

Wisdom and understanding, since the day that I heard of you, I have not ceased to pray for you, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with power according to His glorious might. For He, nope, for the attaining of all steadfastness and peace joyously giving thanks to the Father who has, and there's a Father reference, qualified you and me, that's plural, to share in the inheritance of the saints, church. For He delivered us, the church, plus Paul, from the dominion of darkness and transferred us, the church in Colossae, and Paul, to the kingdom of His beloved Son. In Christ we have redemption; we, the church in Colossae and Paul, have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. That's as far as I read yesterday.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, and by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, where the thrones are dominions or authorities. All these have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. Is that plural or singular? Okay, and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Christ to reconcile all things, having made peace through the blood of His cross through Christ, and the next two words are not in Greek. Which things are on earth and in the heavens? And although you, yeah, but it's past tense, so it was the church before it was the church. Although you, heathen gentile Colossian Puerto Ricans, were formerly alienated and hostile, hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled who? You, in that room, the church in Colossae, in His flesh, both through death in order to present, and boy, this is powerful, folks, you before Him holy and blameless, beyond reproach, and that's a plural, if indeed you continue in the faith; is that you, the individual, or is that corporate? Now don't just placate me. I want to know what you feel about that. This is important. Well, it's conditional, it's conditional if you continue in the faith. Is that plural? Is that singular? I'm sorry. It could go either way. Saints, it's plural, and that makes it strange. That makes it, well, that opens whole new worlds to us.

If you continue in the faith firmly established and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard, that's from Epaphroditus, which was proclaimed in all creation, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Now, I rejoice in my suffering. I'm going to stop right here because I have a lot to say about these passages.

Can someone volunteer to spend the afternoon counting this? And I don't want to. I came up with a zero other than individual references. Other people have come up with as high as three, four, or five. I'm wide open to three, four, or five. Is there someone who could sit down and do this this afternoon, who will do this for me? You sure you will? You won't let us down. I think these others are all correct. In fact, I believe I remember someone coming up with 123 references to the church.

The Father 26, the Son 83, and Paul 16. Does that have any, does that give you any indication of anything? What are the two dominant numbers here? Christ and the church. Now, aren't you surprised who comes in third? The Father. By the way, I don't mind telling you this, Paul is a very self-centric person. Do you understand what I mean by that? I don't mean self-centered. He has a strong personal reference about him. Do you realize that? My wife does not have a strong personal reference to herself. She really doesn't. What about me? Why don't you go ahead and confess it? Yes. A strong sense. The daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt, President of the United States, she said, "It didn't matter where he went; he was the bride at every wedding. He was the corpse at every funeral." You know, some other people in this room like that. Are you going to volunteer some names? Who? Robert. Okay, Robert, you're right. Robert, where are you?

Audience Member: I'm the corpse of every funeral. (laughter)

Anybody else? Can you think of someone else? Darlene, absolutely, no question about it, extrovert. Is there someone else? Someone not here perhaps? Okay.

Paul is constantly presenting himself, seeking to have the brothers and sisters understand the example that is his life; he does it again and again and again. In Galatians, the first two chapters, he dominates with references to himself; in Romans, almost nothing is mentioned except at the very beginning and the very end. 1st and 2nd Corinthians and 1st Thessalonians, he's almost the whole three books. Everything is a presentation of this: what I said among you, what I did among you, what I have taught you, and here is my example of what I have done under similar circumstances.

There's a difference between being egotistical and striving to present the Christian life and using your own life as an example. Okay, I will look for your report on individuals. Give us individuals by name; use the American standard. You even tell us what their names are, and brother, there probably are three or four references in all this. If one says, "You stop your sinning," that's probably individual. I wish I could remember some of the past tallies on this. Well, one, I've only asked for it once before.

Audience Member: Is it possible that a reference could be singular and plural?

Every time in Colossians, I have found one, and I said, "That's singular." Before he finishes the sentence, it's plural. Shirley said it could go either way, but as you kept reading, it became very obvious it was plural. I agree with Shirley. At that point, it's individual until he keeps going on in the sentence, and it's not singular anymore, and Colossians will usually do that. Whose book is this? Thank you very much, brother. That gives cross-references there.

