

## ACTS 6:1-7

### CONGREGATIONAL POLITY

“In these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a crisis in Baptist life today that cannot be resolved by bigger budgets, better programs or more sophisticated systems of data processing and mass communication. It is a crisis of identity rooted in a fundamental theological failure of nerve. The two major diseases afflicting contemporary congregations are *spiritual amnesia* (we have forgotten who we are) and *ecclesiastical myopia* (whoever we are, we are glad we are not like “them”). While these maladies are not unique to the people of God called Baptists, they are perhaps most glaringly present among us.

It is commonly said that Baptists practise a democratic form of church governance. This is not strictly correct, though the members of the Continental Congress during the formative days of the United States adapted Baptist polity as a model for the democracy practised by the American states. Democracy, as practised in the early days of the American Republic, is not the same democracy that is practised today. At the first, and as a significant aside, those who had nothing invested in the republic were not given a voice, though participants in democracy were enjoined to consider the need of all citizens when passing legislation. Democracy was about giving, not about taking.

Democracy assumes that the will of the majority shall rule over a political entity. The church is the Body of Christ; it must not be reduced to a political entity. The church is a spiritual entity with Christ Jesus as its Head. Therefore, the church is to model unity, submitting to the rule of God. The rule of God is exercised by the revelation of His will through the Word which He has given and under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Above all else, the church that will be pleasing to the Lord God is to seek the unity of the Spirit. We do have a mechanism by which we can appeal to a vote in order to accomplish the work of God, but we should consider such remedy as a means of last resort—an admission of failure to achieve unity. Always and ever, as a community of Faith, our first priority is to seek the unity of the Spirit, discovering the harmony which characterises the presence of God, and expressing the peace which marks all His works.

---

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken either from the English Standard Bible, **Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

Despite these issues, Baptist polity has stood as a foundation for our Faith since earliest days. The study of how we conduct our daily business and how we organise our congregations is worthy of our most careful study during this hour.

**A BAPTIST CHURCH IS TO MODEL RESPECT FOR AND ACCEPTANCE OF EACH MEMBER.**

Foundational to the concept of the polity practised among Baptists is Christian courtesy. We are called to model respect for one another and acceptance of one another. Throughout the warp and woof of the fabric which constitutes the Church that Jesus built is mutual respect and trust. In the text before us, mutual respect had begun to break down, and the Christians were beginning to segregate into “us” and “them.” Unfortunately, “them” are not necessarily those outside the Body of Christ.

Our language betrays our heart, which is not surprising in light of Jesus’ words. “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.” That which comes out of the mouth is nothing less than the expression of what is in the heart. “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” [MATTHEW 15:18, 19]. What is imperative for us to see is that the thought precedes the word, just as the attitude precedes the action.

If we think divisively, we will be divisive. If we endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit, we will be unified; it depends upon us—our attitude, our spirit. Perhaps the best way in which to avoid reducing others among the people of God to the underclass of “them” is to train ourselves to speak of Him. Whenever a church ceases to speak of “they” and “them” and begins to speak of “He” and “Him,” it is well on the way to being an apostolic church. I suggest that the world desperately needs to see at least one church which has adopted the language of Zion and seeks to unite the people of God.

The early church was being divided into Hellenists and Hebrews. They were not putting into practise the will of the Father. Paul would later address this particular issue. “You ... are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” [ROMANS 8:9-11].

The reference to “serv[ing] tables” is not intended to be derogatory. The word for “serve tables” (**diakoneîn**) is one of the great words of the New Testament. That same word (**diakonía**) is used when referring to “the ministry of the word” in **verse four**. The verb is the root of our noun, “deacon.” Growing out of this conflict in the early church would be the appointment of the first deacons—spiritually mature individuals who would be assigned the task of caring for the inward, physical needs of the congregation.

It is crucial for us to recognise that the Apostles were admitting that there was a vital ministry to outsiders rendered by preaching the Word and an equally important service to insiders rendered by distributing assistance to those in need. The two tasks must never be in competition or conflict. Neither the church nor its leaders should be forced to choose between evangelism and ethics, between growing and giving, between Word and welfare. However, once the congregation has begun to divide into factions—“we” and “them”—none of the vital functions of the church will be fulfilled. It is impossible to serve Christ or one another so long as we are divided.

The root problem in the *grumbling* of the Grecian Jews was the assumption that the church's leaders should *give up* one ministry in order to care for another ministry. Such a reordering of priorities was declared "not right." Quite literally, the word the Apostles used indicated that it would *not be pleasing [to God]* were they to cease preaching the Word in order to care for this particular matter.

