

...a description of all the major gifts. Are you ready? You know what an evangelist is? That's one of the illiterate brothers in the fellowship in Iconium who's not afraid to talk to somebody about Jesus Christ and tell him he ought to be a follower of Christ. And he's the guy all the rest of us cowards turn to and say, "Go talk to Aunt Nelly and Uncle Jack about the Lord. I don't have the guts to do it." That is an evangelist. He's local. You'll always find him in every fellowship. And that's all an evangelist is. Now, if he's really good at it, the church down the road might ask him to come spend a few days down there, talk to some of their people about the Lord.

You want to know what a teacher is? A teacher is one of those rare people in the fellowship who can read and write. And that's about as good a definition as you need right now of what a teacher is. Do you know what a pastor is? That's a brother or sister who's really good at giving comfort when somebody is down and who just naturally gets called on for help.

You want to hear the definition of a healer? I'm going to give you a definition of a healer, the lack of which you have never heard. A healer is someone who is in a local body of believers. Are you ready for this? When someone is sick, and the fellowship of the body of Christ prays for that person and that person does not get healed, that one soul keeps on helping them and nourishing them and giving them all the possible help they can give to nurture them back to health. That's what a healer is. He is not a brother who hits town and says, "he didn't have enough faith." And then having taken the offering heads for the door.

Now Gene, how do you know this? I have never heard such a definition of all of these people in all of my life because I have seen it with my eyes, and I have watched it grow up organically and naturally in the church of Jesus Christ and it will be there and it's nothing spooky and it's not somebody to reverence and you don't even notice it's being done. It just is.

And what's an apostle? He's the scourge of the earth. He is a pile of dung. He is the least of all Christians. He is to be tolerated at best because he is half-mad, and you do not want him to stay around the church for very long. You will wish him well. You may even give him a little money to get him out of town because the guy's half nuts. He cannot be local. He is so deranged and so unorganized and so intense and so fanatical that if he stays around, he'll drive everybody crazy and wreck the church. But wish him well and send him on his way because he'll go to another town and he'll raise up the body of Christ. Hallelujah. And that's what an apostle is.

He is that one person God has put on this earth to defy the second law of thermodynamics. And he will come back, and he will help you in times of trouble. And he will itinerantly return. He will circulate among those churches which he has raised up. He does not belong to a movement. He is responsible for those places. Nothing more, nothing less.

And Gene, what is submission and authority? Submission and authority is something unobtainable in a body of believers. That's what it is. No matter which way you go, you're into the authority part, just go ahead and break your bones on that concept, brother. Eventually, they'll rebel, for it is for freedom He has set us free. Those of you who are really trying to submit, you'll never make

it. You'll get under the law of submission for months and maybe a few years, but eventually you'll crack up emotionally and psychologically. You cannot live in that world, and you eventually will kick it over, and you will leave, or there will be one royal fight in which the authoritarians are saying you are witches because the Bible says that if you don't submit to authority and you're a rebel, you're worse than a witch or something like that. And if you're the other ones, you're saying you're a dictator and you're an egomaniac, and there it goes. I'm going to tell you, whatever it is, it can't be obtained. It's just one of those things that you cry over all the time.

I personally can't get anybody to do anything I want them to. And I can't. And the brothers and sisters, they're trying to do what they know is correct, and they can't. You see, we're fallen. Our bodies are fallen.

Paul went on a second journey, and they did the same thing. Four months in four churches. That's eight churches. And they left them every four months, till Paul got to Corinth and that place was so messed up he stayed 18 months and that was his world's record and from the letters he wrote them he should have stayed longer live or left earlier left soon and not come back right and that church by the way was still the Corinthian church a hundred years later. A hundred years later, that church was still having its problems. It was chasing something.

Now, I'm going to wrap this up by telling you that you haven't heard anything yet. Here is to me the greatest genius of God revealed in the New Testament about practical things. Paul has eight churches in eight places, and they all meet in eight different ways; and even now, some of them don't yet have elders.

