

A night photograph of a large steel truss bridge over a river. The bridge's intricate steel structure is illuminated from below, creating a warm glow. In the background, a Gothic cathedral with two prominent spires is also illuminated, its lights reflecting on the water. The overall scene is dark, with the artificial lights providing the primary illumination.

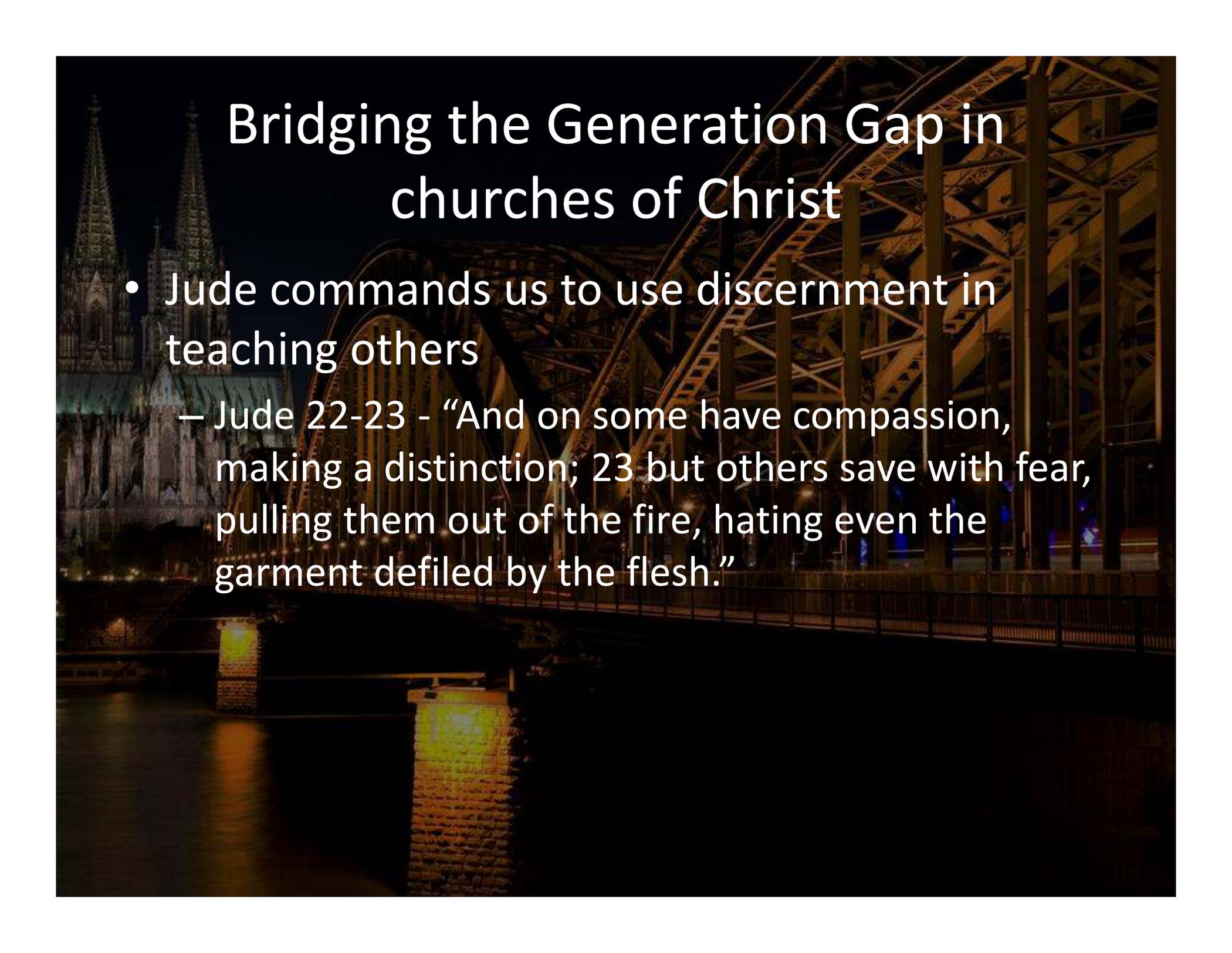
Bridging the Generation Gap in
churches of Christ

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- All of the people who attended here as members or immediate family of members over the past fifty years:
- “Where are they now? Where have they gone?” (Based on records of Tomlinson Run kept by Carl Parsons and myself between 1962 and present; actual tally may be incomplete)
- Passed from this life - 93
- Moved away - 161
- Still here today - 158
- Fallen away - 118
- Of the fallen away, those who did so between the ages of 15-30 -- 57

Bridging the Generation Gap in churches of Christ

- Why have we lost and continue to lose members of the younger generation?
 - Why does it appear that the younger generation has a propensity for unusual worship activities and different doctrinal configurations?
- The older generation's answer is to create hyperbolic monsters to explain the losses, such as worldliness, error, or a generalized blame of youth itself
 - Their cure-all is more sermons on institutionalism, denominational error, sin, evil, etc.
 - While well meaning, it's like giving someone castor oil to cure cancer



