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## United Through the Spirit



### QUESTION 1:

*What is the glue that holds your family or circle of friends together?*

## THE POINT

The Holy Spirit brings us together as one church.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In June 2016, the election of the new president of the Southern Baptist Convention was a close race. A runoff vote was still too close to call, leading to a second runoff vote. Prior to that vote, though, one of the candidates, J. D. Greear, withdrew his candidacy. Greear told the convention he had prayed the night before and believed he needed to suggest his opponent, Steve Gaines, be elected by acclamation.

Interestingly, Gaines had also decided to withdraw as a candidate for the sake of unity. The two men met,

prayed, and agreed that Gaines should be the sole nominee and take the role of president. These men had determined that unity in the mission was most important.<sup>1</sup> Their decision was a remarkable display of unity.

Christians are a diverse group of people, even within a particular denomination. We are different in culture, age, socio-economic status, skill, personality, and sometimes even in the priorities we hold. The only thing that can bring unity among such people is the movement of God's Spirit. He gives us a common faith and a common mission.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> There are different ministries, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. <sup>7</sup> A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good.

When Paul traveled to a new city, he would first go to the synagogue to preach the good news of the Messiah to the Jews who lived there. Jews shared a common culture, a common view of the world, and a common knowledge about God. As Paul told the good news of the Messiah, many responded to the message of Christ by placing their faith in Him. Paul then carried the gospel to the marketplaces of the city and proclaimed Christ to the Gentiles. They also would respond to the gospel. The resulting group of believers—both Jews and Gentiles—would form a single church family, but they were far from a homogeneous group.

Paul addressed this diversity in the Corinthian church because, while diversity is good, the church had become divided into factions. They were not only divided by culture, but also by their understanding of ministry and of spiritual gifts. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 12 was a call for unity in the church.

### QUESTION 2:

***What can we learn from these verses about God's intention for His church?***

A key word in this passage is the adjective *different*: Paul discussed “different gifts,” “different ministries,” and “different activities.” The Holy Spirit is the One who equips, but He doesn’t give the same gifts to all believers. People will not be drawn to the same kinds of ministries. These three areas of difference—gifts, ministries, and activities—describe the working of the Holy Spirit, but each word captures that work from a slightly different perspective.

► **Gifts.** A gracious bestowal (a gift) of blessings on the members of the church by the Spirit.

- ▶ **Ministries.** The service carried out with those gifts focuses on the purpose the Lord has for those gifts.
- ▶ **Activities.** The power behind those gifts and the work of God through the gifts. These activities point to the leadership of God to work out the use of those gifts.<sup>2</sup>

Rifts were occurring in the Corinthian church; therefore, Paul stressed unity in the body. Pride over certain spiritual gifts and one-upmanship caused tremendous damage to the fellowship. The gifting of the Spirit does not create divisions.

However, Paul was not calling for uniformity. Uniformity means we are doing the same

thing in the same way. The Holy Spirit works through people differently, but, in our various ways of living in the Spirit, we exhibit a unity of purpose.

“A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person.” Gifts are more than characteristics the Spirit gives us; they display the power of God by working through us in different ways. In fact, the gifts are not about individuals and what we want to do; God gives us the gifts “for the common good.” Some people may have more public gifts than others, but the Spirit is at work in and through every person. However, God has gifted you and me, we use these gifts in His service, for His church, and for the good of all His people.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-11

<sup>8</sup> To one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills.



One key truth resounds through these verses: there is one Spirit! Paul mentioned a variety of gifts individuals might use in the body of Christ, but regardless of the gift, they all come from the same Spirit. The church has a diverse range of gifts and ministries, but the work is done through the Holy Spirit.

Paul's list of spiritual gifts in this passage differs somewhat from other lists contained in the New Testament (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:9-11). Paul didn't provide a comprehensive list of gifts; His emphasis was more on the Spirit who gives gifts than on the specific gifts we receive from Him. Paul was demonstrating different ways the Spirit gifts His people.

Over the years, people have attempted to group the gifts in various ways, but perhaps the simplest way is to put them in four broad categories:<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ **Gifts that support.** Gifts such as helping and leading guide the work of the church and help to get it done (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28).
- ▶ **Gifts that share.** Gifts such as showing mercy and hospitality are tangible ways of communicating God's love (Rom. 12:8; 1 Pet. 4:9).
- ▶ **Gifts that speak.** Gifts such as prophecy and teaching ground the church in God's Word (Rom. 12:6,8; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11).
- ▶ **Gifts that supplement.** Gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, and faith support the other gifts.

The Spirit works in diverse ways through the people of God to carry on the mission of God. He moves among us in a variety of ways to accomplish the common good. Why does the Spirit demonstrate the gift of leadership in one person's life while working through a gift of hospitality in another? The Spirit distributes His gifts "to each person as he wills." The Holy Spirit knows what's best and He does what He sees fit.

**QUESTION 3:**

***When have you seen diversity bring strength to God's people?***



## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-14

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body is not one part but many.

Paul used an analogy to illustrate his point, describing the church as Christ's body. He extended this analogy through the rest of the chapter, and in so doing, he gave us a strong visual picture of the unity of the church.

