

A Gift to be Given

Ephesians 4:1-16

February 3, 2013

Peter Hiatt

Prayer

So Lord, you are our supply, and all I have in you is more than enough. All of you is more than enough for all of me. Lord God, would you supply us now, through your Word preached. Would you supply us now? Whatever is not of you, not your Word, help us to forget it. Whatever is of you, I pray that we would always remember it. Lord God, I pray that you would member us, that you would bring us together as a body animated by your life, supplied by the blood that flows from the throne. Build us into the body that you want us to be. Come Holy Spirit and be glorified in us. In Jesus' name, Amen

Clip from *Dumbo*

Timothy the mouse: *I wonder how we ever got up in that tree anyway. Let's see
Elephants can't climb trees can they? Nah Nah, that's ridiculous.
You couldn't jump up. Mm Mmm, it's too hard.*

Crow: *Maybe you all flew up?*

Timothy the mouse: *Maybe we flew up.*

Timothy the mouse: *Yeah...maybe we flew up!! That's it! Dumbo, you flew!
Boy am I ever stupid; why didn't I think of this before.
Look at your ears; just look at them Dumbo! Why...they're perfect wings.
The very things that held you down are gonna carry you up, and up, and up!
I can see it all now!*

In our last message from Ephesians, we talked about Dumbo...that is we talked about you. You are an earthen vessel, a strange vessel, a unique vessel. Like each one of these vessels. [Peter points to a table filled with different types of glasses and containers.]

Last time, we said that each one of us is born into this world like one of these vessels, and each of us soon realizes something is wrong, so we judge each other, compete with each other. We build dividing walls and exclude each other. We know something's wrong and assume it's the shape of our vessel. But according to Paul, it's not the shape of our vessel but that our vessel is empty...or worse yet, our vessel is full of earth. [Peter picks up a glass that is filled with sand.]

But here's the good news. A vessel of wrath, like the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus, can become a vessel of mercy...like the apostle of grace—Saint Paul. We can be emptied and filled. [Peter empties the glass from the sand that was within it and then fills the glass with communion wine. God fills us according to the “measure of Christ's gift.” Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that's the measure as comprehensible as a man hanging on a cross. And as deep and infinite as the heart of God.

And with what does God fill us using that measure?

He fills us with blood. Leviticus 17 *“The life is in the blood.”*

Life given is Grace, and we are filled by the power of the Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes, *“Christ, the last, ultimate, finished, Eschatos Adam became a life giving Spirit.”* God fills us with His Spirit through Christ Jesus and when He does...

The contours of wrath become the contours of Grace.
The contours of emptiness become the contours of fullness.
The contours of the old man become the contours of the new man—The God Man, in me.
The contours of Dumbo’s shame (those big ears that brought him down)...
Become the contours of Dumbo’s glory (those big ears that lifted him up)...
But not just for Dumbo; Dumbo is part of a circus.

Clip from *Dumbo*

[Music plays in the background]

[All the elephants that were formerly mocking Dumbo are now enjoying the benefits of his success.]

Elephant 1,2,3,4: ♪ *But I done seen about everything* ♪
♪ *When I see an elephant fly* ♪
♪ *When I see an elephant* ♪
♪ *Fly* ♪♪

All the Crows: ♪ *But I done seen about everything* ♪
♪ *When I see an elephant fly* ♪
♪ *When I see an elephant* ♪
♪ *Fly* ♪♪

[Dumbo flies behind a brand new circus train. He then eases down into his mother’s arms.]

Crow 1: *I wish I’d a got his autograph.*

Crow 2: *Oh man...I got his autograph.*

Crow 1: *Well...so long....*

Dumbo’s uniqueness isn’t just a blessing to Dumbo (not a zero sum game). Dumbo is blessed to be a blessing to every animal in the circus and every bird in the sky. Let’s look at our text.
Ephesians 4:1-16

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. v.4 There is one body.

Now, if you’re paying attention, and if you really take scripture seriously, you ought to say, “Hey, that’s not right!” I’m counting way more than one body. Just look around this room. And there are like 6 billion in the world: “One body! What the heck?”¹ “*There is one body and one Spirit.*” God is Spirit, and Jesus had a Spirit, and God and Jesus send the Holy Spirit. And we’re each made of earth and Spirit (God’s breath that is Spirit).

Ephesians 5:18 We are to be *filled and to keep on being filled with the Spirit,*” like it’s flowing through us:

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

¹ When confused by the Word, don’t dismiss the Word, wrestle the Word, say, “Jesus what the rip are you talkin’ about...one body?”

