

LESSON TEN

**THE WAY TO BE PERFECTED
&
ARRIVING AT THREE THINGS**

Scripture Reading:

Eph. 4:1 I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called,

Eph. 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love,

Eph. 4:3 Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace:

Eph. 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

Eph. 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism;

Eph. 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Eph. 4:7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Eph. 4:8 Therefore the Scripture says, "Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men."

Eph. 4:9 (Now this, "He ascended," what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?

Eph. 4:10 He who descended, He is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.)

Eph. 4:11 And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers,

Eph. 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,

Eph. 4:13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Questions:

Section 1

1. From Eph. 4:7, how do we see that all the saints are gifts who have received grace for the Body?
2. What is the work of the ministry? Is it the work of the gifted members or of the saints?
3. What is the natural concept regarding the church's members? How is it contrary to God's view of the church?

Section 2

1. For the building up of the Body of Christ, what is the primary function of the gifted, perfected saints?
2. According to God's economy, what are the two aspects in perfecting the saints? How does this differ from perfecting someone at work/school?

3. Share with your group some experiences you've had of being perfected or of perfecting others in the Lord's way.

Section 3

1. What does the phrase "until we all arrive" in Ephesians 4:13 indicate?
2. What does it mean to "arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God?"

Section 4

1. What is the difference between the oneness of reality and of practicality?
2. What is the sign that people are fully matured?
3. What does it mean to arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ? What is the way?

[Section 1]

THE WAY TO BE PERFECTED

In 4:12 Paul speaks of the “perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” In this message we shall consider the way to be perfected.

GRACE ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF THE GIFT OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:7 says, “But to each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” Notice that in this verse Paul does not say, “to each one of you”; he says, “to each one of us.” This indicates that Paul was including himself. He did not put himself in a special category, in a category separate from that of the other saints.

Grace has been given to each of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Each member of our physical body has a certain measure. For example, the measure of the ear is of one size, and the measure of the shoulder is of another. The words “the measure of the gift of Christ” refer to the size of a member of Christ’s Body. With every member there is a certain size, a certain measure. Just as our blood supplies the members of our body according to their size, grace also is given to each member according to its size. Although there is more blood in the shoulder than in the ear, the quality of the blood is the same. Just as blood is the life supply to our physical body, so grace is the life supply to the members in the Body of Christ. Praise the Lord that all the saints are gifts of Christ to whom grace has been given!

THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Since verses 9 and 10 are parenthetical, verse 11 is the continuation of verse 8. Verse 11 says, “And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers.” As verse 12 makes clear, these have been given for the “perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” According to grammar, the phrase “unto the building up of the Body of Christ” is in apposition to the phrase “unto the work of the ministry.” This indicates that both phrases refer to the same thing. Hence, the work of ministry is the building up of the Body.

The apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints unto the work of ministry. Whose work is this—the work

of the gifted ones mentioned in verse 11, or the work of the saints? Is it the work of the perfecting ones, or the work of the perfected ones? The answer is that it is the work both of the perfecting ones and the perfected ones. The building up of the Body is not only the work of the apostles and the other gifted ones, but also the work of all the saints. I believe that the work of ministry in verse 12 refers more to the work of the saints than it does to the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

The work of building the meeting hall in Anaheim is an illustration of this. Many brothers worked on the construction of the hall. But very few of these brothers were professional builders. Most of them had little experience in the building trades. The few experienced tradesmen took the lead, and gradually the inexperienced ones were perfected. Eventually, both the journeymen and the learners worked together on the building of the meeting hall. However, most of the work was done, not by the professionals, but by the learners. In the same principle, the work of ministry refers to the unique work of building up the Body of Christ. This work is the responsibility not mainly of the apostles, but of all the saints. Both the leading apostles and prophets and all the believers, including even the smallest member, work together to build up the Body.

