

# Christ Loved the Church

by William MacDonald

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*The church is dear to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, and its unity and purpose are essential to the growth of the Christian faith.*

**Duration:** 49:32

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 3:8-9, Ephesians 4:1, Ephesians 4:3, Ephesians 4:6-16, Jude 1:3

**Topics:** "Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reading from Ephesians chapter 4, emphasizing the importance of unity among believers. He encourages the congregation to focus on what unites them in Christ rather than the things that divide them. The speaker then discusses God's program for the expansion of the church, highlighting the unity and diversity within the body of Christ. He emphasizes the need for each member to fulfill their specific function in the church and not worry about what others are doing. The sermon concludes with a reminder that God gives grace to each person according to their individual gifts.

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## Transcript

Please accept our apologies for the rather rough quality of this recording. Shall we turn for our Bible reading this morning to Ephesians chapter 4. I just have to pardon the fog horn. Ephesians chapter 4 verse 1. I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Wherefore he saith when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things.

And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the Saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man under the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro

and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie and wait to deceive.

But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things which is the head even from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supply of according the effectual working in the measure of every part make an increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. I was thrilled last night when George was giving his 20-point program for this coming year to find his emphasis on the local church. It warmed the cockles of my heart.

I don't know what part of the anatomy of the heart the cockles are but anyway it warmed them. Also that verse he read the Great Commission teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And certainly this brings us into the whole realm of the New Testament church and I'd like to talk with you about that this morning.

By way of introduction I'd like you to look back in Ephesians chapter 3 and beginning with verse 8 I'd like to read a few verses there Ephesians chapter 3 verse 8 Paul says unto me who am less than the least of all Saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hidden God who created all things in Christ Jesus. To the intent that now under the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you which is your glory.

Now the thing I'd like you to notice in verses 8 and 9 is that the Apostle Paul had a twofold ministry. First of all he says unto me was this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. That's evangelism isn't it? But that wasn't all there was another aspect of his ministry and that was to make all men see what is the stewardship the dispensation of the mystery and of course this has to do with the church.

The mystery in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians is the wonderful truth that God has taken Jew and Gentile and through faith in the Lord Jesus has formed them into one new body one new man. And he says that a God forming this new body on the earth this is an object lesson to angelic beings. You know we hardly ever think of that do we? We never think of that when we think of the church as a fellowship here on earth we don't realize that it's an object lesson to the angels in heaven.

It says to the intent that now under the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. Now let's never forget that the church on earth is the body of Christ. It's something that's very dear to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul realized that so everywhere he went preaching the gospel of redeeming grace God used him in the planting of New Testament churches. And this is the thing incidentally that made the work permanent. This is the thing that left a lasting impression.

It says Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. The body is of course dear to the head and the body of Christ is dear to to him. And I'd like to suggest to you this morning the weakest local New Testament Church on the earth today means more to God than the greatest empire in the world.

You agree with that? Well it's absolutely true. The empires of the world are only important to God as they fulfill his purposes. But a local church of believing Christians gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus means more to him than the mightiest empire that ever swaggered on the face of this earth.

And Paul had a keen sense of that and a keen appreciation of that and he said I have a twofold ministry. First of all I go out and proclaim among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and then secondly verse 9 I make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hidden God who created all things by Jesus Christ. I often think of this.

Some years ago God led a man to go down from Canada to two states in the United States, North Carolina and South Carolina and apparently the Spirit of God was brooding over those places at that very time and he went in and started preaching the gospel and souls got saved right and left and everywhere souls got saved he under God saw that they were gathered together in New Testament churches and all over those states today you find these little churches of God's people planted and now they're reproducing themselves and now they're hiding off and other churches being established. I often think how nice it would be to get to the end of the journey and look back and see these monuments, living monuments that God has allowed you to see established in the work going on and expanding. Well I really believe this is God's program for the growth of the Christian faith.