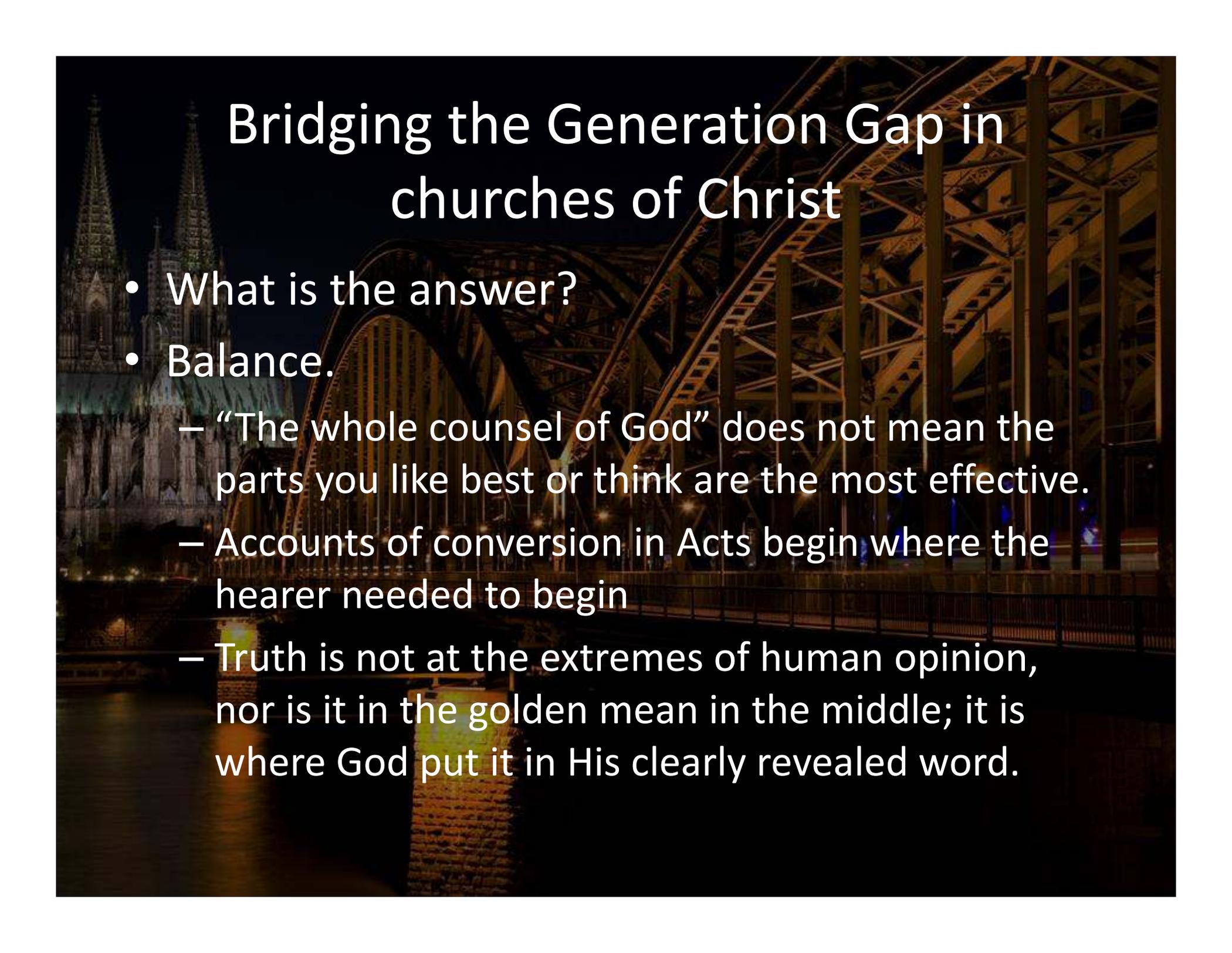
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- Jude commands us to use discernment in teaching others
 - Jude 22-23 - “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; 23 but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”



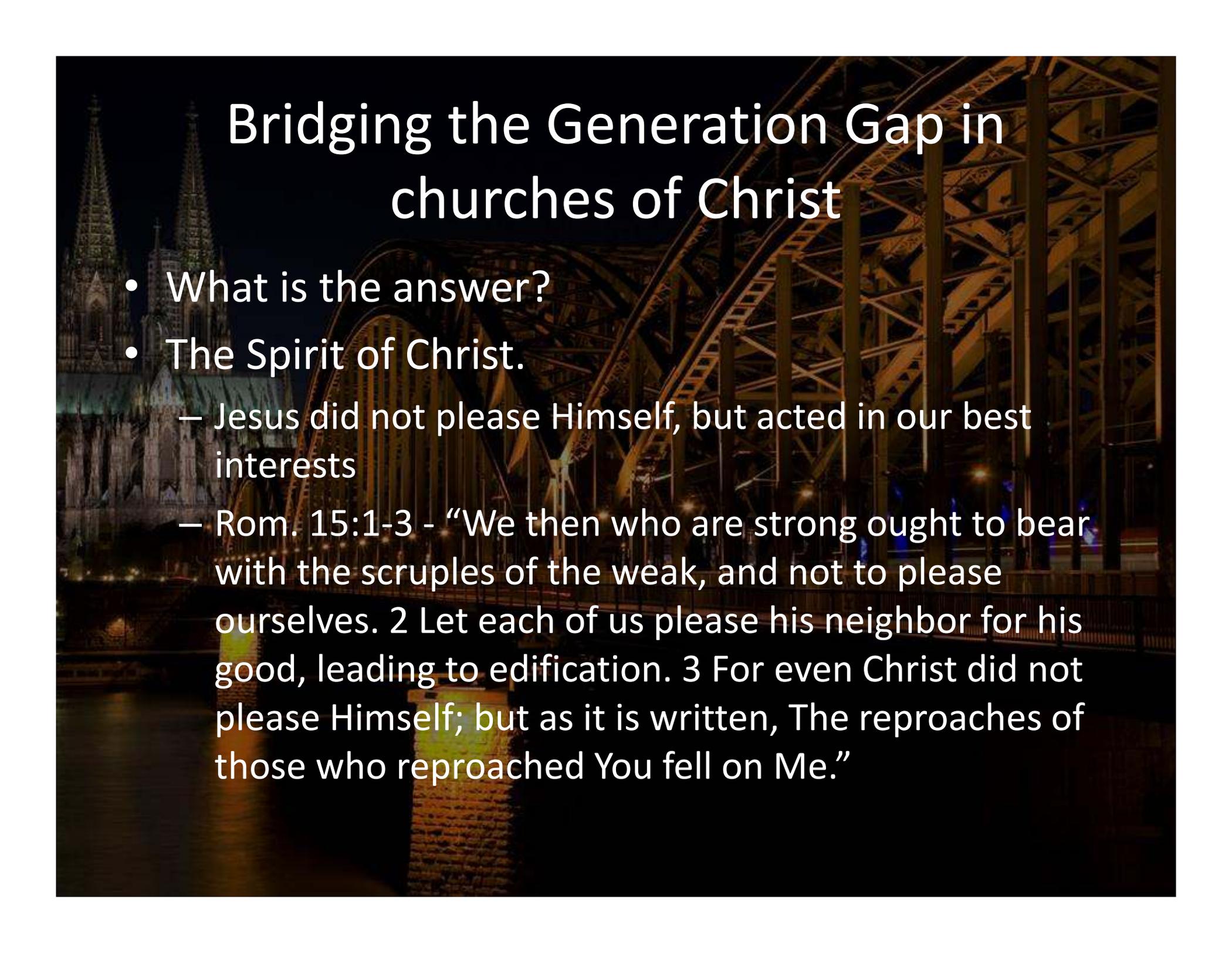
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- Not all hearers develop at the same rate
 - Heb. 5:13-14 - “For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
- While we use the same Gospel, there is no universal, one-size-fits-all teaching plan

