


1 CORINTHIANS 4:7

GREAT QUESTIONS OF LIFE:

WHAT DO YOU HAVE THAT YOU DID NOT RECEIVE?

“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”¹

ur contemporaries, and likely we ourselves, esteem the rugged individual. We imagine that we are distinct from everyone else. We are taught in elementary school that there is no one exactly like us. Biblical Christianity challenges conclusions we may draw from this concept, however. Whenever we speak of a church, we understand that we are speaking of a body. Moreover, we are taught that we do not simply “join” a congregation; we are placed within the assembly of God’s own choosing. We are not placed within these assemblies in a capricious manner; rather, we are divinely appointed to bless those with whom we unite.

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY — One of the woefully neglected areas of instruction provided to God’s professed people in this day is the study of ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church. Unfortunately, whenever we hear the term “the church,” we have been trained to think of an amorphous, indefinite entity to which all who believe belong. Unquestionably, the preponderance of occurrences of the term in the New Testament refers to a local congregation. It is not my intent to invest time reviewing all the instances of the occurrence of the term in the New Testament. What is vital is that we understand what God has done in the life of His people in order to ensure that they are built up, encouraged and comforted!

Listen to a vital, though neglected, portion of Paul’s Letter to the Church at Corinth. “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11].

When one is saved, the Spirit of God takes up residence in the life of that individual [JOHN 14:15-17]. From what is written in the passage referred to moments ago, it is apparent that according to His own will God Himself gifts each individual believer. Let me put this in practical terms. As a Christian, you are a gifted individual. More than that, you *are* a gift to that congregation where God has placed you. There are no inferior Christians; each is important.

There is another point to consider. Throughout the pages of the New Testament, there is no such creature as an unchurched Christian! God places Christians in a particular congregation where that one is to appointed to serve. Make no mistake; the child of God is saved to serve. We tend to focus on the personal benefits of salvation, often neglecting the broader responsibility to invest our gifts and our lives in the lives of our fellow believers. God expects us to serve.

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The service we are appointed to provide is the exercise of the particular gifts God entrusted to each one of us—gifts for the benefit of the assembly where we are placed. Focus once again on one verse in the passage I just read. “To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:7 NET]. God gifted you precisely so that you could benefit your fellow believers; this is your assignment as a Christian.

Iterating what has already been said, God gifts each believer and His gifting is to equip the people of God to serve one another within the Body where each one has been placed. Failure to serve one another is perhaps the greatest deficit of contemporary Christianity. We come into our churches with the baggage imposed through the world’s training—training that teaches us of the necessity to be individualists; and we attempt to impose that attitude on the Body of Christ. We are trained to be served, and we appear to believe that serving others is somehow demeaning or unworthy of a redeemed individual. However, as Christians, we were saved and set where God chose so that we might serve others. Every saint is a servant.

Jesus spoke often of serving others. Assuredly, Jesus spoke of those who followed Him as His servants. Near the end of His time with His disciples, Jesus taught them, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” [JOHN 12:26].

On another occasion, when the disciples had been arguing amongst themselves about their relative importance in the Kingdom work the Master had assigned, Jesus seized the occasion to instruct them. “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves” [LUKE 22:24-27].

Recall yet one other time when the disciples were again jockeying for position within the Kingdom of Heaven. Despite trying to keep their dispute from spilling over and drawing the attention of the Master, Jesus became aware of their discussion. Perhaps they had grown boisterous; more likely, it was because Jesus was God and knew what was in their hearts... Calling them, He once again used their dispute as an opportunity to teach them. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” [MATTHEW 20:25-28].

Pointing to the Master, Paul reminds us of Christ’s position among the churches. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11].

The Apostles identified themselves as servants as they opened their various letters.² Consequently, they urged those reading these letters to adopt voluntarily the attitude of servants. Here are a few examples of such calls to live as servants. “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” [1 PETER 2:16].

² E.g., ROMANS 1:1; TITUS 1:1; JAMES 1:1; JUDE 1

“Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of [those who are lost]” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:19].

“He who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:22, 23].

“Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” [ROMANS 6:22].

I believe it will be beneficial to remind you of one of the difficult sayings Jesus delivered. “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” [LUKE 17:7-10].

