

Studies in Ephesians - Part 4

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity in the church and God's program for the growth of the church through gifts, highlighting the sevenfold unity and the source of the gifts as the risen head of the church.

Duration: 53:51

Scripture: Ephesians 4:7-10, Ephesians 4:12, 2 Timothy 2:2

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker outlines the structure of the book of Romans, dividing it into two parts. The first three chapters are referred to as the 'doctrines of grace,' which explain what believers are in Christ. The last three chapters, from chapter four to six, are called the 'duty of grace,' focusing on how believers should live in light of their position in Christ. The speaker emphasizes that God's purpose is for believers' practice to align with their standing, although perfect alignment will only be achieved when believers see Jesus face to face. The sermon also highlights the importance of passing on the teachings of the faith to faithful men, following the example of the Apostle Paul and Timothy.

Transcript

Ephesians chapter four, please. Fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We'll just read the first sixteen verses.

Ephesians four, verses one through sixteen. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all loneliness 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 gifts of Christ. Wherefore, he said, 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, unto the measure of the

stature of the fullness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children taught to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to be seized, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, make an increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

So I think we'll just stop there because we probably will not get further than that tonight. Now, just by way of review, we might look at the outline of chapter three. We notice that chapter three was divided into two parts.

First of all, there was a section on the revelation of the great truth on the ministry. First of all, it was revealed through a divine. Secondly, we define the mystery, first of all, in general, as a hitherto unrevealed truth.

But this particular mystery was Jew and Gentile formed into one body with the risen Christ as the head. We saw that its messenger was the Apostle Paul and that the message was given to him by grace he didn't deserve. His purpose was that now, under the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.

And then we notice Paul's prayer for power in verses 14 through 19. A fourfold dimension, the breadth and length and depth and height. And we suggested that the breadth referred to as taking in of Jew and Gentile into the Church and the length represented the time from eternity past to eternity future.

The depth was the depth to which Christ came to win us to himself, where we were dead in trespasses and in sins, and the height is seated with Christ in the heavenly. Then he also prayed that the Ephesians might know the love of Christ with passive knowledge and that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. And the Apostle closes the chapter with an inscription of praise to God for his grace.

Now we'll just turn the blackboard over and write down our outline. Now you'll remember at the outset we suggested the epistle was divided into two parts. The first three chapters we call the doctrines of grace.

And you'll remember that the division of the epistle comes here at chapter 4 and so we call this Roman numeral 2, duties of grace. Chapters 4 through 6, the duties of grace. In other words, the first three chapters tell what we are in Christ and the last three chapters tell what we ought to be in ourselves.

God's purpose is that our state should increasingly correspond to our standing. God's purpose is that the believer's practice should become more and more like his position. Now our practice never will be perfectly like our position until we see that but as long as we live we should be exercised to become more and more like him.

Now in chapter 4 you have first of all a plea for unity based upon a sevenfold unity. And that verse is 1 through 6. Now we might just look at those and perhaps you'll want to list those, that sevenfold unity as we come to it under that heading. Plea for unity based on a sevenfold unity.

Paul says, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord. Now this is interesting. In verse 1 of chapter 3 he said, for this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus.

And now he says, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord. Now he uses the expression prisoner of Christ Jesus in the section of the epistle having to do with our position. Remember we're seated with Christ in the heavenly.

But here where it becomes a matter of practice, a matter of everyday living, he speaks of himself as the prisoner of the Lord. And of course that word Lord brings before us our subjection and our obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord means master.

And it's quite significant that even such an expression should be changed when he comes to this portion of the epistle. He says, I the prisoner of the Lord beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. Now it's characteristic of the grace of Christ shining out in the apostle Paul that he doesn't command them.

He beseeches them. In a sense he could command them. The things that he says are the very commandments of the Lord.

And yet grace so shines out even in his ministry that he uses the word beseech. Now the exhortation is, you have been called to a wonderful calling. Now walk worthy of it.