Pay attention to that “all” it’s a pretty big all.² One Father of “all.” There are seven “ones” in those three verses (which is hugely significant.) Seven is the number of the finished *teleos* creation. Seven “ones” and every Jew recited it everyday. Deuteronomy 6: “*God is One.*” “*God is One, and God is Lord, and God is Spirit.*” Paul writes: *One Spirit and One Lord* (Paul calls Jesus “Lord.”) One Spirit, One Jesus, and One Father.

Ephesians 4:4-6 is a classic verse in support of the doctrine of the Orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity that God is three persons and ONE substance,³ a diversity in unity and unity in diversity. My favorite quotes regarding the doctrine of the Trinity come from C.S. Lewis. I wish I could read this to you in every sermon. In *Mere Christianity*, he writes,

All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that “God is love.” But they seem not to notice that the words “God is love” have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love...

And that, by the way, is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and all other religions: that in Christianity God is not a static thing—not even a person—but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance...

And now, what does it all matter? It matters more than anything else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made.

We’ve got to “enter that pattern,” but we can’t enter that pattern until that pattern enters us: “*We love because he first loved us.*”

In the *Problem of Pain*, Lewis writes, “There is joy in the dance but it does not exist for the sake of joy. It does not even exist for the sake of good, or of love. It is Love Himself, and Good Himself, and therefore happy.”

Jesus came “*that we might be one as He and the Father are One...that we might be one in Him.*” God is three persons and one substance, one hunk a hunk a burnin’ love.

Ephesians 4:6-14

One God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, [Literally, “He led captivity captive.”] and he gave gifts to men.’

Irenaeus, and many of the early church fathers, argued that the captives were the “principalities and powers” that seek to divide. Paul is quoting Psalm 68. In the Psalm, the Messiah “receives” gifts from men and here HE “gives” gifts to men...Well, Jesus can’t receive gifts from us that He didn’t first give to us...at the *start* of the dance. Psalm 68:18 “*He received gifts...even among the rebellious that the Lord may dwell there.*”

In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth [Literally, “of the earth”]. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

² Several ancient scribes tried to change it to all of us, or all of you because they obviously knew that all means all. All the best ancient manuscripts just have all. Paul meant all.

³ I don’t think any human conception could fully and accurately explain the Divine nature, but we know that God is One and scripture certainly seems to speak of God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit.

PAY ATTENTION TO THAT “ALL.” That is a really big “all.”

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all ...

HOW BIG IS *THAT* ALL? The “we” is supplied by the translator.

....*UNTIL ALL attain to [or more literally “arrive at”] UNTIL ALL ARRIVE AT:* (3 things):

1. *The unity of the faith and (unity) of the knowledge of the Son of God.*
That is: the faith that Christ (the ultimate Adam) has AND the knowledge that Christ, the ultimate Adam, has...what the first Adam didn't have: FAITH that God is Good and KNOWLEDGE that “the Good” is God.

2. *mature manhood [Literally “to the finished man,” singular and not “mankind” but *andra, teleion andra*, “finished man.”]*
Remember: On the tree, in the garden, Jesus cried, “*It is finished.*” (*teleos*) Paul seems to be saying, “We’re going out to meet “The Man—The Ultimate Adam, and we are His Body and His Bride.”

3. *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped [“supplied”], when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love:

One hunk a hunk of burnin’ love.

Well, it certainly seems pretty clear and evident: You are a piece of the Body of Christ, and despite the movies you’ve seen and books you’ve read, the return of Christ must look something like this:

Clip from *X factor*

[Numerous scattered pieces are all being reunited as they move towards a cloud of light. Dramatic music plays in the background as the pieces join together, ultimately forming a man.]

Something like that, except Jesus won't look like Simon Cowell from the X factor, and his head will remain intact. Something like that and all your jagged edges will make sense. Paul has been saying if for all of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:10

The plan for the fullness of time, anakephalaio, to unite all things under one sacred and wounded head.”

And even now, the true church, His body, is to be united, growing up in every way into Him, who is the Head. And for this purpose, Christ gave gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for equipping the saints (that's us), that the body might “*build itself up in love.*” It's not just pastors that build up the body; it's the body that builds the body in love. That's what all of our gifts

are for. And yet, the church has divided into a zillion denominations arguing over the gifts of the Spirit, and arguing over the communion table where they all come together.

It's like we've almost entirely missed the big picture. As so we don't:

Have We Missed the Big Picture?

1. We don't understand "gifts."
So we're afraid of "gifts."
2. We don't understand giving.
So we're afraid of giving.
3. We don't understand life.
So we're afraid of living.

