

From the Nugget Series (# 272) by Elder Ralph Harris

"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" (Eph. 4:11-12).

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that none of the gifts God has given to the church are for the purpose of *making* saints or *producing* a body for Christ. If popular religion were true, then the major part of the work of the ministry would be to make living saints out of dead sinners and thus determine whether Christ has a body or not, but we do not find a whisper of such things in the Bible. There is a sense in which the preaching of the true gospel can *perfect* the saints, but it cannot *create* the saints. It can and does *edify* those who are a part of the body of Christ, but it cannot bring the body of Christ into being. It can nourish, build up, and instruct those to whom it is the power of God and the wisdom of God, but it provides no spiritual benefit to those who are dead in sin and who consequently view it as foolishness. In a word, it can feed the living, but it cannot raise the dead.

To edify a person is to build them up, establish them, instruct and improve them, and in a scriptural context it refers to doing those things in a *spiritual* sense. The *saints* are the only ones who can be thus improved in moral and religious knowledge and enlightenment. It is in that sense that they are *perfected* or thoroughly furnished. It has nothing to do with fleshly perfection, but rather it involves spiritual growth and development, and a kind of godly and gracious maturity or completeness. The gospel is a "preparation" and is well suited, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish these ends in the lives of those whose hearts have been touched and tendered by the grace of God.

If any of God's gifts to His church had been intended to populate heaven, then the apostle Paul had an excellent opportunity to say so in his instruction to the Ephesians concerning those gifts. But he was as silent as the grave with regard to any such ends or purposes. In many instances the silence of the Scriptures speaks volumes. ---Elder
Ralph Harris