Clearly, the Son of God expects that those who follow Him will serve at His command. We call Him “Lord,” and so He is. The tragedy of that statement is that the term “Lord” has become a rather esoteric term—sort of ecclesiastical argot referring to a distant deity. Thus, it has been emptied of its power in the lives of those who commonly employ the term. In modern parlance, Jesus is Master; He is ruler, king, sovereign. We miss a vital point in the prayers of the first saints. After Peter and John had been arrested, threatened and released, they went back to those members of the Jerusalem congregation who were gathered for prayer.

Take note the prayer offered up by the believers after Peter and John informed them of all that had taken place. The believers prayed, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus” [ACTS 4:24-30].

Note to Whom their prayer is addressed. My text informs me that they prayed, “Sovereign Lord.” It is a translation of the Greek term *Déspota*. We get our English word “despot” from this Greek term. The word occurs ten times in our Greek New Testament. Seven of those occurrences the word is translated “Master”³ in the translation I use; twice, it is translated “Sovereign Lord”⁴; and once, it is translated “Lord.”⁵

³ 1 TIMOTHY 6:1, 2; 2 TIMOTHY 2:21; TITUS 2:9; 1 PETER 2:18; 2 PETER 2:1; JUDE 4

⁴ ACTS 4:24; REVELATION 6:10

⁵ LUKE 2:29

It should not be surprising, therefore, that contemporary translators, grappling with how best to convey the meaning of what is written, choose the English word “Master” to convey what was communicated through the prayer of these early believers: the word “Master” conveys the power of the Greek term more appropriately than most other choices.⁶

I spent time stressing His mastery over the lives of His people for quite a valid reason: since Jesus is Master, acknowledged in our confession as it is recorded in **ROMANS 10:9, 10**, then it follows that we are to see ourselves as His servants. Moreover, when we have done all that we are commanded to do, just as Jesus has taught, we can only claim to be “unworthy servants.” We dare not expect that He will commend us on the basis of our labour; though because He is gracious and merciful He will commend us. We anticipate for those who serve Him honourably that we shall hear, “Well done, good servant” [see **LUKE 19:17**].

Among the professed people of God in this day, the concept of serving others has nearly disappeared. Nevertheless, service to the Body wherein you are placed is the standard for vibrant Christianity. By that criterion, it would not be out of line to suggest that failure to serve is at best rebellion against God’s appointment and at worst it is indicative of failure to be born from above. Though no man can demonstrate which situation describes the proud church member, it should give each non-serving church member pause to consider the reason for such a deficit. I emphasise for each child of God the truth that Christians are saved to serve.

For background to our study this day, note the following truths drawn from the Word of God. If you are a Christian, *the Spirit of God lives within you*. In fact, your body is to be seen as “the Temple of God” [see **1 CORINTHIANS 6:19**]. When we came to faith, not only did God’s Spirit take up residence within your life, *He also entrusted to you gift(s)*. He uniquely fitted you for a specific responsibility within the assembly wherein He also placed you. We do not merely attend the church of our choice—*we are placed by God Himself in the congregation where He chooses that we should serve*. There, we are to exercise the gift(s) He entrusted to us, so that we can build up our fellow worshippers, encourage them and console them. These great responsibilities are the natural outgrowth of Christians exercising the gifts God has entrusted to each one. We perform these duties collectively as a congregation through serving one another.

THE CONTEXT FOR THE QUESTION — I admit that I have invested a considerable amount of time on background issues. I am convinced that without a sound foundation for each of us listening today, nothing that is said will have lasting impact. Therefore, a vital truth to keep in mind as the message progresses is that the congregation is the Body of Christ. We are interconnected with Christ as the Head. No one of us is able to act independently of the other members of the Body. If we will fulfil our role as those whom God appointed, we must invest our lives in one another. This applies to the elders just as it does to all other members.

The context in which the Apostle writes arises from the comparison of preachers by members of the Corinthian assembly. Paul, comparing himself with Apollos and Cephas speaks of each as “servants of Christ” [**1 CORINTHIANS 4:1**]. The Corinthians were focused on the servant and not on the Master. Consequently, each had his or her favourite. It was not wrong for them to appreciate style differences or differences in demeanour, but they had gone beyond appreciation and were beginning to demean and depreciate others whose style or demeanour they did not enjoy. They were picking and choosing winners and losers among the servants of God [see **1 CORINTHIANS 3:4**].

