

March 17/18, 2001

**The Truth About Our Life in Christ**  
*A Study in the Book of Ephesians*  
**God's Strategy for Presenting**  
**Every Person Complete in Christ**  
Ephesians 4:7-16  
**Pastor Bryan Clark**

***The Parable of the Orchestra***

**O**nce upon a time the Creator came to His people and told them He would like them to form an orchestra for the ages. He wanted every instrument playing in perfect balance with the others to create heavenly harmony for His Father. The people were excited at first with this grand opportunity to serve the Creator by making music, but soon their excitement turned to dismay when they remembered they did not know how to make music. They didn't know how to play an instrument.

One day, much to the people's delight, a musician was sent to them from the Creator. He made beautiful music. Finally, the people thought, "We can fulfill our mission." They encouraged the musician to play, and day after day he did. But some remembered that the Creator said He wanted an orchestra, not a solo. All they could do was enjoy the music of the one while they patiently waited for more musicians to come. "We need more musicians," they cried out to the Creator. But none came. Day after day they prayed for more musicians, but no more were to be found. The soloist was near exhaustion from performing all day everyday. Finally he suggested that perhaps his role should be to train others to play an instrument and make music.

At first the people dismissed the idea, saying it was not possible for them to play like him. However, in time, the musician convinced a few brave souls to try. As the few began to learn and practice, they were amazed at the music that was within them. It was as if they had some magical power residing in them to make melody in ways they never imagined. Soon, much to the surprise of the others, they became musicians themselves. As they played their music on the stage the others admired their skills and enjoyed the beautiful music. However, they were not an orchestra. They were merely a small ensemble. The Creator wanted a complete orchestra. They realized now that the musicians must work diligently to train other musicians if they were to ever be what the Creator commanded them to be.

The people were reluctant at first, but little by little, more and more moved from the audience to the orchestra. One instrument was added after another as the music became more and more glorious. People who had been convinced they could not make music were finding, as the others did, that within them was a gift for music they never knew they had. Some regretted they hadn't made music before, but mostly they were thankful this gift had been discovered and cultivated before the days for making music passed them by.

There were those stubborn ones who, for one reason or another, preferred to sit in the audience rather than the orchestra. On one occasion the music crescendoed to the climax of the piece in glorious fashion. But rather than ending with a flourish it ended with a whimper, because the instruments needed to complete the music were missing. The few sitting in the audience saw the disappointed look on the faces of those in the orchestra and they could hold out no more. They knew now that among them were the critical missing instruments to complete the orchestra. Soon the musicians enthusiastically had the new orchestra members trained and making music. And make music they did! They played with an enthusiasm and

*dedication they had never known before. Each instrument perfectly balanced with the others to make music that echoed throughout the heavenlies. Every person playing an instrument. No audience now—just musicians supernaturally gifted to make music.*

*That is, no audience except one. If they looked closely they could see the face of the Creator who brought this orchestra together. He had been listening to the music all the time. The music reverberated through the heavens. This was His masterpiece. Music written by His nail-scarred hands and performed by His children to the praise of His glory. Yes, the Creator was the audience now. As He listened, he turned to the players with a smile on His face and said. “Well done my children, well done.”*

As we have been studying the book of Ephesians, we have been reminded that we, who are in Christ, are God’s family. We are His body. We are His orchestra—each of us called to play an instrument, and coming together to make beautiful music for His honor and His glory. In Ephesians 4:1-6 we studied this marvelous theology, which reminds us that we are one in the Father, in the Son, in the Spirit. Theologically we are unified in quite a magnificent way. But there is always a risk that when we talk about unity there are some who mistake *uniformity* for *unity*.

Several years ago there was a marvelous commercial on television. I don’t remember the product it advertised, but it was a fashion show in some communist country. They had these large, husky women coming out on stage, and they all had these gray uniforms on. The announcer would say “Casual Wear!” and a woman would walk out with a gray, dull uniform on. She came out, spun around, and went back. And then the announcer would say, “Formal Wear!” And she came out with the same dull uniform on and spun around and went back. And then he said “Swim Wear!” and she came out with the same gray uniform on, spun around, and went back. And really, what they were talking about is uniformity—everybody looking exactly the same.

