

**PREFACE**

Verse 7 in this chapter is a foundational statement in two parts, with each part setting up the proceeding two sections, the first of which we have just completed:

*But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit*                      vv8-11  
*for the common good (or mutual benefit).*                                      vv12-31

For the last three sessions we have focused on the various “manifestations of the Spirit”—not a comprehensive list, but a subset. Now from v12 through the rest of this chapter we will focus on what Paul writes in the second portion of v7: “for the common good.”

***A Bizarre Illustration***

Permit me to pose a rather bizarre thought experiment. What if every person in the church were a Rupert Gandwiller? What would this church—including the physical church—look like? One thing about which we could be reasonably certain is that the financial health of the church would be good. The numbers would be well organized, clearly stated, and trustworthy. We could also be reasonably certain that the fellowship and care for each other within the membership would be healthy, and that the body would be in good humor on most occasions.

One thing about which we could also be reasonably certain is that the physical church—that is, the church building—would be in a sorry, even dilapidated state. For a church body comprised of Rupert Gandwillers would not be very good with necessary repairs—and even if, because of the financial health of the church, we could afford to pay an outside source to make the repairs, the Deacon of Building and Grounds (Rupert Gandwiller) would not be very good at *diagnosing* what needed to be done.

This body of believers benefits from having *both* a Rupert Gandwiller and a Harry Farkwar. Both make an invaluable contribution, but in entirely different ways.

The rest of Chapter Twelve can be easily subdivided into three parts:

1. In vv12-14 Paul sets forth his metaphor of the “body” (*soma*), which, by the way, would have been familiar and comfortable imagery in the first century; the apostle was not inventing something new here.
2. In vv15-20 Paul emphasizes the *diversity* within that body, that it is a good and healthy thing, necessary for the well-being, and effectiveness of the body of Christ.
3. In vv21-26 Paul turns around and emphasizes the *unity* of the body—not in spite of its diversity, but because of it.

This last is an important point. Let's compare two of our popular translations to see the difference. First the 1984 NIV:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

The troublesome word in that version is “though,” an extremely poor translation of the Greek *kai* (Fee). The NASB is better, but only marginally so with “and yet.” The NIV implies that the diversity in the body is something that must be overcome; that is, *the body of Christ is one* in spite of *its diversity*. But Paul will go on, primarily in vv15-20, to make the point that the diversity within the church is integral to its *strength*. Hence the better (and more literal) translation of the 1900 KJV:

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.

As with our earlier illustration, the apostle nails the point in vv19-20, but more succinctly.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:19-20.**

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.**

v12

*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

This circuitous verse emerges out of and begins the elaboration of the previous.

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (12:11)

In the rest of this chapter Paul will establish the value—indeed, the *genius*—of the Holy Spirit “distributing to each one individually”—not the same gift, but different gifts—and he begins with v12, which seems to circle back on itself. He establishes the familiar metaphor of the human body in the first two-thirds of the verse. Every person's physical body (*soma*) is one “unit” (NIV), yet it is comprised of arms and legs and head and hands and feet and eyes and ears, etc. Then he circles back and states the same thing from the other direction. All these components of the physical body are, still, but one body.

The Pauline twist at the end is, “so also is Christ.” This is shorthand for “the body of Christ.” That is, the church mirrors the constitution of the physical human body. Paul hinted at this all the way back in Chapter One.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-13.**

He was not asking if the *person* of Christ had been divided, but the *body* of Christ—the church.

v13

*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free,*

One of the things I believe I have gained from this detailed study of the first Corinthian letter—one I hope some of you have as well—is a new and deeper appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life—and beyond that, the life of the church.

It seems to me that Christians more often than not speak of the common *faith* that binds us together, that our solidarity with other Christians is based on that name: that the common denominator, as “Christ-ians,” is our mutual trust in Christ for our salvation. That is not false, but even if we subscribe to the doctrine of election (that those who “believe” were chosen by God to be saved [Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:5]), even if only subliminally we may have the perception that it is our *faith* that has saved us, and insured our place with God for all eternity. Hence it is that common faith that holds together the integrity of the church.

What Paul is emphasizing in this chapter—and pointedly in this passage—is that the church, the body of Christ, is formed of those who have been baptized into it by the Spirit. That is, it is not the belief system that joins the individual to the body, but the indwelling Spirit; without Him there would be no fellowship of believers. As John the Baptizer understood, the water is just the sign; the real baptism is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. John’s baptism was for *repentance*; the Spirit’s baptism is to place us—and confirm our place—in *Christ*.