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

- 1) Understand gifts, so we're afraid of gifts.
- 2) Understand giving, so we're afraid of giving.
- 3) Understand life, so we're afraid of living.

#1 We don't understand the gifts.

In fact, the moment I say, "gifts" some of you go right back to Christmas morning. Your mom is handing out gifts, and you're anxious, you're thinking: "Does father love me more or less than my sister? Did her gift cost him more than mine?"

Well, God the Father paid the same for each gift. He loves each of you with all His heart...with Jesus Christ and Him crucified on a tree, the measure is Christ's gift. He loves each of you the same amount, and yet, that gift takes a different form in each child. He loves you the same, even though He loves your sister with a doll house and you with a toy truck.

You may think you don't have gift, but you do.

1 Corinthians 12:7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

"To each..."

In fear, we think: "All the gifts should be just the same, and we forget that the gifts are gifts, and so we get proud of our gifts, as if they weren't gifts...but things we produced, as if others could have them if only they tried as hard as we. We get proud of our gifts and intimidated by gifts in others.

So, if we don't have a gift, we try and fake a gift. We say, "Oh God just gave me a vision," when we manufactured a vision." We say, "Oh God healed you through me and my gift, and if you don't feel healed...you obviously don't have faith." We give classes on how to speak in tongues: "Say, 'She bought a Honda...Economy condominium.'" There are no classes in Scripture, on how to get gifts. How to use your gifts or discover your gifts is another matter. But please see: The gifts are different for different people and that's by design.

For years, I was jealous of and utterly intimidated by people that would get "words of knowledge." They say, "God just told me xyz," just word for word. I never heard words, and so I was terrified I didn't hear the Shepherd's voice...and so maybe I wasn't a sheep. And then I married a sheep that

heard words, not just the sound of a voice: “blah blah blah fluffy blah blah,” but individual words. Like: “Fluffy, tell Peter to have peace. I am His Shepherd and I will show Him which way to go.”

A friend once prayed for me asking God why He didn't give me the gift I wanted, and she heard God say, “Because if I gave that gift to Peter, he wouldn't need my body.” And check this out: My wife is His body. And because she's my bride, she's actually my body.

I was thinking about that one day, and I remember thinking: “You know words of knowledge isn't the only gift she has that I don't have. She has female parts, and I don't have female parts, and yet, I do have female parts because I'm married to her, bound in a covenant, in which we celebrate communion.” And I remember thinking: “I have male parts, and she doesn't have male parts. And it's a gift that she doesn't have that gift, and yet, when we become one body, she does have that gift. And when my gift meets her “not gift”...that's the best gift; it's life and makes life: Jonathan, Elizabeth, Becky, and Coleman.

I'm just saying that differences don't have to be a curse; they can be the greatest blessing when bound by a covenant and offered in love as an act of communion. The problem is, we don't always use our gifts to give. We often use them to take. A man can use his unique male parts to take life or give life. He can use them to rape or make love. Sin is taking life and grace is giving life.

Well anyway, in Ephesians 4 (unlike other places) Paul isn't just saying that you are uniquely gifted; he's saying that you are the unique gift. Christ doesn't just give a gift of prophecy, He gives prophets.

You are the gift: You, with the places you feel gifted and don't feel gifted...

You, with the unique contours of your personality...

You, with your unique weaknesses and strengths...

You, with your concave edges and your convex edges...

You are a gift given to the Body of Christ!

Now, what parts of your body are dispensable? I mean, do you ever think: “Gosh, I like my eye and my ear is not my eye so I'll cut it off; I want my whole body to be an eye?”

What parts of Christ's Body does He consider dispensable?

If you were to lose a body part, would you want it back? Your body might live but not feel *teleos*-finished without it.

So from Jesus' perspective, what's a non-believer? What is a person that Jesus calls “lost?” What is that person lost from, and why would Jesus care? What if they're all indispensable and unique parts of His body, which is our body? Whatever the case, you are a unique and indispensable part of the Body of Christ, and so it's absolutely imperative that you would be you, so that you would give you; there's no substitute for you. You are a unique and indispensable gift that is to be given to Christ and His body.

See? You are not gifted simply to get (like when you were a kid on Christmas morning or in our society where gifted people get paid more). You aren't gifted to get...but gifted to give, to give your gift to the entire Body, and you are the gift. That's number two.

#2 We don't understand giving.

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes:

To each is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good.”

Then Paul describes various manifestations of the Holy Spirit as gifts given to build up the Body. Remember, we said that each of us has an earthen vessel? And that vessel is to be filled with mercy, filled with blood, and filled with the Spirit. When my vessel is filled with the Spirit, [Peter picks up a glass that has been filled with communion wine] Isn't it the shape of the Spirit in me?

Well, Paul wrote, *"To each is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good."*

See? [Peter pours some of the communion wine from one vessel into another.] When I give my gifts, I'm giving my life, or I should say, I'm giving what I call my life, but it's actually Christ's life. You know, Jesus said, "I am the Life," not "a life," but "the Life." There's only one life. That means, if anyone has any life it's Christ's life, even if they're cut off from the source of life, and don't know His name.

If I cut off my finger, and put it in a cup on the table, does it have life? (Scripture says, "The life is in the blood." It has blood, and it looks alive, and yet, it's good as dead. When that first Adam was kicked out of the garden, he was cut off from the tree of life, or maybe he hadn't yet been connected to the tree of life. Jesus said, *"I am the life."* On a tree, in a garden, we took His life, which is sin and death, on a tree, in a garden He gave His life, which is grace and life eternal.

Jesus, *"from the bosom of the Father,"* is the heart of God...hanging on a tree in a garden—The Tree of Life.

Jesus said, *"I am the Life."* So if you think your life is actually your life...you've obviously taken life, and now you're cut off from life, from the source of life—the Heart of God, and then it must be terrifying to give your life, for in that scenario, life is a zero sum game (like Andrew preached last week.)

I mean, if you give your life, you lose your life, and if you want more life...you must take life two times. On the biological level, we call it eating. On the spiritual level we call it sin, for in a fallen world, life is a zero sum game. I mean, there's only so much life to go around.

If we're lucky we'll form some covenants, some "old covenants." I mean we'll give in order to get, which if you think about it...really isn't giving. Maybe I'll get married and say, "I'll give some of my life..." [Peter pours a little bit of communion wine out into another cup that has some communion wine.] "If you give me some of your life." [Peter pours some communion wine from the cup that was just poured into...back into the cup that just gave.]

If I think she's not giving enough life, I'll consider divorce. If we make it awhile, maybe we'll have a kid [Peter adds another cup and pours wine out into that cup.] They ask for volunteers for the mission project... [Peter adds another cup and pours wine out into that cup] and that takes life. I try to hang on to life and the more I hang on to life...the less it feels like life. Maybe I retire so I can play golf and hang on to life...but soon, I'm dead.

You know, blood in a finger cut off is only life for a few minutes, and then it's death.

See? If you think your life is your life, and so hang on to life, it's not just a zero sum game, it's game over...life over.

But Jesus said, *"If you lose your life for my sake, and the kingdom..."*

Maybe we exist in this zero sum world, in this fallen world, to learn to lose our lives, to learn to truly give our lives, sacrifice our lives, to be crucified; for in Heaven nobody gets crucified. But here on earth, we can learn what giving really is. For if you give to receive, it's not giving, but if you don't give, you'll never receive.

Jesus said, *“The measure you give is the measure you receive.”* *“If you seek to save your life you’ll lose it.”* But Jesus said, *“If you lose your life, for my sake and the kingdom, [Peter pours all the wine from one cup into another] you will find it”...* [Peter then takes the pitcher of communion wine and fills the cup that had just been emptied.]...according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

What is the measure of Christ’s gift?
How much life flows from the ancient tree?
How much blood flows from the Lamb upon His throne?

The institutional church must think it’s very little because we guard the communion table like we think it’s a zero sum game, but eternal life is not a zero sum game.

The apostle Paul didn’t guard the communion table from us...but us...from the communion table because it’s God’s judgment; it’s burning love and it will burn you down to faith. It will unclog your vessel whether you want it to or not.

“There is a river that flows from the throne of grace.” Julian of Norwich writes, “His blood is the most plentiful substance in all the universe” and there’s enough blood for all. He died for all, and it’s a big all.

So life...real life...is not a zero sum game. And my life is Christ’s life, and I am a gift to be given, and that’s the game, that’s life.

When my kids were little, we’d all go play ball in the basement. We usually didn’t keep score; we just bounced it around. When Coleman, my youngest, started to join us, he would sometimes get the ball, then run with the ball, and keep the ball in his arms in the corner: Game Over. And soon, even for Coleman, all the fun would be over. The point isn’t possessing the ball...but passing the ball. The point isn’t possessing your life...but passing your life.

You are a gift to be given, or maybe I should say, you are the form in which the gift is given. [Peter fills a cup, then empties it into another cup, fills the same cup, then empties it and keeps doing this over and over.] You know, rather than dumping the blood from one vessel into another vessel (feeling empty and full, empty and full), what if each vessel was not such a closed vessel?

