

What Do You Do If The Saint Ain't?

Equipping the Saints for God's Glory

When I was saved, I was not affiliated or inclined to attend any particular church at all. In fact, I didn't even think of going to church until I was saved. I went to a Bible study at work. As a result of going to the Bible study at work, I began going to services at the Shikina Fellowship in Long Beach. You may want to Google that. So, my first introduction to Christians was at a Bible study taught by Pentecostal co-workers, and my first introduction to public worship, if it be called that correctly, after I was saved was at a charismatic healing service on Saturday nights in Long Beach. It was only later, after my personal reading of God's word began to cause me to wonder if I and my Pentecostal and charismatic friends were reading the same book, that I was invited and then attended a Baptist church in Torrance. I was baptized at that Baptist church. I became a member of that Baptist church, but I became a Baptist by conviction gradually over a period of time. So please recognize that with me, the cart has never come before the horse. I do not believe what I believe because I'm a Baptist and therefore am inclined to hold to historic Baptist positions. That is not an accurate description of me. I believe what I believe because I believe the Bible teaches what I believe, and discovered only later that what the Bible teaches happens to be what Baptists have historically believed.

That said, let me restate a couple of things I have come to learn from my personal study of God's word down through the decades and that I have preached to you time and again. First, I have come to learn from my studies that during this era in which we live, God's work done God's way will be done through local congregations, churches just like this one. The notion of Christianity at large, freelance Christianity I call it, is simply not scriptural, and evidence of Christians living out their Christian lives apart from local churches is not found in the Bible. Second, this local church and other congregations like our church belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for the church, and he has a special and unique role for the church in every believer's life. The church, unlike any organization or ministry founded by man, is the Savior's institution of higher learning. This is the place where his people gather to be trained to live for him and to serve him in a way that pleases him.

We know from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that God is to be glorified in the church by Jesus Christ now and forever (Ephesians 3:21). But what has the Savior done to ensure that God the Father is glorified in the churches? He has given gifts to these churches. We have learned from the apostle that these gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. So, how do we know the Lord Jesus Christ gave these gifts to churches? Simple. God's plan calls for a Christian to live his life in connection with his church. A Christian's rewards at the judgment seat of Christ will be given largely based

upon service to Christ through his church, and there is nothing else in existence Christ could give such gifts to once you set aside the preposterous notion that Christianity is supposed to be an unstructured and undisciplined anarchy. The four kinds of gifted men were given to entities, specifically congregations.

But why? What are they to do? What is their function? And that, my friends, is what our text for today tells us. I would like you to make your way to Ephesians chapter 4. We begin reading verse 8 through verse 12, and when you find that passage in God's word, I invite you to stand along reading with me silently while I read aloud. Ephesians chapter 4, beginning with verse 8: Wherefore he said, when he ascended up on high, he being the Lord Jesus Christ, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now, this is what we're talking about. Now he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Won't you please be seated.

There are three consequences in verse 12 that are supposed to result from the Lord Jesus Christ giving gifted men to entities, to congregations, to churches. Let us examine those three consequences that are supposed to happen and see how they relate to each other. Verse 12 of Ephesians chapter 4 begins: for the perfecting of the saints. This is the first supposed consequence. Gifted men have been given to congregations by the Lord Jesus to perfect the saints. This is an interesting word that is best explained, in my opinion, by illustration. The ship builders of those days would construct a boat out of the water, much as we do today but on a much smaller scale, of course. Upon completion of the boat's construction, it would, and of course all boats were made of wood back in the day, and upon completion of the boat's construction, it would then be lowered into the water. Once in the water and tied up to a dock, a crew of men would then board the boat and rig it for sailing by erecting a mast, hanging the sails, mounting the rudder and the tiller, and such things as that. Those things done by a separate crew after the boat had been built and launched into the water. You had one crew building the boat; a second crew rigged the boat. That which was described, the activity of those who then got on the boat after it was put into the water, is described using the same Greek word that we find in this verse translated as perfecting, the term being *katartismos*.

If you liken then salvation to the construction and the launching of a boat, then the rigging of the ship for navigation through the storm-tossed seas of life, that is the job of the pastors. My assignment, then, is not to construct you so as to bring you into existence. My job is not to launch you onto the waters of your new life in Christ. My job is to do a work in your Christian life so that you will be prepared to navigate into the prevailing headwinds that are sure to come into every believer's life.

