

Puzzled
1 Corinthians 12:1-13:8
September 20, 2009
Peter Hiatt

Do you ever find yourself puzzled by church? Like it's not all that it's advertised to be? Like it's one thing on the cover of the box and a different thing once you look inside?

The last two weeks in our new place have been great, but the honeymoon will wear off. Something will happen or not happen, and you'll think, "What were they thinking?" You'll ask, "What's the vision here?"

Well, I have the vision. It's right here.

[Peter holds up a jigsaw puzzle still in the box.]

I purchased it yesterday at Mardel's. I have the vision and I'm gonna give it to you now.

[Justin plays "Be Thou My Vision" as Peter opens the box and begins throwing puzzle pieces]

This is an explosion of meaning, an explosion of vision. Everybody get the vision? Take a piece. One piece and hang onto it. If you have a piece, you have the vision.

Now let me ask you: what color is the vision? Blue? Green? Red? Black? White?

Does everybody agree? No?

Well maybe He's saying you don't get the vision.
Maybe you haven't received revelation.
Maybe you don't fit.

Well before any of you leave, let's look at 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12:1-3 "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you are led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, 'Jesus is accursed!' And no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." ... or except *by* the Holy Spirit.

That is an utterly remarkable statement and having a little experience with the demonic I've found that it's true. It's remarkable for it means that anyone who confesses, "Jesus is Lord" does so by the Holy Spirit.

That's a remarkably broad perimeter that Paul draws around the church. So whether or not you see one color or another color, whether or not they baptize infants or don't, whether or not they even sin in rather fantastic ways and disagree about the sin, whether or not you agree with the apostles Creed or subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith, if you say, "Jesus is Lord," the Spirit is at work in you.

The Holy Spirit's work is to reveal and glorify Jesus as Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."

There's a diversity of *charismata* -- gifts, and *diakonia* -- service, and *energia* -- works, but one Spirit, one Lord, one God, one love.

If there is only sameness, uniformity, then we're a crowd, a pile of sand or dust. If there's only difference, diversity, we can't even talk to each other. But if there is unity in diversity and diversity in unity then we're a family, a city, a symphony, a body -- a life.

1 Corinthians 12:7 "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

If you say, "Jesus is Lord," and then say "I have nothing to offer," you may be saved... but you're lying. If you say, "Jesus is Lord," you are part of the puzzle and the puzzle is incomplete without you.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge [literally: to one the *logos* of wisdom, to another the *logos* of knowledge, same *logos* in two different forms] according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy [Scripture says "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." So it's remarkably diverse. It includes visions, trances, and telling a neighbor Jesus loves them.], to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions each one individually as he wills."

...as he wills.

As He wills.

It's really not up to you what gifts you have or don't have. And if you feel proud about your gifts or insecure about your gifts, you probably don't really believe they're gifts, in which case they'll feel more like a curse rather than a blessing.

I feel like I'm called and gifted to reach, but as soon as I feel proud or insecure, my gift feels more like a curse rather than a blessing.

Now there are a variety of gifts in several different lists in Scripture, so I don't think any one list is exhaustive. And Paul isn't just talking about freaky supernatural gifts. he's talking about "*diakonia*" and "*energia*" -- service and works. And one day you'll see that anything good is supernatural and a gift.

Even so, you may be wondering, "What are my spiritual gifts?"

Well there are questionnaires, surveys, books, and conferences, and I think they're all helpful at times. But there is a still more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 12:11 "all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who portions each one individually as he wills.

"For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the ear should say, 'because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'

Are you ever intimidated at church? I am, and I really used to be. At church I hear someone say, "I had a vision," or "I was praying, and God told me: X,Y, and Z." And I would think, "Holy Moly! I'm not a Christian. I must not hear God's voice."

Well, if I confess, "Jesus is Lord," I do hear his voice, and I have heard his voice just not in the same way.

If someone says, "I heard Jesus say: X,Y, and Z," either

A) They're lying, and that's taking the Lord's name in vain (which happens and it isn't pretty), or

B) They're telling the truth. And they have a gift, which you may not have, which actually is an even better gift for to not have a gift means you do have a body.