It's a good thing chapters 4, 5, and 6 don't come first. It's a good thing our standing isn't dependent upon our obedience, isn't it? It's a good thing that our Christianity isn't dependent on what we do. No, God puts us in the position and then tells us to walk in the light of the position he puts us in.

I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. So apparently the Lord knew that when he called people of such diverse temperaments, backgrounds, nationalities into the church that there was going to be need of grace, need of lowliness, need of longsuffering, and need of meekness.

And so hence the exhortation. Verse 3, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Now God never tells us in the word of God to establish a unity in the church.

He has already done that. And the part of the Christian is to recognize the unity that already exists. And dear friends, it's one of the most difficult things today to do.

A very difficult thing today for people to witness to the unity of the body of Christ. But thank God it isn't impossible. And all over the world there are people who are seeking to do that very thing.

To show to the world a testimony that all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are one. And a refusal to recognize anything that would be a denial of the unity of the spirit. Now Paul has a sevenfold basis for this appeal.

Why should we endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit? Well there are seven reasons. First of all, there is only one body. All true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we have said, are members of the church.

I might just picture it to you this way. Supposing this were to picture the church universal, composed of all those who have been sent by the precious blood of Christ. Doesn't make any difference what their affiliations on earth.

Now God's purpose is that there should be a miniature on the earth to the truth of the church universal. And every local church on the earth should be a miniature of the church universal. And no local church

should deny, by practice or precept, any of the great truths of the church universal.

Now you say, what are some of those truths of the universal church? Christ is the head of the church. Now nothing that a local church ever does or says should contradict or deny the truth of the church universal. If Christ is the head of the church, then we must carry that truth out in Christ.

Truth number two, all believers are members of the church. All believers are members of the church. The local church should seek to carry that out.

Welcoming into its fellowship all who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, who are holy in life, not under discipline from some other church. No unbelievers are members of the church universal. Well then the local church should seek into its fellowship any who are unbelievers.

All right, the Holy Spirit has been given by God to govern the church universal. That is to direct the worship and the service of those in it. And every local church should seek to give liberty to the Holy Spirit to direct the activities of the local church.

Gifts have been given to the church universal that we're going to read about tonight. Opportunity should be given for the exercise of those gifts. All members of the church universal are priests of God.

Well then that should be recognized here in the local church. And in every great truth that you have in the New Testament concerning the church universal, it should be carried into practice by the local church. So that when the world looks on a local church, it will see a true representation of the body of Christ.

Now of course not everyone in the body of Christ would be in this particular local church. But that particular local church should give witness to the great truth. Now is that what we have today in Christendom? I'm afraid if we were to draw what we have today in Christendom, it would look something like this.

We have all kinds of variations of it. We're reading here there is one body. Look about you in Christendom tonight.

Is that what you find? Of course you don't. You find Christians calling themselves by all kinds of names. And refusing fellowship to those who do not bear the name.

Well I just suggest that for your consideration, that there is only one body. And that every local church should seek to carry out that precious truth. And refuse to deny it.

People say, well what are you? Well the answer is, I'm a Christian. Oh they say, I know, but you have to be something else. Well I am something else.

I'm a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh but they say, you don't understand, that isn't enough. Oh isn't it? What else do you want me to be? Well you have to belong to something.

Well I do. I belong to the church. I belong to Christ, the head of the church.

Yes, they say that. Not satisfied yet. They want you to take some ground that scripture doesn't give you.

And that I steadfastly refuse to do. Because the moment I do that, I'm on vulnerable ground. Christ has put me in the church.

I'm one with all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I refuse to adopt any label that will separate me from any who love his precious name. Now I believe that God is calling his people back to this truth today.

And thank God for every evidence of a return to it. There is one body, verse 4, and one spirit. And of course this spirit is the Holy Spirit.

Only one Holy Spirit leading the church in its prayers and praises. Even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. Now here again you have the word hope.

And characteristically in the New Testament, the hope refers to the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. And all true believers in Christ are looking for his coming. Now a lot of us who are Christians don't agree on the exact details of his coming.