Rome under Claudius, I believe it was Claudius, had thrust all the Jews out of Rome. Whether there were Christians there or not, you and I do not know, but there's one thing for certain. Paul cheered when those Jews were chased out of Rome, because if there were any Christians there, he knew that it was not going to be a Judaistic type of Christianity. The Jews were no longer in Rome. Claudius died, another emperor came to the throne, and he let the Jews come back. Paul couldn't get there. He called on two friends of his. He said, "Get to Rome fast and take a stand for whatever you take a stand for." And then he did the most brilliant thing. You can find it in Romans 16.

He went to all of his churches and said, "Y'all got any volunteers who will move and move to Rome?" And boy, what a church the church in Rome was for about 200 years. Do you understand what happened? They got there and cross-pollinated. Christians, not workers, Christians got there from all over the heathen world and cross-pollinated. They brought their many and varied experiences. It had to be that way because Rome had more different nations and more different tongues and cultures represented than any other place on the planet. And they came there and Paul wrote them a letter, and in so doing, he revealed a little bit of his gospel preached during those four months. But there's one other thing that is the genius I referred to a minute ago. And that's when Paul of Tarsus, on his third journey, decided to go to one town, and in this moment, he duplicated the ministry of Jesus Christ in the raising up of church planters. And he turned to each

of his churches. By the way, this was before the Roman experience. And he said, "I want you to go with me to Ephesus, Gaius, Secundus, Tychicus, Trophimus, Timothy, Titus, Aristarchus.

He pulled out five young men from among his churches, all of whom indicated a call of God in their lives. Now listen to these men. This brother was there from the beginning. He was saved when he was first in Derbe. This brother was saved when Paul came to Lystra. This brother was present in Corinth from the beginning, and he witnessed the birth of the church. Secundus was there at the beginning of the birth of his church. He went through those four months. He went through those years, and so did Aristarchus and Timothy. And of course, Titus was the richest of all in experience.

He brought eight men with him to Ephesus, and he duplicated the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, forever speaking to the church, and said this, not to Bible schools or seminaries. This is the way workers are raised up: first, they must be in the body of Christ and have experienced its primitive beginnings. They have to be in church life. They have to show forth a calling that can be witnessed by that local assembly of people. And then they are raised up under a man who is as old as the hills, who has spent his whole life raising up churches and has only one shot at it. To do it once, just like the Lord and just like Paul.

And he took them to Ephesus, and they lived with him for two years, watching him raise up that church. Then he left Ephesus and went out into the surrounding country, and he sent those men out in twos to raise up churches. And they did. And they were under his tutorship. That's how you raise up Christian workers, and that's how you raise up church planters. One old man at the end of his years, eight people. And you might say, "Then Paul died and went to heaven, and that's what he left on this earth." And your lineage does not go back to the twelve apostles. You go back on your lineage far enough, you'll hit those eight men before you hit anything else in the New Testament. They are the people who took the gospel to the West.

Now, very quickly, Paul got into big trouble after he left Ephesus. Finally ended up in prison in Rome. And there was a ninth worker who was raised up. I don't know where he came from. All I can tell you is that he was probably one of the Christians in Ephesus who wandered out of Asia Minor across the border and went to a town called Colossae, and raised up Christians there, people who had never known Paul of Tarsus. They wanted to know how Paul was doing in Rome, and they raised enough money to send Epaphroditus, also known as Epaphras, on a ship. Epaphras went to Rome, met Paul, and stayed with him for a while, and came home with five letters: one to Philemon and the other four to churches. One to a Greek church in Philippi. How many does that leave? I'm sorry. There are only four letters. Four letters. One to Philemon, one to a Greek church in Greece. Philippi. Thank you. And two letters to the brothers and sisters in Colossae. Two letters. Colossians 1, Colossians 2. Now, you never heard that, did you? Only he said, when you get through Epaphroditus reading these two letters to Colossae, pass them around to all the churches in Asia Minor, which are nearby. About 300 years later, somebody named it, misnamed it. And what did they misname it, brother? Do you know? You read it all the time. Somebody knows. All

the early manuscripts left a blank; to the church in...Ephesus. Two letters were written to Colossae. One letter was written on the headship of Christ, and the other one was written on the body: the head and the body. The two letters are to one church to be passed around to all the churches in Asia, and it is in those two letters that one of our questions gets answered. What was the gospel that could be preached for only four months and leave a people dizzy and exalted, awed and dumbfounded at a Lord so great?