This verse continues: for the work of the ministry. This is a tough phrase to interpret properly. The preposition translated *for* at the beginning of this phrase, *eis*, is not the same Greek preposition that is translated *for* in the preceding phrase, which is *pros*. The verse starts out *pros*, then moves to *eis*, and they are both translated by the same English word *for*, but in each case, *for* means in one phrase what it does not mean in another phrase. So, what that means is this: there is a very strong argument to make

for the phrase *for the work of the ministry* being an equivalent statement to *for the perfecting of the saints*. For the work of the ministry, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the perfecting of the saints—different sides of the same coin. That would mean we have two phrases describing the same essential thing from different perspectives. If that is the case, then the work of the ministry is really what only gifted men do. This does not mean that Christians in churches who are not gifted men don't serve God. We know this because of Ephesians chapter 2:10: *for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*. And Ephesians chapter 4, verse 7, which reads: *But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the grace of God*. Each one of us has a different measure of grace to do what God wants us specifically to do. So, it doesn't mean church members don't serve God. It does mean that scripture teaches that the particular kind of ministry that gifted men in churches are assigned is markedly different from others, and those men who are not special gifts to the church should not try to serve in the same way as gifted men serve. It is inappropriate to take upon yourself what you have not been called to and equipped for.

This interpretation bears some close scrutiny in light of the fact that most Christians these days think little of the call of God to the ministry and the enabling of God for the ministry. Most Christians—eh, that's just what he does, ah, that's just what I do. It also deserves close scrutiny when James chapter 3, verse 1 comes to mind, which is a warning: *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*. The word *master* translates the Greek word for teacher, and I am persuaded is used in reference to the ministry of a pastor-teacher. Does this verse mean that I, and only I, should teach the word of God at Calvary Road Baptist Church? Obviously, that is not where this passage leads. I do not believe that, I do not assert that, I don't practice that. What this passage does suggest is this: that only gifted men should engage in pastoral ministry at Calvary Road Baptist Church. That would be me until it becomes obvious that another gifted man is mature enough to labor with me in this endeavor that I am convinced God is persuading you about at present.

What happens when a gifted man, or when gifted men in a church, perfect the saints, and when they do the work of the ministry? What happens when such things are properly done, though they are always done by flawed and fallible men? Flawed and fallible, we will see this result: *for the edifying of the body of Christ*. That's the result. The body of Christ, of course, being the local congregation. Edifying simply refers to being built up, to being built up spiritually and being built up numerically.

So, it is obvious to anyone with the eyes to see that the Lord Jesus Christ's plan for glorifying God the Father in the church is directly related to the ministry pastors have in the lives of saved people in the church. In other words, the Savior has seen fit to glorify the Father by sending men like me to congregations like this to do a work in the lives of people like you. That's the plan. The result will be as follows: you will grow spiritually, and you will serve God. The church will grow numerically as lost folks are reached and brought in. God will be glorified.

But what happens if there is a breakdown in this prescribed sequence? What happens if there ain't a saint? What happens if the saint stays home on Sunday night or on Wednesday night or doesn't get up in time to come to church Sunday morning? What

happens if the saint refuses involvement in a pastor-led discipleship program, but the women in the church go for women's Bible fellowship, and guys get into some type of lone ranger program without accountability to the gifted men or leadership input from the gifted men? Do any of these breakdowns affect the Savior's effort to glorify God? They certainly do, they certainly do.

So, let us each do our part to glorify God. I commit myself to you to do my job and to fulfill my role. Will you commit yourself to do your job and fulfill your role, which is to come to the services, gather for special meetings and events? I want you guys at the men's events, I want you there, I seriously want you there. Yield to ongoing discipleship under my leadership, and let me equip you to serve God. I pray that you will do these things.