THE CONCEPT OF HIERARCHY

At this point I need to say a frank and honest word about the degraded condition of today’s Christianity. Christianity has become degraded largely because of the influence of the natural concept. According to the natural concept, in any group or society there should be ranks among the people, with some of a higher rank and others of a lower rank. Ignatius, one of the great church fathers, a good teacher and a pious man, made the mistake of saying that bishops are higher than elders. He said that the authority of the elders is local, but that the authority of the bishops is regional. Through such a concept the seed of hierarchy was sown. As the hierarchy developed, there were not only bishops, but also archbishops, cardinals, and, at the top, the pope. After the Reformation, this hierarchy was not abolished. Rather, it continued in various forms in the Protestant denominations, and it still exists today.

The concept of a hierarchy or a pyramid arrangement among the believers, fits into the natural concept. But if we have the light from the clear revelation in the New Testament, we shall see that the church is not a pyramid; it is a living

organism, the Body, with Christ as the unique Head. In Matthew 23:8-10 the Lord Jesus said, "But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone your father on the earth; for One is your Father, He Who is in the heavens. Neither be called leaders, because One is your Leader, the Christ." Nevertheless, according to the natural concept, the twelve apostles are regarded as being above all the other saints. However, if you study the New Testament carefully, you will not find very much difference between the twelve apostles and all the other disciples. The grace in the New Testament is not given uniquely to the twelve apostles, but generally to all the disciples. In John 17 the Lord Jesus prayed, not for the apostles, but for the disciples. Furthermore, in chapter twenty of John, the Lord appeared on the day of His resurrection to the disciples. On the day of Pentecost one hundred twenty were together praying. The Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost was poured out upon all the disciples, not just upon the apostles.

NO RANK AMONG THE BELIEVERS

In the New Testament economy there is no thought of hierarchy. On the contrary, God's economy in the New Testament makes all the believers of the same rank. This is the reason that the Lord Jesus said that we all are brothers and that only Christ is our Leader, Guide, Instructor, and Director. Although God's economy puts all believers in Christ on the same level, the natural concept is that in the church, as in any social group or organization, there should be a special class of leaders.

[Section 2]

PERFECTING THE SAINTS

We have pointed out that the gifted persons in 4:11 are for the perfecting of the saints. What do you suppose the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints to do? The only reasonable and logical answer is that they perfect them to do the same thing that they themselves do. For example, a mathematics teacher trains his students in mathematics. His goal is to teach them to do what he himself is able to do. Eventually, through years of training, his students will also be able to become teachers of mathematics. But suppose a certain teacher has taught mathematics for many years without perfecting even one student. What a poor teacher he would be! Nevertheless, this is actually the situation that exists among many Christians today. Many Christians attend so-called church

services year after year without being perfected in the least.

About twenty-five years ago, some brothers from the church in Manila went to a hospital to visit a certain brother who was sick. As they gathered around the brother's bed, each of them offered prayer to the Lord. Some other Christians were nearby and were greatly surprised to hear so many people praying. One of them said to our brothers, "In our church, the pastor is the only one who prays in a public way. We don't know how to pray. But look at you—every one is able to pray. What kind of church do you go to?" This is just one example of the shortage of a perfecting work among today's Christians.

In Acts 8 a persecution rose up against the church, and the believers were forced to scatter. The apostles, however, remained in Jerusalem. The disciples who were scattered spontaneously did the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Suppose today's Christians were scattered because of persecution. What would these scattered ones be able to do? We need to ask this question of ourselves. What would we be able to do if we were scattered? My hope is that many would be able to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Finding themselves in an unfamiliar place, some would become burdened for the Lord's interests there. Firstly, they would preach the gospel. Then they would care for those who are saved by shepherding them and teaching them. We all need to be perfected in order to do this work.

IN THE CHURCH AND UNDER THE MINISTRY

The practice of today's Christianity is not the Lord's way according to the New Testament. In Christianity seminaries are established to train people to serve the Lord. But those educated in the seminaries are not perfected according to God's New Testament economy. The genuine perfection of the saints must be in the church and under the ministry. Today the Lord's ministry is criticized, slandered, and scorned. If the eyes of the believers are opened, they will see what the ministry is and where it is today. In the church the ministry is needed to perfect the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.