I really do. Now we're going to look especially at Ephesians chapter 4 this morning and those who are interested in an outline the first five verses are Paul's plea for unity, Paul's plea for unity and verses 6 through 16 God's program for the expansion of the church. First of all Paul's plea for unity verses 1 through 5 it says I therefore the prisoner of the Lord.

Apostle Paul introduces himself as the prisoner of the Lord. I love that he wasn't even willing to admit he was a prisoner of Rome. He wasn't in prison because some great power on earth was greater than God.

He was there because God wanted him to be there and that's a thrilling thing to think of an epistle like this written from a prison and as somebody has said there isn't even the smell of a prison about it. Now that's true. He starts right off and he's soaring in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

So here with dignity and with pardonable spiritual pride he introduces himself as the prisoner of the Lord Jesus. Then he beseeches the believers that they walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. Now the vocation wherewith they are called has been explained in the preceding chapters and that is this called into the fellowship of the church which is the body of Christ.

Chapter 2 in a very special way explains how God has taken the Jew and the Gentile saved them by his wonderful grace broken down the middle wall of a partition and formed them into one new man so making peace and incidentally that was one of the mightiest transactions that has ever taken place in the history of the world. You know that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was one of the greatest differences that has ever existed in the world and the antagonism between those two has been one of the greatest antagonisms. We in our country think that we have a real problem on our hands a race problem and mind you it is a problem a bitter problem and a wretched problem a problem for which there is no excuse but even the race problem going on in many parts of the world today is nothing compared to the problem that existed between Jew and Gentile.

They were miles apart and mind you that distinction was in part set up by the law. The law that God gave through Moses set Israel apart as a separate people with separate food and separate types of clothing

separate rules and laws to guide their life and it really contained them as a separate people and the Gentiles were dogs outside the pail. The antagonism was great the enmity was great the middle wall of partition had been set up between them and now God comes along and in Christ Jesus he breaks down that middle wall of partition and now you see people gathered at the Lord's table and here's a Jew saved by the of God and a Gentile saved by the grace of God brothers in Christ all one in Christ Jesus.

This is a vocation wherewith we are called. That is if you study the thing in the context that's what it is walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you're called. Now there was a terrific danger that these people saved and brought into the fellowship of the church should revive some of those ancient enmity.

Here's that Gentile brother and he sits down to a nice dinner of roast pork and the Jew converted Jew looks on and he's absolutely horrified that Gentile would eat roast pork. And so in the early days of the church there was a there were very real tensions set up because a clean break was not made with the past. And so the Apostle Paul says with all lowliness and meekness with long-suffering for bearing one another in love.

And this is one of the things that fellowship in the local church is designed by God to produce in our life. We're working with people of different temperaments people from various cultural backgrounds and there's a tremendous tendency to wish everybody in the local church had the same sweet temperament that we ourselves have to understand. And one of God's purposes is to take people with such diverse backgrounds and put them together so that the fruit of the Spirit might be developed in their life.

And I just like to pause here and say this but if the church were not a divine institution and never would have survived this long I don't believe it. With all the potential dynamite that's there, differing temperaments, different personalities, different backgrounds, different nationalities, and all the rest. If the church were not a divine institution it never would have survived.

And I'd like to say that when I'm on this subject that it's one thing for us to go out and evangelize the world and preach the gospel. We know very well that the devil will oppose but frankly I personally don't believe that the devil opposes evangelism as much as he opposes the local New Testament church. Mind you, he comes to us in different guises.

When we go out to evangelize the world he's a roaring lion with all the bluster that goes with that. But I want to tell you when you seek to see a testimony established for the name of the Lord Jesus he comes to you as the serpent, as the crawling serpent, and you'll see things happen as you seek to see under God a group of people formed into a local church of God's dear people. You'll see the devil working in ways that will just cast your wildest imagination.

Not only working from without them but even working much more from within. And so it's really a challenge. I believe that this is the will of God that the work should be expanded in this way and I can see the devil blasting away in every conceivable manner.