This message is titled "What do you do if the saint ain't?" What do you do? Imagine this scene: I am an outfitter who lives on the shore of the Mediterranean about 1900 years ago. The ship builder I work for from time to time has left word with my wife that he's just finished building a new boat, and he wants me to come over and do my thing. And what do I do as an outfitter? I am the guy who hangs the rudder, mounts the mast, hangs the sails, and runs all the ropes. I am not responsible for making the boat float, but I am responsible for making the boat navigable. So, I grab a bite to eat and something to drink and assemble my crew, and we head over to the docks, being just a few minutes from my house. I get there in time to say hi to the ship builder and the owner, who is a very wealthy man that I've met before. After a half an hour or so, they knock out the props from under the boat, and it slides down the wooden ramp it was built on and into the water.

But something weird happens, something strange, something very unusual. Instead of floating, the boat slides down the wooden ramp and into the water, and pulled down by the ballast rocks in the keel, the boat sinks. It didn't have to sink, it shouldn't have sunk, but it did sink because one of the ship builder's guys, not one of my crew, one of the ship builder's guys, forgot to the boat and make the hole watertight, so it sank. It sank nevertheless. Even though the result of the ship builder's labors for the past three months is at the bottom of the harbor, and even though the owner's new pride and joy doesn't float at all, they both turn to me and they say, "Well, get to it. We'll expect the mast mounted and the rudder and sails and rigging in place by the week's end. This ship needs to be ready to sail by the new moon." And they turn and walk away, leaving me and my crew.

Can you imagine such a thing as that? Of course not. In ship building, such a thing as that would never happen. And why not? Because no one in his right mind could ever hope to think that you could successfully perfect a sailing vessel that wasn't floating and seaworthy. You can't, you can't mount a mast on a ship that's at the bottom of the harbor. After all, what good does it do to put a mast on a boat or put a rudder and sails on a boat that doesn't float? But do you realize that the same kind of thing which we could never imagine with a literal boat is attempted with people all the time?

In my text for today, I've already described for you that *for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry* is much like the outfitting of a boat for the high seas. But what happens when attempts are made to mount the mast, mount the rudder, and hang the sails and the controlling ropes, but the ship is still never able to sail? In like manner, there are church members and professing Christians who are exposed to the

ministry of gifted men, who sit under the ministries of pastors for considerable periods of time. The pastor toils and labors and prays, but that individual never seems to be equipped for service. You can always count on him until you need him. That person always seems to be either a no-show, a no-go, or a no-show no-go. That person never seems to become a net asset to any church ministry but seemingly forever remains a net liability, devouring Bible teaching and exhortation and visitation and prayers and everything the pastor has to offer, but never becoming dependable, never becoming reliable, never becoming effective, never becoming productive, never becoming giving, and never becoming a fruitful church member.

Christian, you want to know what the problem is? No, I'm going to tell you anyway. Look at the word *saint* in Ephesians 4:12. Gifted men can only perfect people who are saints. As it does no good to perfect boats that do not boat, which is to say, do not float, so it does no good to perfect people who are not saints. Say, "Well, I know somebody who's a Christian, they just don't go to church." Of what possible benefit to are they to anyone or anything? To put it another way, pastors cannot perfect for the work of the ministry those who are not saints, those who are not saved.

Let me describe for you why a gifted man, why a pastor, why I cannot prepare for service, cannot effectively involve in the church's ministry someone who is unsaved, someone who is not a saint. And please, put out of your mind the Roman Catholic notion of what a saint is; it bears no resemblance to what the Bible actually says. Why I cannot? First, because God is holy. In connection with God's holy nature, there are three things that are clearly seen in scripture. First, the declaration of God's holiness is seen. Make no mistake about it, God is holy. Holiness is not merely something God does; it's something that God is. Holiness is the very essence of his being. In Leviticus 20:26, the Lord God of Israel declares, *I the Lord am holy*. In Joshua 24:19, Joshua declares to the people, *He is an holy God*. In 1st Samuel 2:2, Hannah cries out to heaven, *There is none holy as the Lord*. In 2 Kings 19:22, the great prophet Isaiah describes him as *the holy one of Israel*. In the 22nd Psalm, verse three, the sweet psalmist of Israel sings out to God, *Thou art holy*. And in Isaiah chapter 6, verse three, the angels in heaven cry out to each other, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts*. So, it is declared by God himself that he is holy; it is the very essence of his being. It is recognized by God's people that he is holy, and it is trumpeted by the angels in heaven to each other that God is holy.