I sat on a porch with a group of 25 Christians in a country called Albania. You know it as Dalmatia, as the farthest point Paul ever preached the gospel before he went to Rome. You probably don't know Albania is part of the Holy Lands. I sat on that porch with 25 Christians in the oldest city in Albania, and probably the town where Paul went. Those 25 Christians had never known Jesus Christ 30 days previous to my arrival. They didn't own Bibles. And probably the poorest people on this earth today are Albanians. And that's barring nobody. I have a friend over there who is a plastic surgeon. He's one of the highest-paid people in Albania. He makes \$12 a month working 80 hours a week. He's a plastic surgeon. The average family lives on \$6 a month, and it'll buy just about nothing other than some basic grain. And all the bread factories are situated inside military compounds to prevent bread riots; all manufacturing of bread is within army camps. Those people don't have anything, and they are ignorant, and even now, they are just beginning to learn about the outside world. The only thing they knew about us as Americans was that we were starving to death. We were eating rats over here because things were so bad. You can ask them about anything religious; they don't know. A brother with me said to someone, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" And the lady said, "I don't think he's in these apartments here."

And I sat down in Dalmatia, and I watched some Christian missionaries line those people up on pews, benches, and lead them in singing. And when the woman said, "Let us pray," they had been meeting for three weeks; this was the fourth week they met. When they said, "Let us pray," about 15 little children got down on their knees and did this, and that's when I lost my temper. And they were sitting there on those pews, and they said, "Now we have this man coming from America to preach to us this morning." I asked everybody to put the benches back where they had been, and they had been around the edge of the porch. Then I said to Eddie, who was going to translate for me; he was an Albanian, but he'd been living in Greece. I said, Eddie, anything I do, you do. These things hurt, by the way. And I did this, and he did this. And I did this, and he did this. And I sat down on that concrete porch, and he sat beside me. And for two hours, I presented to 25 people who had not known the Lord for a month the deepest, most profound Gospel that can be proclaimed in tongue, and they understood every word. I preached to them on everything and ended on a subject most of us have never heard addressed: in Christ, and one with God.

They had tears in their eyes. When I finished, they all got up and hugged one another, something they wouldn't do in 10,000 years in the direction they were being led. They embraced and hugged one another because they had heard of their Lord. We all walked down, or a lot of us did, I'm sorry, not all of us, a little path, a stone-cobbled path, down to the place where the car was parked. By then, it was dark, and we got in a huddle just like you did, put our arms around one another, and

they had never touched each other. And we got into this little cluster, and we began to sing, cry, pray, and praise, and it's organic to the species. And I looked up, and I can't explain to you what a hell hole that town is, or a hell hole.

We were standing right near a garbage dump. Just room enough for a car to get in there beside a big drop off. And I don't know where they came from, but I looked up and there were about 50 Albanians who had encircled us and were just standing there, staring at a site they had never seen before. And I want to tell you something, saints. Soul-winning, Bible distribution, radio programs, television programs, and every idea that has ever been perpetrated on the Christian scene do not have the evangelistic power that is innate to the church of Jesus Christ. She is her own greatest instrument of evangelism; she cannot be topped. She will draw men and women unto her to Him. And there were 50 people standing there, watching us and wondering at such a demonstration of affection, joy, and love.

Now, I'm a gambling man; I'm going to answer the second question tomorrow night. I am going to present the Gospel that Paul of Tarsus presented to those heathen towns, those new converts, and those people in Albania 2,000 years ago and about three months ago. And that Gospel is your Lord and mine. And it is upon Him and the revelation of Him and the experience of Him and that alone upon which the church is born, built, falls in love with one another and with Him. Brothers and sisters, that's pretty much the story of how it was done in the first century, and there is not in that story one paraphernalia of anything that we do today. Nothing.