But that isn't the point here. And those little minor details shouldn't break fellowship. The great thing is, are you looking for his return from heaven? Yes I am.

That's a mark of a true believer in the Savior. When I hear people denying the fact that he's coming again, I begin to wonder. One body, one spirit, that's the Holy Spirit.

One hope of your calling, that is the coming of Christ, taking his people to be with himself. One Lord. And here again the word Lord means masses.

One we look to for our direction, for our guidance. One faith. And that's the Christian faith, isn't it? It speaks of the faith once for all delivered unto the saints.

And it's comprehended in this book we hold in our hands tonight. One faith. The word of God given to us by the Lord himself.

One baptism. Oh. Is there just one baptism? I thought there were many.

I thought some sprinkled and some immersed and I thought there was a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Well, right enough, there's quite a bit of confusion about this particular verse. Some folks believe this is a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Others believe it's Christian baptism. I tend to believe the latter, that it refers to Christian baptism. And you say, well there are many different kinds of baptism practiced today.

Yes there are, but there's only one in the New Testament. Only one in the New Testament. You say, well why isn't it baptism of the Spirit? Well, the only reason I would suggest it isn't baptism of the Spirit is that the Spirit is already mentioned in verse 4. One Spirit.

And it seems to me it would be rather duplicating to mention him again in verse 5. But I would suggest it's Christian baptism. That rite by which we publicly identify ourselves with Christ in his death and burial. As you read in Romans chapter 6. But if you disagree with me, that's perfectly all right.

Verse 6. One God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. Now Paul appeals on these sevenfold facts for unity among the people of God. Now the word of God never insists that we be uniform in all that we believe.

There are a lot of things in the Christian faith that Christians will never agree on. But there are great fundamental truths that all Christians should agree on. And here you have them.

The great essentials. The great fundamentals of the faith. And these form the basis of fellowship.

Do they not? And so you have first of all then a plea for unity based upon a sevenfold unity. Now the next thing we have in this chapter is God's program for the growth of the church. God's program for the growth of the church from verse 7 to 16.

Verses 7 to 16. And you'll find as we read these verses that the subject of these verses is gift. The way God has ordained that the church should grow is through gifts the Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church.

And so we'll just put down first of all the source of the gift. Number one, the source of the gift. Verses 7 through 10.

All right, now let's just look at it verse by verse. It says, But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Now in verse 4 we read there's one body.

And scripture in 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that we're all members of that one body. Every believer is a member of the body of Christ. And that means that every believer has a function to perform in the body.

Just as every member of my body has a very real function. When it's gone, it's missed. So every member of the body of Christ has a function to perform.

Now verse 7 teaches that God not only gives you a function to perform, but he gives you the grace with which to perform. Unto every one of us is given grace. And grace here means undeserved ability.

According to the measure of the gift of Christ. Some gifts require more grace than others. Well, if he's given you a gift, he'll give you grace commensurate with the gift.

So there's no need to say, oh, there's nothing I can do in the church. I'm just a little nobody. Nothing was ever further from the truth.

Every one of us who is a believer should be exercised to know what our function in the church is. And we should always remember that it isn't the most spectacular gifts that are the most important. Not at all.

Oftentimes the most lowly, the most menial service is that which is of greatest price in the sight of God. I don't suppose you here have ever heard of a man named B.C. Greenman. But he was a devoted servant of the Lord who labored for many years in Canada and the United States.

And after he had been serving the Lord for some time in Canada, he got very discouraged. And one night after his meeting, he decided to give the whole thing up and just go back home. He was through.

And so he was walking along the highway at night, no public transportation, and he was walking toward his home. And he saw a light in the distance, and he came nearer, and it was just a little humble cottage. And when he got to the cottage, he saw the light was coming from the shed at the back of the cottage.

And as he got closer, he saw past midnight, here was a dear mother out doing the washing for her family, working into the wee hours of the morning to keep her little family going. And as B.C. Greenman passed

the window, he heard her singing, Lamb of God, our souls adore thee, while upon thy face we gaze. And he said to himself, B.C. Greenman, you're a coward.