And this is what makes the work of elders in the local church so very very important. It's easy for us to look down our sophisticated noses at the elders and see all the mistakes they made but I want to tell you elders who are seeking to go on for God really face problems that we don't know anything about. And many an elder I believe has gone down to his grave broken under some of the terrific onslaughts of the devil.

And so now when the Apostle Paul here appeals to the saint that they walk with all lowliness and meekness with long-suffering for bearing one another in love and believe you me it takes that. A lot of young people especially form themselves into fellowships here on earth with people of the same intellectual level or the same cultural level or something. They feel quite snug and complacent but it's never God's will.

God's will is to take people of different ages and different intellectual levels and different cultural backgrounds and different temperaments and put them together. See the Spirit of God working in their lives in brokenness and lowliness and meekness and forbearing and this is a testimony not only to the world but to angels as well. And I believe that's what the Lord Jesus meant in John 17 when he said that they all may be one that the world may believe that thou has sent me.

I don't think for a minute that he meant a great ecumenical movement in the church. How are we all to be one? Let's look at the verse John chapter 17. Neither pray I for these alone verse 20 but for them also which shall believe on me through their word that they all may be one as thou father art in me and I in thee that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that thou has sent me.

Now what is that oneness? Is that a functional oneness? Is that an organizational oneness? I don't believe it for a minute. I've abandoned that view years ago. What does it mean? Well I believe it means this oneness in likeness to Jesus.

Oneness in likeness to the Savior. Savior is just like God the Father morally, spiritually and that's exactly what he wants in our life and when the world sees that Christ in us the world will believe. Isn't that right? Think it over.

What is that oneness that is spoken of in John chapter 17? I believe it's oneness in the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in conformity to Christ in likeness to him and that's the thing that's going to convince the world. Okay it says in verse 3 of Ephesians chapter 4, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The unity of Spirit is something that's been formed.

We've already read about it in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. It's the bringing together of these diverse elements and making one new man. We don't have to make the unity of the Spirit we have to endeavor to keep it.

The devil will come along and sow all kinds of little insidious potential danger seeds in the church and if we're not walking along in the Spirit pretty soon there'll be a great explosion and people will be fighting about days of the week or they'll be fighting about food or they'll be fighting about wine and other matters of moral indifference. And incidentally most of the difficulty that has come in the church has not come over matters of fundamental importance as much as over the color that you should paint the walls of the chapel or something like that. Really matters of moral indifference.

Then he goes on to stress the sevenfold unity that we have as believers. There's one body. That body is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Began at Pentecost and will continue until the Lord takes his people out of this scene. And there's only one body. There's confusion in Christianity today.

People are looking around them and scratching their heads. But God looks down and he sees one body on earth made up of who names the name of Christ. And of course part of that body is already in heaven.

There's one spirit and that spirit of course is the Holy Spirit. Just as my body, just as I as a personality have a body and a spirit. So there's one spirit that animates the body of Christ and that's the Holy Spirit.

It's a wonderful thing isn't it? That we're all members of a body and there's one pulsating, moving in that body and that spirit is the Holy Spirit. Even as you're called in one, hope of your calling. And the hope of the calling always looks forward to the culmination of our salvation.

It always looks forward to the future. You don't hope for what you already have. But the hope of the calling is that day when the church will be presented to himself without spot or wrinkle.

When we all will have our glorified bodies and be there presented as a chaste virgin to Christ. Then it says one Lord. All true believers in the Lord Jesus acknowledge one Lord.

It says one faith and that is the Christian faith. That is the body of truth which has been delivered to us. Now Christians disagree on many matters, many peripheral matters, but all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are agreed on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

A lot of Christians are stumbled by looking around and and seeing so much disagreement. I don't look around to see the disagreement. I look around to see the areas of agreement and it's really quite thrilling.

It really is. When you think that there are people in so many different Christian fellowships and yet if you get them together and say do you believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus? They say we most certainly do. Do you believe that he was born of a virgin? You say we certainly do.