A night photograph of a large steel truss bridge, likely the Bixby Creek Bridge, illuminated with warm lights. In the background, the illuminated spires of a gothic cathedral are visible against the dark sky. The bridge's structure is a complex network of steel beams and arches, with a prominent arch in the center. The water in the foreground reflects the lights from the bridge and the cathedral.

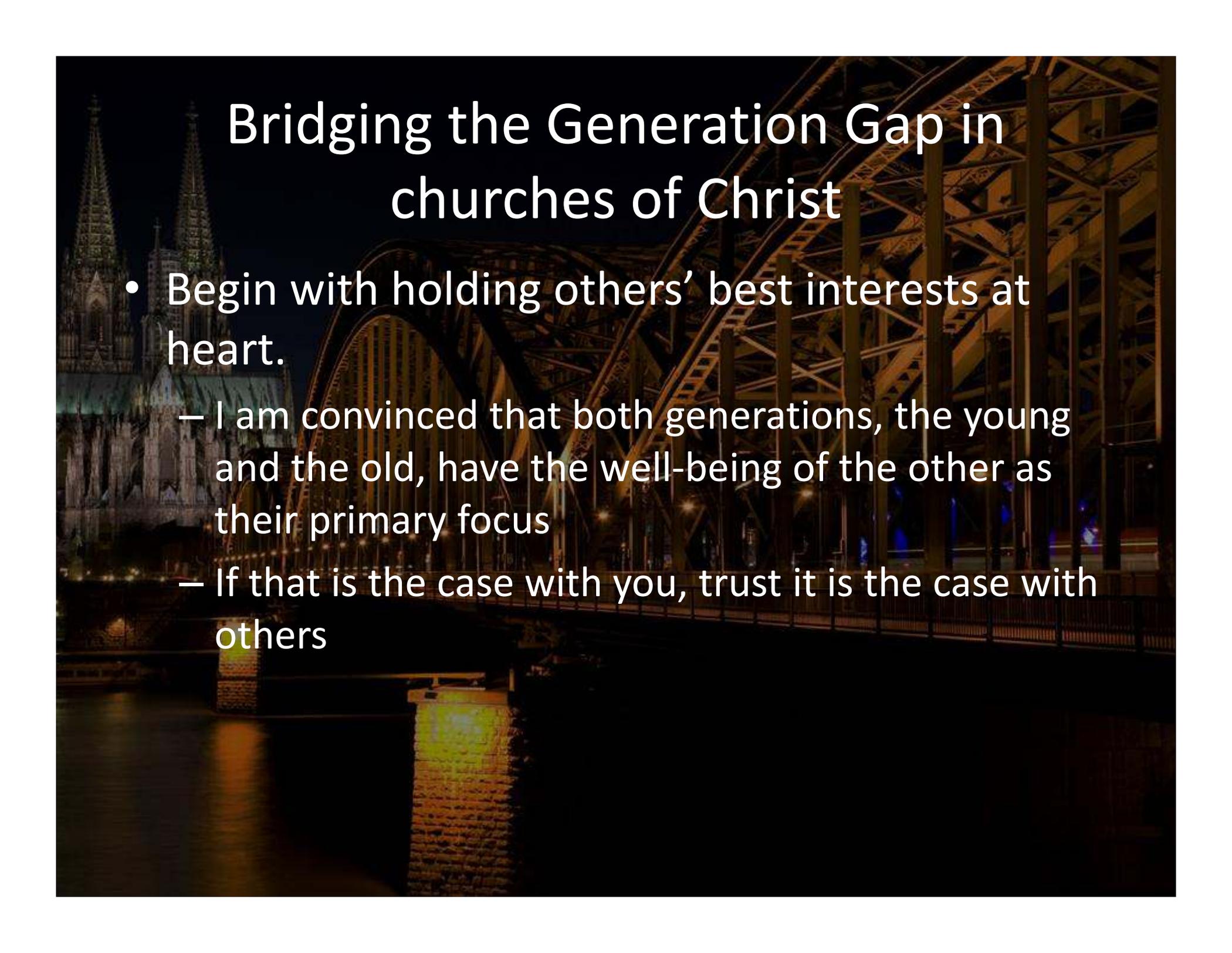
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- What is the answer?
- Balance.
 - “The whole counsel of God” does not mean the parts you like best or think are the most effective.
 - Accounts of conversion in Acts begin where the hearer needed to begin
 - Truth is not at the extremes of human opinion, nor is it in the golden mean in the middle; it is where God put it in His clearly revealed word.



