



**“Ye are the body of Christ, and the members in particular”  
(I Corinthians 12:27).**

## **The Unity of Spiritual Gifts**

**Central Truth:** Each believer should serve God as part of the total ministry of his church.

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**Topic:** Holy Spirit: Gifts of.

During World War II a man went into the office of an automobile dealer to discuss the purchase of a new car. He saw on the office wall a picture torn from the cover of a magazine. It showed a man's hand with the fingers spread apart, pointing upward. Each finger was shaped like a man's body. In each hand was a weapon of destruction and an expression of hatred was on each face. Across the palm of the hand someone had written “humanity.”

The picture represented the human race as each person desiring to do injury to every other person. But that is not the way God designed the human hand — each finger seeking injury to every other finger. A hand determined to destroy itself is contrary to nature and indicates that its members are out of touch with the control of the head. When the head is in control, the body operates in harmony, with each member caring for every other member.

That principle applies to the spiritual body also. God designed the body of Christ to function in unity. It is no surprise to find the Bible emphasizing the unity of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12:1-11 emphasizes the diversity of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12:12-26 emphasizes the unity of spiritual gifts. “We are not divided;/All one body we,/One in hope and doctrine,/One in charity”(Sabine Baring-Gould). Thank God for that unity.

### **I. UNITY ILLUSTRATED (I Corinthians 12:12)**

Our unity in Christ is illustrated by comparing the spiritual body of Christ with the physical body of a person. Each shows many members indwelt by the same spirit (human spirit in the physical body and Holy Spirit in the spiritual body) functioning in perfect harmony.

One's body is (1) the place of the residence of his spirit and (2) the vehicle for the expression of his person. Christ's body is (1) the place of the residence of His Spirit and (2) the vehicle for the expression of His person.

The physical body has many members. Each differs from all the others in design, location, and function. Yet together they all make up one physical body. The spiritual body follows the same design of diversity and yet unity. *"We, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another"* (Romans 12:5). What a beautiful analogy!

Is that comparison a figure of speech, or is it actual reality? It is real. It is so real that our physical bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and limbs of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 6:15, 19). It is no cause for boasting but rather for rejoicing. *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"* (I Corinthians 12:27). Believe it and rejoice.

## II. UNITY EXPLAINED. (I Corinthians 12:13)

*"By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body"* (I Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit did something (called baptism in this text) which placed us in Christ's body. Being *"in Christ"* is the explanation of our unity.

**A. Believers *"in Christ."*** That is the central theme of Paul's doctrine of salvation and sanctification. We were placed *"in Christ"* at conversion, whereby each of us became a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). Each of us belongs to Him, and therefore each of us belongs to every other one of us, *"for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). To be *"in Christ"* is to be saved, and to be saved is to be *"in Christ."*

**B. Believers are *"in Christ"* without distinction.** His body includes Jew and Gentile, bond and free (Galatians 3:27-29). Christ has broken down the partition which divided Jew and Gentile, reconciling both to God and to each other in himself (Ephesians 2:13-22). It makes no difference what your racial background or social status is; if you are in Christ, you are saved and a member of His body.

**C. Believers are *"in Christ"* by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.** Paul includes himself with believers in Corinth and says, *"We have all been once for all baptized in the one and same body by the ministry of the Holy Spirit."* That could not mean water baptism because Paul was not baptized when and

where the Corinthians were baptized and was not a member of the same local church as they.

There are three primary understandings of the meaning of baptism by the Holy Spirit. (1) It came upon the church as an institution at Pentecost and will never be repeated. (2) It comes on a believer at his conversion and all have received it. (3) It comes on some believers in a special experience of sanctification and — though all should receive it — only a few do in fact. Of the three, the second seems to fit all the Scripture references the best. That is the position taken in these comments.

One puts on Christ in symbol in the ordinance of water baptism because he has put on Christ in fact in the reality of Spirit baptism. “*As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). The explanation of Christian unity is that each one who trusts Jesus is in Christ and Christ is in him.

**D. Believers are “in Christ” by drinking of the Holy Spirit** (I Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit of God is the “*living water*” which Jesus promised to each one who believes in Him (John 4:10, 13, 14; 7:37-39). To drink of the Spirit is to receive His indwelling presence in the conversion experience. One drinks of the Spirit in that he receives the Spirit, and he is baptized by the Spirit in that the Spirit places him in Christ. Both happen at the moment one is born again.