Do you believe that he was sinlessly perfect when he was here on earth? Absolutely. Do you believe that he died on the cross of Calvary as a substitute for sinners? Yes we believe that with all our hearts. Do you believe he was buried? Yes.

And that he rose bodily the third day from the grave? Yes we believe that. Do you believe he ascended back to heaven and is seated now at the right hand of God? And they say of course we believe that. We've always believed that.

And do you believe he's coming again? And they say yes. And I don't know any true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who doesn't believe those things. I don't mind you the details of some of those things there's disagreement on.

But that's the great area of agreement and that's thrilling. And Jude speaks of that as the faith once delivered unto the saint. And I think it's important for us to realize that when he uses the word once he doesn't mean once upon a time but he means once for all.

The faith and I think the revised version uses it that way. Jude verse 3 says beloved when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation. And that's what we're talking about.

It was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saint. It's a good verse to remember when you're dealing with cultists who claim other books in addition to the Bible. They say yes it's the Bible plus ignorance and sickness and padlock to the scriptures or the Bible plus the Book of Mormon or all the rest of it.

This verse tells us that the faith was once for all delivered unto the saint. All right then it says one baptism and you say huh what are you going to do with that one baptism? Look around Christianity today you see

a lot of different types of baptism. Yes but fundamentally there's only one Christian baptism.

There's only one. I'm not speaking of mode or any particular church's practice but fundamentally there's only one identification with Christ in his death burial or resurrection. I don't argue with you today whether this is water baptism, believer's baptism, a baptism of the Spirit.

I believe fundamentally it's the fact that all who are saved are identified with Christ in his death burial and resurrection and that's what baptism is according to Romans 6. Then it says one God and father of all. No matter what your background is, what your cultural difference might be, yet if you acknowledge Jesus as Lord you also acknowledge one God and father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. And so that really is at the beginning of this chapter an impassioned plea to people of all different kinds of backgrounds brought together in the church to go on happily with one another, to submerge petty personal differences and to keep your eyes on the Lord and go on happily with him.

This will have a voice to those who'll be working in close contact during the next year, tendency to get on one another's nerves and all the rest to build up differences in personality and all the rest. Here's the voice of God speaking to us and saying don't look at the things that divide, don't look at the things that make us different, look at the things that unite us in Christ. All right then in verses 6 through 16 you have God's program for the expansion of the church.

The first six verses have to do with unity. These next verses have to do more with diversity and you know that's one of the thrilling things about a body. There's unity in a body and yet there's diversity in the body.

There are many different members in the body, yet only one body and it's through the proper functioning of the body and especially through the obedience of the members to the head that the body goes on as a working functioning unit. My head, when I go to walk my head tells my legs to move in a certain direction. Now if they started becoming independent and moving in opposite directions that'd be quite a problem, but the body functions because all the members obey the head and this of course is the picture as far as the church is concerned.

The body has a head, we don't do things the way we want to do them, we look to the head in heaven, yet our directions from there and the work goes on well. And so it says in verse 7, but unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Now every member of the body is in the body for some purpose.

Some have never found out what that purpose is and I strongly urge young people when I talk to them, what is your function in the body? What is the gift God has given you? Why are you there? They say I haven't a clue. Well when I don't have a clue about something I get down before the Lord and ask him why am I here? What's my function in the body of Christ? Am I a finger, a toe, a tongue? Sometimes I think I'm a tongue more than anything else. But what is the function in the body? It's a first importance that we find out.

In this verse of script it tells us first of all that every one of us does have some function, does have some gift, and then not only that but that when God gives you a gift he gives you grace to exercise that gift. And grace of course is the unmerited ability to carry it on. Isn't that a wonderful thing? I tell you it's a thrill and it thrills me as I see other members of the body of Christ doing things that I could no more do those things than fly to the moon.

Why? Because that wasn't the job that God gave me to do. That isn't my gift in the church. And if God had given me that gift he'd have given me the grace to do it too.