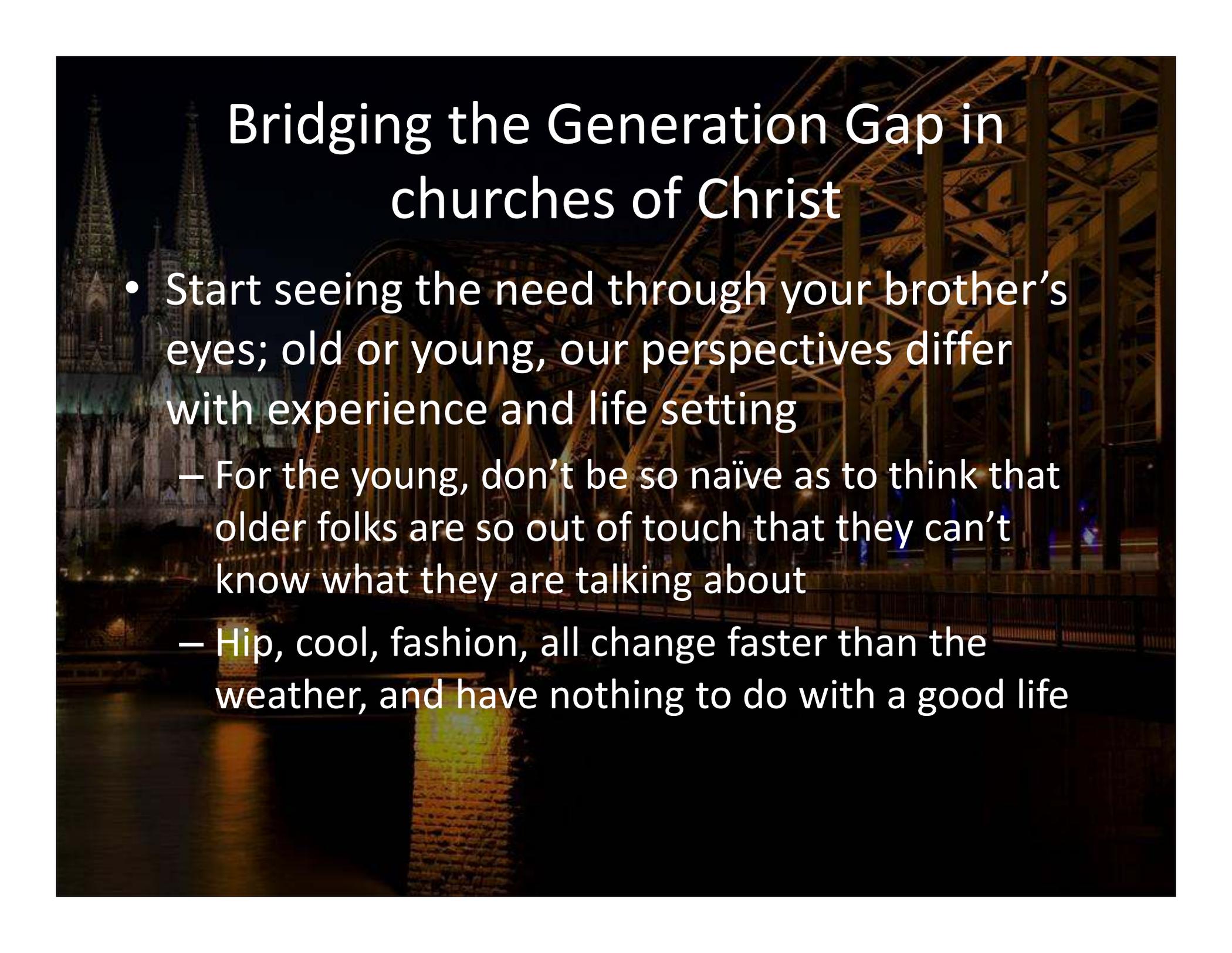
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- What is the answer?
- The Spirit of Christ.
 - Jesus did not please Himself, but acted in our best interests
 - Rom. 15:1-3 - “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”



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- Begin with holding others' best interests at heart.
 - I am convinced that both generations, the young and the old, have the well-being of the other as their primary focus
 - If that is the case with you, trust it is the case with others