LIFE AND FUNCTION

In order to be perfected, we must pay attention to life and to function. The way to be perfected is to

grow in life and to become skillful in function. The Greek word rendered “perfecting” here also means completing, equipping, furnishing. To perfect a saint is to complete him, to equip him, and to furnish him. Only by growing in life can we be completed. Not until we become mature will we be completed. For example, a child of five is not a full-grown person. As long as, spiritually speaking, we remain underage, we shall not be complete. Mothers perfect their children by feeding them. Furthermore, parents equip their children and furnish them by training them to behave and to speak in a certain way. Thus, children are perfected by feeding and by training. The same is true with respect to perfecting the saints according to God’s economy. The saints need to be fed and they need to be trained so that they may function with the proper skill.

For example, if a child is not taught to eat properly with the necessary utensils, he will be “wild” and unruly at the table. Do not think that as long as a person is spiritual in life, he requires no training. No, in spiritual things, as in physical things, there is the need of training. In spiritual things we need the maturity, the growth in life, and we also need the skill. The maturity comes from growth, and the skill comes from training. Therefore, in order to perfect the saints, we need to feed them with spiritual food that they may grow, and we also need to train them to develop certain skills.

THE LORD’S WAY

Once the saints have been perfected, then wherever they go, they will be apostles, the ones sent to that place. They will also be prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. To perfect the saints to be such gifts to the Body is the Lord’s way. If we do not follow this way, the Lord will not be able to get what He desires. How we thank Him that, in His mercy, He has shown us His way!

We have seen that in 4:13-15 Paul did not exclude himself. Rather, he said, “Until we all arrive...that we may be no longer babes...but holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things....” None of us should think that we have already been perfected. On the contrary, we all need more life supply and more training. If we are willing to grow and to be trained, then we shall not repeat the history of Christianity. If we are faithful to practice what the Lord shows us, the Lord will have a way among us. The Lord’s way has never changed. His way is to perfect the saints to do the

work of ministry for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is the way for the Lord to gain what He desires as the necessary preparation for His coming back.

[Section 3]

ARRIVING AT THREE THINGS

Ephesians 4:13 says, “Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” This verse is the direct continuation of verses 11 and 12, which say that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers have been given for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry. We have pointed out that the gifted ones in verse 11 perfect the saints to do the same things that they themselves do. We all can be sent out and we all can speak for the Lord as prophets, preach the gospel as evangelists, and shepherd others and teach them as shepherds and teachers. If we love the Lord, we shall speak for Him as His witnesses. Furthermore, we need to preach the gospel, whether in season or out of season. This is not only the task of the leading evangelists, but of all the saints. Furthermore, we daily need to shepherd others and to teach them. The leading ones set the pattern for these functions, and we follow their example. Hence, all the saints can do the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

The saints need to be perfected unto the work of ministry. In the New Testament there is a unique ministry: the dispensing of Christ into others for the building up of the Body. In order to carry on the work of ministry, the saints need to be perfected.

The building up of the Body of Christ is not accomplished directly by the leading ones. The direct work of building is carried out by the saints who have been perfected. How different this is from the situation in today’s Christianity! The proper way is for the leading ones to set up a pattern and then train the saints to do what they do. After the saints have been perfected, the leading ones should step aside and allow the saints to do the direct work of building. Every leading one must learn when and how to step aside. Firstly, the leading ones must learn how to perfect others. After this work of perfecting has been accomplished, the leading ones must leave the direct work of building in the hands of all the members of the Body.

In verse 13 Paul did not say, “until you all arrive”; he said, “until we all arrive.” This indicates that Paul included himself with all the saints. It is not good for a few to arrive at the destination and to leave so many others behind. On the contrary, we all should arrive together. Arriving at the three things spoken of in verse 13 is not a matter of a race; it is a matter of all arriving at the destination at the same time.