How do you meet? Who knows? That's for you to find out, and in so doing, to shame fallen angels and to cause elect angels to glory when they see you in love with Him and in love with one another meet together under His headship when He is head of the meeting, and that brothers and sisters will be organic to your area and your culture. Amen: that's all there is to that.

28th day of November. It's about 10:30 in the morning. We're meeting in a gigantic building; I understand it's a quarter of a mile long or longer. It'll hold over 100,000 people, and there are about 20,000 of us in the building right now (laughter). There are actually about 25 of us present here this morning; I suppose maybe more than that. You must have been a Pentecostal at one time, brother. Okay, there are 30 people here. I want to just take a moment to talk to the Lord.

Lord, what I would ask of You is that You awaken our hearts to see things the way they really are, the way they really were, and the way they ought to be. Cleanse us as You always cleanse us and have cleansed us. And our spirits, Lord, that they be alive and that our spirits here. Amen.

Very quickly, we'll start where Paul of Tarsus and Barnabas went to Galatia, were gone two years, raised up four churches, came home, spent a couple of years loafing in Antioch. Obviously, they did not know we were supposed to evangelize the world in one generation. There was a coming of Peter to the Antioch church, and with them the Judaizers, who got things really worked up. It would appear that one of those Judaizers did not go to Jerusalem to settle the dispute between Antioch and Jerusalem but rather sneaked off to Galatia while Barnabas and Paul met with the

apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Paul got back to Antioch and discovered that there was a mess going on in Galatia; somebody was up there circumcising Gentiles. Barnabas and Paul had a fight; Barnabas took off for his home country of Cyprus, and Paul went back to Galatia. He preceded his trip there with a letter, known as the Book of Galatians. The letter to the Galatians. Then he went to Galatia, found out he was well received, and that that guy hadn't made as near as much progress in circumcision as he was afraid he had.

They went on to a little town called Philippi that later became the precious church of Paul's life. Went to Thessalonica, Berea, and then Corinth. Came home again and sent a couple of Jews from Corinth to Ephesus to go before him. Gathered up eight men and went to Ephesus. The church was raised there for a period of about two years, and then, after two years, he trained those eight young men in the smaller towns of Asia Minor. He then starts home on a very complex journey. He stops in Corinth. He writes a letter to the Romans because now Priscilla and Aquila have arrived, and Christians have gathered there from all the Gentile churches, and they're having a ball. He then writes a very introductory letter to Rome, very basic for those new Christians who have been joined with these people whom he has sent to Rome.

He gets to Jerusalem because he's trying to keep the unity of the churches. He who wrote the book of Galatians shaves his head for the unity of the body of Christ among a bunch of legalistic believers in Judea and Jerusalem. The young man he takes with him, whose head is also shaved, has a remarkable resemblance to whom? Titus. And they thought Titus, being a heathen, had gotten into the temple. There was a riot, and he ended up arrested, beaten, and shipped off to jail. Finally, he appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome as a prisoner. Had a shipwreck. Got there finally. There were brothers and sisters who met him on the Appian Way. Don't ever try to walk on that road. It's walled on both sides, and the buses are 3 inches wider than the road is. Try to press your body up against the wall with one of those great big 10-ton things coming down on you.

Anyway, he is in Rome; he is a prisoner. In the meantime, a ninth brother is coming into existence. Probably comes from the town of Philippi, that dear, precious little church. I don't know where he came from; that's a wild guess, but somehow or other, this young man is going around preaching the gospel and doing what Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, Trophimus, Secundus, Gaius, Aristarchus, and did anybody ever look up the others' names? I can't remember. Alright, I think it's in Acts 22 or 23. If anyone has a Bible back there, I would really appreciate it if you could look it up.