There are scores of other passages in the Old as well as the New Testaments that declare the holiness of Almighty God, but holiness is something rather difficult to understand, to wrap our minds around. So, let's examine several of the illustrations of God's holiness. These are not instances where God is said to be holy, but where God is shown to be holy. Because God is holy, Moses was commanded to remove his shoes as he approached the burning bush from which God spoke to him (Exodus 3:5). Because God is holy, the children of Israel were forbidden to ascend or to touch any part of Mount Sinai under penalty of death (Exodus 19:12). Because God is holy, the high priest of Israel was allowed to enter the holy of holies, wherein the glory of God dwelt between the cherubim above the mercy seat that was upon the ark of the covenant, only once each year; he could only go there one time each year, and that under the cover of a thick cloud of smoke. Because God is holy, Moses in Deuteronomy 4:4 warned the Israelites by telling them that *the Lord thy God is a*

consuming fire. Because God is holy, Moses in Deuteronomy 9:3 comforted the Israelites by telling them that as they entered the promised land, God would go before them as a consuming fire. And finally, because God is holy, the writer of Hebrews declared in Hebrews 12:29 that *our God is a consuming fire*. And friends, that's in both the Old and the New Testaments. If you think there's any inconsistency between the holiness of God and Christian love, listen to the very next verse in Hebrews after it declares, *For our God is a consuming fire*: it urges, *Let brotherly love continue*. There's no conflict, there's no conflict. Make no mistake about it, God is holy, and his holiness is described in these and other passages of scripture to illustrate to us, to all who have eyes to hear and ears to hear what is written in God's holy word, that God is pure and clean and free from the taint of any kind of sin or moral defilement. Yay, he abhors defilement; he hates uncleanness.

So, what about the result of God's holiness? Because holiness is what God is, it is one of the determining factors of what God does. And we see how this is true with another attribute. The Bible declares that God is love, and how does love move God? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Well, God is also holy, and because God is holy, he moves to demonstrate his holiness just as his love causes him to move to show forth his love. And how does God manifest his holiness? How does he put it on display? How does he exhibit it? If you recognize that holiness is moral purity and the complete freedom from defilement and uncleanness of any kind, it is easy to see that what follows holiness is the powerful desire to cleanse that which is dirty, to punish that which is criminal, to correct that which is wrong, to purify that which is contaminated, and to glorify that which is holy. That is why God created the lake of fire for the devil and his sinful angels (Matthew 25:41). That is why sinners cannot be allowed into heaven, leaving only the lake of fire as the ultimate place for you to spend all eternity. Because God is holy, he will cleanse his creation with the fire of judgment.

That was number one. Next, you are unholy. How did you come to be unholy? You came to be unholy in exactly the same way every other person born of woman came to be unholy. In Job 25:4, the question is asked, *How can he be clean that is born of woman?* Here is the issue: with an unholy father and an unholy mother, how can a child born of such a union possibly be holy? Yay, *the stars are not pure in his sight, how much less man that is a worm* (Job 25:5-6). So, your unholiness has been inherited from your parents. That is how you came to be, how you are. That is how I came to be, how I am.

What is the result of you being unholy? The result of you being unholy is this: you will not go to heaven when you die. Instead, you will go to hell for at least 1,000 years. You will be judged for the kind of life you lived on earth, and finally, you will spend all eternity in the lake of fire. You see, hell's not the end of it; hell's like county, lake of fire is like Pelican Bay. Something or someone is either holy or unholy; it's a black or white moral issue. There are no degrees of holiness or unholiness with God. So, when God says over and over and over and over again in the Bible, *Be ye holy for I am holy*, he does not mean try to do better. He doesn't mean that. He means you'd better find a way to get holy, or else. A person is unholy if he or she is not morally perfect, if there is any kind of spiritual blemish, if there is any taint of sin, any history of wrongdoing. Have you ever done anything wrong, even error? Then there is no holiness.