### **III. UNITY APPLIED (I Corinthians 12:14-20)**

Some members of the physical body are more attractive than other members. Some members receive greater attention than other members. Some members are more obvious than other members. And yet they all are needed in the full function and health of the body.

Do not be surprised if some spiritual gifts in the church are more obvious than other gifts, thereby receiving greater attention than some others. The teacher is more obvious in the exercise of his gift than one with the gift of helping or of showing mercy. The teacher stands before the group, while the helper and mercy shower often minister privately to one person. Yet all members are needed, and each member is essential to the full ministry of the body.

**A. The lesser members are needed by the body** (verses 14-20). Each is a part of the body, “*for the body is not one member, but many*” (verse 14). No member must disparage itself or its place in the body. The foot must never say, for instance, “I am not the hand; therefore, I do not belong to the body.” Of course it belongs to the body, but as a foot and not as a hand. It

being what it is makes it no less a part of the body. Each member, including the lesser members, renders an important function to the body. The body needs the ministry of each member, not just the ministry of the greater members.

The lesser members of the body were designed by God himself, the same as the greater members. When God fashioned a form from the dust of the earth and breathed the breath of life into it, that physical body of man had all the members it has today (Genesis 2:7, 21-23). Let no member designed of God depreciate itself as if it were unimportant. *“Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him”* (verse 18).

The lesser members are essential to the body (verses 19, 20). There would not be a body without them. All members are essential for complete life. Every one of them was designed of God. The body is not the result of an accidental arrangement. For a member to reject its place in the body is to insult the wisdom of God who placed it there.

**B. The greater members are needed in the body** (verses 21,23). Some members of the physical body are more essential than other members. One could live without a hand, but he could not live without a brain. But for one to function fully, he needs both hand and brain. The greater members of the body must not reject the lesser members. *“Those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary”* (verse 22).

The lesser members are blended with the greater members to prevent a schism in the body. What happens to one happens to all. *“God hath tempered the body together, . . . that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another”* (verses 24, 25).

There is the explanation for the unity of the church. We come together in church membership from all kinds of backgrounds and with differing spiritual gifts. Yet we become united in church fellowship because we have a prior union in Christ. We accept one another, honor one another, and minister to one another. We are one in the body of Jesus Christ.

**C. All members are joined in mutual care for all other members** (verses 25, 26). We are members one of another (Romans 12:5). Racial distinctions are erased and social differences are forgotten as we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

We support one another with loving care for each other. We who are *“strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”* (Romans 15:1). We minister in a selfless way because Jesus taught us that *“it is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). In

bearing one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ and bear witness of Him to a sin-cursed world (Galatians 6:2).

We are so joined in Christ that whatever happens to one is as if it happens to all. *“Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it”* (verse 26). There is no loneliness in suffering. There is no jealousy in honor. Weaknesses are shared; offenses are shared (II Corinthians 11:29). Each empathizes with the other as if the bond and the suffering were being endured personally (Hebrews 13:3).

That is the explanation of the unity we enjoy in the churches. That is the key to loving, self-giving service to fellow Christians. It is not a Christian ministering in his own human concern and resources. Christ himself is living, loving, and lifting others through His power ministered through the believer. What a way to live and serve!

Whatever your spiritual gift is, there is a place for it in the body. God has placed you in a congregation of Christians, the visible manifestation of the spiritual reality. In that congregation you can and must use your gift in ministry. All He asks of you is that you minister according to the ability that God gives so that Jesus may be glorified in everything (I Peter 4:11).

## Questions

1. What is the diversity of spiritual gifts?
2. How can there be unity in the midst of diversity?
3. How is spiritual unity illustrated in a physical body?
4. How does the believer come to be “in Christ” according to verse 13?
5. Why might one with a lesser gift disparage himself?
6. Why might one with a greater gift elevate himself?
7. How does I Corinthians 12:14-20 deal with those two problems?
8. What is the significance of verse 25 to your church?
9. How can you work out the principle of verse 26?
10. What can you do to promote unity in your church?