

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Spiritual Gifts: Part of One Body

*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. (1 Corinthians 12:12–14, KJV 1900)*

It is interesting how certain words in Scripture trigger people to reveal their favorite private interpretation or idea. Baptism is one of those words. From rather early in historic Christian doctrine, the ideas regarding baptism have been highly diverse. In some circles, every appearance of the word in the New Testament automatically triggers the advocates' minds to run to water baptism, even when the language of the text makes no such connection at all. In the study of Biblical interpretation, two inclinations appear. In one mindset, the reader seeks to learn from Scripture, so he follows Scripture and strives to draw out of Scripture the truths that the Holy Spirit put into the Book. In the other mindset, the reader forms his own opinions and ideas, and then goes to the Bible and strives to force his views onto Scripture. In the first view, the reader follows Scripture; in the second, the reader attempts to lead Scripture and to force it to support his private ideas and interpretations, when it doesn't at all teach those ideas. The errant idea that water baptism in some way causes or contributes to a person's eternal salvation often leads advocates of this error to the myopic view described here toward the word whenever it appears in Scripture. "...not the putting away of the filth of the flesh" (1 Peter 3:21) rejects the idea that water baptism washes away the guilt of sins, though the context specifically identifies that baptism indeed "saves" us in terms of "...the answer of a good conscience toward God." The explanation that Peter's reference to the "filth of the flesh" is a mere reference to physical dirt, making the passage a lesson in hygiene, utterly lacks credibility. Peter's teaching affirms the spiritual value of water baptism as an act of faith by a "Faithful" disciple that honors the Lord and answers the quickened, good conscience of the born again child of grace, but the Holy Spirit directed Peter to avoid the very idea that became popular a few short centuries after he wrote these words.

*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.* Paul has already introduced his theme of spiritual gifts in this chapter and context, all of which he will emphasize that the Lord "...set in the church." (1 Corinthians 12:28). The Lord did not set these gifts

outside or over the church, or in some mystical "Body" other than the church. He set them "**in the church.**" The Lord didn't create multiple "Bodies," all of which have a mind of their own and are free to chase their own ideas or identity apart from that one body. Paul is not writing to a mystical global body in this letter. He is writing to one specific church body, located in the ancient city of Corinth. Thus, when Paul teaches these people that the Lord has set these spiritual gifts "*in the church,*" the logical and obvious, not to mention the compelling grammatical meaning of his point is that the Lord had set these gifts in the Church at Corinth. Despite this church's disappointing and anemic spiritual state, Paul reminds them; the Lord has set these gifts in the church and has commanded that the people in the church strive to perpetuate the harmony and health the Lord intended by these gifts.

Further, the emphatic point of our study passage teaches us that the Lord intended this church to function as a unified, harmonious body, one body of believers, holding to the same faith and working together in unity for the service of the Lord and His people in Corinth. It is this truth that makes the abominable schism that Paul refutes so wrong.

*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. (1 Corinthians 1:10-11)*

Paul adds indisputable weight to these words in the verses that follow. "*Is Christ divided?*" (1 Corinthians 1:13) A believer who chooses to feed a divisive or contentious spirit in a church in the face of these words must utterly ignore the multitude of passages in both the Old and the New Testament that teach the same truth. Paul's inspired letter to the Corinthian Church, including especially these verses, provides rich instruction to all believers who read and are willing to submit their lives to God and His word, but we should never think that the

Corinthian Church is to be viewed as an ideal or model church. Quite the opposite in fact. What twisted logic a person must follow to think that he should cultivate or even tolerate contentious divisiveness in a church and remotely imagine that such conduct will be blessed by the Lord.

In our study passage, Paul begins a lengthy and instructive lesson that will set forth the body analogy as the inspired basis for a healthy New Testament church to imitate and to cultivate in its members. "...*the body is one.*" Beginning with this verse, Paul fully develops the structure and harmony of a healthy human body as the basis for a healthy and sound New Testament church. It would be difficult to imagine more diversity than we observe in the human body, but all of those diverse parts and subsystems work harmoniously together for the health, well-being, and defense of the body. It is this united and harmonious diversity that Paul uses in this analogy to teach—and to rebuke—the Corinthian Church in their present confused and divided state of mind. Although the human body has many members, it is one and only one body. Paul emphasizes the point, "*So also is Christ.*"

Before moving to the next point, take a moment to notice that all three verses in our study passage begin with the same connective word, "**For:**" Paul is not teaching three different lessons in these three consecutive verses. He is teaching one tight united lesson across the three verses, a united lesson that will continue throughout this entire inspired thesis on spiritual gifts. When Paul introduces the word "baptized" in Verse 13, he does not deviate from his theme or introduce a different topic for discussion. There is no diversion whatever in his emphasis on spiritual gifts and the diverse, but harmonious function of the church body.

*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.* Without question, Paul asserts a supernatural role performed by the Holy Spirit in this verse. The grammar of the verse requires that we conclude that the Holy Spirit is performing the "Baptizing" in question, "...**by one Spirit.**"

What is the objective of the Holy Spirit in this work? Contextually, Paul is not teaching regarding the new birth, so we cannot honor the context of the passage and superimpose regeneration, the new birth, onto the passage. He is not dealing with new converts who have not been baptized in water. He is teaching an existing, functioning—though poorly—church whose members have all experienced water baptism. He is explaining something to them that they have forgotten and are not respecting or following at the moment.

Christ is not divided! Paul was not crucified for a single member of the Corinthian Church. This anemic church desperately needs the truth that Paul here teaches them. Their existence as a New Testament church is not attributable to their own organizational or philosophical abilities. They do

not exist as a New Testament church because they got together and decided to form a new business venture or social order. Their existence as a New Testament church resulted from a work of the Holy Spirit, bringing them together, enlightening them in the truth of the gospel, and immersing them into a ***united body of like-minded believers.*** Subsequently, someone of influence entered into the church and sowed discord, leading them to subdivide into various schismatic groups that violated the Holy Spirit's work and intent for their existence as a church. Despite their broad diversity in terms of race and culture, the Holy Spirit had molded them into one body of united believers, but sinful divisiveness had invaded their healthy body and now threatened their existence as a healthy, harmonious body in which all the members worked unselfishly for the health of the body, not for their own personal gain, interests, or favorite ideas. The unity of heart instilled by the Holy Spirit in molding them into a church body was far more effective than all their diversity in terms of race, culture, language, or social status. And that same Spirit of God who brought them together and molded them into this one church body, also lead them to the fountain of "living water" where they could drink freely of the cool refreshing waters of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

*For the body is not one member, but many.* The "Immersing" work of the Holy Spirit in planting the Corinthian Church brought all these diverse people into one united body of believers. He didn't bring together a whole array of clones, all having exactly the same background, language, personality, or profession. He brought them from the broadest of human diversity, but he so immersed them, "baptized" them, into His grace that they became one body with many diverse members working together for the harmony of the body in the one faith. Remember Paul's words to the Ephesians.

*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.* (Ephesians 4:3-4)

What does the Spirit create in the church body? Unity; Paul defines "...*the unity of the Spirit.*" The unity that the Spirit produces every member of a faithful, New Testament church should endeavor to maintain, not run to contradict or destroy. I added Verse 4 to this quotation to show the close harmony that Paul teaches in the two contexts of First Corinthians and Ephesians.

The Holy Spirit's role in this context is not regeneration, the new birth, or water baptism, but wholly immersing a body of believers in a local area into a diverse, but united body of believers, uniquely and gloriously bound together by His bond of unity and grace for the glory of God and for the spiritual health of His people in that church body. And so it is with every church "Of the Lord's planting."

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor