

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS
MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT
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FOR THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS

In verse 12 we see the reason for Christ's giving of the gifts: "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." The Greek word rendered "for" in this verse is weighty and significant. It indicates that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers for the purpose of perfecting the saints. The saints are perfected "unto the work of ministry." The Greek word translated "unto" means "resulting in." Therefore, the perfecting of the saints results in the work of ministry. The many gifted persons in verse 11 have only one ministry, that of ministering Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ, the church. This is the unique ministry in the New Testament economy (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12). According to the grammatical construction, "the building up of the Body of Christ" is "the work of ministry." Whatever the gifted persons in verse 11 do as the work of ministry must be for the building up of the Body of Christ.

ARRIVING AT THREE THINGS

Verse 13 continues, "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." According to this verse, the perfected saints will arrive at three things: 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. Christ has a fullness, the fullness has a stature, and the stature has a measure. We must arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We shall cover this matter in a later message.

CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL TRAFFIC

Let us now consider in more detail how the gifts are given by Christ to the Body. We have seen that, concerning the Body, all the basic elements are one. However, the gifts and the functions are different. Christ has traveled from the heavens to the earth, from the earth to Hades, from Hades back to earth, and from the earth to the third heaven. It is by this universal traffic that the gifts have been given by Christ to the Body.

Consider the Apostle Paul as an example. How could a sinful, devilish persecutor of the church such as Saul of Tarsus become a gift to the Body of Christ? Only by the traveling of Christ throughout the universe. Christ traveled from the heavens to the earth. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem, and He lived for about thirty years in the little town of Nazareth. After He was crucified on the cross, He went down into Hades and took a tour of that region for three days. Then He came out of Hades on the day of His resurrection. Between His resurrection and ascension, He appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days. At the end of those forty days, He ascended into the heavens.

If we had Ephesians 4 without Psalm 68, we probably would not realize that when Christ ascended to the heavens He led a train of captives. He entered into the heavens as a conqueror with a train of captives. He presented these captives to His Father, who in turn gave them back to Him as gifts. Then Christ gave all these captives as gifts to men. One of these gifts was Saul of Tarsus. This is the way Christ gave gifts to men.

By His universal traveling Christ not only gathered up many sinners, but He also defeated Satan, the one who had captured them. At one time, we all were captives, those who had been captured by Satan, sin, and death. By traveling from heaven to earth, from earth to Hades, from Hades back to earth, and from earth back to heaven, on the one hand, Christ gained all of us and, on the other hand, He conquered Satan, who had usurped us and held us under his power of death. Having been released from Satan, sin, and death, we are now Christ's captives. All the angels know that when Christ ascended to the third heaven, He was leading a train of captives and that these captives were presented to the Father. What a victorious celebration this procession must have been! Although this glorious event was hidden from the eyes

of men, it was seen by angels. They knew that an event of tremendous significance was taking place in the history of the universe. This is not a product of our imagination; it is a marvelous fact.

CAPTURED BY CHRIST

More than nineteen centuries ago we were captured by Christ and put into His train of captives. As those who have been captured by Him, we have no way to escape. Although we have never seen the Lord Jesus, we have no choice but to believe in Him because we have been captured by Him. Now that we are in His train, we cannot get away from Him. Not only have we been captured by Christ, but He has also presented us to the Father. After beholding us with great appreciation, the Father returned us to the Son as gifts. In this way, we all were made gifts to the Body through Christ's universal traveling.

According to the New Testament, we were saved before we were born. When people ask me when I was saved, I sometimes tell them that I was saved more than nineteen hundred years ago, at the time of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. We were redeemed in Christ's crucifixion, and we were regenerated in His resurrection. Even before Christ put us in His train of captives, we were already saved. By the time He presented us to the Father, we had already been saved and regenerated.

GIFTS TO THE BODY AND TO MEN

Now we can see the steps by which sinners have become gifts to the Body of Christ. These steps include Christ's incarnation, His human living, His death on the cross, His burial in the tomb, His descent into Hades, His resurrection from among the dead, and His ascension to the heavens to return to the Father. By means of these steps we, the sinners, have become apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Now we are gifts to men. Wherever the Lord may send us in the days ahead, we shall be sent as gifts to the people there.

Not only the leading apostles and prophets are gifts, but every member of the Body is a gift. For example, my little finger is a gift to my body. It can do something for my body that no other member can do. None of us should regard ourselves as too small to be a gift. Sometimes it is the smallest members who are the most useful and who render the greatest comfort to the Body. Therefore, we all are gifts given by Christ to His Body. Because of Christ's universal traveling, we are no longer sinners, but sons of God, trophies to the Father, and gifts to the Body.

In Ephesians 4 we see the giving of the gifts, whereas in Psalm 68 we have the receiving of the gifts. According to Psalm 68, the Son received trophies from the Father as gifts. Then in Ephesians 4 the Son gave them all as gifts to the church. We, the saved ones, have been given not only to the church, but even to the whole world. Thus, wherever we may go, we shall be a great blessing to others.

In some of the foregoing messages I have pointed out that all the saints can be today's apostles and prophets. In this message, I would like to point out that we also can be evangelists, those who preach the good news, those who proclaim the glad tidings. As we contact people in our daily living, we need to tell them the good news. If we are faithful to do this, we are evangelists. We are also shepherds and teachers, those who take care of others and instruct them in the way of the Lord and in the things concerning God's economy.

NO CLERGY OR LAITY

Ephesians 4:11 does speak of some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Perhaps you are wondering how I can say that all the saints can be such gifts to the Body. The gifts in 4:11 are the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. We, of course, cannot be these leading ones; however, as their followers, we can be the same kind of persons. I certainly do not consider myself an apostle like Paul, who was a leading one. But as a follower of Paul, I do regard myself as one of today's apostles, today's sent ones. We all should have such a concept concerning ourselves. We all should be followers of the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. If we are not such followers, we shall fall into a great heresy—the heresy of a clergy-laity system. We shall make the leading ones the clergy, and the followers will become the laymen. But in the church, the Body of Christ,

there is no such thing as either clergy or laity. As gifts to the Body, we all are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. As gifts given by Christ to the Body and to all mankind, we can be a great blessing to the whole world.

Ephesians 4 tells us that grace is given according to the measure, the size, of the gift. The grace produces the gifted persons and then supplies them according to the measure of the gift. All the gifted persons are for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all arrive at the three items mentioned in verse 13. In a later message, we shall consider these items in detail.