As a matter of fact, if you were to take our orchestra analogy, it would basically be everybody playing the same instrument, playing the same note all the time. There would be no harmony—no diversity. That is not what God wants from his church. We have unity, but within unity there is diversity. That is what makes the music—that is what makes the harmony.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 4, picking it up in verse 7, and talks about unity with diversity, and that is what we will talk about in this discussion. He has just completed this wonderful discussion about how we are one in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in verses 4, 5, and 6. Then you will notice that verse 7 opens with a contrast with the word “but”—which is saying “but in this unity, don’t lose sight of the fact that we are still individuals with an individual calling.” He says, “But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Now, when he says grace was given, we understand that he is referring to our calling. He is saying that every person has been called to play an instrument, called to serve in the body of Christ.

If you look back at chapter 3, verse 8, Paul clearly used this language to refer to his own calling when he said, “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.” So that is the same language he is using in chapter 4. He is saying that each one of us has a calling from God, and it is all according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Now what does that mean? He explains that in chapter 4, verses 8, 9, and 10. He quotes from Psalm 68 in verse 8, when he says, “Therefore, it says {*meaning*

*Psalm 68 says* } WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”

The psalm he refers to (Psalm 68) was about God being the victorious King of Israel. God led his people out of bondage in Egypt, and the psalm celebrates that. They moved to Mount Sinai where God gives forth His law, which reflects His own person and character, and the psalm reflects the glory of that. And then it moves from there to ascending the hill, entering Jerusalem as the conquering King. And as He moves into Jerusalem, the land of promise, to establish His throne, He then receives gifts (which would be typical of a conquering King—receiving the spoils of the victory).

That is the portion of the psalm Paul is quoting—this idea of the conquering King entering into the land of promise and receiving these gifts. But if you look at Paul’s quotation, he doesn’t say receiving gifts—he says giving gifts. So why the difference from Psalm 68 to Ephesians 4? Well, it’s really not as different as it may seem. In that culture it was understood that when a King entered into the city, that he received the spoils of victory. That was part of the benefit of this conquering, and so he received gifts. But it was also with the understanding that he received the gifts in order to distribute them out to his people. So the concepts of receiving and giving were really one and the same. Here Paul is painting the picture of Jesus Christ as the conquering King, ascending to glory, and then distributing these gifts that were brought about because of His victory. Verses 9 and 10 are a commentary on that psalm. He says:

Now, this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.

What is he talking about there? There is quite a bit of discussion on that phrase, “He descended into the lower parts of the earth.” Some people think it means that Jesus, after He died on the cross and was buried, descended into hell for a period of time before His resurrection. But we need to understand there really is no biblical support for that, and it would be quite a stretch to say that is what is being said here. There are a couple of reasons why that doesn’t make any sense. One reason is that when Jesus died on the cross, He uttered the words, “It is finished.” It is the Greek word *tetelestai* and it means “paid in full.” So when Jesus died on the cross, the payment was completed. There was no need for any further payment to be made, so there would be no reason for him to go down into hell. The other reason would be that payment was not made to the devil; the payment was made to God the Father. So that belief makes no real sense, and it’s probably not what is being referred to here.

If you look in John 3:13, John uses the exact same language that clearly referred to Jesus’ incarnation, and I think that is what is being talked about here. When Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, He is as high as one can be, so there was no place for Him to ascend. That is the point that Paul is making—how could He ascend unless He first descends? So it is talking about His willingness to set aside the riches of heaven to become flesh and dwell among us, ultimately to be nailed to a cross, and to be buried in the grave. That would be what he means by descending to the lower parts of the earth in order to win the victory. The conquering King rises from the dead; and, as we learned in Ephesians 2, when He ascends, we who are in Christ ascend with Him, and we are seated with Him at the right hand of the Father.