And he never did leave the work of the Lord. Now he never knew, or that woman never knew, the ministry she had as a member of the body of Christ that night. She never knew what she was accomplishing by just going about her humble duties in the home.

God had a discouraged servant, an Elijah, going by outside, and he heard her singing, which he didn't have too much to sing about, humanly speaking, and he kept on in the work of the Lord. It says, verse 7, therefore, but unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith.

Now, just in your thinking, perhaps you'd like to change that to, wherefore it saith. What? Who saith? Well, wherefore it saith in the book of Psalms, because that's where this quotation comes from. Wherefore it saith in Psalm 68, 18, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

Now, this is a very difficult portion of scripture, and let me just seek to explain it in this way. The subject is gifts, and the subject of these immediate verses is the source of the gifts. Who gives gifts to the church? Is it the ordination committee of the church? No.

Paul's going to show here that only the risen head of the church can give a gift. Men might educate, train, do everything else with their fellow men, but in the long run, only Christ can raise up a gift for the church. So it says, Paul says, I'm going to quote from the book of Psalms, strangely enough.

And back in the book of Psalms it says, wherefore when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and received gifts for men. That's the way it reads in the book of Psalms. And the thought is this, the Lord Jesus Christ is depicted by the psalmist as going up to heaven, having triumphed over Satan and his cohort, that's what it means he led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.

That is, as a reward for his mighty conquest, God gave Christ gifts for men. He led captivity captive. We could use the illustration, as we have done, of the missionaries in the Philippines during the last war.

They were held in Japanese prisons in the Philippines as captives. And then the American troops came in and they broke that captivity. They took the Japanese jailers and led captivity captive.

Well, that's what the Lord Jesus did. He defeated Satan and all his hosts at Calvary, and ascended up and received gifts for men. Now Paul says here in verse 8, wherefore it says in the book of Psalms, when he, Christ, ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

He received gifts from the Father for men and gave them to men. Verse 9, now that he ascended, and perhaps you'd want to write down that this means now, when it says that he ascended, when it says in the book of Psalms that he ascended into heaven, what is it but that he also descended? What does it mean but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? And the thought is this, the psalmist is speaking about Christ ascending up into heaven. How could Christ ascend up into heaven? Wasn't he always in heaven? Didn't he dwell with God the Father in heaven? Well, Paul says that when the psalmist speaks about him ascending, doesn't it mean that he first of all had to come down? And of course that's what happened at Bethlehem.

You'd never know it just by reading the Old Testament, would you? You'd never know it just by reading in the book of Psalms, but it necessitates that. Verse 9, now when it says that he Christ ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended previously into the lower parts of the earth? Now I know that many people make the lower parts of the earth here to mean Hades and Sheol and a lot of other things, but I don't believe it means that at all. I believe it means the surface of the earth and perhaps the grave, but I believe it refers primarily to his incarnation.

That same expression, the lower parts of the earth, is used in Isaiah 44 and 23, and it can only mean the surface of the earth there. You might just turn to that, Isaiah 44 and 23. It couldn't possibly mean Sheol or Hades.

It says in verse 23 of Isaiah 44, Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Shout, ye lower parts of the earth. Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forests and every tree therein.

Now what Isaiah is doing is calling upon the mountains, the forests, the trees, the valleys, the lower parts of the earth, to break forth into singing, the Lord hath done it. And it couldn't mean Hades there, and I would suggest that in Ephesians 4 it refers to the Lord Jesus condescendingly coming down to this earth, the lower parts of the earth. Verse 10, He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.

Now Paul is seeking to emphasize in this portion that it's the risen, ascended, glorified Christ who gives gifts to the Church. Now let me just go over that again, just so that it will be clear in our minds before we proceed to the next point. But unto every one, verse 7, unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

That says that if the Lord gives you a work to perform in the Church, and He does, He gives you the ability, the strength, the grace to do it. And all He wants is obedience and willingness of your part. Wherefore it says in the book of Psalms, when Christ ascended on high, He led captivity captive.