"The ear should not say because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body." For in fact, it's precisely because the ear is not an eye that it does belong to a body.

My friend Pam was praying for me once, and she heard God say this: "I didn't give Peter all that he had asked of me because if I had he wouldn't need my church. He wouldn't love my church."

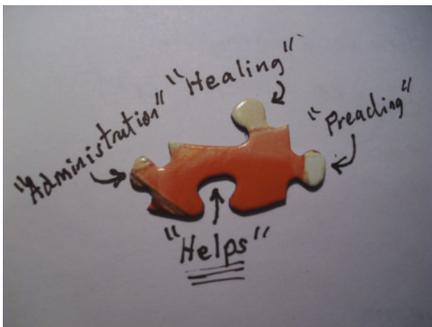
You see the church is a body, and I am a member.

Well if you're intimidated, perhaps you feel like this:



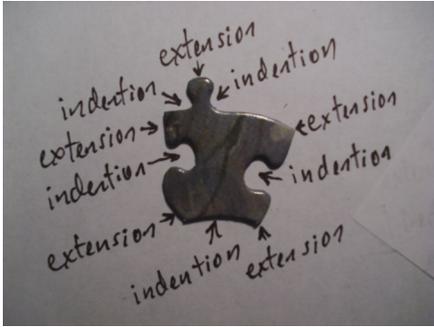
Like you have one little gift of "helps" like vacuuming, and you lack the cool gifts like miracles and prophecy. Yet your lack of gifts is where you receive the greater gift: the body.

But maybe you feel like this:

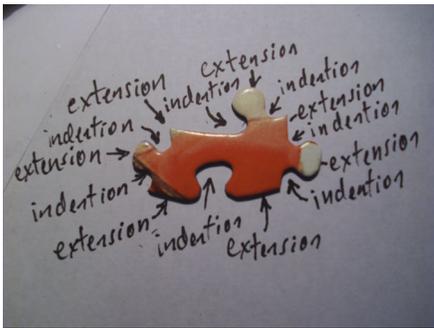


You feel so gifted you don't even notice where you're not gifted. You're so gifted you think, "I don't need the church. I don't need the body, and I don't need others." Maybe you come to church and think, "those boneheads couldn't even organize their sock drawer." But you never stop to ask, "Hey Jesus, are you calling me to organize their sock drawer? And could it be that their lack of a gift is really the presence of the gift of a body in which I'm called to be a part?"

Well the reality is that we're all extensions and indentations



And for each extension is an indention



And each extension and each indention is a gift, a way to connect to the body. Even our sin -- especially our sin -- if it is surrendered



God didn't create sin, for sin is most truly nothing, it's an absence. God didn't create sin, but he subjected us to sin in hope. If I hide my sin in shame, I remain alone and dead .



But when I surrender my sin, what God did not create, I invite another to extend grace, something God did create



I get the vision, and the body comes together.

The vision isn't just a puzzle, it's a living puzzle, a body. And it comes together at joints: body broken and blood shed, relationships of passion pain and pleasure. It's knit together not with policies and programs but living tissue. It's a body. So:

1 Corinthians 12:21-24a "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty [it's a wordplay in Greek that reads, 'to our unrepresentable parts we give the greater presentation'], which our more presentable parts do not require."

Have you ever felt like one of those unrepresentable parts?
Ever been called one of those parts?

Well think about it: those are pretty important parts, seed, soil, life. The future depends on those parts.

But Satan wants division in the body, that is, he wants a dead body. So he'll work to make you hide your needs in shame and cover your gifts in shame. For me preaching is exhilarating but at the same time profoundly painful.

One night sitting in my office working, struggling, and praying, I prayed something like, "God I feel naked, embarrassed, ridiculous, and exposed. God I feel like a -----" and I used the term for the male unpresentable part. I didn't hear words but I heard this thought, "Peter, why would that be so bad? I know you feel awkward and embarrassed and ashamed, but you deliver a word to my bride in its seed and its life." I felt like a total ----- and he honored me with that.

1 Corinthians 12:24b-27 "But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

If you feel like you lack honor then watch out the honor is coming.