What if each vessel didn’t really hold the blood but constantly transmitted the blood without reservation, such that, as soon as it was emptied it would be filled. Then each vessel would constantly be emptied...but never be empty, for it would constantly be filled. Each vessel would constantly lose its life, and yet always be filled with life, a river of life.

What if I could totally unclog all these vessels, [Peter picks up a glass filled with sand and begins pouring it out onto the ground] every clogged vessel, every damned vessel, and circumcise the ends...like cut off the ends and turn them into pipes. Well then, they wouldn’t be earthen vessels for containing life, they’d be blood vessels for transmitting Life.

Kind of like this...[Peter picks up a basket of PVC pipes and begins fitting them together, building a body] each one unique and different, each one fitted to another one by every joint [Peter continues building]. (Home Depot didn’t have earthen pipes...but PVC pipes and fitting. There are even male ends and female ends. And this should remind you of a great sermon Frances preached this summer.)

But what if all the vessels could for one Body? [Peter puts all the PVC pipes, connected together as a body, on a table and puts a funnel at the top.] And what if I poured the one life into all these many and strange vessels? There’d be One Spirit, One Life, One Faith, One Knowledge, One Grace. But grace would be given to each...according to the measure of Christ’s love...a river of life that would come out the toes and onto the carpet, and I don’t want to tick off the cleaning lady so I won’t do it. But...what if all these vessels were joined together not as many lives but One Life.

[Peter puts a head on the PVC pipe body] What if they were all united under one head *Anakephalaio*.

I'm saying, what if you really got the picture: That you are a unique and indispensable part of the Body of Christ, that the person next to you is a unique and indispensable part of the Body of Christ. Maybe even your enemy is a unique and indispensable part of that, even if currently they don't know it, even if currently they're full of themselves and cut off.

What if we're all part of Christ's body?

Some already connected...called the Church.

Some still to be connected...called the lost.

What if we're all part of Christ's body, and life is not your possession but you are life's possession? Which means, you are Christ's possession. Which means all belongs to you, and you belong to all.

If we really got the idea or He got us...we wouldn't hang on to life (in anxiety, loneliness and despair) we'd begin to live life...Christ's life—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit LIFE.

Ten years ago, one weekend at church, at a time when she very much didn't want to have visions, my thirteen-year-old daughter had a vision. (It was a time in which she was battling some very frightening things).

She came to me after the service and said, "Daddy, as I watched people go forward for communion, I saw these big cutter things (she called them cutter things—swords) that would swing out and cut people." She said, "Daddy, they cut off parts of their bodies, but they still came to communion. They hobbled around communion and began to bump into each other, and when they'd bump into each other sometimes they'd fuse. Like...if someone didn't have an arm, they'd bump into someone that did and they'd fuse. And Daddy, I wasn't frightened. It was really cool, for in the end they formed one huge body and nothing could hurt it."

Communion

Well, on the night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body broken for you; take and eat, and do this in remembrance of me." Now, if you do that, where is His body? And He took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, as often as you drink it, do it in remembrance of me."

You see, when we come to the table and participate in communion, we actually RE-member Christ. We RE-member His body or maybe He RE-members us. Or maybe, He just members us because we were never membered before. Whatever the case, you come to this table and you need to know: You are a unique and indispensable member. In Jesus' name, believe the gospel and worship.

[A few worship songs are sung.]

So just speak to Him now. And if you would, make my words your words, repeating them silently in your heart after I say them. Just say to the Lord, "Here I am. Unclog my vessel. Circumcise my heart; fill me Holy Spirit, and keep filling me...like a river because the gift isn't just for me...it's for us. So...empower your gifts Holy Spirit and make us into the Body that we are destined to be, through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray these things. Amen"

Benediction

I hope one thing has become clear and that is: I cannot build the Body of Christ. At best, I can build PVC Franken Christ. But the Holy Spirit can build the Body of Christ and the Holy Spirit is building the Body of Christ as we surrender to Him and He knits us together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each joint is working properly and together the body builds itself up in love; that's how the Holy Spirit builds up the body.

We'll begin to talk about that more in the next few weeks. But now you need to know that you are a unique and indispensable part of the Body of Christ, and Christ has given you His life so that you can also give His life. The measure you get is also the measure you give. And the measure you receive is also the measure you give. When we worship we even receive a measure and give a measure back to God. It's the life of God as God creates us in His image. So, in Jesus' name believe the gospel and live.

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.