

THE UNIQUE WORK IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

The Work of the Ministry

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:11-32

- I. The unique work in the Lord's recovery is "the work of the ministry"—Eph. 4:12:**
- A. In Ephesians 4:12 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 the work of the ministry is the building up of the Body of Christ:
 - 1. Our work is not merely to preach the gospel, to teach the truth, and to set up meetings; all these necessary activities are for the building up of the Body—Mark 16:15, 20; Eph. 4:12, 16.
 - 2. Any activity that is not for the building up of the Body of Christ is a work of division, and it is not for the work of the ministry.
 - 3. The work of the ministry has only one goal—to build up the Body of Christ—v. 16.
 - B. The gifted persons in verse 11 have only one ministry, that is, to minister 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:
 - 1. All those who served the Lord and ministered Christ for the building up of the Body throughout the centuries had different ministries that were all a part of the unique New Testament ministry—2 Cor. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:5, 11.
 - 2. The Body is built up by one ministry, the unique New Testament ministry—2 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 4:12.
 - 3. Whatever the gifted persons do as a work must be for the building up of the Body—vv. 12, 16.
 - C. The work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ is not accomplished directly by the gifted ones but by the saints who have been perfected by the gifted ones—vv. 11-12, 16:
 - 1. The work of the ministry is both of the perfecting ones and the perfected ones—vv. 11-12.
 - 2. The gifted persons perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry in the divine dispensing by nourishing them according to the tree of life with the life supply for their growth in life—Gen. 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:2, 6.
 - 3. In order to be perfected, we need to pay attention to life and to function; the way to be perfected, completed, equipped, and furnished is to grow in life and to become skillful in function—Eph. 4:11-16.
- II. In doing the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ, we need to "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"—v. 13:**

- A. As believers in Christ, we were born into the oneness of the Spirit, the oneness of reality; now we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of practicality, the oneness of our living in practicality—John 3:6; Eph. 4:3, 13.
- B. The word *arrive* in verse 13 indicates that a process is required for us to arrive at the oneness of practicality; the oneness of reality is the beginning, and the oneness of practicality is the destination.
- C. The oneness of practicality is the oneness of the faith—v. 13:
 - 1. *The faith* does not refer to our act of believing but to the things in which we believe, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work accomplished for our salvation—1 Tim. 1:19; 6:10, 12, 21; Jude 3.
 - 2. The speciality of the church is *the faith*; in the church life we have only one thing that is special—*the faith*, which is composed of our beliefs concerning the Bible, God, Christ, the work of Christ, salvation, and the church—v. 20.
- D. The oneness of practicality is also the oneness of the full knowledge of the Son of God—Eph. 4:13:
 - 1. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the apprehension of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience—Matt. 16:16.
 - 2. The oneness of the faith altogether depends on the full knowledge of the Son of God; only when we take Christ as the center and we focus on Him can we arrive at the oneness of the faith, for only in the Son of God can our faith be one—John 20:31; Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; 4:4, 6; 1 Cor. 2:2.
- E. If we would arrive at the oneness of practicality, we need to hold to truth in love so that we may grow up in all things into the Head, Christ—Eph. 4:15.
- F. The oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is both the full-grown man and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—v. 13:
 - 1. To arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is to arrive at a full-grown man and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; for this we need to grow in the divine life—vv. 13-15.
 - 2. A full-grown man is a mature man; maturity is needed for the practical oneness.
 - 3. The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ, which has a stature with a measure—1:23; 4:13.

III. Ephesians 4:17-32 gives us a picture of a life that can carry out the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ:

- A. Ephesians 4:15 says that we need to grow up into Christ in all things, and then the rest of chapter 4 unveils the details of this growth in Christ to have a life that is suitable and adequate for the building up of the Body of Christ.
- B. In 4:17-32 there are three verses that reveal the dispensing of the Divine Trinity in the believers' living for the building up of the Body of Christ:
 - 1. Verse 18 speaks of the life of God for supplying His children with His divine riches in His divine dispensing.
 - 2. Verse 21 speaks of learning Christ as “the reality is in Jesus” for infusing His believers with His God-man living in His divine dispensing:
 - a. Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for

God; God was in His living, and He was one with God—this is what is meant by *the reality is in Jesus* in verse 21.

- b. In the daily life of Jesus there was something very real, and that reality was God's divine life realized and practiced as the truth in Jesus' humanity.
3. Verse 30 speaks of the sealing of the Holy Spirit for saturating the members of Christ with the divine element in His divine dispensing; for the building up of the Body of Christ, we should not grieve the Holy Spirit but always make the Spirit happy.
- C. For the building up of the Body of Christ, we need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, that is, our regenerated spirit mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God; this mingled spirit spreads into our mind, becoming the spirit of our mind, and in this spirit we are renewed for our transformation—v. 23; Rom. 12:2.
- D. A life that is for the building up of the Body of Christ is also a forgiving life; to do the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ, we need to forgive one another even as God in Christ has forgiven us—Eph. 4:32.
- E. We need to pray that we all will live a life that is adequate and qualified for the work of the ministry, the building up of the Body of Christ—vv. 11-32.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS UNTO THE BUILDING UP OF HIS BODY

Ephesians 4:12 tells us that the gifted ones were given to the Body “for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” The many gifted persons in the preceding verse have only one ministry, that is, to minister 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 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 the ministry is the building up of the Body. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry. The word *unto* in verse 12 means resulting in, for the purpose of, or with a view to. This means that the perfecting of the saints is for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ. Whatever the gifted persons in verse 11 do as the work of the ministry must be for the building up of the Body of Christ. However, this building up is not accomplished directly by the gifted ones but by the saints who have been perfected by the gifted ones.