"When one suffers all suffer," "when one is our honor and all are honored" "because you are one body bound in the covenant of Christ."

And that kind of reminds me of my marriage vows—the covenant of marriage. You know I've found my wife to be deeply puzzling. She's different than me -- physically and spiritually -- yet when we put the puzzle together, when our diversity comes into a new unity, that diversity becomes ecstasy and produces life, even babies, but not just physical babies, spiritual babies.

For a long time as the pastor and the leader, I felt like I needed to make my wife more like myself with my gifts as a bible student and systematic ethical thinker. What a tragedy if I had succeeded. My wife is an artist who gets words of knowledge and visions and may not actually have a left brain at all. But when I pray with her, wow! She has visions, and I interpret them—diversity in unity bearing life—Christ's life.

You know the sacrament of the covenant of marriage is the deepest physical celebration of diversity and unity. And the sacrament of the covenant of Christ, the table of the Lord, is to be the same thing and more: diversity in unity bearing life, eternal life.

We worry about the temptation to homosexuality -- sameness -- because it's not diversity is unity but uniformity. We worry about homosexuality and maybe we should be more worried about *homoecclesiology* -- sameness in church. I mean we get the same body parts in the same place doing the same thing. It's just like Martin Luther King Jr. said, "the most segregated hour in United States of America is 11 AM on Sunday morning."

Because of our arrogance, insecurities, fears, and shame, we listen to the devil and think everyone should be just the same. Such when Sunday morning comes:

all the ears get together at the Quaker church
all the hands get together at the Methodist Church
all the eyes get together at the Pentecostal church seein' stuff
all the knees get together at the Roman Catholic Church
all the scholars get together at the Presbyterian Church
all the really great singers get together at the African Methodist Episcopal

and that's not the body; that's bags of body parts.

I sure hope you don't only want to hang out with folks like yourself because then you would be stuck with yourself -- boring and dead, bags of identical, boring, and dead body parts.

When we put puzzles together as kids, sometimes to start we put all the blue pieces in one pile and all the white pieces in another pile. And it's great that they're schools for scholars and conferences for prophets and seminars for teachers, but that's not the church, and that's not the puzzle. It's preparation for church and preparation for the puzzle, but it's not until you put them all together, that you get the picture.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."

"Ask the Spirit for good gifts" says Paul, "you might get them. And now I'll show you a still more excellent way" to get them.

You see, I don't have the gift of vision, and yet I do because I have Susan.
I don't sing on key, and yet I do because I have Justin.
I'm not a good administrator and yet I am because I've got Elaine and Karissa.

I don't have all the gifts, and yet I do have all the gifts because I have the body of Christ. And when it comes together, it's life. It's Christ's life, and that's the vision.

Jesus is the vision. "Be thou my vision O Lord of my life." You know that, Jesus is the vision. It's printed right there on the box: Church of Jesus Christ.



Jesus is the vision.



Yet you're puzzled because you look inside the church, inside the box, and all you see is these broken pieces.



All these puzzle pieces. That's because (Romans 5:5), "The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."

It happened when the *Eschatos* man, that it is Superman, the perfected man, Jesus Christ, was lifted in the air where he offered himself for the sins of the world, delivering up his spirit in death like an explosion of love and meaning that rain down on all the world. For when the entire world shows destruction, Jesus Christ shows love. When all tried to take his life, he gave his life for all. He is the love of God "shed abroad in our hearts" like this:

[*Iron Giant* movie clip 1]

A military officer sends off a missile.

General: That missile is targeted to the Giant's current position. When it comes down everyone will die.

[The scene changes to a crowd of people with the Giant behind them. The Iron Giant looks lovingly at all the people around him. He then bends down to speak to a boy.]

Iron Giant: Hogarth. You stay. I go. The giant lovingly touches him. No following.

Hogarth: I love you.

[The Iron Giant flies off into outer space to intercept the missile. While flying, the Iron Giant hears Hogarth's voice in his mind: *You are who you chose to be!*]

Hogarth: Superman.

[The missile hits the Iron Giant and there is a massive explosion in space. People watch on earth.]

The pieces rained down all over the earth.