He goes to the town of Colossae, which is near Asia Minor, but not in it. I don't know where all he goes, but one place is Colossae, and a fellowship of believers is raised up there, and the brothers and sisters there have never known Paul of Tarsus, and they know he's in prison, and they vicariously fall in love with him, and they send this young man who raised up that church to Rome. His name is Epaphras. Sometimes they're called Epaphroditus. That's a good heathen name. All the Christians among the Gentiles had good heathen names. It was not until after Constantine, 300 years later, that we began to give our children Bible names. It's a heathen practice. You name your son Apollos, Zeus, you name him Mercury, you name him whatever. Constantine started naming

kids after Bible characters. It's a heathen practice for those of you who have Bible names. Anyway, Epaphroditus goes to Rome. He is, by the way, my favorite New Testament character other than Paul. I consider him to be one of the greatest Christians of the first century. Now, there's not much that's known about him, but he was an amazing brother.

He is in Rome, and Paul sends him home with four letters. He's going to take two of them to Colossae and then he's going to pass them out in Asia Minor. Then he's going to go home to Philippi and give them a personal letter, and he's going to deliver one letter to Philemon, a friend of Paul's, which, to me, is one of the most fascinating pieces of literature in the world. Paul manipulates Philemon like you wouldn't believe in about 18 sentences, something like just unforgivable what Paul does to that man, about a runaway slave named Onesimus. I think it is a hilarious letter. I mean, every time I read it, it gets better and better, and it gives some real insight into how Paul almost faces the subject, backs away from it, changes the subject, almost penetrates that, backs away from it, and the whole book is just full of hints. And you know what the hint is? Dummy, set him free, my cow, why thrash around with this problem? Let the boy go. Give him his citizenship. Give him his freedom. But he never says that. Don't beat him or send him off to the copper mines of Cyprus. Set him free. That's the only reasonable solution to the problem.

Now, Epaphroditus comes home to Colossae. Colossae is not a large town. We would be stretching our imaginations to believe it was a town of over five or 10,000 people. Now, I want to describe Colossae to you, and I believe you're the brother who asked for the five-fold gifts. I want you to remember that the book we call Ephesians was first read in the city of Colossae, and it was a circuit letter that was passed out all over Asia Minor. In fact, and I hate to bring this up because it always makes people uncomfortable. Perhaps the first church to receive it was the church in Laodicea because that church is actually mentioned in Colossians. Be sure and pass it around.

Now, I want you to see the ekklesia in the city of Colossae, our town, and I want you to remember that Paul has never met these people, and I believe he preaches his gospel to them in those two letters. More clearly than anything else, other than Romans, we see what Paul of Tarsus spoke on during those four months that he was with the churches.

Here's not only Colossae, but any town you've heard mentioned in the New Testament outside of Israel, which will look like this and be composed like this. I'd like for you to drop every preconceived notion you have. At the center of the town will be a forum. The Romans built that to remind the people that they belong to, and are under the control of, and are enemy-occupied by Rome. The downtown center of the town is usually decent, sometimes downright pretty. It has some colonnades. If there are any stores there, they will be filled with products from Rome. This is where the wealthy shop; it's mostly for them. Now, somewhere leading off will be a street that is the market street, and there, people will be bringing their goods to sell or barter. But the truth is that they barter; they do not sell. You must understand that most people in the Roman Empire never, in their lifetimes, actually held coins in their hands. They never had money. They bartered. Unless there was some particular need for it, they would take, after bartering all that they could,

they would take what they had, and they would sell it to basically a bank, which would be a money changer. He would, of course, take a good-sized discount, and coins would then be used. Coins were not a common way to live; barter was, for most people, the only way they lived.

Now, this town has a population of 10,000; let's really stretch it. Of those 10,000, 1% are the wealthy; they do not live in Colossae. They live on the hills around it in villas. They are the ones who gave the money for the forum. Rome did not build it; the wealthy Romans sent there, or those who moved there, built it. They live in villas and they have slaves. The law in Colossae is only relevant to those people; no one else is under the protection of Roman law. In fact, everything else is pretty much anarchy. You protect yourself. You get beaten up or things are stolen from you, your house is ransacked, don't bother to go to the police. You don't exist.

