

CHAPTER ONE

AN OPENING WORD TO THE PERFECTING TRAINING

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:11-16

These six verses from Ephesians 4 have a number of crucial points, but the focus of these crucial points is the perfecting of the saints. In these few verses, the center and central thing in the Apostle Paul's mind was the perfecting of the saints.

According to these verses, we are first told that the gifts were given: "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers." This is the initial step; then the result is unto the work of the ministry, that is, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. How could the Body be built up? By the growth in life. Then out of the growth in life the function will come, the operation in measure of each one part, to cause the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. Thus, there is the initial stage and then there is the result. Between these two ends is the perfecting of the saints. If there is no perfecting of the saints, all the gifts given by the Head become vain. Also, there will be nothing to cause the growth of the Body in life that functions may come out to build up the Body in love. The crucial and central point in this portion of the Word is the perfecting of the saints. Throughout the past years the Lord has been leading us in the ministry to perfect the saints for the growth in life so that the functions may come out to build up the Body in love.

We need to cover several points so that everyone may be impressed with what we are doing in this Perfecting

Training. Why, after so many years, must we begin to have another stage? We all know the situation in today's Christianity. Among so many believers in Christianity I would say honestly that there is no growth in life at all. I was with fundamental and formal Christianity, and I saw no growth there. I was also with the Brethren assembly, which may be considered as the best among the Christians. Yet after seven and a half years with them, I was the same; I had experienced no growth in life. In fact, they did not even talk about the matter of growing in life.

What about the functioning among today's Christians? In a large so-called church, with perhaps three thousand, five thousand, or even seven thousand members, not one is a proper functioning member. What they have is just some hired professional preachers and ministers and certain rules and regulations of their organization. They just have an organization with hired professionals to carry out their work. That is not an organism at all; that is an organization. But the Body which is the church is an organism, and every member of this organism must be organic.

We have pointed out in the past that every normal person is born complete and perfect. Regardless of how little a baby is, if he is proper and normal, he has all the organs. He has eyes, ears, a nose, a mouth, a heart, lungs, a stomach, intestines, hands, and feet. But, although he is complete and perfect in all his organs, he has almost no function. His eyes, feet, hands, and mouth are complete and perfect, but they do not function. Why? It is because there is a shortage of growth in life. This complete and perfect person needs to be perfected, which is mainly through the growth in life. All the mothers know that the way to perfect their babies is to feed them so that they will grow.

This, too, is the way for the saints to be perfected; they need to grow. Then from the growth, a certain function will come out. The more a child grows, the more functions he has. This is to be perfected. In these verses, the apostles, prophets, and others function just like nursing mothers.

Their work is just to perfect the saints. Verse 11 says that the gifts were given, and verse 12 says they are for the perfecting of the saints. The work of the gifts is to perfect the saints. Actually, the gifts such as the apostles and prophets do not and should not build up the Body directly. But, in today's Christianity, the hired professionals do all of the work directly by themselves. The Bible tells us that all the gifts should not build up the Body of Christ directly, but that they should perfect the saints so that the saints may grow. Then the different operations, or functions, in measure of each one part will come out of the growth in life. Each member has a measure, but it must have the growth in life for the operation to come out. It is by the operation in measure of each one part that the Body is built up.

We can see clearly from these verses that the Body of Christ is built up by the function of every member in its measure. The function depends upon the growth. Verse 13 mentions a full-grown man. Verse 15 tells us that we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, and then, out from whom comes the operation in measure of each one part.

I am so happy that the Lord has preserved us and brought us into the church life. Just to be here is a great mercy and grace! However, although I am very happy and excited, I feel that we are short of something. Many of you have been here for more than three and one-half years, attending the church meetings and training meetings. You have come to meeting after meeting, each of which has cost you about two hours. Thank the Lord that we all have a heart for His recovery and that, at least to some extent, we all mean business with the Lord for His move on this earth. Yet, I have a big question: how much growth in life have you gained?

Furthermore, many among us still do not function as we should. If we are lacking the growth in life and lacking the proper functioning, how can the Lord's recovery go on? Eventually we will drift back into the situation of Christianity. Then we will be a repetition of the sad history

of Christianity. So, this is a crucial matter! On the one hand I am excited, but on the other hand I am concerned about the shortage of growth and the lack of function. I realize that a good number do function, but according to my observation, your function is not so effective. You function, but you do not produce any spiritual fruit. Thus, some among us do not have the growth in life, others do not function, and many who do function are not so effective. Why do we lack the adequate growth? Why do we lack the proper function? And why do we function without effectiveness? We need four brothers to come to the platform to help us discover the answers to these three whys. Brothers, please tell us why the saints have not grown so much.