Well Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8 "... earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing [If I'm the world's greatest body part, but am not connected to the body, I'm nothing; I'm dead].

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away."

Love never ends.

Love never ends because it is the end.

Love isn't just a gift of the Spirit, love is the spirit.

"Love is of God and God is love and if you have God, you have everything."

Love is the most excellent way and the final destination.

Love is the vision and love is what brings the pieces together.

Love in flesh is Christ.

Love in you is the body of Christ.

Colossians 3 says, "above all these, love which binds everything together in perfect harmony." All the pieces are useless unless they're bound together in love.

You may be the most impressive puzzle piece, but without the puzzle, you have no meaning, no purpose no vision, no life. We are called to life and to manifest a vision.

We are called to love each other that the world would know. So they could look and say, "Oh wow! That's Jesus."

And so we're called to love. And you say, "How do we love?"

Answer: "We love because he first loved us."

So first and foremost, we stare at Jesus; we worship Jesus; we ingest Jesus so we can live Jesus. He is our vision, yet he's a living vision. He is not stuck on a puzzle box. So even as we ingest Jesus and live Jesus, we begin to see Jesus as he is here and now on the corner of 30th and Vallejo.

So we stare at Jesus like we used to stare at the picture on the cover of the puzzle box. Then we start bumping into each other hoping to look like him, even his body.

Churches have all kinds of programs and pastors, means and methods for connecting the pieces, the members. That's what apostles, prophets, teachers, administrators, and pastors are for. And I think we have the best congregational life pastor that I know of. And yet no program no pastor can knit your heart and life to another. It seems to happen almost by accident when folks bump into each other with the vision of love. But it's not an accident. It's the spirit of love -- it's God.

So at the sanctuary we all worship together every Sunday except the last Sunday of the month when we worship in several different places in smaller groups. We call them house churches. And we do it this way in order to bump you into your neighbor.

When I was a kid, my mom used to always bring puzzles on our vacations to my uncle's cabin in the mountains. We had no TV, and so for hours each night we'd sit around working on a jigsaw puzzle. Just bumping one piece into another piece hoping they fit. Most of the time they didn't fit, but sometimes they did. And after hours and hours, days and days we'd complete the puzzle and get the picture.

We all do it and I used to wonder, "Why do we do it?" I mean why not just buy the poster of the cute kittens? Rather than the one that comes cut in 1000 pieces and stuffed in a box?

Have you ever wondered why God didn't just zap us all the way done right at the start?

Ever wondered why the church is such a mess?

I mean why didn't he just make us the completed body of Christ from the start?

Why a few million or billion pieces?

Well that's an immense philosophical and theological question, but I think I understand why mom bought the puzzle and brought them on family vacations.

1. It was fun.

Making stuff is fun as you are made in the image of the maker. So bringing diversity into unity is ecstasy that makes life and is love, and that's number two.

2. We were learning to love.

Mom knew that she wasn't just building a puzzle; she was building us, a family. So we just sat there staring at the pieces and staring at each other. Studying what piece would connect to another piece. I might try to match my piece with my sister's piece, but if it didn't work I wouldn't panic or cry, "It doesn't fit! I don't fit!" I wouldn't quit because I had faith that there was a picture, and I had a piece of it.

I hear people say, "I tried small-group or house-church, and it didn't work." Well usually it doesn't work but that's part of how it works. Sometimes I would try to force a piece. My sister would get mad at me and I would get mad at her and then and mom would say, "Don't get mad at each other. Forgive each other. Try it this way, try it that way."

Sometimes what didn't fit revealed what it fit in. You know people want to know what their gifts are. And my advice: skip the spiritual gifts test and start bumping into folks with a vision of love.

In the next chapter Paul writes: "if you're eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the Church." That is: work on the puzzle and you discover the pieces, your gifts and others gifts.

But working on a puzzle was awkward and frustrating at times, a lot of rejection: it doesn't fit, it doesn't fit, it doesn't fit. And when it did fit, then you had to give it away. So you had to love your piece but not be too attached to your piece because you have to lose your peace to find the puzzle.

