continue to rebel against God by hating and despising his church, they will only further become a tool of Satan. And I don't want that for them. Love the church.

Christ loved the church and gave his life for her. How can we not love the church? How patient is Christ with his church? Ought we not be patient with his church? Nomadism is a disease. Don't get it.

Let the prayer.

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