

A Great Diversity United by One Spirit – 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

Introduction – The great, overarching issue that Paul has been addressing in the entire letter is becoming very clear. God’s gift to us of the Holy Spirit has made us all into one Spirit-sustained body, the body of Christ. But we are many members, this body, and we must learn to live and love accordingly. The many and diverse kinds of members is a design feature, not a flaw, and it is the work of one Spirit in one body.

Review – The argument in Chapter 12 can appear long and redundant at times. So, let’s review. Paul indicates that they have asked about “*spiritual things*.” He reminds them that, as Gentiles, they had been “*carried away*” by a myriad of idols (false teachings about spiritual things – v2). The central message from the Spirit and the focal point of all the Spirit’s words is this: “*Jesus is Lord*” (v3). The diverse gifts, ministries, and activities of the Trinity (vv4-6) are involved in animating the members of the body for the profit of the whole body (vv7-10) as the Spirit wills (v11).

Connected by One Spirit (vv12-14) – In the same way your body is made up of many diverse parts, so is Christ (v12). Paul is speaking of the “*body of Christ*” here (i.e. v27); he is using a metaphor to describe an ontological truth. The body of Christ is not just like a physical body; by means of the Spirit, we are not just ‘sort of’ connected. Baptism by the Spirit is the way we got into the body of Christ (v13) and this is true for everyone of different pasts, cultures, socioeconomic places and so on. Having been baptized, we are all made, or brought, to drink of the Spirit (v13). Nevertheless, we remain diverse members of the one body (v14).

The Spirit: Our Union in Christ – The atoning work of Jesus occurred in the past, objectively and definitively. Subjectively the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) personally quickens an individual and this is sometimes called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (v13, Cf. John 1:30, Acts 1:5). Everyone who is in the body has been baptized by the Spirit and without that baptism we are not part of the body of Christ. There are not two groups in the body, one who has been baptized in the Spirit and the other not. And again, remember Paul’s argument. Everyone who confesses “*Jesus is Lord*” does so by the Spirit (v3); it is not necessary to display some miracle-gift in order to prove one’s conversion.

The Spirit: Baptismal Washings and Union – The promise of this baptismal cleansing and union runs throughout the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:3-5, 52:13-15, Ezek 36:25-27) and explained in the New (Titus 3:4-6, Col 2:11-12). Baptism, then, is a declaration of the Spirit’s work far more than it is ever a declaration of the individual’s work or profession. And while we have spent centuries debating the theological details of baptism, Paul’s point to which we all must agree is that baptism places us into the body of Christ.

Consider all that we have because of this union. By the work of the Spirit, we are a new *creation in Christ* (2 Cor 5:17). We are blessed with every spiritual blessing *in Christ* (Eph1:3). We are chosen and accepted *in Christ* (Eph 1:4, 6). We have redemption and forgiveness *in Christ* (Eph 1:7), and an eternal inheritance (Eph 1:11). We are sealed by the Spirit *in Christ* (Eph 1:13) and we sit in the heavenly places *in Christ* (Eph 2:6). We abide *in Christ* and He abides *in us* (1 John 2:28, 4:13).

The Spirit: First Union, Then Communion – First we are baptized into one body and then we are all made to drink into one Spirit. The pattern is everywhere. First you are born, and then you eat. First the ceremonial sacrifices were offered and then you partook of that which had been sacrificed. First there was circumcision and then the eating of Passover. In 1 Cor 10, first there was the baptism into Moses and then drinking of the spiritual drink.

New life comes by Christ through the Spirit and then ongoing, renewing, refreshing, nourishing comes through partaking of Christ by the Spirit. The word translated “*made to drink*” is “*potidzo*” and can be understood as irrigating (1 Cor 3:6), or imbuing and saturating one’s mind. So drinking the Spirit is another way of speaking of taking the Word and causing it to irrigate us, to saturate us, to refresh and nourish us. And when we partake of Christ at the Table, we are partaking of the Word of God by means of the Spirit. Another thing to notice: We are baptized individually, brought to life one by one. But then, united into a body, we are nourished together as the body, both as individual members, but also corporately as the body.

One Spirit, One Body, and Diverse Members – As we said, the many and diverse kinds of members is a design feature, not a flaw, and it is the work of one Spirit in one body. We are to grow up into a unity of faith (Eph 4:13) but not into a uniformity of persons. As the Geneva Bible Notes comments, *“The unity of the body is not prevented by this diversity of members, and furthermore it could not be a body if it did not consist of many members, and those being different.”*

Nonuniformity – This idea bothers those with tidy-minds. Disunity and a schismatic spirit is a sin to be confessed; nonuniformity is a work of the Spirit. He has His reasons for our differences, just as a body has a need for differences in the members (vv15ff). This is not license to simply believe or do whatever we’d like (or Paul wouldn’t be correcting so much false teaching and sinful living in Corinth or throughout so much of his epistles). But one of the things he is correcting is a party spirit that causes schisms and divisions where there should be fellowship and unity in the midst of diversity. It means we must *“walk worthy”* in our calling, *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect (mature) man (think “body of Christ”), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:1, 3, 13). This is the work of the Spirit, using the Spirit-Word in us. And that fullness, that mature man, will still be a body which *“...is not one member, but many”* (v14).

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