So when you come to church, expect to feel puzzled, awkward, and sometimes rejected. You're learning to love yourself, yet lose yourself. And that's good because you must lose yourself in order to find your life in the picture. To lose your life and find your life in another is to love.

3. We learned to love the picture.

Have you ever seen those people (maybe you are those people) that finish a jigsaw puzzle, mount it on a board, frame it, and hang it on the wall? When you finish a jigsaw puzzle you just want to stare at the picture for hours. For weeks, we'd beg mom not to put the puzzle back in the box. If it were just the poster of the kittens and not the puzzle, we would have barely noticed. God wants you to notice Jesus the Christ and His body.

4. We learned to love ourselves because of the picture.

As a kid I felt like I just didn't fit. I was awkward and often rejected, picked last for baseball at recess. Last. But there was this magic moment that happened sometimes when working on a puzzle. You know my mom could put a puzzle together faster

than any of us. But as we got near the end, she'd slow down and encourage us. And Mom never placed the very last piece in the puzzle. Sometimes my piece was the very last piece. The last piece was the piece that had been most rejected and least fit to that point. But when I placed the least fit it suddenly became the most fit. The last was first and a perfect fit. And everyone saw that I -- Peter -- completed the vision with perfection.

Jesus is the vision, "the perfect image of the invisible God." Did you realize that He is incomplete without you -- in particular you? Like a puzzle is incomplete without every piece, he is incomplete without you for you not only have a piece, you are a piece of him. You are a member of his body—a member. They are scattered all over this room and all over this world.

Iron Giant movie clip 2

Hogarth's dad: Oh Hey, Hogarth. The general sent this to you. He said it was the only part recovered.

Hogarth: I miss him. [Hogarth turns around and looks at a statue of the Iron Giant.]

[Hogarth is laying in the dark in his bed and suddenly his eyes open. He opens up the box where he had placed the Giant's bolt and the box is empty. Hogarth looks under the bed. A light begins flashing (from the bolt) outside Hogarth's window and Hogarth smiles. He opens the window and the bolt falls to the ground and begins to move away from the house.]

Hogarth: *See you later.*

[The bolt continues to move "toward" something and soon other "parts" of the Giant are seen and all are moving toward a light and beeping sound. The next scene is the Giant's head with a light and antenna on the top of his head. Suddenly, his eyes open.]

On the night that Jesus--the Superman, Eschatos man, last and first man--the night he was betrayed, as he prepared to be lifted up as an offering—an explosion—of grace and life to the entire world, he took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you."

He is not asking you to put it in a box by your bed. You just need to put it in your heart -- to eat it, to become it.

He said, "this is my body. Take and eat. And this is my blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Take and drink in remembrance of me."

In re-membrance. At the table the body is being re-membered, members coming together. All over our world this day, believers are doing the same thing: re-membering. And all over the world his body is coming together.

And now he asks you to come to his table and re-member. He's asking you to remember that you in particular are part of his body. And His body is incomplete without you. He's coming to get you. He loves you.

Look at the picture, the vision. Then ingest the vision, and let's put it together in love.

Amen.

Communion

Benediction

One Love

by Bob Marley

One love, one heart
Let's get together and feel all right
Hear the children crying (One love)
Hear the children crying (One heart)
Sayin', "Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right."
Sayin', "Let's get together and feel all right."
Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa

Let them all pass all their dirty remarks (One love)
There is one question I'd really love to ask (One heart)
Is there a place for the hopeless sinner
Who has hurt all mankind just to save his own?
Believe me

One love, one heart
Let's get together and feel all right
As it was in the beginning (One love)
So shall it be in the end (One heart)
Alright, "Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right."
"Let's get together and feel all right."
One more thing

Let's get together to fight this Holy Armageddon (One love)
So when the Man comes there will be no, no doom (One song)

Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner
There ain't no hiding place from the Father of Creation

Sayin', "One love, one heart
Let's get together and feel all right."
I'm pleading to mankind (One love)
Oh, Lord (One heart) Whoa.

"Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right."
Let's get together and feel all right.

In the name of Jesus let's get together. You are an indispensable part of His body.

In Jesus' name, believe the gospel. Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.