

“Be the Gift!” **(Eph. 4:11–13 ESV)**

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There is a short list of movies that make me stop doing whatever I am doing so that I can watch them. On that short list is “Field of Dreams.” The premise of the movie is quite preposterous. An Iowa farmer named Ray hears a voice saying, “Build it and he will come.” He figures out that if he sacrifices a corner of a corn field to build a baseball field, the ghosts of baseball legends from past generations will come to play including Ray’s idol Shoeless Joe Jackson, and far more importantly, Ray’s father. The premise is preposterous, but the film is quite powerful because it captures the human experience. You see that on display in one scene when Ray is facing bankruptcy because of everything he has poured into the ball field. Ray’s friend, Terence, tells him that he should keep the ball field because people will show up in droves paying \$20 or more to visit his ball field. Why? Terence says, “It is money that they have but peace that they lack.”

It is peace that they lack. That is the human experience ever since the fall into sin. You know exactly what I am talking about. You know what it is to long for peace as it remains ever elusive. You have watched family, friends, co-workers and colleagues all yearning for the peace that they lack. We long for peace. That is why Christ has given us pastors. The Lord calls pastors to deliver the goods. One of the manifold goods that Christ delivers through pastors is peace. Think of your own pastor and how he has delivered peace to you when you desperately needed it. At the bedside of your mother as she neared the end of life, there was your pastor delivering peace. In your living room as you faced an uncertain future because of a lost job, there was your pastor delivering peace. When you were facing isolation or maybe even animosity from someone you love, there was your pastor delivering the Father’s peace given to you by the Spirit for the sake of Christ. That is the gift Christ has given to you in your pastor.

So says the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. With apostolic authority, Paul says that when Jesus ascended, He gave gifts to men (Eph. 4:8). What gifts did he give? That is answered in our text, Eph. 4:11–12 ESV. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ.” There is much in us that needs to be completed. In the initial verses of Ephesians 4, Paul encourages the Ephesians — and you — to walk in a manner appropriate to your calling. And when Paul unpacks what it looks like for us to walk in that way, he includes these words being “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3 ESV). There it is. The Ephesians, the church, me, you are called to live in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That you may have such peace, Christ has given the gift of pastors.

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If you have read Paul's letter to the Ephesians, you will notice how it overflows with Christ's gift of peace. Paul draws attention to the need for peace among the Ephesians because of what he calls the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. That dividing wall of hostility is an affront to the cross. Paul proclaims that those who were once far off — there's the dividing wall of hostility — have become near by the blood of Christ because Jesus Himself is our peace (Eph. 2:13-14).

I expect that you don't think much about the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. It is apparent in some settings, but for many it is something to discuss when studying first century Christianity. But you do know what it is to live with a dividing wall of hostility. Against whom has sin divided you? It happens in congregations today just as it did in the Ephesian congregation. Ethnic divisions pit us against one another as we identify ourselves ethnically more than we identify ourselves baptismally. Economic disparities will turn brothers and sisters in Christ into foes. Political allegiances supersede faith, estranging those who kneel at the same altar. Personal animosity takes hold as we see another as an obstacle to be overcome or an argument to be won, rather than a person to be loved and understood. The dividing wall of hostility remains. We are desperately in need of peace.

Jesus has come to bring you peace. The apostle Paul tells the Ephesians and you, "And he came and preached peace to you" (Eph. 2:17 ESV). That is how Jesus does things. He speaks it and it happens. He preaches peace and so peace is yours. But when did Jesus preach to the Ephesians? Jesus traveled everywhere by foot. The closest He ever got to Ephesus in His earthly ministry was more than 1,000 miles by foot. So, how can Paul say that Jesus preached peace to the Ephesians? Because when Jesus ascended, He gave gifts to men. He gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to bring the saints to completion. Even the completion of peace. Jesus preached peace to the Ephesians through the pastors He sent to them.

Jesus is still preaching peace today. Jesus preaches peace to you through your pastor. This is a cause for thanksgiving because when Christ's Word of peace is preached, peace is yours. The Word of Jesus delivers what it promises. This is also a reason to pray to the Lord that He would raise up those who would prepare to serve as pastors, deaconesses and other servants of the church who will be harbingers of peace. Such servants are needed because this fallen age is starving for peace. This fallen age needs the gift of pastors who preach the peace of God in Christ, the gift of deaconesses and other servants who speak peace.

Prayerfully consider whether Christ is calling you to prepare to be the gift — the gift that is desperately needed. Paul knew that the church needs the gift of pastors. He spent three years in Ephesus, preaching and teaching to both Jew and Gentile. When the day came that Paul knew he would not see the Ephesians again, he gathered the Ephesian elders — pastors — together. His message to them included this word. "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood" (Acts 20:28 ESV). Paul knew that the church needs the gift of pastors, so he commended them to their divine call. But think about what Paul said of those pastors. They tend to the flock that Christ has purchased with His blood. How incredible is that! What a gift it is to be the gift that Christ gives.

Standing at the "Field of Dreams," Terence tells Ray, "It is peace that they lack." But not you. Peace is yours. It is given to you every Sunday by the mouth that Christ has made to be His gift to you.

The LORD bless you and keep you.

The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.