He broke the power of Satan, leading him captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now when it says that Christ ascended, what does it mean but that He must first have descended into the lower parts of the earth, that is the surface of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.

And so the source of the gift is the risen Lord Jesus Himself. Now next in verse 11 you have the names of the gifts. And that will be number 2, verse 11, the names of the gifts.

It says, and He gave some apostles. Now you notice these are special gifts that He gave for the growth of the Church. He gave some apostles.

And we pointed out previously that these apostles were connected with the foundation of the Church, the apostles and the prophets. Now, chapter 2, verse 20, connected with the foundation of the Church. The apostles sent ones carrying forth the message, establishing churches of prophets, spokesmen for God, speaking by divine revelation.

We believe that the apostles and prophets, New Testament prophets, are not with us today. We now have the complete word of God, which was not in existence at that time. Now the other three gifts, the other gifts we do have, He gave some evangelists.

And the evangelist is the man who goes forth today with the evangel, the good news of salvation. It's a special gift. Not all are evangelists.

All can do the work of an evangelist, as Timothy was exhorted to do, but not all are evangelists. An evangelist has a real perception. He can speak to a troubled soul.

God gives him the ability to diagnose the case, to say the right thing, to lead the soul to Christ. He can discern people's attitudes and where they stand, and he can give the suited message. He gave some evangelists and some pastors and teachers.

Now, you'll notice that the word some comes before apostles, and it comes before prophets, and it comes before evangelists. But it doesn't come before teachers. And a lot of Bible students feel that this expression, pastors and teachers, refers to the same person.

The pastor, of course, has the idea of shepherding, and the teacher has the idea of making clear the word of the Lord to the people of God. Explaining it, expounding it, making it clear to their understanding and to their spiritual perception. Be that as it may, perhaps pastors is a separate gift.

I'll leave that for your consideration. Pastors is used in the plural. You'll notice not one pastor over a church, but pastors in the church.

And so those are the names of the gifts God has given for the up-building of the church. Now notice in verse 12, the work of the gifts. And this is very important.

The work of the gifts. Verse 12. Now, when you read this verse in the King James Version, it sounds as if there were three different reasons why the gifts were given.

Notice. One, for the first, don't write this down, because I'm going to seek to show you that it isn't the exact meaning. One, for the perfecting of the saints, comma.

Two, for the work of the ministry, comma. Three, for the edifying of the body of Christ, period. Or colon.

Now, in the original language of the New Testament, there are no punctuation marks. These punctuation marks were put in by the translators of the Bible. And in general, they're accurate, and just the way we would want them.

But I'd like to suggest to you that they confuse the meaning of the passage here. And if you look at almost any other version of the Bible, you'll find an important change here. For instance, if you look at John Nelson Darby's translation of the Bible, you'll find it reads this way.

He gave the gift, verse 12, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. Unto the edifying of the body of Christ. Does somebody have a Darby here tonight, just to check on that? Or a revised version, or any other version of the Bible? We all, King James, go through Bibles.

Let me just write that down. For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. Unto the edifying of the body of Christ.

Now, if you check the revised, or Weymouth, or Darby, or I think almost any other version, you'll find this change made. Unto the edifying of the body of Christ. Now, it's very important for this reason.

According to this verse, the purpose of the gift is not that the saints of God should be perpetually dependent upon this. But rather is that the saints of God might themselves be built up in the faith. Now please, when you think of that word ministry, don't think of public ministry necessarily.

Ministry is service in the New Testament. And the thought is that the saints of God should all of them be sole winners. The saints of God should all be Bible students.

The saints of God should all be built up in their most holy faith. Now perhaps I could just illustrate it this way, to make clear the point. Let us say here is a gift.

A gift Christ gave to the church, a man, because the gifts are men in this passage. And here are the dear people of God sitting in their seats. And they come year in and year out, and they enjoy the ministry of that man of God.

We'll presume he's a man of God. And that's all that ever happens. They come Lord's Day, they come midweek, they sit and enjoy the ministry.