⁶ Cf. Holman Christian Standard Bible; International Standard Version; The Message; The Good News Translation; God’s Word; The NET Bible First Edition; etc.

In this letter, Paul is compelled to caution the saints that their judgement meant nothing. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, each is to be regarded as belonging to the Corinthians themselves. Whether these preachers proved faithful to Him who appoints to holy service was the vital issue the Corinthians were to keep in mind. This is the essence of Paul's opening words for this chapter. "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

"I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-6].

When Paul writes, "I have applied all these things..." he refers back to vivid imagery he has employed throughout this letter to this point. He had pointed out that he was neither crucified for them nor was he the source of their baptism [1 CORINTHIANS 1:13]; Christ was crucified for them and they were baptised because of Him. He has spoken of planting and watering [1 CORINTHIANS 3:6]. He has spoken of himself and Apollos as "God's fellow workers" [1 CORINTHIANS 3:9]. He spoke of himself as a "skilled master builder" [1 CORINTHIANS 3:10]; then he spoke of himself and of Apollos as "servants of Christ" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:1] and as "stewards [administrators] of the mysteries of God" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:2]. These rich images were chosen so that the Corinthians would see these men as what they truly were—channels of God's power presenting the Good News. Rather than seeing God at work in the lives of these gifted men, the Corinthians were exalting themselves over the Word. What is worse, they were exalting themselves by creating divisions where there should have been unity.

The Corinthians were identifying with people—mere servants, and not with the Master. As he opened the letter, Paul confronted the divisions that were apparent in the congregation. "It has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ'" [1 CORINTHIANS 1:11, 12]. They were forming cliques built around their favourite preachers. The Corinthian Christians were boasting of their own wisdom and prestige. They had grown arrogant; and their arrogance grew out of positions that could not be justified by the reality of their situation. The amazing thing is that the Corinthians were boasting about men that would never boast about themselves! They were boasting about being tied to a particular preacher, and they had no reason to boast because the preachers were but humble servants of the Risen Son of God. Thus, the Apostle confronts them to ask the great question, "What do you have that you did not receive?"

Unfortunately, modern Christians have not changed all that much in the two millennia since Paul wrote this letter. We are prepared to battle over things that really are inconsequential. We divide churches over style of worship, over décor of the building in which we meet, over music that is supposedly sung to the glory of God, over preaching styles; we even divide churches over preachers themselves! None of this is vital as all is given by God for our benefit. Rather than uniting over the Word, we divide over the externals. We are focused on things and individuals that must perish rather than being focused on the Scriptures and what they teach about God's sovereignty and the role of those whom He appoints.

We Christians excel at dividing one another. Among the professed people of God are multiplied examples of such division. In one denomination, the churches are split over whether they should stand to take the Communion Meal or whether they should sit. Other Christians, professing to love God who is One, have divided their churches over whether they can have musical accompaniment or whether they must sing a cappella. Imagine! Brothers and sisters condemning one another, censuring one another over whether they have an organ or a piano or sing without accompaniment. Before we guffaw too loudly, how many fundamental churches anathematised one another over whether there was a drum set on the platform or whether there was a guitar to assist in holding a tune?

In one congregation that I served, a young man endeavoured to change the music because it was too lively. He was convinced that the anthems sung by the choir were too modern. According to this young fellow, the hymns and anthems had rhythms that were suggestive of the demonic powers of this fallen world. He argued that I was compelled by the Word to agree with the weaker brother; and in this instance, claiming to be the weaker brother he insisted that his view must prevail. I don't suppose you would be greatly surprised to learn that shortly after this, the young man sought out a congregation that had no instrumentation. Though he was unable to see what he was doing, his attitude sought to divide the congregation over music.

That same church nearly divided at another point when the congregation voted to purchase a new piano. Two factions developed, dividing over the issue of whether the new piano should be a grand piano or an electronic piano. Naïve as I was, I was thrilled at the prospect of instrumentation!

I pastored a congregation at one point that fought over interior décor. The battle became so severe that some of the oldest members of the congregation left. In fact, they ceased worshipping anywhere because nowhere else was as good as what they previously enjoyed. You need to understand that the building had been quite rundown when I came. In fact, there were gaps greater than four inches between the walls and the ceiling. Over one-half the windows of the church were broken out and the front doors leaned into one another so that they could never be fully closed.

