

“For As The Body Is One ...” #1

“... and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12f).

Since this verse begins with “for” it is linked with the preceding verses; verses which have identified the nine spiritual gifts. In the verses which follow it will be important for us to remember that while the figure of a body with its different members, each having different functions, may be and is properly applied even today to every Christian and his individual ability, in our immediate context the application in these verses will be made to these various gifts, that while often greatly different from one another, each made its own unique contribution to the body and its functions, yet in perfect harmony and unity with each other gift, in that first century. Just as in a human body the different members may radically differ from each other, so also were these nine gifts greatly diverse from each other. How marvelous and yet how astonishingly true it is that so many different members, so diverse from one another, should so perfectly blend into one smooth functioning unit — the body. Little wonder the Psalmist wrote: “I will praise thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made and that my soul knoweth right well” (Ps. 139:14).

A second “for” appears in vs. 13, and just as in its preceding usage which links together vss. 1-11 with vs. 12 with one common denominator, the same is true with this second “for”: vss. 12-13 are closely related to each other. The apostle writes, “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks ...” While this text is understood by some as a reference to “Holy Spirit baptism” such as experienced by the apostles on Pentecost, it is not, to our mind, a reference to “the element (Holy Spirit)” in which the Corinthians were immersed (that element was left unnamed); but rather he is identifying the agent who led them to be baptized. The KJV helps our understanding right here for that translation has the verse “For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body ...” We are persuaded that the latter translation gives a better understanding of the verse and is far more suited to the argument the apostle is making. One rule of interpreting a passage is that one which states that any word is to be understood in a literal sense unless the context demands otherwise. Ordinarily “baptism” is a reference to “water baptism.” Romans 6:3-4 states, “Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk

in newness of life." Clearly the baptism of which Paul wrote was "water baptism." Water baptism pictures a death, burial and resurrection in a way that is not so obvious in either "baptism in fire"; "baptism in the Holy Spirit" and "baptism in suffering." In each of these latter three, the point of emphasis is to show that the one "baptized" is overwhelmed. An emerging from that baptism is not so clearly depicted. So, 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells that it is by the instructions of the Holy Spirit all men are baptized into one body and that, in addition to this, because they are in that one body they all drink of the blessings offered by that one Spirit. To "drink of one Spirit" is not literal; we do not literally drink of the Spirit, but we do all share in the blessings offered by the Spirit. Akin to this was Jesus' promise to the Samaritan woman. Were she to "drink" of the "water" which He would give, she would never thirst again. All understand that Jesus did not speak literally of water.

There is not a single blessing that comes to the physical body that is not equally shared by each member of that body. For in what way or in what manner can the body be blessed without each member of that body being blessed? After all "... now are there many members but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20).

And so, simply stated, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 teaches us that it is by the instructions of one Spirit all are baptized (in water) into one body. Whether those baptized are Jew or Greeks, bond or free — all are led by one Spirit to be baptized into that one body. Equally true is it that since all are now in that one body, now all share the blessings which come from that Spirit.

In this understandable illustration of how the body functions as one unit despite the diversity of the members; the apostle sets the stage to understand how that nine spiritual gifts, diverse as they were each other, harmoniously functioned to the edification and profit of the whole church, the body of Christ.

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