I. ARRIVING AT THE ONENESS

A. Of the Faith

The Greek word rendered “arrive” in verse 13 may also be rendered “attain to.” This indicates that a process is required for us to attain to or arrive at the practical oneness.

The oneness of the Spirit in verse 3 is the oneness of the divine life in reality, whereas the oneness in verse 13 is the oneness of our living in practicality. We already have the oneness of the divine life in reality. We only need to keep it. But we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality. This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. The faith does not refer to the act of our believing but refers to what we believe in, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work for our salvation. The faith is used in this sense in Jude 3, 2 Timothy 4:7, and 1 Timothy 6:21.

B. The Full Knowledge of the Son of God

The full knowledge of the Son of God is the realization of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. The Son of God refers to the Lord’s person as life to us, whereas Christ refers to His commission to minister life to us that we, as members of His Body, may have gifts for function. The more we grow in life, the more we shall cleave to the faith and to the realization of Christ and the more we shall drop all the concepts concerning minor doctrines which cause divisions. Then we shall arrive at, or attain to, the practical oneness; that is to say, we shall arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Many Christians do not know the difference between the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. The first is the oneness of reality, and the second is the oneness of practicality. Because the Spirit is the reality of our oneness, the oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of reality. Oneness is nothing less than the Spirit Himself. If there were

no Spirit, then there would be no oneness. Although we have the oneness in reality, there is still the need for the oneness of practicality. This means that the oneness of reality must be practiced; that is, it must become the oneness in practice. Hence, in verse 13 Paul speaks of the oneness of practicality.

Between the oneness of reality and the oneness of practicality there is a distance. For this reason, there is the need to “arrive at” the oneness of practicality. The oneness of the Spirit is the beginning, whereas the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is the destination. This indicates that we must journey from the oneness of the Spirit to the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. In other words, we must travel from the oneness of reality until we arrive at the oneness of practicality.

As believers, we already have the oneness of reality. But we need to keep it. The best way to keep the oneness of reality is to go on, to proceed, toward the oneness of practicality.

We have pointed out that the faith in verse 13 does not refer to our act of believing but refers to the object in which we believe. Every believer in Christ accepts this faith. When we first believed in the Lord Jesus, we were very simple. All we had was the faith. But afterward we became quite complicated by taking in various doctrines, teachings, and concepts, nearly all of which are divisive.

Several young men may be saved at the same time, through the preaching of the same evangelist. On the day they are saved, they all accept the faith. Afterward, however, they take in different doctrinal concepts. These concepts cause them to be divided from one another. In order for these believers to arrive at the oneness of the faith, they need to be perfected through the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. This work of perfecting will cause them to care for the oneness of the Spirit and to lay aside the divisive doctrines. As they arrive at the oneness of the faith, they no longer care for the various divisive doctrines but care only for the unique faith concerning Christ and His redemptive work. By the perfecting work they also arrive experientially at the full knowledge of the Son of God. They do not pay attention to divisive doctrines or practices but care only for Christ as the Son of God. They care for the full knowledge of the Son of God as life experientially. They desire more and more to

experience Christ in their daily life. By arriving at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, these believers have not only the oneness of reality but also the oneness of practicality. Now they are able to come together without division and to enjoy oneness in a practical way.

The oneness in the Lord's recovery is such a practical oneness. Our oneness is the oneness of our unique faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God in our daily experience of Him as our life. I believe that most of us in the Lord's recovery have arrived at the oneness of practicality. Therefore, we are one both in reality and in practicality.