Moreover, the roof leaked in over seventeen places. Rather than repairing the roof, the members had placed pots, pans and buckets around the building. Since the building was situated in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, you can imagine that addressing the situation was critical. It was so bad, that the first Sunday I spoke I couldn't use the pulpit as a pan was set on the sacred desk and a steady torrent of water dripped into the vessel.

The situation when I arrived necessitated that I would need to the church building early on a Sunday morning, armed with a pellet rifle to shoot pigeons roosting inside the building. My eldest daughter, an eight-year-old at the time, would follow me about thirty minutes after I left home, bringing a bucket and rags so we could clean the bird manure off the pews and the pulpit. And the people couldn't understand why people would visit once and not return!

A group of men and their wives volunteered their labour and raised funds to refinish the building. I jumped at the chance to make the house of the Lord attractive to those I was inviting. The workers hung new doors, replaced all the broken windows and refinished the interior of the building. Then, they reroofed the building, hung new guttering and replaced the fascia boards. When they finished, we had a joyous celebration because of their generosity and kindness.

A couple of days after the workers left, one of the long-time members came by my house. He was disgruntled as they had chosen the wrong panelling—he decided it was too dark! Also, the windows weren't the right colour, and the doors were not suited to the style of the building.

As dreadful as these examples are, more dreadful still is the situation when a congregation forms cliques over preachers. When a church begins to segregate over the messenger, it is certain that they have ceased hearing the message. Forming cliques is a sure sign that the members of the congregation are beginning to jockey for pre-eminence. When such maneuvering begins to take place, not only do the cliques marginalise the preachers they imagine they are honouring, but the people have actually begun a rapid descent into spiritual oblivion. That congregation will no longer be capable of building up the members as they are responsible to do. What is worse still, that church is already at that point shattered and will shortly be scattered by what can only be classified as wickedness. It will require years, if years are permitted, for that church to regroup and again be a force in the spiritual life of the community.

When we begin to segregate into cliques, we are setting ourselves up as judges. In the fifth verse of this chapter, the Apostle cautions against making such sweeping judgements about servants of God. Eugene Peterson presents Paul's cautionary statement in folksy language. "Don't get ahead of the Master and jump to conclusions with your judgements before all the evidence is in. When He comes, He will bring out in the open and place in evidence all kinds of things we never even dreamed of—inner motives and purposes and prayers. Only then will any one of us get to hear the 'Well done!' of God" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:5].⁷

We do well to take to heart the apostolic admonition. "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

"Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written,

'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God.'

"So then each of us will give an account of himself to God" [ROMANS 14:1-12].

Let me make a statement borne out of years of observation of churches. Churches are perched precariously on a spiritual divide; they are poised either to grow and prosper or to slide into oblivion. History is littered with the wreckage of churches that once served as lighthouses pointing the lost to faith in the Risen Son of God. Should that church be united, no denizens identified with this fallen world can withstand the force of love the congregation presents. However, should a church begins to pick and choose, to divide and segregate, the weakest of Satan's emissaries is able to sow discord and bring every effort of that assembly to naught.

⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

THE QUESTIONS ANSWERED — Pride in spiritual leaders must ultimately lead to division within the church. The point is sufficiently important to stress yet again: pride in spiritual leaders must ultimately lead to division within the church. Paul poses three questions that are designed to expose the actions of the Corinthians as wicked. He asks, “Who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it” [1 CORINTHIANS 4:7]?

Paul has focused on the servants of Christ—himself, Apollos, Cephas. Each of these men is (literally) an “under rower.” If you ever saw a picture of a Roman trireme with three rows of rowers, those in the very lowest row were under rowers. These rowers were the lowest class of slaves. They obeyed the orders of others without seeing where they were going. They worked harder than anyone else on the ship. They received no glory; they were willing to allow someone else to receive the credit. They were team members, never demanding that anyone take notice of them. These under rowers did the dirty work, the despised work. However, because of them, the ship would arrive where the captain wished it to go. Paul deliberately chose this word picture in order to portray himself before the Corinthians.