With this understood, it is undeniable that you are unholy. You cannot deny that you are unholy because that would be a lie, making you unholy. That understood, listen to the fate of all who are unholy: Matthew chapter 25, verse 46: *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.*

And finally, you must be cleansed. Since unholiness is moral defilement, contamination, spiritual dirtiness, if you will, the remedy for unholiness is cleansing. The only way that which is unholy can be made holy is by cleaning it. And the only way that an unholy person, whose entrance to heaven is barred, whose access to a holy God is prohibited, can be made holy is by cleansing away that which makes him unholy and unclean. And what makes an unholy person unholy? Your sinful nature and the sins that you commit. Nobody had to teach you how to lie. You began lying moments after you were born. There's no such thing as a mom that doesn't know that her baby lies. "Pick me up, I'm hungry." You're not hungry, I just fed you.

But there is a problem. In Job chapter 14, verse 4, the dilemma that unholy people have faced for centuries is stated: *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.* Therefore, if you are unholy, nothing you can do will remedy your unholiness, and neither can any mere man help you, since all men are unholy as well. You cannot turn to God the Father; he is a consuming fire, and he is unapproachable by unholy men. Your deliverance can only come from the Lord Jesus Christ, and deliverance is accomplished by the blood of Jesus Christ. Are you unholy? The Bible declares that you are, your actions show that you are. Then you must be cleansed, and as 1 John 1:7 states so clearly, *the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin.* As the old gospel hymn goes, *What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.* You are sinful, your sin makes you unholy in the sight of God who is holy, and the cleansing you must experience before you can approach God, the cleansing you must experience to go to heaven, the cleansing you must experience to escape the wrath of God who is holy, only comes by the blood of the lamb. Because you see, as Hebrews 9:22 tells us, *without shedding of blood there is no remission.* Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ washes away sins, nothing else will do.

But how do you obtain the benefit of the shedding of Christ's blood? Sure, he died and shed his blood to wash away sins, but how are your sins washed away? What must you do to be saved? That's the question you need to ask. Through faith in Jesus Christ, he will wash your sins away in his blood and make you holy. How can we be sure? When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* (Acts 16:30), they could have said anything. What they did say was, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved* (Acts 16:31). And how does the Apostle Paul address this man, this Philippian jailer, and those who were later saved in exactly the same way in Philippi, who ended up comprising the Philippian congregation? Paul wrote to them in Philippians chapter 1, verse 1; notice what he said: *To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.* Those Christians were all saints, all of them.

Have you sat under the ministry of a gifted man for a while without discernable results? Are you dead in the water spiritually? Was your boat launched only for it to sink? Am I attempting to rig for sailing a boat that isn't even floating? No gifted man can perfect you for the work of the ministry unless and until you are a saint. Why? Because God is holy, because you are unholy, which is to say, you are not a saint, because the word

saint means holy, and because you need to be cleansed. Once you're cleansed, you are a saint—not perfect, not sinless, but a saint. Once you are cleansed, once you are saved, once you trust Christ to save you by washing away your sins in his precious blood, once you become a saint, a gifted man can then do in the church what we do for you and what we do to you. But not until then.

Do not try to approach God; he is holy, you are unholy. But he sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. You can come to him by faith; he will save you, he will make you a saint, and then all will be well with your soul, and your life of humble obedience to God's plan for equipping you can proceed. If you do not come to Jesus Christ by faith, the Bible way, and if you die in your sins, if you die unholy in the sight of God, you will suffer the torment of the damned. You will be punished by a holy God, deservedly so, forever in the lake of fire.

You can be saved. I want you to be saved. Certainly, God wants you to be saved. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The question is, do you want to be saved? We'll see, we'll see.

Let's bow for prayer, shall we? Father, we thank you for your goodness. You know my heart, how frustrating it is to try to put a mast and sails and a rudder and a tiller and rigging on a boat that isn't even floating. And as the boat needs to be floating before the rigger can do his job, so the person must be a saint before the pastor. And he has to be here, and not occasionally, consistently, faithfully, determinedly here before I can rig him, before I can perfect him, before any gifted man can effectively minister to him. I pray your blessings upon those who are believers and need to be tied up at the dock so the riggers can do their job, and those who are not yet believers in Christ. Please work in the lives of those here who are not saved, that they might flee to Christ for salvation, full and free, that they might escape the wrath that you will pour out upon them if they do not flee to your son Jesus Christ. Bless to that end, we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.