So what he is really referring to here is this wonderful victory that was won through Jesus’ death on the cross, made possible when He descended from glory, became flesh, died, was buried, rose again, ascended to the Father, and took captive a host of captives (that would

be those who are in Christ), and we ascended with Him. Having won that victory, then, the conquering King turns around and gives gifts to His people in order to accomplish His mission. The question is: What are those gifts?

Now at this point, we need to be careful that we don't automatically go to our understanding of how we define spiritual gifts. Often when people refer to this passage in Ephesians 4, it is the understanding that it was the giving of spiritual gifts, but that is not what he is saying here. If you look very closely at the language, the gifts that were given were not spiritual gifts in the kind of narrow definition that we use, but the gifts were actually people. His gifts that He gave back to the church in order to accomplish His mission were people—people serving people in order to accomplish the mission.

Look at the language here. Verse 11: “And He gave some...” Now obviously, the word “gave” refers to His gifts in verse 7 and 8, and what He gave were some people—some people as apostles and prophets. Now when we see *apostles and prophets* (several times in Ephesians we have seen this) it is a reference to the twelve apostles Jesus used to establish His New Testament church and the prophets through whom God spoke truth before they had the Scriptures available like we have them today. So the apostles and the prophets basically laid the foundational truths of the church, and we have been told that several times here in our study of Ephesians.

If we go back to our analogy of the orchestra, what is being said is that the apostles and prophets establish the melody line. Before you can have harmony, you first have to have melody. That was their role. They established the foundational truths, the doctrines of the church—they established that melody. So he said these were the gifts that He gave to His church. He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists. Now when we say evangelist, there's a tendency to think of a televangelist or someone who travels around doing evangelistic meetings, and that is really not what the term is referring to here. It means someone who was a proclaimer of the gospel. Often they would stay in a city two, three, or four years, and their responsibility was just to proclaim the gospel. It was probably more similar to what we would think of as a missionary today. Their responsibility was to go in, proclaim the gospel and bring those believers together to establish the church. Once that church is established, then they become the responsibility of the pastor-teacher, which is the next one in the list.

The grammar in this text would lead us to believe that we're not talking about two different people—a pastor and a teacher—but we're talking about pastor-teacher. It is saying here that every shepherd (a pastor) is also a teacher. If a shepherd can't teach, then that shepherd can't fulfill his calling. It doesn't mean they all teach the way I teach—that they all teach sermons or that they even necessarily teach in a classroom. But it is saying that the responsibility of a pastor is to be a teacher in order to equip the saints to do the works of service. That's what he says in verse 12. So He gave gifts, and those gifts are people, as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Why? “For the equipping of the saints for the work of service {*sometimes translated for the work of ministry*}.”

What is being said here is very important. If you were to go into some churches, you would see a two-tiered system. You have the clergy and you have the congregation. It is the responsibility of the clergy to do ministry; it is the responsibility of the congregation to sit and watch. The clergy are the performers and the congregation is the audience. But that is not what Christ intended for His church, and this passage is telling us that. You do not pay me to

do the ministry—you pay me to equip you to do the work of the ministry. Sometimes people call me a minister. This week someone said to me, “Are you a minister?” And I launched into my Ephesians 4, “Well, technically, the word says...” No, I didn’t. But, actually, I am not the minister; I am a trainer of ministers. *You* are the minister.

If someone were to ask you, “I see you praying all the time—are you a minister?” you should respond “Yes, I am.” That is what Paul is teaching in this passage. You pay your pastors to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. When the ministers do the ministry, then we accomplish the mission. But when we leave it up to the clergy to perform and the congregation watches, we’ll never get anywhere. As a matter of fact, there is a great concern in that, because Paul is going to go on to say that you cannot become complete in Christ if you are not serving. If you are an audience you cannot become complete in Christ. We cannot accomplish the mission of the church unless we understand we are all called to be ministers—to serve, to pick up our instrument and to play.