Don't go around in the church wishing you were somebody else. What God has called you to do that's your destiny and rejoice in it and do it to the glory of God. You know I find Christians everywhere and especially young Christians and they spend their life hiding away and wishing they were like somebody else.

It's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. Your great aim and mine should be to find out what my function in the church is and to carry it out to the glory of God and don't worry about what others are doing. Absolutely not.

All right so you have in verse 7 then the assurance of grace for every gift. The assurance of grace for every gift. Billy Graham gets up and he talks to 116,000 people at a time.

Would you like to do that? Some of you would say oh no my legs would turn to India rubber. Of course they would. Of course they'd turn to India rubber if you get up people.

Why? Because God hasn't called you to do it that's why. But if God called you to do something like that he'd give you the grace to do it too. He absolutely would.

Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. The assurance of grace for each gift. Verse 7. Then in verses 8 through 10 you have the giver of the gifts.

The giver of the gift. It says wherefore he said when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now this is a quotation from Psalm 68 18.

Psalm 68 18. And I'd like you to turn back to that Psalm just for a minute. It's always helpful to go back to the quotation and what it says.

Psalm 68 18 says thou hast ascended on high thou hast led captivity captive thou hast received gifts for men. Uh oh. Change.

Did Paul slip? No Paul didn't slip. Yea for the rebellious also that the Lord God might dwell among them. Now here the Spirit of God is addressing the Lord Jesus and says thou has descended on high thou has led captivity captive thou has received gifts for men.

Yea for the rebellious also that the Lord might dwell with them. When Paul quotes that in Ephesians chapter 4 he says when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Oh you say there was a slip of the pen.

No. What happened was this. The Lord Jesus after his mighty work at Calvary's cross was buried of course rose again from the dead ascended back to heaven.

Psalm 68 tells us that when he went back to God the Father God the Father rewarded him in a sense by giving gifts to him. Giving gifts to him. And he turned around Ephesians 4 and gave those gifts to men.

And those gifts are men who are given for the planting and establishment of the church. The planting and growth of the church. Now just so we won't go too fast wherefore he saith means wherefore it says or the Spirit of God says in the book of Psalms.

When he Christ ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now a lot of people have a problem with that expression led captivity captive. And they look at it as Christ going down into the subterranean area and leading the Old Testament Saints and taking them back to heaven.

Well that may be the meaning. Maybe when I get to heaven I'll find that was the true meaning of this passage. But I personally doubt it.

There's only one other place in the Bible where that expression led captivity captive is used. And that's in Deborah's song. The song of Deborah.

Let's see if we can just find that. Judges chapter 5 and verse 12. Judges 5 and verse 12.

The only other place where that expression lead captivity captive is found in the whole Bible. And it says awake awake Deborah. Awake awake utter a song.

Arise Barak and lead thy captivity captive thou son of Abinoam. Now when Barak was leading his captivity captive was it friends or foes? Anybody? Friends or foes? He's just been out to battle. He and Deborah had just been out to battle and they won a mighty victory.

And the word is arise arise O son of Abinoam and lead thy captivity captive. Enemy. I believe in it means the same in chapter 8. When the Lord Jesus ascended and went back to heaven he went right through the realm of the prince of the power of the air and he led his captivity captive.

It was a mighty triumph over Satan and all his hosts. And when he got there God gave him gifts and he turned around and gave those gifts to men. Verse 9 says now that he ascended what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth.

This means now this scripture in the Old Testament speaks of Christ ascending back to heaven. How could he ascend back to heaven? He had always been in heaven wasn't he? In heaven from all eternity. How could he ascend back to heaven? Well the answer is he first of all had to descend.

And my own interpretation of descending into the lower parts of the earth is not going into Hades but is coming into the world at Bethlehem. That expression lower parts of the earth is found only twice in the book of the in the Bible elsewhere. Once it could mean under the earth.