The work of the ministry is both of the perfecting ones and the perfected ones; the building up of the Body is the work not only of the apostles and the other gifted ones but also of all the perfected saints. The unique work of building up the Body of Christ is the responsibility not mainly of the gifted ones but of all the saints. Both the gifted ones, including the leading apostles, and all the believers, including even the smallest member, work together to build up the Body.

The gifted persons are for the perfecting of the saints. The gifted persons perfect the saints in the divine dispensing in order that all the saints may be able to do the work of the New Testament ministry, that is, to build up the Body of Christ. The gifted persons perfect the saints

by nourishing them according to the tree of life with the life supply for their growth in life (Gen. 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:2, 6). The gifted persons perfect the saints to do what they do for the direct building up of the Body of Christ. The apostles perfect the saints by visiting the churches (Acts 15:36, 40-41; 20:20, 31), by writing epistles to the churches (Col. 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:2), and by assigning their co-workers to stay in certain places to perfect the saints (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15; Titus 1:5). The prophets perfect the saints by teaching them to speak the Lord into people, by speaking in the meetings to set up a model, and by helping the saints to live a prophesying life by being revived every morning and overcoming every day (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 14:31; Prov. 4:18). The evangelists perfect the saints by stirring them up to be burning in the gospel-preaching spirit, by teaching them with gospel truths, by training them to preach the gospel, by helping the saints to be equipped with the power of the economical Spirit, and by setting an example of loving the sinners and praying for them (2 Tim. 4:5). The shepherd-teachers perfect the saints by shepherding—feeding and nourishing the young saints and teaching the growing saints (Acts 11:25-26; 13:1). The result of this perfecting is that we will all arrive 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 (Eph. 4:13; cf. John 17:23). This perfecting will cause us to be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a satanic system of error (Eph. 4:14).

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* in verse 12 also means completing, equipping, and 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. As long as, spiritually speaking, we remain under-age, we will 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 so that they may grow in the divine life, and they need to be trained so that they may function with the proper skill. We should all pray, "Lord, make me willing and ready to be perfected. I will receive the perfecting from the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers."

We should not think that as long as a person is spiritual in life, he requires no training. Rather, 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.

All the saints should be building members. The gifted ones mentioned in verse 11 are not high officials with a special rank. Rather, they are given for the perfecting of the saints (v. 12). The saints need to be perfected, equipped, furnished, unto the work of the ministry. The perfecting or equipping is related both to growth in life and to training in certain skills. The work of the building up of the Body of Christ should be carried out not only by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers but by all the members. Hence, all the saints need to be building members. We should be not only members who have been built up but also members who build up the Body. First, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints. This means that they build up the saints. Then the perfected saints become the building members.

In verse 16 Paul goes on to say, “Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.” Here *joined* implies the thought of joining by fitting; *knit* implies the thought of interweaving. The Body causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and working parts. The expression *every joint* refers to the specially gifted persons, such as those mentioned in verse 11, and *the rich supply* must be the particular supply, the supply of Christ. Further, the expression *each one part* refers to every member of the Body. Every member of the Body of Christ has its own measure which works for the growth of the Body. The growth of the Body is the increase of Christ in the church, which results in the building up of the Body itself in love.

In brief, by His death Christ conquered all the enemies and solved all the problems. Through His resurrection He released all the divine riches, and through His ascension He received God’s chosen people with the divine fullness. From the time of His ascension, Christ has been working to constitute the vanquished foes into gifts for His Body. First, He comes to these vanquished foes and enters into them. Then He gradually fills and saturates them with Himself. Eventually, those who were once His enemies are transformed and constituted into useful gifts that can be presented to the Body. These gifts not only teach others but also transfuse Christ into them. In this way the members of the Body receive nourishment and are cherished. Then they will be sanctified, purified, and transformed to become functioning members. As a result, the whole Body will be fitly framed together and compacted by every joint of supply, according to the operation in the measure of every part. This will cause the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 3420-3424)

**BUILT UP BY ONE MINISTRY OF MANY GIFTED PERSONS
PERFECTING THE SAINTS TO DO THE SAME ONE BUILDING UP WORK**

The Body is built by one ministry of many gifted persons perfecting the saints to do the same one building up work Eph. (4:7-16). The ministry mentioned in Ephesians 4:12 is referred to by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 where he also told us that the Old Testament had one ministry, the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of death, which is the ministry of the law (vv. 7-9). In the Old Testament age, there were many priests, prophets, and kings, but they all participated in the one ministry of the law, which was the ministry of condemnation unto death. In the New Testament there is another ministry, the ministry of grace, which is the ministry of the Spirit and the ministry of righteousness unto justification of life (2 Cor. 3:8-9; Rom. 5:17, 21). All the ones who served the Lord and ministered Christ for the building up of His Body throughout the centuries had different ministries which were all a part of the unique New Testament ministry. The Body is built up by one ministry, the unique New Testament ministry.