Look at what he says in verse 12: “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service {*or ministry*}, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith...” Now throughout our study, we have understood this phrase *the faith* as a reference to the truth. The truth is in verses 4, 5, and 6. Theologically what is true is that we are united as one body, as one orchestra in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But what he is saying in verse 13 is we all come together and experience that unity when we understand our responsibility to serve one another in the church, so that what is true theologically is then experienced in our practice. He is saying that our practice lines up with our position “until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”

Now we know that when we see the word “knowledge” it is not talking about information—it’s talking about intimacy. It is through that intimacy, as we serve one another in the body of Christ, that we become more intimate with God—that we know Him in a deeper way. He is saying here that when those who are called to equip the saints do so, and they do the work of the ministry, we experience a unity that comes together and measures up to what is theologically true of us. In experiencing that intimacy, we grow in our intimacy with God. And in experiencing intimacy with God, we become complete in Christ. That is what he means when he says. “...until we attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man {*or a complete person*}...”

Colossians 1:18 is the verse from which we get our church’s mission statement, where Paul says his passion in life is to seek to present every person complete in Christ. That word “complete” in Colossians 1 is the exact same word that is used here in Ephesians 4. So it could be translated “a complete person.” In others words, what Paul is laying out is God’s strategy for seeking to present every person complete in Christ. It all starts with an understanding that Christ has given gifts to His church, and those gifts are people; and each one of those people have been called to pick up an instrument with a supernatural ability to play it, and be part of God’s orchestra. When we gather together and serve one another, as God intended, then we experience this unity that is true of us through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the process of experiencing that, we grow deeper in our relationship with God; and as we grow deeper in our relationship with God, we become a complete person in Christ.

What does it mean to be complete in Christ? I think he defines it in verse 13: “... to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” In others words, we measure up to the stature. We measure up to our position as being people filled with the

fullness of Christ. Do you remember how chapter 4 opened up in verse 1? Paul was pleading with the people to walk worthy of our calling—that our walking, our practice, would measure up to our position. And now he is saying that is defined as being complete in Christ. What is theologically true is then lived out in everyday practice.

What Paul says at the end of verse 13 takes us back to the end of chapter 1:22-23, when we learn that Christ is the head of the church; and even though He runs the universe, He is way over-qualified to run the church. But in an act of grace and submission and humility, He goes from not only running the universe but specifically to being the head of His church. Then, not only being the head of His church, but He dwells within us and fills us with His fullness so that we can live out this new life in Christ. In the past we used the illustration of Sammy Sosa. We talked about Sammy Sosa playing in the Big Leagues, but having a willingness to come all the way down, being way over-qualified, to play on a Little League team. And he would play on that Little League team, but he wouldn't be satisfied just to play on that team. He would crawl inside the skin of those Little League players and he would empower them to play at his level. That was the picture we used to describe that doctrine at the end of chapter 1. Now Paul is coming back to that and saying that when we experience this unity, by everyone serving as they are called, then we experience intimacy with God. Through that, we become complete in Christ, which means that we measure up to what is true of us in Christ—that we actually live out this fullness that is ours in Christ.

Verse 14 states the result of that: “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.” First of all, he says what we're not. The opposite of being mature would be immature, and he says, “You're no longer like that. You're no longer children who kind of get blown this direction and blown that direction.” It's the idea that a child is fairly easy to mislead. They're fairly easy to deceive, and that's the way immature people are. They are blown this way by this doctrine, and then they're blown that way by that doctrine. They're constantly looking for something that will satisfy, and so they follow this trend, and they read this book, and they're just all over the map, but they're never really growing to maturity in Christ.

If we go back to our analogy of the orchestra, this is someone who has been gifted to play an instrument. But, somewhere along the line, somebody convinced them that they shouldn't play in the orchestra, but that they should play in a band on the street corner. So they play in a band on the street corner, but that doesn't satisfy, so someone tells them, “You know, what you need to be doing is playing in this band in this lounge.” So they get in this band in this lounge, and they play there awhile, and that isn't very fulfilling either. Then somebody says, “You know, what you really need to be fulfilled is to go in a solo career and get under the big lights, and boy, that's really fulfilling.” So they take off on a solo career, but that isn't very fulfilling. They never really grow to maturity because they go this way and they go that way.