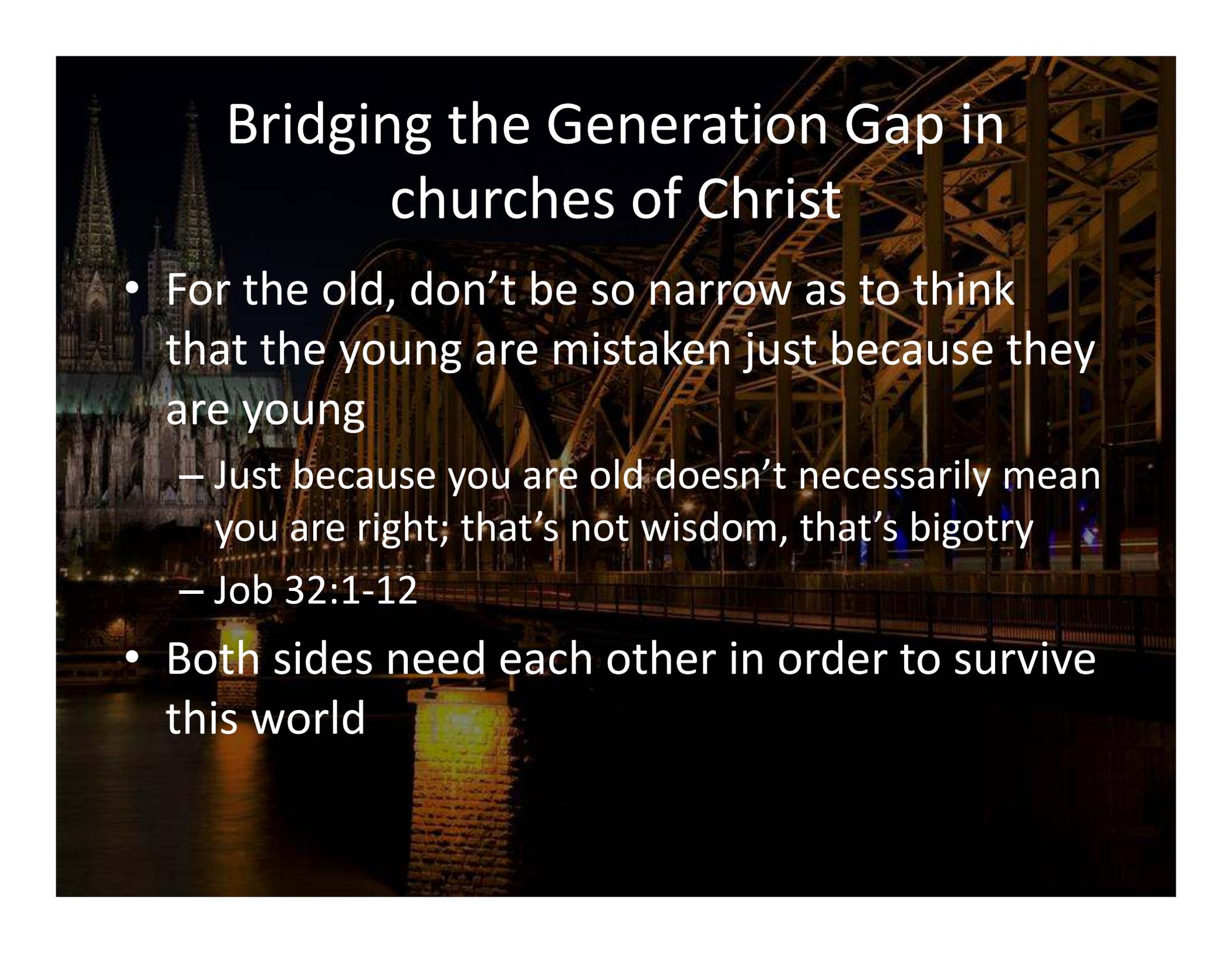


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- Start seeing the need through your brother's eyes; old or young, our perspectives differ with experience and life setting
 - For the young, don't be so naïve as to think that older folks are so out of touch that they can't know what they are talking about
 - Hip, cool, fashion, all change faster than the weather, and have nothing to do with a good life