Saints, in the first century. Almost all the literature that has survived is about that top 1%. It has taken a hundred years of archaeology for brilliant men to ferret out who the rest of the people were. They don't even get mentioned. They are not considered. They're not thought of. Now, here are some things that you need to understand. One of them is, there was no such thing as freedom. It was not yet a concept in the minds of men, not the kind of freedom you know. When half of an empire is slaves, and the rest of the people, except for the rich and one other group, are virtually slaves, you don't think in sweeping terms of freedom. That's a term that only a Roman might understand. These people are not protected by law, and they do not have steady jobs. They go to the marketplace every day, hoping someone will hire them. They might be hired for three days, five days, ten days, or fifteen days. They might get hired for three months in good weather. The Romans might hire them to help build a bridge. But when that's over, it's over. There's no such thing as employment. For Jerry, it's like living in Atlanta, where just every day you hope the phone rings, and you get a job. That's the way they all live.

Now, look at me very carefully. This is the sociology of the first century. There's 1% of the people up here who are wealthy. They are made up of basically two groups: Romans and ex-soldiers who got rich stealing booty. That's about all there are that are wealthy. They live in villas. They don't live in town because it stinks. There is another 1% right up here, and they are the middle class. See the rich class, the poor class. And here's the middle class. It's about that big. In the United States, I understand, we have the rich class, the middle class, and the poor class. Well, here it is in Rome. Rich class, middle class. They are made up exclusively of Jews and Greeks. They are the merchants in the marketplace. They are selling their wares to the poor, to one another, and to the wealthy. They have their little tents, or booths they open every day, and you come by and you haggle with them. There's no price tag on anything. By the way, not all of those people can read and write, but some can; reading and writing is a profession, just like carpentry. You read letters for people, you write letters for people, you explain documents to them, and draw up documents. Now there are others who can read and write, but it's looked upon as a marketing skill. It doesn't mean these people are that ignorant; many of them are highly skilled, but they still can't read and write. But they are incredibly poor. Now we come to the other class, and it's split right down the middle. In the bottom part of it, half of the people in the Roman Empire are slaves; the other half are the great

unwashed. That's what they're called. Brother Ed, do you know why they're called the great unwashed? Because they stunk. They have the clothes they wear, and they may have some sandals. Their kids run naked in the streets. They may have one room. They probably don't own it; they probably rent it from the wealthy or a merchant. That room has a window and a door. It may not even have a window. The people sleep on the floor in that room, and they cook in that room. That's the unwashed. The slaves may live in or around the villa; they may live in the village. They may sleep in a wagon. They may sleep in a barn, but I'll tell you, the ones that fascinate me the most are those who were skilled.

Now, you've heard about Paul and his tent-mending business. Well, I want you to know what Paul of Tarsus is up against. I want you to imagine Paul in any town he was ever in. Let's take the town of Thessalonica, and he's there working for a living. Beside him in another booth is another man who mends tents, but that man is a slave. Now I want my tent mended, and I walk up to these two men, Paul of Tarsus and a slave named Demetrius...we gave him a nice, good slave's name. And I say, "I want this mended." Paul says, "I'll do it for such and such. I'll do it for a half pound of grain. I'll do it for copper." Whatever. The slave says, "I'll do it for a quarter of a pound of grain, not a half a pound. I'll do it for half a copper." Now, why can he do that? Because he doesn't have any overhead, and he will at the end of the day, whatever he has gained he will take that to his master and it becomes his master's and that's what Paul of Tarsus and every other skilled workman was up against, they were up against equally skilled slaves who were under bidding them, it was a self-destructive society. Now, these people are slaves; half of them. The other half are the great unwashed, with 2% who are wealthy and middle class.

Go with me and stand in the street. The street is five or six feet wide. In it, the middle of it is a little cutout notch that drops about six inches. It's about a foot wide. That's the gully. When it rains, that's where things wash. It is also the city garbage dump. In fact, that entire street is a garbage dump. Everyone throws their filth and their garbage into the street. If you're in a street, you cannot possibly walk around this stuff. Flies have filled the street up completely. There is a stench that rises out of that street that is ghastly, but everyone just opens the door and throws their garbage out there, and it's never collected. The only thing that ever changes it is if there's a good torrential rain; it will wash it down and out just by the flooding.