Paul says that isn't the way we are when we're maturing in Christ. The opposite of that is in verse 15, “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.” To grow up into Him basically means that, in our practice, we grow up to the measure of our position in Christ. We grow up into Christ.

What does he mean here by “speaking the truth in love”? You might be interested to know that the word “speaking” doesn't show up in the Greek text at all. They are just trying to figure out a way to translate the word “truth.” The word truth in the Greek language is a verb

in this case, and we have no way to translate this into English, so I'm going to translate it the way it literally reads. Paul says that we would be "truthing in love"—that's actually what the word means there—that we would be truthing. I don't think "speaking the truth" captures it, because it's not limited to that. What he is saying is that we live the truth—that we are truthing—that our practice is consistent with what we know to be true of our lives in Christ. So we are "truthing in love"—we're living out the truth of chapters 1, 2, and 3, and that is a huge emphasis in this passage.

In verse 16, I think he just summarizes what we've studied so far: "from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies {*we could say every instrument that's been given*} according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." This is clearly God's strategy for seeking to present every person complete in Christ: understanding the victorious King has given gifts and those gifts are people, and those people are equipped to serve one another, and in the process, we all grow to maturity. We experience this marvelous unity that is theologically true, but needs to be experienced as true, when that orchestra comes together. Everybody is playing a different instrument, but everybody is playing the same piece of music, following the same conductor, Jesus Christ. That experience of unity causes us to become more intimate with God and to know Him in a deeper fashion. And as we know Him more deeply, then we grow to maturity—we become complete in Christ, which means our practice measures up to who we are in Christ theologically.

Several years ago, I read an article in *Reader's Digest*, and for some reason it just really stuck in my mind as a beautiful picture of what we are to be about as the church of Jesus Christ, here in this culture filled with so much conflict and suffering and war. It is about a cellist who chose to play his instrument in the midst of the war in Sarajevo. Listen to the story:

On May 27, 1992 in Sarajevo, one of the few bakeries that still had a supply of flour was making and distributing bread to the starving, war-shattered people. At 4 p.m. a long line stretched into the street. Suddenly a mortar shell fell directly into the middle of the line, killing 22 people. Not far away lived a 35-year-old musician named Vedran Smajlovic. Before the war, he had been a cellist with the Sarajevo opera—a distinguished career to which he patiently longed to return. But when he saw the carnage from the massacre outside his window, he was pushed past his capacity to absorb and endure any more. Anguished, he resolved to do the thing he did best—to make music—public music, daring music—music on the battlefield. For each of the next 22 days, at 4 p.m. Smajlovic put on his full formal concert attire, took up his cello, and walked out of his apartment into the midst of the battle raging all around him. Placing a plastic chair beside the crater that the shell had made, he played, in memory of the dead ones, the mournful and haunting pieces in his classical repertoire. He played to the abandoned street, smashed trucks, and burning buildings, and to the terrified people who hid in the cellars while the bombs dropped and bullets flew. With masonry exploding around him, he made his unimaginably courageous stand for human dignity, for those lost to war, for civilization, for compassion, and ultimately for peace.

You know, the first time I read that, for some reason it just created for me a picture—that is our calling. Our calling is to go out into the battle, out into the suffering, out into the carnage of the culture. We are called by God to make music in the midst of such suffering. And, in that music, we are called to give people hope that draws them to the music, ultimately to be introduced to the conductor Himself, Jesus Christ, who can so radically change their lives.

But there is no way that we can make that music unless we understand that each of us has been called to play an instrument, and every instrument is necessary. Every person who is in Christ has been empowered to supernaturally make music. We all come together with different instruments, great diversity, wonderful harmony, but all playing the same piece of music, becoming His masterpiece for His glory. To become complete in Christ we must serve one another to make His music for His glory.

Will you be responsive to His call to play your instrument?