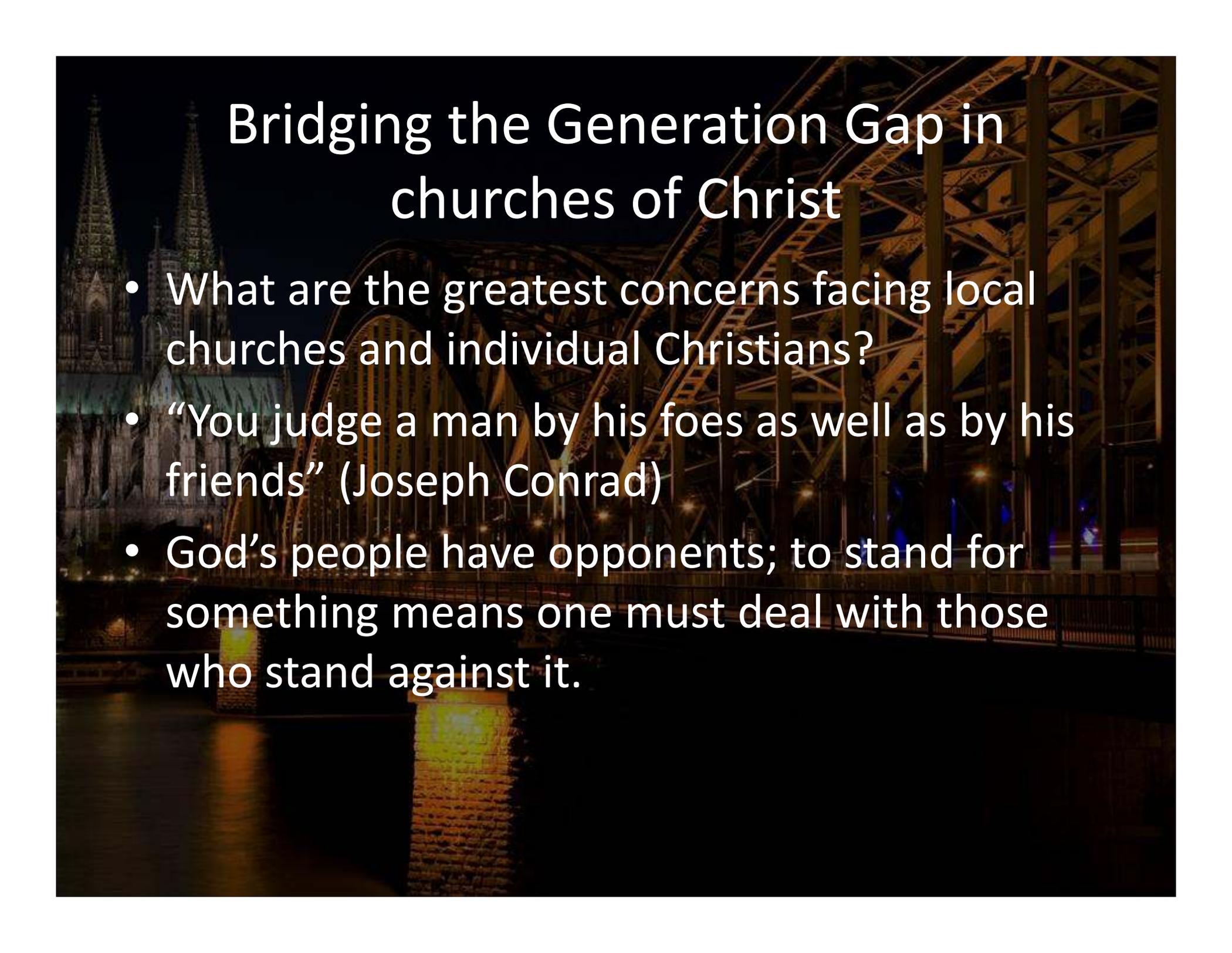
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- Ecc. 1:4-7, 9-11 - “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again... 9 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, See, this is new? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after.”



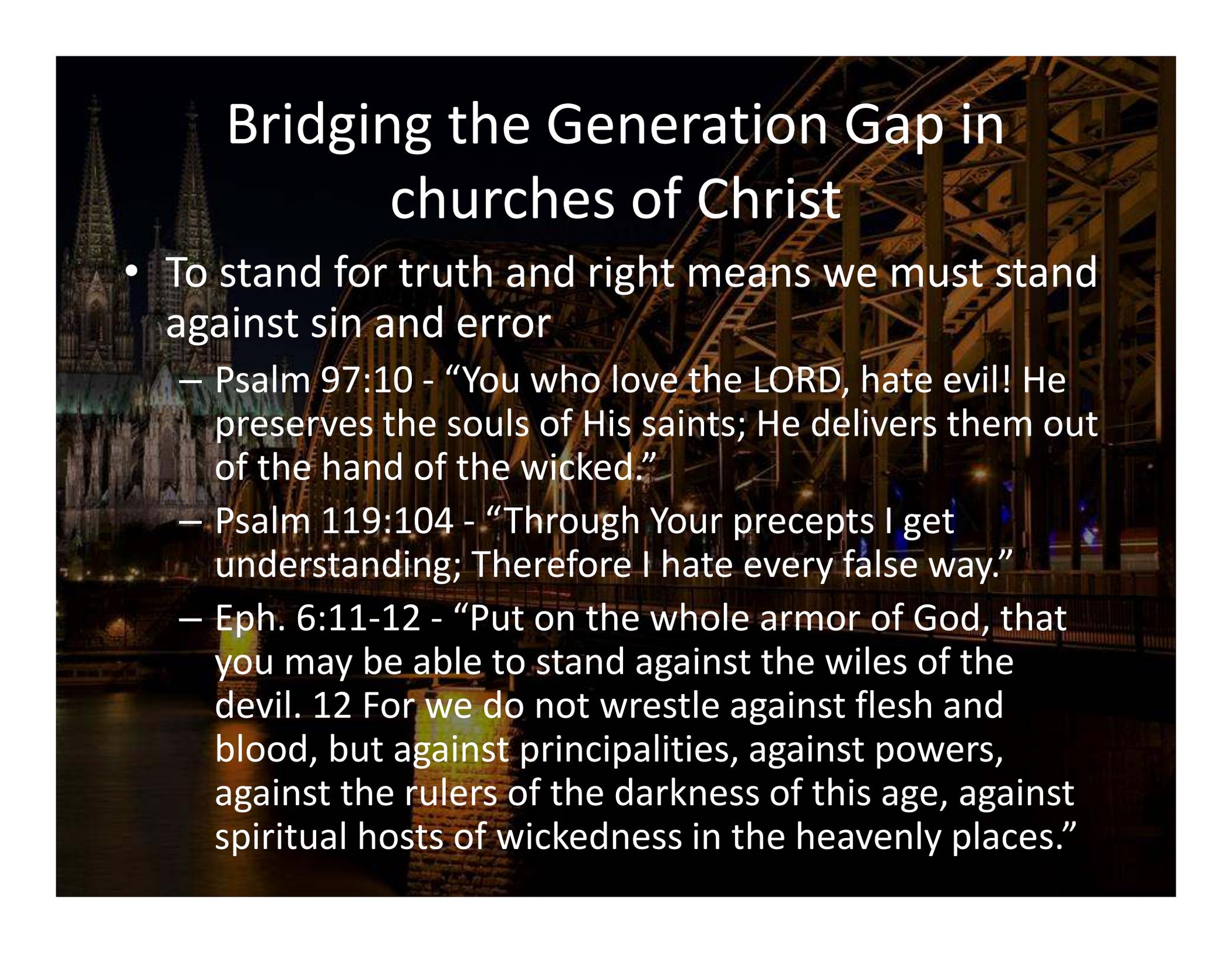
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- For the old, don't be so narrow as to think that the young are mistaken just because they are young
 - Just because you are old doesn't necessarily mean you are right; that's not wisdom, that's bigotry
 - Job 32:1-12
- Both sides need each other in order to survive this world