They become servant-tasted, but nothing ever comes of it. Now I would suggest the word of God never teaches that. Never teaches that at all.

It never teaches that the people of God should be perpetually dependent upon the gifts that Christ has given to the church. Upon any one gift, or any group of gifts. Rather, I would like to suggest that what this verse in Ephesians teaches is this.

Here's a gift, and here are the people of God. They come, and they sit under his ministry. It seems to be apocryphal, they sat in Ephesus.

But they were being built up in their most holy faith. Then what happens? Well, his man goes off here. And he seeks to minister to others.

Not officially. Perhaps over the back fence. And this one goes off here.

And perhaps he has a Bible class in his home. And he seeks to minister to others. And this man goes off and does the same thing.

And you see the possibilities go through. This is like the chain reaction that you have in connection with atomic energy. I think I read about it.

Supposing all of these people stay built up in their most holy faith. Exactly the way the Lord intended. For the perfecting of the faith unto the work of the ministry.

Now please turn to 2 Timothy 2.2. In this same connection. 2 Timothy 2.2. Paul writing to Timothy, and he says, And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit now to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Now look carefully and tell me how many generations of Christians you can find in that verse.

Can you find a son there? Yes, I can find a son. Can you find a daddy there? Yes, I can find a daddy. Can you find a grandfather in that verse? How far can you go? Well, I think if you go far enough you'll find there's even a great grandfather there.

His name is the Apostle Paul. Let me illustrate 2 Timothy 2.2 this way. Here's Paul.

He says to Timothy, And the things thou hast heard of me. We'll just put Timothy down here. Among many witnesses.

Not only Timothy, but Paul entrusted these precious truths to others. The things thou hast heard of me among many witnesses. What? The same commit thou to faithful men.

My blackboard isn't going to be long enough, I warn you. Paul, Timothy, and many witnesses. The same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.

And this is the divine way, I say, for propagating the Christian faith. Now, I couldn't possibly list the fourth generation on that blackboard. In fact, if that method were followed, the whole population of the earth as it is today would be reached for Christ in 30 years.

That's quite a few people. Now, in case you don't think this is the divine method, I'd like to suggest that the reason those of you who are Christians here tonight are here because of this method. Because the Lord Jesus Christ himself spent a night in prayer once.

And the next day he chose 12 disciples, just 12. And he taught them, he trained them, and he sent them forth. And you and I, saved by his grace, are here tonight because of the efforts of those 12 disciples.

Now, the Lord knows which is the best way. What has happened today? Well, I'll tell you what has happened today. I have a very good business.

I'm just speaking metaphorically. And things are going very good and I'm very prosperous. And frankly, I don't have time to study the word of God.

And I'm really too busy to witness for Jesus Christ. But I'll tell you what I do. Here's a spiritual man in the church.

Look, I'll just pay you to perform my religious duties for me. You take care of it for me, will you? See? And that's what has grown up down through the years. People shirking their own duties that are given to them in the word of God, and saying, well, I'll pay somebody else to do it.

Well, dear friends, you won't before the judgment seat is crossed. You cannot pass off that responsibility. God wills that every Christian be a student of the Bible.

Every Christian be engaged in ministry. Not publicly, but over the backbench, at the workbench, in the office, at school, spreading the faith in the many dear servants of Christ today occupying that first position. I've showed on the board.

Come and they say, what can I do to get my people to pray, to get my people to study the word of God, to get my people to take an active interest? Well, the answer is they're paying somebody else to do that. But they don't want to be bothered. But you can't improve on God's way.

Now, what would happen if this system were followed? What would happen? Well, I'll tell you what would happen. The faith of God would be built up in their faith. And that's what it says here, the latter part of this verse, Ephesians chapter 4, says, for the perfecting of the faith unto the work of the ministry.

Who is to do the work of the ministry? The saints are to do it, under the edifying of the body of Christ. And edifying means built up not only numerically, but spiritually as well. Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now, the church is the body of Christ. And one day we're going to be with Christ and be His complete body. Be exactly what we should be for Christ.