The people live on mixed grain, a little fruit, and a little vegetables that they grow for themselves, and some yogurt or cheese. They die at the average age of 35, 40, or 45, and they die of old age, malnutrition, and they die without doctors. They can't afford them, and they don't even die with the philosopher to say nice things over them, out of which came our Christian funerals. That was for the wealthy and the middle class. Brothers and sisters, their children were naked. These people's arms and faces were filled with sores. Plagues would come through and sometimes wipe out half a town. The plagues had no name; they didn't know what started them. We don't know what started them. Rats are everywhere, and so are flies. These people have no entertainment, other than every once in a while, something at the amphitheater if there is one in town, and that's it. They have no protection from the law. They have tattoos around their mouths and over their eyebrows. I told you

last night that when they go to the temple, they stand around this little round circular thing, probably dedicated to Zeus or Jupiter or someone like that, and they slaughter an ox, and they drink the blood. These are miserable people. They are ignorant people, and they are unhappy people. They do not understand literature. They are uneducated. Superstition is their great religion. There's nothing in their lives but life and death. For every mother who gives birth to six or seven children, one will survive. That's a way of life. It was hardly worth crying over. That's just the way it was. One or two might survive. Those kids had no shoes, and they probably ran naked in the streets until they were two or three years old.

Point. Out of those people came the vaulted, almost mythical folks that we have called first-century Christians. Revise your thinking, buddy. This is not Cecil B. DeMille. And into this town of Colossae - but I've described any town in the Roman Empire - into this town comes Epaphroditus. I don't know how he does it, but somehow or other, he leads some of those people to a savior and a Lord. And saints, I cannot explain this to you, but if there is anything that differentiates the Christian faith from any other religion, it's what happens to people when they meet the Lord. Buddha doesn't do this, and Muhammad doesn't do this. And the Shinto religion, the Tao religion, the Zoroastrian religion, and Hinduism, none of them do this incredible thing of causing people to be quickened and to fall in love with one another. It's a peculiarity of our species. It's an instinct, and it happens all over the world, and it can happen without American Christian missionaries telling them. In fact, I think American Christian missionaries kill church life because they bring them into John Calvin's Sunday morning church service and almost demand that we never get to know one another. Unwittingly, we do that.

And again, I think of Nepal because I have just also described to you a nation that exists today, that's exactly like the nation I just described. And I think of a Prem Pradhan winning one or two people in a village, and that's all, and another one, and another one. And these people, each week, they'll get up early in the morning and they will walk to one of the villages. Let's just say there are seven villages and there's one convert in each one, and they come together walking miles from daybreak. They meet. They are all illiterate. Maybe one of them can read. They all get together. They spend the day. They sing. They praise the Lord. They share. One brother reads. The only book that they had in Paul's language in the early days was the book of John, which, by the way, does not ever tell you that Jesus Christ ascended. It's not recorded in the book of John. And a lot of these people got the idea in their heads that he's still on earth somewhere in some city that they haven't been to yet.

And they get together and they praise the Lord and sing and share and cry and so on and so forth and hug one another and then they all go home. Buddhists don't do this. Mohammedans don't do this. Muslims don't do this. Christians do this. And Epaphroditus preaches the Gospel to these people, and they learn to sing, and they learn to share, and they learn to love. Out of them comes the fivefold ministry. And this is why I know what an evangelist is, besides seeing it experientially. And why I know what a pastor is, why I know what a prophet is, and why I know what a church planter is. Epaphroditus was a church planter. These people, please see them. Let's hope and pray

to God in reverse time that a Greek got saved. Let's hope in mercy they don't meet in the home of a slave or a great unwashed. It would be such a filthy hole; it would be unimaginable. Let's hope a Greek or a Jew got saved in some place where there were three or four rooms and a little garden in the middle, and let's hope they all met there. Will you hope that with me? Every time I get to thinking about this, I get unraveled. Please, Lord, let a Greek get saved. Let a Jew be converted.