For the building up of the Body, the Head has given some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11-12). Their work is “for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ” (4:12). Therefore, the saints are perfected by the gifted ones to do the work of the ministry also. In Ephesians 4:12 “unto the work of ministry” is in apposition to “unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” Thus, the work of the ministry is the building up of the Body of Christ. The gifted persons have the same one ministry to build up the Body of Christ. The one Body is built up by one ministry.

In today’s Christianity, so-called ministries that are different from the apostles’ ministry build up denominations. One so-called ministry builds up the Presbyterian denomination. Another so-called ministry builds up the Baptist denomination. Still other so-called ministries

build up the Episcopalian and Methodist denominations. In Christianity there are many different ministries outside of and other than the one unique ministry, and these issue in division after division.

When I refer to “one ministry,” I do not mean that this one ministry is my ministry. But I would say that my ministry is a part of the one ministry. Each member of the Body of Christ has a ministry that is a part of the unique New Testament ministry. Some sisters may be burdened organically to clean the hall. This cleaning of the hall is their ministry, which is a service for the work of the building up of the Body of Christ. The saints who go out to preach the gospel are carrying out their ministry as a part of the New Testament ministry to build up the Body of Christ. The Head has given all the gifted persons to perfect the saints so that they may participate in the ministry which the gifted persons are carrying out for the building up of the Body of Christ. To perfect the saints is to develop their organs, equipping and furnishing them with functions through the growth in the life of Christ. Eventually, all the saints do the same one building up work as the gifted members. The saints are perfected to do the work of the ministry for the direct building up of the Body of Christ by their growth in Christ.

LIVING A LIFE THAT CAN CARRY OUT THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY TO BUILD UP THE BODY OF CHRIST

Verses 17-32 of Ephesians 4 is another section showing us how to build up the Body of Christ by the growth in Christ. Verse 15 says that we need to grow up into Christ in all things, and then the rest of chapter four unveils the details of this growth in Christ to have a life that is suitable and adequate for the building up of the Body of Christ. Paul tells us that we should no longer walk as the nations who walk in the vanity of the mind, estranged from the life of God (vv. 17-18). When we walk according to the life of God within us, we do not have a hardened heart, we are not in darkness, we care for the consciousness of our conscience, and we would not give place to the Devil (v. 27). We also need to walk in truth, that is, in the reality as it is in Jesus (v. 21). God is the truth, the reality. Ephesians 4 also says that we have put off, regarding our former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit (v. 22). Deceit is personified. It refers to the deceiver, the Devil, from whom are the lusts of the corrupted old man. For the building up of the Body of Christ, we need to put off the old man and be renewed in the spirit of our mind (v. 23). This renewing is for our transformation to the image of Christ. Our regenerated spirit is mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled spirit spreads into our mind, thus becoming the spirit of our mind. It is in such a spirit that we are renewed for our transformation.

In our baptism we put off the old man and the old manner of life, and we put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth (4:24; Rom. 6:6, 4a; Col. 2:11-12). Righteousness is being right with God and man according to God's righteous way, while holiness is being separated unto God from anything common and being saturated with God's holy nature. We need to live a life of righteousness and holiness. This is the way that Jesus lived on this earth to set up a pattern of One who lived a life of always doing things in God, with God, and for God, ministering Himself as grace to others. We learn from Him, according to His example, not by our natural life, but by Him as our life. We need to live a life that gives grace to others for the needful building up. This is a life that ministers Christ to others as their enjoyment and supply for the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:29). We should not let any corrupt word proceed out of our mouth but only the words that give grace to others. In all of our speaking, we should distribute the riches of Christ.

To build up the Body of Christ, we must also learn not to grieve the Holy Spirit so that He can keep sealing us for the day of the redemption of our body (v. 30). We should always make the Spirit happy. Everything in our behavior should be pleasant to Him. The sealing Spirit is

continuously sealing us with the essence and element of the Triune God. When a piece of paper is sealed with a seal, the paper receives the ink essence and also the likeness and the shape of the seal. The sealing Spirit brings the essence of the Triune God into us and causes us to bear the likeness of the Triune God.

A life that builds up the Body of Christ is also a forgiving life. To practice the Body life we need to forgive one another, forgetting one another's offending, as God in Christ forgets our offenses (v. 32b; Heb. 8:12). To forgive means to forget. Because we are still in our old man much of the time, we make mistakes and offend others. This is why we need to forgive others by the life of God in the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 4:17-32 gives us a picture of a life that can carry out the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ. There is much, much hope, promise, and potential that all the churches in the Lord's recovery could be built up in this way. May the Lord bring us into the reality of the one Body built up by one ministry with thousands of saints perfected to live a life that is adequate and qualified to do the work of the building up of the Body of Christ. (*The Body of Christ*, pp. 41-45)