Bridging the Generation Gap in churches of Christ

- What are the greatest concerns facing local churches and individual Christians?
- “You judge a man by his foes as well as by his friends” (Joseph Conrad)
- God’s people have opponents; to stand for something means one must deal with those who stand against it.

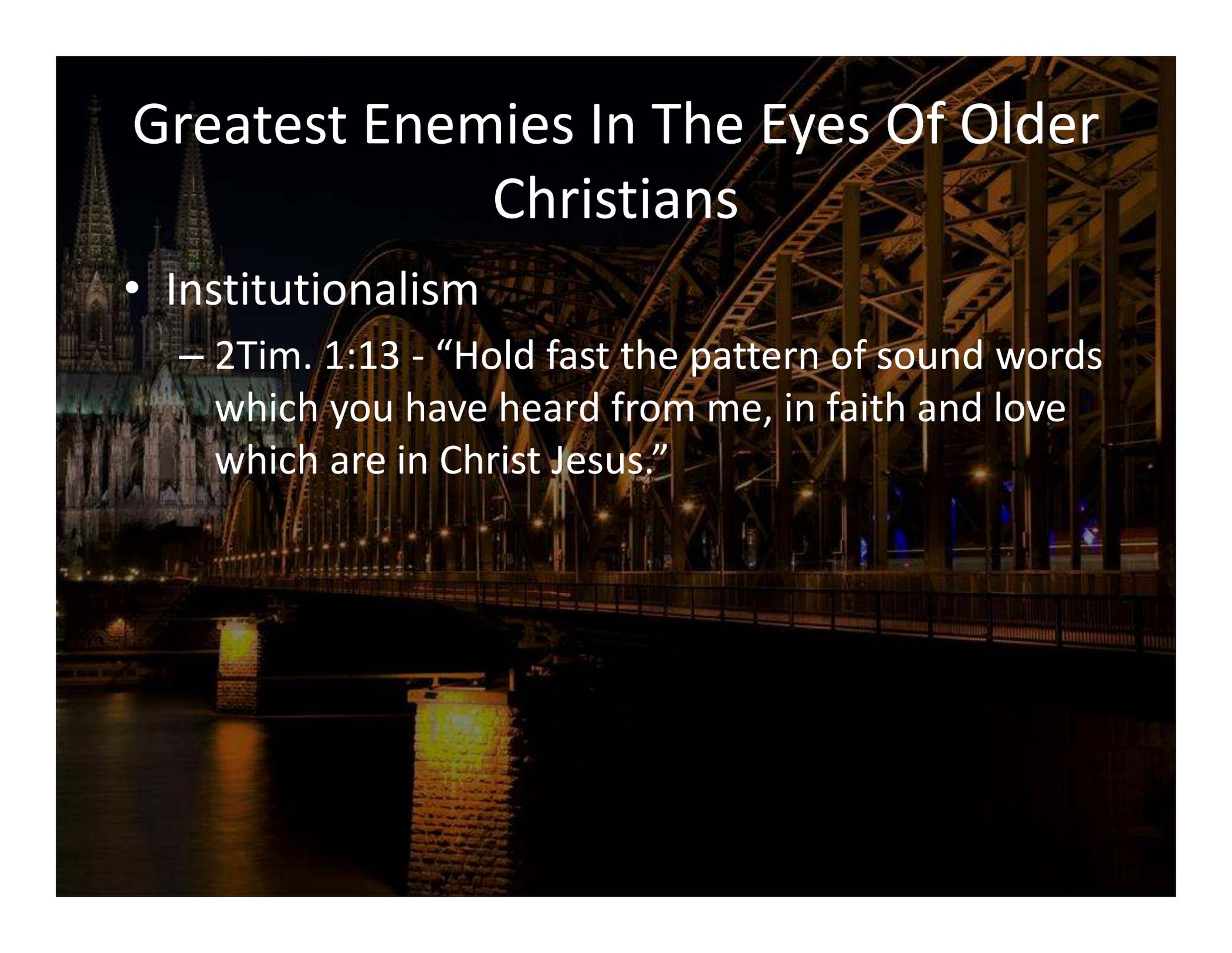


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- To stand for truth and right means we must stand against sin and error
 - Psalm 97:10 - “You who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.”
 - Psalm 119:104 - “Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.”
 - Eph. 6:11-12 - “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Greatest Enemies In The Eyes Of Older Christians

- Denominational error
 - 2John 9-11 - “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”