Well, I know from having eight children myself, that I have seen the growth through constant and steady eating. Not one of them has stunted growth, but every one continues growing in a very steady way. But I know that many of us do not eat in a constant and steady way. The growth depends very much upon our eating habits. While our habit to come to the meetings is very consistent, we may many times miss our spiritual eating.

Do you other brothers feel this is right? Do you feel that although the saints would never miss a meeting, they might unconsciously miss the proper spiritual eating?

I feel quite much the same way, and I would make this comparison: it may be compared to children of rich families who have the best food available to them, and when they eat with the family, they eat a proper, hot, and balanced meal. But when they are away from the family, they do not eat properly. Although the riches are available, they may not partake of them adequately. It is one thing to have a heart, but it is another thing to be consistently partaking of the riches that are available.

Actually, brothers, I do not believe this is the problem. You check with all the saints. When they come to the meetings, surely they pick up a lot of spiritual food. You cannot say that the saints come to the meeting, yet neglect to eat. They eat a lot.

It may be that they eat in the meetings, but I am thinking more about the private life, the daily walk. Certainly there is an abundance of food in the meetings.

You have to realize that as long as they eat in the meetings, they do get some food. It is not normal to continually eat twenty-four hours a day. Just a few times a day is sufficient. I would say that the reason your children eat regularly and grow steadily is because they have no disease, no sickness. But with so many saints, there is a kind of sickness. Although they eat a lot, they do not grow. Although they eat much food, some disease within them eats it up and they do not grow. Many among us have this kind of sickness or disease. We must discover what kind of disease is causing this lack of growth. It seems there is another eater within the saints, eating the food that they eat. How shall we designate this inside eater? What is the disease that eats up our food? Please consider yourself, brother. Why do you not grow? What kind of disease keeps you from growing?

It may be that ambition is the disease.

It may be that ambition is the problem. If you really do have some ambition, that is terrible. Surely ambition is a big eater. But I think some other germs may also be here. We need another brother to help diagnose your sickness.

One problem is that his time is very occupied by his work, because he wants to be faithful to his job. Due to this factor he spends sixty to seventy-five hours a week on his job. Therefore, he has no time for the church life. This is his real problem.

This is just an outward symptom. You have not touched his real disease.

Another disease is that he was an elder in a certain place and was mistreated. That is now in the past, but perhaps the brother did not take this situation from the Lord. Therefore, he has some doubts and unhappiness concerning the whole situation. Because of this he occupies his time with outward things to replace his inward emptiness. He needs to overcome being mistreated and believe in the sovereignty of the Lord in the situation. He

should go to the Lord to see how the Lord wants to deal with him.

This sounds like a pastor using the materials of the Lord's recovery. You are teaching him to take the mistreatment and to consider it something from the Lord. I would like to check with all of you — do you consider this as a proper teaching? If so, then you all are sick. Apparently this teaching is right; actually this is a sickening teaching. If taken, it will cause a Christian to be sick. If this brother considers the mistreatment as something from the Lord, his old man, his flesh, will be strengthened to the uttermost. This will become his boast. He would consider himself to be quite spiritual — that although he was mistreated, he did not react, but took that mistreatment as something from the Lord. Then he would become a mistreated hero. This would simply strengthen his old man, his self, and his flesh. So you have to realize this is not a healthy teaching. Rather, this teaching will make people sick. It will strengthen their flesh and self.

What then, for the sake of growth in life, should the brother do? First, he should go to the Lord without being offended in any way. He should go to the Lord, asking, "Lord, what do You want me to learn? I have been mistreated and have lost the eldership, but what do You want me to learn?" Do not pick up the religious teaching that you have to bear the cross and to take every mistreatment and circumstance as something from the Lord. This kind of teaching is not something living, something directly from the Lord. Forgetting all these things, just open to the Lord: "Lord, what do You want to teach me? I believe this is something of You. What should I learn from this?"

If he is so open to the Lord, the Lord may enlighten him and shine upon his ambition. Due to that shining, he would prostrate himself before the Lord and pray: "Forgive me, Lord! Forgive me, Lord! I did have such an ambition, and I still have such an ambition." The Lord would then say to him: "Drop such an ambition." In tears he would say, "Lord, thank You! I would drop it." This is the real