The other other time it means the valley in contrast to the mountain top. That's in Isaiah. You'll find those references incidentally in your in a margin of your Bible.

Let me give them to you. Psalm 63 9 and Isaiah 44 23. The only other places where the lower parts of the earth is used.

I don't believe it means going into hell and preaching to the spirits in prison. I believe that's something quite different. But the idea is how could Christ ascend back to heaven? Well he first of all had to come.

When did he come? He came in incarnation as the babe in Bethlehem. And verse 10 goes on to say that he that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things. What these verses teach is that the Lord Jesus Christ the ascended Christ is the giver of the gift.

This is very important. I hope you don't forget that. The gifts were given for the expansion of the church by the risen ascended glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's what verses 8 9 and 10 are demonstrating. All right then the the names of the gifts are given in verse 11. He gave some apostles some prophets some evangelists some pastors and teachers.

Now I notice our time is going by quickly so I'll have to handle it quickly too and I don't like to do that. But who are the apostles? Well the apostles were men called by God witnesses in most cases of the resurrection of Jesus sent forth with miraculous powers spokesmen for God in a very real way who went forth and preached the gospel and also established churches. Who were the prophets? Prophets were spokesmen for God.

When they spoke in the day before the New Testament was given they spoke the very voice of God. What was the function of the apostles and prophets? The function of the apostles and prophets had to do with the foundation of the church. Ephesians 2 verse 20 and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

They as it were laid the foundation. You only lay the foundation of a building once. That was their function and the foundation they laid was the teaching they gave us concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the strictest New Testament sense of the word I don't believe we have apostles and prophets today. In a secondary sense we do but in the strictest first primary meaning of the words I don't believe that they're still with us. The third gift is evangelist.

What is an evangelist? An evangelist is a man who has a gift for preaching the gospel and for leading souls to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now any of us can do the work of an evangelist but not every one of us is an evangelist. If you see a real evangelist with that gift from God you'll see a man who can deal with souls and tell just where they are spiritually.

He can tell whether they're far from the kingdom or whether they're right on the edge of stepping through the door. He has I was going to say an uncanny skill in dealing with the unsaved. That's exactly what it is.

It's something spiritual. It's something supernatural. You either have it or you don't.

Now that doesn't mean that we're not all witnesses. We are all to be witnesses. We're all to do the work of evangelist like Paul told Timothy but not every one of us is an evangelist.

And I might live to be a hundred but I'll never be an evangelist. I know that. I know that as I move around and preach the gospel and work with people.

It's just not my gift. That's all. And when I see an evangelist in action it just rejoices my heart but it doesn't make me jealous.

That isn't what God called me to do. All right then it says evangelist pastors and teachers. Pastors are men with shepherds heart.

They really love the sheep of Christ and their great desire is to be among the sheep of Christ. Going in and out among them and helping them in the things of God. You either have this gift or you don't.

We can all do this work. We can visit the sick and visit the aged and all the rest. But the gift of pastor as it's given here in the fourth chapter of Ephesians is something altogether different.

It's something that's a miraculous supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit of God. And I'm sure you've all seen men like this and know men like this. And closely linked with the work of pastors the work of a teacher.

And a teacher is a man who can take this the word of God and by the spirit of God break it down so that it's understandable to the people of God. Other people can teach the Bible but that man that has the gift of teaching is just something different. Dr. Barnhouse in the United States.

I don't know if any of you ever heard him or came in contact with him. What a gift but teaching. Why when you got through your soul was just enraptured as he took you through the word of God and many others whom you could name.

Now the key verse is verse 12 which gives you the purpose of the gifts the purpose of the gift. And this has been one of the verses that has meant most to me in my study of the New Testament Church. Why were the gifts given? It says in the King James Version.

I'm going to read it just the way it is here and then show you how it should be changed. It says for the perfecting of the Saints comma for the work of the ministry comma for the edifying of the body of Christ. And when you first read that verse you'd think that there were there was a threefold purpose for the gifts.