And that is the goal toward which we're pressing. And this process should be going on today with that goal in view. Now, if you don't follow this plan, and you make yourself perpetually dependent upon a man or a group of men, the result is that the saints themselves close the Bible.

It becomes a closed book. And they become the willing prey of every kind of false wind of doctrine that might come along. If you go to the false cults today, the cults that deny the Lord Jesus Christ, and start interviewing the people that are members of that cult, one of the sad things you'll find is that they were formerly in so-called evangelical denominations.

It's a sad, sad thing. But they didn't take this, they didn't follow the pattern laid down for them in the Word of God, and they became prey to these false cults. It says in verse 14 that, we henceforth be no more children taught to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait.

As long as Satan can close the Word of God, he has achieved his objective, and he can lead souls into all kinds of error. But if every Christian is exercising his responsibility toward the Lord, if every Christian is studying the Word of God, and when he hears something that doesn't sound true to the Word of God, he challenges it, and he will not listen to it, then Satan is defeated. Verse 15, but speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

And it does the same for exercise in this way. Each one, individually, we grow up into Christ. That is, into his likeness.

Just think of it. Here is my body, and here is my head. And the Lord Jesus Christ says, You are my body, speaking to Christians.

Now, the body of Christ on earth should represent him. My body is the vehicle through which I manifest myself, the vehicle through which I act, the vehicle through which I work. And that's exactly what he wants his body to be.

And he wants it to be an accurate presentation of himself to the world. And it is only so when we do the work which he wants us to do. But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working and the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

What does that mean? Well, let me just use this illustration. Here's my body. Supposing I put this arm in a sling for the next ten years.

And then I try to use it at the end of ten years. What'll happen? That arm will atrophy. I'll lose the use of it.

Now, we're all members of the body of Christ. And the verse tells us, that last verse we read tells us, that Christ has put the body together. He's linked the members of the body together and he has a work for them to perform.

And it's as all members of the body of Christ are exercised to perform their function, that the body increases, both numerically and spiritually. Now, once again, I say you can't improve on God's method. I'm thankful to say that a lot of people throughout the world are seeing this precious truth and seeing that God's purpose is for the church to be self-propagating.

Now, this same picture I showed you with regard to individuals applies to little churches, too. Here's a little church. A representation of the body of Christ.

Well, it too should have a desire to see itself propagated. Perhaps a mission work here. Perhaps a mission work here.

A mission, another one, into the surrounding area. Well, is that what's happened? No, no, we're very comfortable. Please don't bother us.

But Paul said to the Thessalonians, For from you sounded forth the word of the Lord into the entire surrounding region. And I believe that's God's method with churches. Planted churches.

Paul went and planted churches in key centers and then from those churches went out little independent assemblies, little independent churches throughout the entire region. And so that's God's program. I think perhaps there's a point we didn't put on here.

The work of the gift, verse 12. The ultimate object of the gift. The ultimate object of the gift.

That is the building up of the body of Christ so that it will be complete and mature and perfect. And that's the ultimate object of their work. Verses 13 through 16.

Now that word perfect means mature. It means full grown. It's the opposite of being children.

God wants all his saints to be that. He wants them to be full grown. To be in the word and to be useful for him.

Now the pathetic thing about this little picture that I do here of the gift with all his dear people sitting under him is that these people become just like the Dead Sea. They're a dear Christian people and they might be well taught in the word of God. The Dead Sea is fed by the Jordan River.

And the Jordan River flows into it all the time but there's no way that's why it's dead. Because it's all intake and no outgo. And the members of the body die spiritually.

And the trouble is that at the end of ten years these saints are no more able to stand in their own feet and carry on than when they started. And if this man leaves, another important man another man with a name has to come and take his place. Well it isn't God's will.

God's will is that the saints might be built up to carry on the work of the ministry and thus spread the Christian faith. Now I've transgressed five minutes tonight. I hope you'll excuse me.

We'll just close with a word of prayer.

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