He then painted a second picture for the Corinthians, presenting the preachers as household stewards entrusted with “the mysteries of God.” In our world, we want to be managers, because they have the power to call the shots. However, Paul is saying that the preachers are simply slaves appointed by the Master to care for matters until He calls. As stewards, they were entrusted with dispensing food and directing the affairs of the household on behalf of the Master. The preachers were not the masters, but mere slaves of the Master. They were responsible to be faithful and to be trustworthy. Not a word is said that they must be good speakers, or handsome, or well educated—they must be faithful, trustworthy.

Paul’s point is that those reading his words need to realise that they have no business making judgements about the preachers they admired. Consequently, they members should not even make such judgements about one another. As each faction followed their supposed leader, they became more and more isolated from their fellow worshippers. The result was that they began to imagine themselves superior to others.

So, Paul asked these questions—questions we would do well to memorise and ask ourselves. The first question asks, “Who sees anything different in you?” The question, as posed in one recent translation, asks, “Who says that you are any better than other people?”⁸ We don’t have all the facts; we need to be cautious about judging what others are doing. It is one thing to rebuke errant doctrine that contravenes what is clearly written; it is quite another thing to question motives or to disparage sincere efforts to serve the Lord.

Paul then asks, “What do you have that you did not receive?” Whether the preacher you admire, or the evangelist that has blessed you so greatly with his service, or even the gift you have received and for which you are responsible—do you actually have anything that God didn’t give you? Your genetic makeup, your looks, your native intelligence, your personality—what do you have that wasn’t given you? Nothing you can claim to define you is the result of your own effort. That is the conclusion each of us is compelled to draw of our own effort.

With relentless logic, Paul asks, “If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” Paul has just exposed the wilful individualism of the Corinthian Christians. Similarly, he has exposed what is undoubtedly one of the greatest weaknesses of contemporary Christians. Focused on the differences among their fellow members, the Corinthians had created a hierarchy of status rather than creating opportunities for service.

⁸ **God’s Word Translation** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

THE APPLICATION FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY — Unquestionably, God esteems differences—He made us decidedly different from one another. The things mankind values the most are the things that are rarest; that is why they are valuable. For this reason, each person is of significant worth because each one is unique. In the strictest sense, each individual is soon to be extinct, because there is no one else exactly like him or her. However, our differences can either drive us apart or draw us together. If we focus on our differences, we will begin to take pride in ourselves rather than realising that God is giving us opportunity to use our differences to create diversity in the Body so that we will build up one another, strengthen one another and honour one another.

As much as God values distinction, He values even more greatly unity among His redeemed people. However, we church members too often confuse uniformity with unity; the tendency among churches is to attempt to impose strictures that will guarantee that we look as if we were cut out with cookie cutters. However, unity permits us to be precisely the people whom God wants us to be without any artificiality. This accounts for the emphasis on unity and on harmony that is in the Word of God. Take note of some of the verses pleading for unity and enjoining the congregations to labour as one.

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight” [ROMANS 12:16].

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” [ROMANS 15:5, 6].

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:10].

“Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents” [PHILIPPIANS 1:27, 28].

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” [PHILIPPIANS 2:1, 2].

“Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body” [COLOSSIANS 3:14, 15].

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” [1 PETER 3:8].

When the disciples gathered in the Upper Room following Jesus’ ascension, we read, “[The disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” [ACTS 1:12-14].

Note the fourteenth verse: “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.” It has been said of the first disciples that they, being many, had one heart. Of Judas, it is said that he, being one, had many hearts.

I make a modest proposal for the people of God. We stand poised on the edge of a new year in which we will either honour God or we will advance our own personal interests. Undoubtedly, each Christian listening will aver the desire to honour God. If we are serious, there are some steps mandated by the questions Paul posed to the Corinthian saints.

1. Formulate a realistic view of your own position as a Christian.
2. Work at appreciating what God has done in the lives of your fellow worshippers.
3. Determine that you will avoid judging the abilities and effectiveness of God’s servants.
4. Take time each day to reflect on God’s sovereignty.
5. Think frequently of Christ’s mercy and grace demonstrated toward you.

May God bless each believer with wisdom. May He lead us to value one another and truly to esteem those who share this Faith. May He be glorified in each of our lives. Amen.