And they come together and they sit around on the floor. They don't have chairs; chairs weren't invented for another 1500 years. Benches exist, but they don't have them; they sit on the floor. I'll tell you how they sit, too. You want to see how they sit? They sit like this. That's how they sit. That's how people sat in those days: it was like this. And they're perfectly comfortable. You and I are not, but they are. And they chatted and talked and sang and shared, and they fell in love with one another because they had a common life that just loves, as does the Godhead love. And if you don't know how the Godhead loves, then you don't know one of the great imponderables. The Father's desire to live only for the Son and the Son's desire to live only for the Father and the Spirit's desire to see that they both are glorified, and that life is in them.

One morning, two men get hired to go out and bale hay. Halfway through the day, the manager of the field says to them, You know, we need another hand, and one of them says, I know somebody, and he strikes out back for Colossae. And he goes and knocks on someone's door and says, Hey, you didn't get a job today. No, come go with us. A sister and a brother aren't doing too well in getting some work each day, and someone shares grain with them. Someone shares a copper, a bronze, or an iron coin. Sisters take care of one another. Brothers meet each other in the marketplace and hug. Out of the home of a Greek, there rises music that can be heard for several blocks, and they recognize some of the old folk tunes of that town, but they don't recognize the words. Those people are making up songs, Colossians. They are making melodies.

They see these believers doing something you don't see in Colossae: they watch these people smile. And smiling is virtually unknown among these folks. They hear one of them shout one day when he sees another brother and hugs him, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord." And Colossae knows that something is growing up in their town that not since the fall of Adam has the eye ever seen. Nowhere, ever. What is it that's being seen? A little bit of heaven. It's called the ekklesia. And if you ever touch her, she'll win your heart and destroy your life. And I will repeat what I said last night, but let me do it now in context. The greatest single instrument of evangelism the world has ever known is the church herself. She is the most magnetic thing there is, and those people in that town were curious. They'd tell stories about their love for one another and their care for one another, along with some other weird stories they would tell. But every once in a while, somebody would have the good sense to know, I want to look into this for myself, and they would go into one of those meetings and sit down in a corner and do like that.

And the people touched one another. They were touched. There was affection. The sisters kissed one another. If you please, their brothers kissed one another. Live with it. They'd sit there and talk, and they'd talk about this God and this Lord and then sing and then praise and then share and then

hold one another and cry, and you'd walk into that room of pagans, and you would hardly know the name Jesus Christ. You walk out a believer, but there's something you would know that you didn't walk out and join a parachurch organization; the next day, you wouldn't say in the marketplace, 'I'm shopping around for a church and taking my family.' You would not be going to any seminars on marriage, nor would you be joining a mission society for left-handed, Albino Eskimos refugees in southwest Africa. These things didn't exist.

There were two things that were synonymous. They were so synonymous that men and women were incapable of thinking otherwise, and that is the Christian ekklesia. Salvation was not separated from the body of Christ. You knew that if you followed the Way and became a follower of the Way, you belonged to that body of believers, and there was no choice in the matter. Otherwise, you weren't even considered a believer. You were considered some weirdo who walked in, said he was a Christian, and walked out. That was incomprehensible. I'm not talking about salvation by the church. I am talking to you about a lifestyle, that the lifestyle was absolutely inseparable with the concept of the Gospel, that you belong to the ekklesia, if you became a believer, and you took the medicine and the shame and the condemnation and perhaps the family excommunication, or at least the stigma of belonging to this strange thing that met down there in Gaius' garden, there in the middle of his little house.

I cannot tell you, nor can you, nor I, understand the incredible joy a group of people would know. I don't want you to erase the tattoos. Don't erase the scars, the blind eyes, the deaf ears, the poverty. Don't erase the filthy clothes. Don't erase the old age at 35 and 40, nor the malnutrition. Don't erase the dead babies born... (continued in Part 4)