### Read Luke 3:16.

So in the first portion of this chapter (vv1-11) Paul speaks of how the Holy Spirit is responsible for equipping the saints *for* the church; here he speaks of how the Holy Spirit is responsible for equipping the saints to be *in* the church in the first place.

*...and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

The jury is out on precisely what Paul means by this statement. Some say he refers to the Christian ordinance of water baptism, others say he refers to the ordinance of Communion.

**Note:** the “into” included in the KJVs is not in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts.

The operative verb here is *epotisthemen*, translated “were...made to drink,” or “have been...made to drink.” It is from the root *potizo*, meaning to give to drink.

I believe the attempt to somehow associate what Paul says here with believer baptism or the Communion cup misses the point. Paul is searching for and has settled on pertinent words with which to describe how the “one Spirit”—the Holy Spirit *saturates, drenches* the church and every believer in it. I like the way the venerable Matthew Henry pulls all this together.

*Matthew Henry:* Christians become members of this body by baptism: they are baptized into one body. The outward rite is of divine institution, significant of the new birth, called therefore the washing of regeneration, (Titus 3:5). But it is by the Spirit, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, that we are made members of Christ's body. It is the Spirit's operation, signified by the outward administration, that makes us members. And by communion at the other ordinance we are sustained; but then it is not merely by drinking the wine, but by drinking [of] one Spirit. The outward administration is a means appointed of God for our participation in this great benefit; but it is baptism by the Spirit, it is internal renovation and drinking [of] one Spirit, partaking of his sanctifying influence from time to time, that makes us true members of Christ's body, and maintains our union with him. Being animated by one Spirit makes Christians one body.

The body of Christ—the church—is a distinct, unique entity. *Nothing* in this world is like it, and nothing in this world has the same rule for membership. One does not become a member by paying one's annual dues; one does not become a member by passing through an initiation or by wearing a silly hat or learning a secret handshake. One does not become a member by osmosis—because one's parents were members. One becomes a member by only one means—a means which has nothing to do with any action by the individual. God, by His choice and will, places the Holy Spirit in the individual (“were made to drink of one Spirit”); that and that alone gains one the privilege of joining with the other “parts” of the body of Christ. And Christ Jesus Himself associated the Spirit with the believer first drinking, and then being inundated by, immersed in the “water” that is the Spirit.

**Read John 7:37-39.**

v14

*For the body is not one member, but many.*

In v14 Paul restates some of v12—although in the negative—but also cues up his discussion of diversity within the body in vv15-20. For those in the Corinth church it also is a rebuke to their behavior.

The influential elites in the church thought themselves—and their Spirit-gifts—superior to the Plebeians in their midst, and their attendant gifts. Implicit in the attitude of the elites was that the church was better off with them and their gifts, and perhaps the church would benefit if *everyone* were like them! But the apostle is about to spend considerable time and ink explaining that, no, the church benefits from its diversity: a rich tapestry of varying gifts, some flashier than others, some, at least on the surface, more menial than others, but all necessary.

Verse 14 wraps back to the illustration with which I began this session. Select any one person in the body of Christ, and if he is replicated throughout, with everyone being him, or even just everyone having his Spirit-gift, the church suffers. Indeed, the church cannot operate properly *as* the church in that circumstance. It *requires* a variety of both members and gifts.

By my count Paul uses the word translated member or members (*melos*) about sixteen times in this chapter. And it is an interesting, multifaceted word. I do not often quote from *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (“Brown,” for short), but one paragraph offered a good summary of this word.

The body [*soma*] was also used in antiquity in a figurative and corporate sense in mythology and for groups of people. In this connection *melos* (member, limb) denotes a part of the group or whole. It is used in theological contexts to show the functions of members in relation to the whole. At the same time their action reveals something of the corporate personality.

So we may instinctively associate the word “member” with someone just on the roll, someone on the list of official members. But perhaps a better association is with the idea of a “limb,” as the branch of a tree—or vine (John 15)—is something attached to the root, or whole, as well as an arm or leg is a limb attached to the trunk of a human body. Brown, however, offers yet a third idea for this word: each individual member or limb reflects back on the personality of the body of Christ. Think for a moment about all we have learned about the elites in the Corinth church, and their divisive behavior. What was their behavior and mindset saying about the church to the public at large? This, I believe, is why Paul is so exercised about this situation in Corinth, and why he spends so much time and effort in an attempt to correct it. These people were behaving in a way that was destroying the name of Christ in the secular world of the city.

Here, contained in this small five-letter Greek word, is a veritable wealth of imagery describing the individual believer’s relationship with the church, the importance of his or her Spirit-gifts to the body of Christ, and the importance of his or her behavior in relation to the surrounding, unbelieving community.