One, two, three. One for the perfecting of the Saints. Two for the work of the ministry.

Three for the edifying of the body of Christ. And that completely misses the point. If you see that divided into three separate purposes for the gift it becomes meaningless and unintelligible.

The revised version and probably some other versions that you are following today gives the true meaning and I hope you see it this morning. If you don't get anything else out of our passage this morning I hope you see this. The gifts were given for the perfecting of the Saints unto the work of the ministry unto the edifying of the body of Christ.

Why were the gifts given? To build up the Saints to do the work of the ministry. For the building up and maturing of the body of Christ. Who's to do the work of the ministry? The gift.

That isn't what it teaches. The purpose of the gifts is to come in, see souls saved, see them taught in the Word of God so that they in turn will go out and carry on the work of the Lord. What I'd like to suggest this morning to you is the gifts are not meant to be indispensable.

They have a function to fulfill, they fulfill that function, they move on and the Saints carry on. Isn't that what the verse teaches? Does somebody have another version of the Bible, maybe Berkeley, a revised standard that they'd be willing to read verse 12 from it? Anybody? No? Would you read it please, verse 12? Yeah, well they carry the four there and it just depends on how it's punctuated. Are there commas between it? Revised standard, I'm surprised at that.

What's that? How do they do it? Good, that's exactly what it means. Exactly what it means. The gifts were given for building up the Saints to do the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Now that means that people should not become perpetually dependent upon the gifts and that's what's happened in Christendom, isn't it? That's what's happened in Christendom. Here's a man and he can hold the people spellbound with his preaching and week after week they go and taste his sermons and go all about through their secular work during the week and nothing ever happens. They're not out witnessing for

the Lord and they say I just adore his preaching.

That was never the intention. The purpose of the gifts is to build up the people of God for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ. Which leads me to say this, as long as people have a perverted view of the gifts that Christ has given to the church, the world will never be evangelized the way God intended it to be.

Until the vision of Ephesians 4 becomes more widespread in the church than it is today, the world will never be evangelized. It cannot be evangelized by a certain class of people, call them what you will. It's got to be evangelized by the church, by all the members of the body functioning as God intended them to function.

I wonder if I've made myself clear there. Verse 12, for the perfecting of the Saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ. He said this is the way the body of Christ will grow.

This is the way the church will expand on earth, get the Saints to work. And incidentally ministry here is something very unofficial. When we think of a ministry, we think of a of a separate class of people who've been to seminary and all the rest.

Forget it. Ministry in the New Testament means service. A minister in the New Testament is a servant.

That's what the word means. And it's terrible how the heart of man immediately wants to invest that person with certain privileges and titles and all the rest. That's not the teaching of this passage.

Ministry is service. And this teaches that every believer should be a witness. Every believer should be going forth with the word of God, bar none.

Thank God it isn't left to O.M. If it were, never be able to do it. Just the thing is fantastic. But go and see people saved.

See them established in the faith. Send them forth with the word and you'll soon see the job done. All right, how long? Verse 13, the duration of the gifts.

The duration of the gifts. Till we all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Christ has a body here on earth.

He doesn't want it to be a dwarfed body. He doesn't want it to be a malnourished body. Supposing you were the Lord Jesus, what kind of a body would you like to have on earth? You'd like to have a healthy body.

You'd like to have a functioning body on earth. You'd like to have a body that's growing and developing and progressing, not one that's stunted. And this is the way.

Get the members to exercise themselves in the things of God and the body will grow. And so this process that Paul is describing in Ephesians chapter 4 is going to go on until the body is complete, until it's full-grown. And that's the meaning here.

Mature. Perfect in the New Testament doesn't mean sinless, but it means full-grown, mature, grown up in the things of God. All right, then you have the consequences of not exercising the gifts.

Verse 14, the consequences of not exercising the gifts, that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie and wait to deceive. What does that mean? Well, it means if you have people who are professing Christians or Christians and they're carrying out their function in the body of Christ as is set forth in this portion of the Word of God, then they become ripe prey for every crazy doctrine that comes along. Is that true? Well, it's absolutely true.

I'd like to tell you today that the cults get most of their adherence, not from raw heathenism, not from people with no church background, the cults get most of their adherence today from people who once had a profession of Christianity, who came from some of the great denominational churches but never really were let on in the things of God. They were sermon tasters. One day somebody came along at their door and knocked on the door and peddled this pernicious doctrine and they said, well, he talks about God and he talks about Jesus and he talks about the Bible, he must be a good man.

That's what they say. They never had their senses exercised to discern between things. They've never grown in the things of the Lord.

And the next thing you know, wham, they're right in the cult. And the next thing you know, they put them to work in there and develop them. And instead of carrying on for Jesus Christ, they're carrying on for the devil and for sin and for ultimate destruction.

Well, that's it. That's it. That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men.

So what's the slight of men? Well, it's, it's the hocus pocus that they come along with, you know, they're masters at words and they're, they're shifty and they're slippery and oily, these cultists. And, uh, they, they capture the unwary, cunning craftiness whereby they lie and wait to see. But then finally in verses 15 and 16, you have the proper functioning of the gifts.

But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ from whom a whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supply of the, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, make an increase of the body under the edifying of itself in love. What does that mean? Well, it means that the body grows through exercise. You see that little baby in the crib and my, you say all that wasted energy, the arms are flailing around and the feet are kicking and the lungs are working overtime as the baby is yelling and shouting and screaming.

And you think, I want an enormous waste of energy that could only be directed into constructive channel. That is, that is constructive. That's the way the baby's developing.

That's the way the baby's growing. It's all very good and all, and all the members of that little body are being used and the more they use, the more it grows. Isn't that right? Of course, it's true spiritually too.

It's true spiritually. You get people who are exercised about the things of the Lord, the body of Christ grow. You get people who sit back in their comfortable pews and compare one sermon with another.

No growth there. No growth there. This is just it.

If I were to put my arm in a sling for 11 months and then at the end of 11 months try to use it, I wouldn't be able to use it. We just take these things for granted. We go throughout life and we're exercising and

walking and talking and all the rest.

And it's all very wonderful. We don't realize this is God's purpose for the church. And so in verses six through 16, you have God's program for the expansion of the church.

First of all, in verse seven, you have the assurance that grace will be given to you for whatever your gift may be. Secondly, in verses eight through 10, you have the giver of the gifts. Who? The ascended, risen, glorified Christ at God's right hand.

Then you have the names of the gifts. Verse 11, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Then you have the purpose of the gifts.

Verse 12, the crucial key verse for building up the saints to do the work of the ministry that the body of Christ might grow and develop. Then you have the duration of the gifts. Verse 13, till the church is taken home, raptured home to be with the Savior forever with the Lord.

The consequences of not exercising the gift. The body becomes dwarfed and deformed and the world is not evangelized. Verses 15 and 16, the proper functioning of the gift.

Each gift going to the Lord, finding out what do you have me to do in the church? Then carrying it out. The body of Christ will grow. New Testament assemblies planted all over the face of the earth, a permanent testimony to the name of the Lord.

And then them fanning out with the word like it happened at Thessalonica. May the Lord bless this study to our hearts this morning. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for thy precious word.

We know that we have our own schemes and plans and desires. We know that nothing can come up to thy divine plan. We do pray today for the church, the body of Christ worldwide.

We realize that many members of that church today are in prison, in distress, in trial, in difficulty. And Lord, how we would commend them to thee. We ask today for the whole household of faith.

We would embrace as brothers and sisters in Christ, all who truly belong to thee. Oh God, how we pray thee for a fresh baptism of the truth of the New Testament church in this world of ours, that Christians might not be complacent and just willing to drift along as church members, but that they might get into the thick of the battle and exercise their God-given function that the world may hear in our generation. For the glory of our great Savior, we pray in his worthy name.

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