[Section 4]

Today many Christians who love the Lord, including a good number of pastors and ministers, have not seen the oneness of practicality. However, they do have the oneness of reality, which is the oneness of the Spirit. Many of these Christians say that as long as we are genuine believers in Christ and have the indwelling of the Spirit, we all can be one. In a sense, this is true. But this oneness is not yet the oneness of practicality. It is real, but it is not practical. Therefore, such Christians need to journey the distance between the oneness of reality and the oneness of practicality. I praise the Lord that so many of us have traveled from the beginning, the oneness of the Spirit, to the destination, the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. We have made the journey from the oneness of reality to the oneness of practicality.

II. ARRIVING AT A FULL-GROWN MAN

Verse 13 also says that we need to arrive at a full-grown man. A full-grown man is a mature man. Through regeneration the saints have become babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). Now the saints need to grow into maturity (1 Cor. 3:6, Gk.; Heb. 6:1). Such maturity in life is needed for the practical oneness.

If we are still divided by doctrinal differences, it is an indication that we are childish. Such divisive doctrines are "toys." During the early stages of our Christian life, we may be fond of playing with such "toys." The more childish the saints are, the more "toys" they have. But as children grow up, they gradually lay aside their toys. When people become fully matured, they have no toys at all. In the first few years of my Christian life I dearly loved my doctrinal "toys." Because these "toys"

meant so much to me, it took me a rather long time to drop them. But today I have no "toys." I have only Christ and the church.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul said, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Here Paul indicates that certain things may be "toys." As the believers grow, they will drop these "toys." Eventually, by being perfected, they will all arrive at a full-grown man.

III. ARRIVING AT THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

According to verse 13, we also are to arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ (1:23), which has a stature with a measure. To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is also a necessity for the practical oneness. Hence, to go from the oneness of reality to the oneness of practicality we need to press onward until we arrive at the three things mentioned in this verse.

The fullness of Christ is simply the expression of Christ. As Christ's fullness, the Body is Christ's expression. Christ's fullness, the Body, has a stature, and with this stature there is a certain measure. Hence, verse 13 speaks of the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is to arrive at the full building up of the Body of Christ. It is to arrive at the full completion of the building up of the Body.

We have seen that we need to arrive at the practical oneness, at the full growth, and at the complete building up of the Body. If we would arrive at these three things, we need to do the work of ministry. As verse 12 indicates, the work of ministry is equal to building up the Body of Christ. Among us there is just one ministry. Although thousands of us may participate in the work of ministry, the ministry itself is unique. This ministry is strictly for the building up of the Body of Christ. No matter who we may be, leaders or followers, we all are working to carry out the ministry in the New Testament economy to build up the Body of Christ. We are not here to go on alone, but to go on with others, even to bring others on. As we ourselves go on, we need to bring others on. We take others on by speaking for Christ, by teaching, and by shepherding.

Once again I wish to point out the need in all the churches for some kind of practical training. We need to be trained in the matters of teaching, shepherding, and preaching the gospel. Through this training the saints will learn how to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. As we function in all these ways, we have one goal: the building up of the Body of Christ. As we participate in the work of ministry for the building up of the Body, we arrive at the practical oneness, at full growth, and at the completion of the building up of the Body of Christ.

If our only goal is the building up of the Body, we shall spontaneously be regulated. As we carry on a particular work, it will be with the consciousness that this work is for the building up of the Body. Formerly, we may have preached the gospel without realizing that gospel preaching must be for the building up of the Body. Now we see that whatever we may do as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers must be for the unique goal of building up Christ's Body. If we have seen the goal, then we shall be burdened to help others arrive with us at the practical oneness, at the full growth, and at the full building up of the Body. If we are clear about this, then the Lord will have a way to come back, for He will have a way to obtain the Bride He desires.

The Lord's way to do this is found in three crucial verses—in Ephesians 4:11-13. These verses reveal that all those who have been captured by the Lord have been presented to the Body as gifts for the perfecting of the saints, so that the work of ministry may be carried out and that the building up of the Body of Christ may be accomplished. Then we shall all arrive together at our destination—at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This is our goal, and we must diligently press toward it until we all reach it together.

References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 41 & 43