

GOD'S PROGRAM FOR 2013

TEXT: EPHESIANS 4:11-13

INTRODUCTION:

1. Ephesians 4:8 says, "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."
2. Then down in verse 11, the gifts are said to be preachers.
3. What is the purpose of these gifts? According to Ephesians 4:12, they are "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ."
4. This is God's program, and this is what I would like to preach about this evening.

I. THE PREACHERS PERFECT THE SAINTS (4:11, 12).

1. Some here have a Roman Catholic background, and have been taught that saints are extraordinary Christians who live exceptional lives of virtue. Roman Catholics are taught to venerate their "saints," and to pray to them.
2. The Catholic Roman Church has a process called "canonization," through which certain notable Catholics are recognized as saints after they die, and the church "canonizes" them.
3. Like many other Catholic traditions, this is contrary to Scripture. According to the Bible "saints" are simply Christians. If you are saved you are a saint and you do not need to be canonized.
4. In 1969 the Roman Catholic Church reviewed all the saints on its list of saints and discovered that many saints, including some very popular ones, never existed. Consequently some of these phony saints were dropped from their calendar of feast days.
5. Among those who were dropped is Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travels. For many years, Catholics were taught to pray to and worship this non-existent saint. Many Catholics have his little statue on the dashboard of their car, and wear his medal around their neck.
6. But it was determined his legends were all fake and so he was taken off the Catholic saint calendar. He was "decanonized."
7. The whole thing is ridiculous and unscriptural. Let us stick with the Bible, and avoid the errors of the RCC (and any thing that contradicts Scripture).
8. Sadly some true saints do not always act like saints! Ephesians 5:3 says, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints."

9. Saints should be saintly, not sinful, not worldly, not carnal.
10. Ephesians 4:11 and 12 says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints..."
11. This is the only time we see this word "perfecting" in the Bible, but the verb form appears many times. It means, "equipping," and that is how some translations render it.
12. Matthew Henry gives a great definition. He says the word means, "to bring into an orderly spiritual state and frame those who had been as it were dislocated and disjointed by sin, and then to strengthen, confirm, and advance them therein, that so each, in his proper place and function, might contribute to the good of the whole."
13. So evangelists, and pastors and teachers, were given by God to the church to "perfect" and "equip" the saints so that they can effectively do the work of the ministry.

II. THE SAINTS DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

1. The saints then do "the work of the ministry," i.e. they serve God in their local church (soulwinning, teaching Sunday School, preaching, playing the piano, singing, ushering, working in the nursery, cleaning the church building, etc.).
2. This is "the work of the ministry." Expecting the pastor to do all the work of the ministry is unscriptural and unrealistic.
3. Expecting the pastor to do all the soulwinning, and all the visiting, and all the calling, and all the inviting, and all the tract distribution is wrong and it will eventually kill the church.
4. This mindset hinders the spiritual growth and development of the individual church members; it stifles the outreach of the church; it slows down the progress of the church; it limits the missions program of the church; and it stunts the growth of the church. And unless it is corrected, it will eventually kill the church.
5. Some people have this notion that only pastors and evangelists and missionaries are to do the work of the ministry. They mistakenly believe that the "ministry" is restricted to those employed in full-time Christian service. But all Christians should serve (minister).
6. Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."
7. This verse is referring to church members ministering in a local church. It is not referring to pastors or other so-called "ministers."

8. We often use the term "full time Christian service," and it is a valid term because there is a difference between full time Christian workers (pastors, assistant pastors, evangelists, missionaries, etc.) and those who work secular jobs.
9. But all Christians should be ministers, in the sense that they should be working in the church. Some churches give titles to everyone: music minister, youth minister, seniors minister, education minister, etc.
10. That is not necessary because all the members should be ministering in the church. We have been saved to serve.
11. According to the New Testament, all Christians are ministers and priests. The Bible teaches the "priesthood of the believer." First Peter 2:5 says we are "an holy priesthood," and I Peter 2:9 says we are "a royal priesthood."
12. All Christians have been saved to serve.
13. *In the harvest field now ripened There's a work for all to do;
Hark! the voice of God is calling
To the harvest calling you.*

*Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame.
There's a crown—and you can win it,
If you go in Jesus' Name.*

III. THE CHURCH IS EDIFIED (4:12).

1. When pastors and evangelists are properly teaching the Word of God, the members are "perfected."
2. Hebrews 13:20 and 21 says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."
3. The church is then edified or built up – both spiritually and numerically -- when the saints are perfected (equipped), i.e., properly disciplined and trained.
4. We are built up (edified) by the Word of God. That is why preaching the Bible is important. Teaching the Bible in Sunday School is important. Studying the Bible every day is important. Memorizing the Bible is important.

5. In Acts 20:32, the apostle Paul said the Word of God "is able to build you up." Many Christians are weak because they do not read the Bible. Sadly many preachers do not preach much Bible.
6. All Christians should be reproducing themselves. On a usual Sunday, we usually have some first-time visitors. Now, if each one of us brought one visitor, we would double our attendance. This is how the church is "edified" (4:12), or built up numerically.
7. The saints are equipped for the work of the ministry. They are growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).
8. The church is edified or built up spiritually by the preaching of the Word of God (cf. Acts 9:31).

CONCLUSION:

Consider Acts 9:31 --

- The churches were edified.
- They had rest. They were at peace.
- They were God-fearing.
- They were walking in the Spirit (comfort of the Holy Ghost).
- They were soulwinning (were multiplied).

This is God's program for the church.