Greatest Enemies In The Eyes Of Older Christians

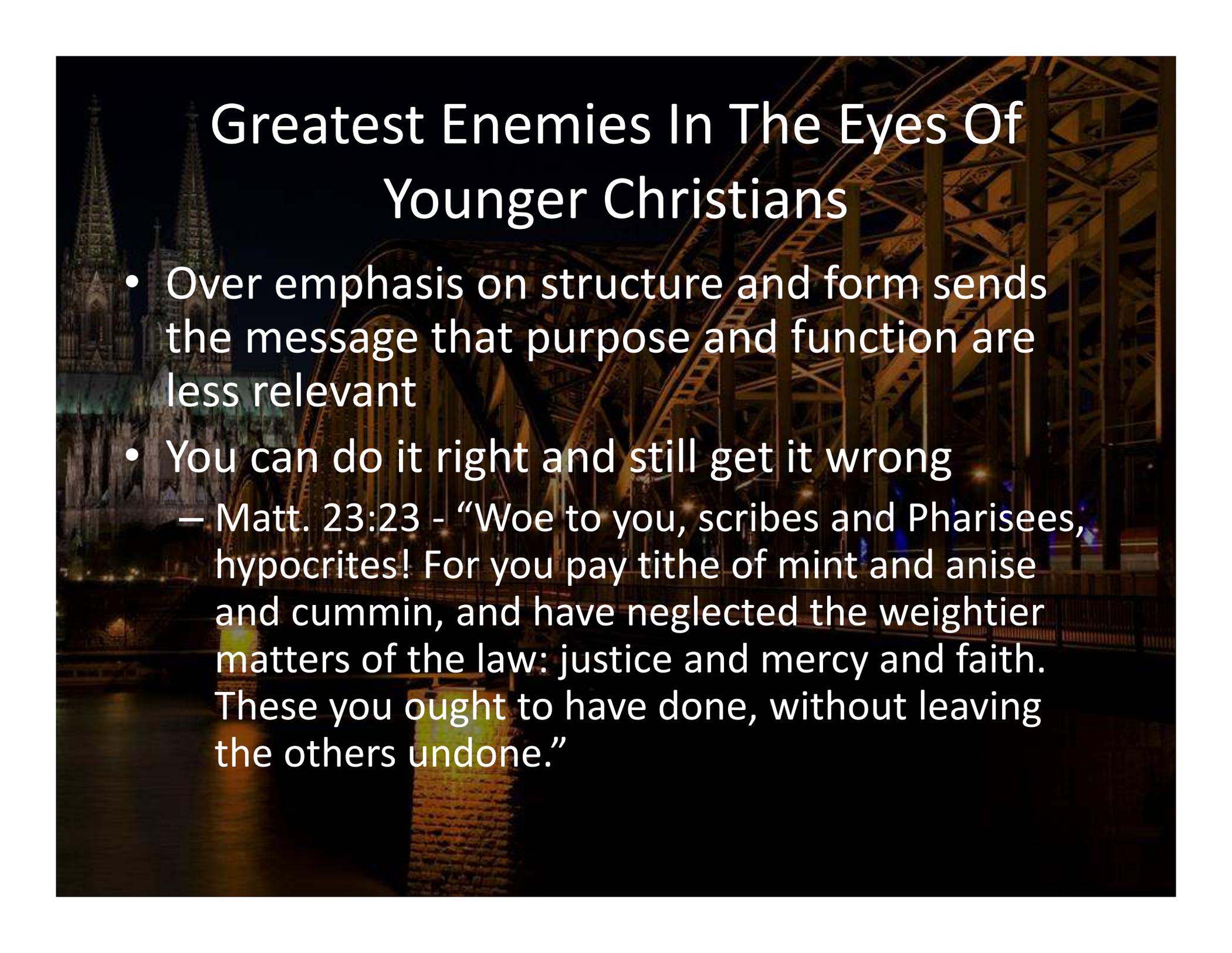
- Institutionalism

- 2Tim. 1:13 - “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

Greatest Enemies In The Eyes Of Older Christians

- Worldliness

– 1John 2:15-17 - “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”



Greatest Enemies In The Eyes Of Younger Christians

- Over emphasis on structure and form sends the message that purpose and function are less relevant
- You can do it right and still get it wrong
 - Matt. 23:23 - “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”



Greatest Enemies In The Eyes Of Younger Christians

- Emphasis on tradition can close the door to growth
 - Young people notice it when Christians treat traditions as if equal to the gospel

Greatest Enemies In The Eyes Of Younger Christians

- Being judgmental and hyper-negative are not only unnecessary and counter-productive to preaching the gospel, they quell the interest and zeal of the young in the faith
 - Michael the archangel used discretion and restraint when rebuking Satan
 - Jude 9 - “Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke you!”

So, Who's Right?

- Both old and young are correct that their concerns are real spiritual dangers.
- Jesus rebuked the loose, liberal Sadducees
– Matt. 22:22-29
- Jesus rebuked the stifling, self-righteous Pharisees
– Matt. 23:1-7

So, Who's Right?

- Both old and young are incorrect when they focus on only one set of enemies
 - It's the enemy we are not looking for that gets us
 - Num. 13:30-33 - "Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it. 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. 32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. 33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

So, Who's Right?

- “Older Christians who constantly complain about the young often don't realize that if not careful, they can be grouchy, unloving, inwardly focused, and even sectarian and proud as they overlook the teaching of Jesus. Efforts of younger disciples to promote prayer and group studies are undercut when they talk about attending ungodly movies and wear tight or revealing clothing. They must remember that belittling the importance of Biblical patterns regarding church organization and worship resulted in the Roman Catholic Church and the Disciples of Christ denomination, both far in their practices from the simplicity taught by Jesus. A renewed focus on Christ... will help us battle all spiritual enemies, not just those that may be unpopular within our social circles.” (*Gardner Hall, Biblical Insights Magazine, June 2012, p. 17*)