Paul wrote that the human body is one. Your body "has many parts": hands, feet, eyes, a pancreas—lots of parts. All the parts of your body are important to you. Your body can function with only one eye, but the loss creates new challenges. And even though you can't see your pancreas, try living without one. But you still only have one body. Your body is not a collection of random spare parts; all the parts add up to one body.

### QUESTION 4:

***How is the human body a good metaphor for the church?***

It's the same with the body of Christ. We are one spiritual body in Christ. There are many of us, but we are not a disconnected group of random individuals that just happen to be sitting together in the same building.

Our unity is not because of the similarity of the parts. Christ's body is more like an organic whole where essential parts function differently but also interdependently. Some of the Corinthians were Jews and some were Greeks; some of them were slaves and others were free. The church today is varied also. Believers today come in all shapes and sizes and ethnicities and with a variety of gifts and ministries, but we are all one in Christ.

Paul pictured the work of the Spirit to bring people together in two ways.

▶ **"We were all baptized by one Spirit."**

Believers are united because we were all immersed in Christ and His Holy Spirit.

▶ **"We were all given one Spirit to drink."**

We are immersed in the Holy Spirit, and we are also filled up with Him.

Unity among different kinds of people seems unrealistic, but the Holy Spirit works in us, binds our hearts to each other, gives us a common purpose, and makes us one.

### QUESTION 5:

***What are some ways our group reflects both the diversity and unity of the church?***

## EQUIPPED

*The Holy Spirit equips each of us differently. Describe how you believe you have been equipped for kingdom use in the church. Then write a prayer asking for wisdom in using your unique design for His glory.*

Gifts:

Ministries:

Activities:

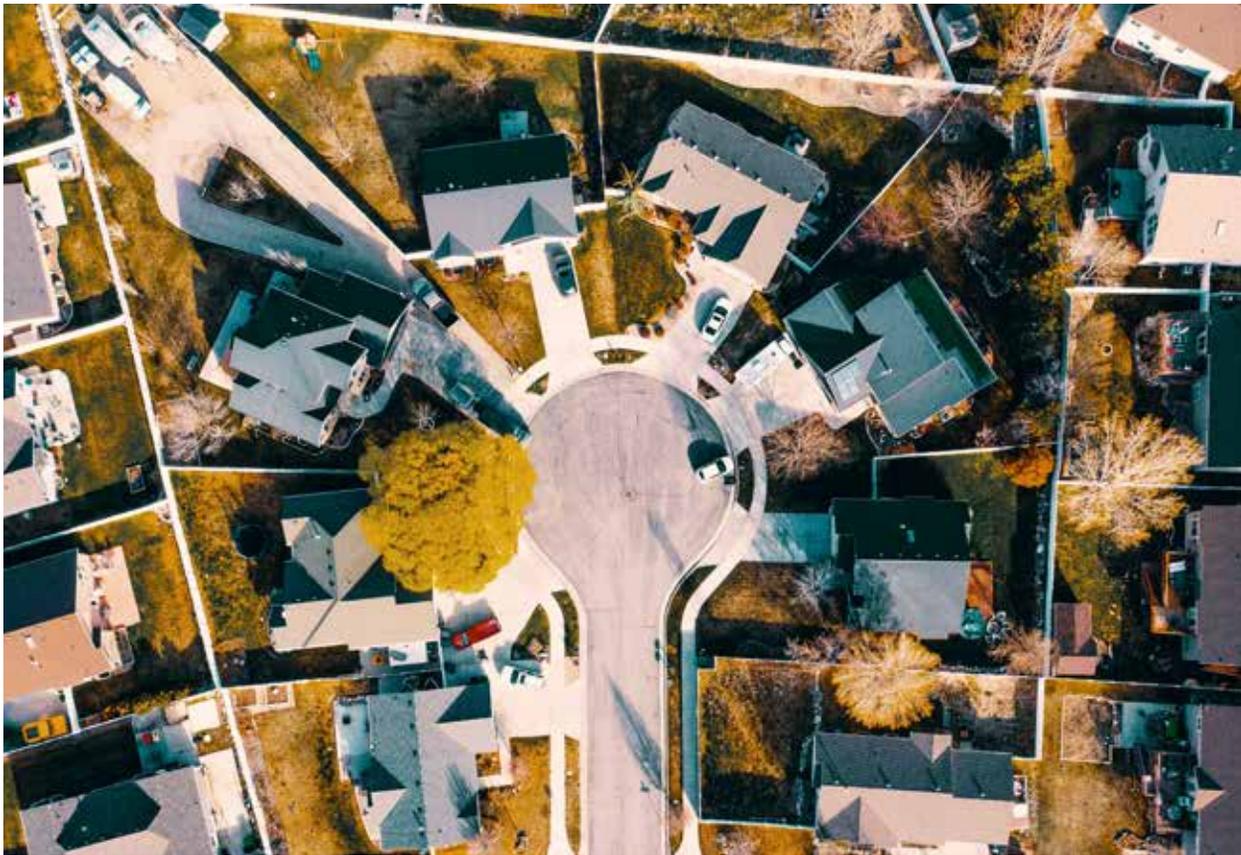
**My Prayer:**

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*“Believers are never told to become one;  
we already are one and are expected to act like it.”*

JONI EARECKSON TADA





## WHO IS MY “NEIGHBOR”?

by David E. Lanier

The question was simple enough: “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29),<sup>1</sup> Jesus’s response was totally unexpected and ran contrary to traditional thinking.

### IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ERA

The original meaning of neighbor was “associate” (Hebrew, *rea*). In Leviticus 19:18, the term clearly referred to a fellow Hebrew: “Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.” Here the parallel for “your neighbor” is “members of your community.” The Israelites were to treat such persons fairly and kindly and were not to cheat or rob them.<sup>2</sup> Further, they were to extend the same kindness to the foreigner dwelling among them: “When a foreigner lives with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You must regard the foreigner who lives



Part of the ruins at Qumran; the Essenes defined a neighbor as someone who lived in their community.

with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt; I am Yahweh your God” (Lev. 19:33).

How one treated a neighbor was important in determining righteousness in Israel. To refuse to treat one’s neighbor justly was a cause for national disintegration and invited God’s judgment (Isa. 3:5; Jer. 9:4-9; Mic. 7:5-6).<sup>3</sup>

#### **IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA**

A narrower interpretation of “neighbor” arose, one the Qumran community and the Pharisees espoused. People living at Qumran defined “neighbor” as someone who was part of their separatist community. Everyone outside that community dwelled in darkness and was to be shunned in order to avoid spiritual contamination.<sup>4</sup> Although the people at Qumran were to hate the “children of darkness,” or the “men of the pit,” they did not tolerate taking personal vengeance.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise the Pharisees separated themselves from contamination, which they believed non-observant Jews transmitted. When the temple police returned from monitoring Jesus at the temple and praised His teaching, the Pharisees rebuked them: “Are you fooled too? Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd, which doesn’t know the law, is accursed!” (John 7:47-49). This separation applied to fellow Israelites. How much more would the Jews have shunned the hated Samaritans, a group that had no advocates among the Jewish people.

The Samaritans dated back to 722 BC, when the hated Assyrians had exiled all but the poorest among the northern ten tribes of Israel. In their place were Elamites and Assyrians, who interbred with the poor Israelites left in the land, resulting in a half-breed race stigmatized with idolatry and uncleanness. They were called “enemies” in Ezra 4 when they attempted to help rebuild

the temple and the city of Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> The hostility between the Jew and Samaritan was legendary. The Samaritans built their own temple on the slopes of Mount Gerizim. They had their own scriptures, the Samaritan Pentateuch. Samaritans showed hatred and hostility to Jews traveling to Jerusalem, so much so that many Jews preferred to bypass the region of Samaria entirely and to pass on the east side of the Jordan.

The Jews responded by publicly cursing the Samaritans in synagogue services and refusing to accept their witness in court. When the Samaritans pleaded with Alexander the Great to release them from required tribute payments because they had let the land rest, Alexander refused their request after determining they were not true Jews. He afterward besieged and destroyed the capital city of Samaria.<sup>7</sup>

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

An “expert in the law” approached Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25). Jesus responded by asking him to summarize the law, which he did by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, . . . soul, . . . strength, and . . . mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (v. 27). Jesus told him that was correct and added, “Do this and you will live” (v. 28). The scribe then attempted to justify himself by asking, “And who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). This would have been key in the interpretation, for if a person omitted some group that God intended, he would have violated the Law.

The scribes prided themselves in defining relationships. They applied the Law of Moses to every conceivable situation involving individuals and groups. To them the lines

were clear. The scribes’ rulings dictated to the Pharisees and to all observant Jews parameters for permissible relationships.

Instead of answering the question directly, Jesus told the scribe how to be a neighbor to anyone in need. He used a hated Samaritan as the hero of the parable. A hated Samaritan put his life at risk by stopping, treating the Jew’s wounds, placing him on the Samaritan’s own animal, and taking him to a nearby inn. There he negotiated with the innkeeper for the man’s care, giving him two denarii (two days’ wage) and promised to pay more, if needed.

Jesus asked the scribe, “Which . . . proved to be a neighbor?” The scribe avoided the hated word “Samaritan” and replied, “The one who showed mercy to him.” Jesus responded, “Go and do the same” (vv. 36,37).

In this encounter, Jesus redefined “neighbor” inclusively, a violation of Jewish tradition. The term now included the least expected. The Samaritan had kept the Law as God intended by loving his “neighbor” as he loved himself.

1. All Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).
2. Merrill F. Unger, “Neighbor” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Unger’s), ed. R.K. Harrison, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 915.
3. R. L. Thomas, “Neighbor” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 4:408.
4. A. R. C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 121. This sentiment is especially evident in the *Manual of Discipline*. “Neighbor” refers exclusively to those within the Qumran community itself and appears in texts commanding proper behavior.
5. Heinrich Greeven, “plhsi/on” (plesion, neighbor) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 316, n. 41.
6. “Samaritans” in *Unger’s*, 1118.
7. *Ibid.*

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