Okay, now, I'm going to attempt to do something that is extremely difficult. I'm going to attempt to communicate things that cannot be communicated. We're going to take chapter one. Thank you very much. We don't give applause to those who read.

I call on you, Holy Spirit, either today or someday, somewhere along the line, this weekend or 10 years from now, to open the hearts, no longer to open the spirits of the brothers and sisters here and give them a revelation of the church. Not just that she is, but all that she is. Be thou my help. Amen.

Until this very hour, everyone who has ever picked up the book of Colossians has read it for their own selves. When theologians pick it up, they pick it up to find doctrines either to buttress what they believe or to create what they believe. What we have never done is to read it from the viewpoint of the church. When we do that, we get a totally different book. A book so astounding, and I confess to you again that it is impossible to communicate. I'm going to do the best I can, but I will fail.

Now, last night, we went through the story. But right now, I want you to appreciate a prison cell. I want you to know that Paul has already said to Tychicus, I'm going to write some letters. I want you to take them way down there to Asia Minor to three little obscure towns full of Gentiles who hardly know the Lord. Now, put yourself in Paul's place. Here are churches that are probably young, and they are probably weak. According to my own theory, that's the reason Epaphras went to Rome, was to get help.

I sit down in that prison, and I have chains on my hands. I'm thinking about a church that's as far away as Atlanta is to Chicago, and they need help. First, the very fact that I'm thinking church, not individual, makes it unique because today's faith thinks individual. Do you understand that? Even when a pastor stands in the middle of a church building and preaches to his people, he preaches an individual gospel. He nor they, generally speaking, understand a corporate anything. If you don't believe that, go to church next Sunday and listen to the preacher. He'll probably say something like, "Oh gosh, it's been so long, Gene. If you'll walk on the sunny side of the street, be positive and so and so and this and that and the other, then God and you will, and here's an illustration of somebody who did that, and it was wonderful to walk on the sunny side of the street." Amen. Don't forget to come back next Sunday.

It's an individual gospel, do you understand? I don't know if we're capable even here in this room, at least in the first round of plummeting the depths of the corporateness of brothers and sisters in that day. How interwoven the church was with the individual Christian life. Saints, that does not mean you give up your individuality. Just forget that. My gosh, we've had 1700 years of individuality; maybe we should tilt back a little bit. I don't even care if we go over, but I'm not sure we can. If I can even get to the middle, I'll be pleased. I really doubt I can, but I'm gonna give it a try.

The thought of those people as being one, the thought of that man in that prison of those people in Colossae being one person. That's the first thought I have is first of all, what would I write to them? And second of all, I'm impressed with the fact that Paul is thinking corporately, not individually. Now, the third thing that I consider, this is the third thing, is that if I had written this letter, it wouldn't look like this. I would say you need to pray three hours a day. No, I've never

been that bad off. You know why? Because I don't pray three hours a day. Have you heard my rule of thumb as to how far to follow a man? Whatever he preaches, it doesn't matter. Don't pay attention to what he preaches; follow him up to the point that he does what he preaches. You understand? Don't worry, you won't get too bent out of shape doing that.

This book never ceases to amaze me. I can't find what I'm looking for, my own mind wanders away, and I begin to think individually. And I realize, Lord, what is it I have overlooked and do not see? I'm going to read this thing. Chapter one, stay with me, let's see what we can find. Okay, this is the Edwardian version, and it's not all that good. I'm not bragging about this thing. Oh, maybe this can come up; I can only see writing about 8 inches, maybe 12? Is that as far as it'll go? Let's not take it any further. I don't want it to fall. Okay, and therefore, I have to get right down on it; I still can't see it. Well, and it sounds like I'm illiterate or semi-literate. Now, that's not true. There was a time in my life when I could read, but it's long past.

Paul, a sent one, and that means, the reason it's capitalized is it's not a transliteration, as the word apostle is, it's a translation, sent out by Christ. My being one sent out was by the will of God, and with me is my brother Timothy, and this book is written not to a holy one, but to holy ones, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who gather in Colossae.

Now, before I go any further, I want you to do something for me. Now you're going to have to get into this, okay? When I raise my hand like this, I want you to say, "Amen." That's who we are. Would you do that? And when I do like this, I want you to repeat what I said, and you'll probably know what I'm about to say because I may say it two or three times so that you can repeat it perfectly. Okay? All right, Amen. That's who we are. You got that? Say it. That's no good, Amen. That's who we are. Okay, everybody says it. All right, that's too much. Wonderful. Good enough. All right. And repeat what I said. Repeat what I've said. Wonderful. Wonderful. All right.

Okay, first, I want to talk about the word grace. It is an obsession with Paul. Don't think this is some ministerial benediction; this is a legalist who found freedom. He wants you to live in freedom, and he wants you - plural - to live in freedom. Are you with me? Paul wants you to live in grace. You, as a body of believers, are to live free. Good enough, I just thought I'd say.

Grace to all of you who are in Colossae and peace to all of you from God our Father. He has two words, grace and peace. That brother is obsessed with those words, along with the word Christ. I give thanks to God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying for a corporate body of people, because I think corporately, I think of you as one person, and we will find that out later.

I've been praying for you as a body of believers ever since I heard of your faith in Christ and your love for all the other holy ones. Do you realize that you are already holy ones? Thank you, lady. All right, and of the faith laid up for you in heavenly places, and brothers and sisters, again, everything in me aches for you to not read that as you, the individual. And that's not all, this is not a reference to heaven. As I recall, I've got to look up this someday, I think the word heaven only appears in the New Testament in one place. Every reference that you see that says heaven is

not heaven. It's either the heavenlies or heavenly places, and that is not a reference to the New Jerusalem or harps and clouds and gold and streets and all pearls and all of that stuff. It simply means the other realm.

That you might know what you have in your faith, what you have in the other realm. And it's not you the individual, it's you as a body of believers, and Lord Jesus, give the brothers and sisters in Chicago a glimpse of what they have in heavenly places. And may you more and more, and this is Gene Edwards speaking, not Paul, may you more and more and more find that place and touch it. And that's my prayer for you. And that was Paul's prayer for a church long, long ago. Well, as much as I, see what I did, the only other person in the room who can do something like that is Frau. I think we need to get a hold, don't we? I think I got it this time. Good. All right.

Now, I'm not the first person to tell you this; you, as a people, Epaphras told you first. I'm just telling you what Epaphras told you; it's my prayer that you will continue to see what you have laid up in heavenly places. Praise the Lord for Epaphras, and that is the good news.

Now, brothers and sisters, what's the good news? Jesus Christ is the good news. And in the other book that Paul wrote, the twin to this one, 2 Colossians, he says, "I pray that you will understand and come to lay hold of the riches that are in heavenly places," that are where? In Christ Jesus. Where are the heavenly riches, brothers and sisters? So, if you want to find them, what you do is you find the Lord Jesus. Not the Christ of Galilee in Judea, but the Christ Paul presents in Colossians. By the way, I am not here to put any of you under condemnation; we're going to try to make a lot of this practical before I leave here this weekend. Okay?

This good news has come to all the world, and it has also come to you, and it is bearing fruit both in the world and those of you who are in Colossae and have, since that day that you heard and understood, what, the truth of the grace of God. Brothers and sisters in Colossae and Chicago, you were born free.

Does anybody here ever write new words to popular songs? Have you ever done that? Who could do it? Who's good at that kind of writing? Okay, then, Darlene, you have an assignment. Okay, Darlene, y'all get together and write a Christian song to Born Free, okay? Will you do that? Okay, great. You were born free, and the Gospel is flowing in you. Amen, all right, good. The gospel is flowing and growing in you, just stay in the grace. The flowing and the growing end when grace goes out the window, and that's the only thing in the world that can stop the growth of the Lord in you. Grace. This brother is obsessed with it.

All right, here we go. Don't forget grace, would you? Epaphras, who is from among you and from whom you heard the grace of God, now here in Rome, Epaphras is my beloved fellow slave and a faithful servant of Christ both to you and to me. And brothers and sisters, that's plural. He has been faithful to Paul in Rome. He is a faithful servant to the church of Jesus Christ. It was Epaphras who informed me of your love in the spirit.

