Gene Edwards
(Updated & Revised)

Originally published by Dan Walker, Steve Atkerson, & Jon Zens

Introduction by Dan Walker -- A reviewer of house church websites once said that The New Reformation Review was the funniest site on the web. Well folks, there ain't nothing funny at all about this issue. It is very sad for me to have to finally come out publicly and acknowledge the grave problems afflicting Gene Edwards’ ministry.

I was part of the trio who invited him three times to the Annual Southern House Church Conference back in the 1990s. The early issues of NRR are peppered with favorable references to him. But there have been way too many seismic rumblings by discontented, upset, and hurt Christians involved with Gene Edwards’ churches for me to ignore this any longer.

I have heard too many personal testimonies by people involved in his churches, and read too many emails such as this one: "I see Gene as way over the top. He is dangerous. I have lost people I care about to his deception... Anger at the rest of the body is not a good reason to do anything. It's too bad. I think Gene could have been a wonderful bridge builder between people coming out of institutionalism and those involved in house church."

There's something wrong. The brother who introduced me to Gene Edwards's writings, who every morning got up before work and read Edwards's books to his kids for their devotions, told me after watching Edwards's performance at an Annual Southern House Church Conference meeting, that Edwards was simply "indefensible." I've held out as long as I could. But my brother was right. Edwards is indefensible.

We need first of all to apologize for referring to Gene Edwards by name. But all of us have attempted to meet with him in person to discuss with him the various things he has said and done which have caused so much damage to so many Christians. So far Edwards has refused to meet with us.

We need to make it very clear that all of the concerns that are expressed in this article have long since been put to Gene Edwards and his followers by letter, email, and telephone. Because no reasonable or satisfactory response has been forthcoming, we are proceeding with this article, which is intended to be a warning to those who may be seduced by Edwards’ ideology.
It is very difficult to assess Gene Edwards, and for several reasons. One is that some of his books are very good. While Edwards is careful never to mention his sources or give credit where credit is due, the content of his books rehash other authors who we respect and agree with.

Gene Edwards in person is a different story. As one wag has put it, it's a shame that Gene Edwards's tongue doesn't have an editor as good as his pen. In listening to Edwards perform (and the word "perform" is used purposely), one is inundated with an ocean of hyperbole, and it is often difficult to know whether the bombast is merely meant to be funny, or taken seriously.

He frequently puts other ministers and church leaders down (sometimes under the cloak of humor). He teaches never to say anything negative about others, but he himself is known for casting aspersions on others who are involved in ministry.

We must point out that the authors have spoken to over forty people formerly involved in Gene Edwards' churches. In every case, their testimony has been consistently parallel. Their testimony is independent of each other, and unrehearsed. In many cases there is absolutely no animus towards Edwards, but rather a sadness that things turned out the way they did. Over the last thirty years, the closest associates of Edwards stopped working with him. Their reasons for leaving his ministry are all the same.

Here are some of the problems that plague his ministry:

- **Elitism.** Edwards has indicated repeatedly that only he and the churches he is involved with are legitimate and genuine. He is condescending to all other church planters and all other churches even if they are organic. If they a church or servant of God is not under his ministry, they are sub-par. This comes through in his speaking. Everyone we have talked to that used to be in an “Edwards” church has said the same things. People who get involved with Edwards or one of his churches become infected by this elitist spirit. Many of them have confessed this and repented of it.

- **Dishonesty.** One of the things that we have observed is Edwards’ constant tendency to bear false witness. He has rewritten history in putting other people in a bad light, especially when they do not conform to his own ideology. Because of this many who have come to know him do not trust him. His resume and conference brochures say he has planted over ten churches that still operate today. The truth is only five exist. The rest have disbanded or broken away from Edwards.

- **Egomania.** Edwards appears to be fixed on his own importance. He claims to be “the dean of the house church movement.” Embarrassingly, Edwards himself is the originator of this slogan; no one else regards him as “the dean” of the movement except for possibly his followers. In one of his spoken talks, he made the statement, “No one is doing what I am doing today” in reference to planting genuine churches. Statements such as “no one has ever saw this before in church history” abound in his talks and promotional materials. In every case, others have written or spoken on the same themes before he came along, but he never names his sources; therefore, the unlearned believe his over-the-top, self-promoting statements.

- **Bombast.** Edwards has claimed publicly to be the only man who has read every English book on the history of the early church, and to be the first person on earth in modern times to truly understand the history of the New Testament. He has also claimed to be the only man ever to understand the book of Galatians. At one House Church Conference years ago, Edwards told the crowd that he was the only speaker of the weekend who had ministered Christ, and that every other speaker was an example of warmed over Plymouth Brethrenism. It is unclear how Edwards knew this since he arrived late, and attended very few, if any, of the sessions. What made his statement even more embarrassing was that it
was given just a few hours after another speaker, with Edwards absent, gave an excellent talk on knowing Christ and focusing on Him as the only reason for doing home church. At that same conference, Edwards dismissed every single book on the book table as essentially worthless.

- **Devastation to Christians.** At one time, Edwards had over 20 churches in his network. Today, we can count only five and most of them are extremely small. Each of the former groups have their own sad story of disintegration, but the pattern is the same. Edwards is said to be the source of the dissolution in every case. People felt betrayed, lied to, manipulated, controlled, used, and even pitted against one another by Edwards.

- **Influence from Witness Lee.** If you read the history of “the local church” network founded by Witness Lee, you will find striking (almost scary) parallels between Lee and Edwards in rhetoric, mindset, and overall fruit. The main difference is that Lee’s movement is much larger and more influential. This shouldn’t be surprising since Edwards spent years being mentored by Witness Lee in the 1960s. The testimonials from people who have been hurt in “the local church,” and those who have been hurt by Edwards's ministry are almost identical.

As we see it, the root problem is that Edwards has never allowed himself to have peers. For the last thirty years, he has and continues to work independently; therefore, his character defects have never been dealt with or corrected. Most of the churches he has had any direct influence on have been destroyed. The men who once worked with Edwards have all stopped associating with him. The bleeding still continues. It is time for such spiritual carnage to stop.

We would still be happy to meet with Gene Edwards in person, since we would like to see nothing more than for him to repent and apologize to the many people he has wounded.

Edwards talks a great deal about knowing God, but repentance is an irrefutable proof of knowing God. We hope someday this happens in his life.