Can you tell me the difference between your spirit and heavenly places? Can you tell me the difference between your spirit and heavenly places? I have two things I want to say to you. Every person in this room right now is thinking individually. Is that not true? Do you know you didn't learn to love individually? You have a love for one another here. Every once in a while, it cracks a little bit, but generally speaking, is that not true, brother? Have a real affection for one another. Did you get that individually? I can tell you, you did not get that individually. The love you have here in Chicago, you cannot find in Christians because of individual discovery.

Brothers and sisters, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has a spirit. Now, I want to really get clear here with you. This room is filled with individuals who have a spirit, but this room is also filled with one being. One human being. That person, unique among all other creatures on this earth, has a spirit. And you have learned to love one another by the one spirit of this one person, and you're not going to find love for the brothers and sisters any other way.

I meet a Christian, and he loves Christians. Says things in his vocabulary, this is wonderful. He loves the Lord, he loves brothers and sisters, he'll tell you he does. Stick him in the body of Christ and let him touch that one spirit, and he'll come out of there with an intensity of love for the other brothers and sisters and the Lord, he cannot find within his own spirit. All right, praise the Lord. Are you with me? Are you following me? This is important.

Now, the other thing I wanted to say to you is it's very hard to tell the difference between the spirit and heavenly places because your spirit puts you in heavenly places. Now, you get there in little ways and medium-sized ways and big ways, even our singing together puts us in our spirit. Holding on to one another, hugging each other, singing together like we did last night, puts us in our spirit, and we touch a little bit of other realms. Just a little, and the more we do that, the Lord gains a little ground in our lives, just a little bit. No big deal here, brothers and sisters. No big promises, just a little bit.

Those of you in Michigan, are y'all listening to me? Are you, sister? Are you listening to me? What is your name? You got a Japanese name? No? Well, you should have a Japanese name anyway. What's your background? What are you, Chinese? Korea. So, you're Korean? You don't have a Korean name? Let's stay with the other one now, and what was it? And the American version of English. Nadin? Okay, it's Nadin then. Nadin, your growth in Christ is boxed in as an individual; your growth in Christ corporately is not. It doesn't have any walls around. The process may be slow, but it's infinite. We don't hear that, and that's why the Christian life doesn't work, and that's why those sermons didn't do you one bit of good.

Okay, it was also Epaphras who informed me of a body of believers' love and the corporate spirit that existed among them. It is not you—it is plural. On the day I heard, I haven't been able to stop praying for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of the Lord's will. My prayer is that you may be filled with that spiritual knowledge coming in all wisdom and understanding, resulting in your being able to walk in a manner worthy and pleasing to the Lord.

Now, Paul had a prayer for a corporate group of people, and it gets really complicated. Let's make it really simple. There is human knowledge and human understanding. There are a lot of human things you can know about the Christian life, but he is asking that you might have and lay hold of spiritual knowledge. Brothers and sisters, spiritual knowledge does not have words. You can turn them into words. They will fall short; there's nothing wrong with doing it, but spiritual knowledge doesn't have words, you know that. You remember the time the Lord really showed you something? For a second there, it didn't have a word in this world, then later you tried to explain it. And do you know something else? Every one of you is thinking individually right now.

I tell you the truth, open your eyes. Did it ever occur to you that as a people, you have a spiritual understanding? I want you to just go home and consider that. The brothers and sisters in Chicago have a spiritual understanding. What is it? I have no idea, and you don't either. But as a body of believers, there are things you know and you know them exclusively, all of you here. Hey, can you cut that thing off for just a minute? Those of you who are watching this on video, it kind of clicked; we had a moment or two in which you were not. I know that you, as a people, have an understanding of spiritual things that you don't have as individuals, and I also know it's beyond words; may it grow in you as a person.

I want you to consider that there's one person in this room. I don't particularly want to use the word "she" right now because later we'll find out who this person is, but she really does have things about her that are her own, that do not belong to the individual.