The Grecian Jews had a perfect right to expect their daily needs would be met in equitable fashion; but they did not have the right to expect attention at the cost of neglecting another equally essential ministry of the church. In effect, the Hellenists were emphasising the immediate to the exclusion of the permanent. In the South we used to caution, "Don't sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary." The Hellenists saw the issue as one of *either/or*, when in reality it was an issue of *both/and*. We must reach out, and we must care for those we have already reached.

Focus for a moment on the teaching of the New Testament concerning our response to those whom God brings into our midst. Paul, in Romans writes, "Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about doubtful issues" [ROMANS 14:1 CSV].<sup>i</sup>

Clearly, the teaching of the Word is that we are to receive one another as equals before God. Paul does not have in view some form of grudging acceptance; rather he envisions a welcoming of one another as a brother or as a sister. This truth is iterated in ROMANS 15:7: "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

The expectation of mutual acceptance is perhaps shown even more clearly in the First Corinthian letter. "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. 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]. Certain truths from this passage are germane to our study.

***Every member has a divinely assigned role in the church.*** This is restatement of a truth which I have emphasised throughout the days of my service to the churches. Though we say we join a church, we recognise that we are actually placed in a given church by the Spirit of God. Therefore, we are each equipped for and given a role within that congregation wherein God has placed us. My purpose in this statement is to encourage each member of this Body to fulfil his or her assigned role in the church. Find a place of service and begin today to make the Body stronger through the exercise of your gift. This is your responsibility before God! Christians are saved to serve! Moreover, faithfulness to the assembly is expected of each member.

***Every member is a gift from God to the church.*** Each Christian has received a gift; and in the same manner, each member *is* a gift to the entire Body. When we begin to inspect the gifts exercised within the Body, our focus on the Giver can become blurred. If we are focused on the particular expressions of His grace we have a tendency to rank one another, failing all the while to see that it is the person gifted and given to us for our benefit who is the expression of God's grace. Receive one another as divinely given gifts. I urge you to make every effort to esteem one another as the precious gift of God.

***Each member must recognise the worth of every other member.*** No one of us has every gift; it is only as we live in unity that we benefit from all the gifts. Though I would that we had many more missionaries within the membership, not all of us are apostles to be dispatched on mission for God with accountability to our congregation. I could wish that we had a number of individuals able to express the mind of God, yet not all of us have that ability to reveal the mind of God to our generation. Fortunately, not all of us are teachers or we would each be grousing that we could do a better job than the pastor-teacher we now have. Instead, if we will be a church which honours God we will recognise the worth of every other member and rejoice in the presence of each one.

***Each member must realise that the assignments are given by God.*** If we recognise the worth of each member of the Body, we will shortly begin to recognise the sovereign hand of God at work directing and placing the members of the Body as He desires. Because He provides gifted individuals to serve as He determines we may be assured that He is ever anticipating needs and providing even before the need is apparent to us. Thus, we are assured that there are no inferior positions within the church.

Some within the church are called to labour full-time at the work God assigns. Such individuals—usually pastors and teachers of the Word—deserve special honour. “Respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:12, 13]. This does not mean that full-time workers are of greater importance to the assembly, but it does mean that we recognise their labour on our behalf. Nevertheless, each member is to be esteemed as a precious gift from God.

Moreover, each Christian is called to exhibit courtesy toward every other saint. “Remind [the members of the Body] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” [TITUS 3:1, 2]. If the command of God is to show perfect courtesy toward all people, does it not follow that we are to be courteous especially toward those who share the Faith with us?

If we accept one another as equal before the Lord, receiving one another with respect and treating each other with dignity, there can be no place for either political partisanship or manipulation among us. Mutual respect and acceptance taught in the Word of God excludes all efforts at manipulation or coercion among the people of God. We may speak openly and honestly our convictions, but we must ultimately yield to courtesy and respect borne out of our mutual redemption. Paul teaches us that as Christians, “We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:2].

Our ultimate authority is Christ Himself. We know what His will is through reading the Word. Therefore, we are called to submit to the Word of God as our rule of faith and practise. However, we ask the assembled Body of Christ to come to consensus in every activity. We believe that through prayerful meditation on the Word of God and submission to the Spirit who directs us in the Word, the assembled saints will discover the will of God regarding any given issue. Our goal within the church is not some form of democracy; rather, we seek the mind of Christ. We do not merely wish to advance an agenda; rather, we want to advance the cause of Christ in a spirit of unity. What is important is not that the majority rule, but that the Spirit of Christ rules among us.

**A BAPTIST CHURCH KNOWS BUT TWO OFFICES.** We do not have the Twelve Apostles among the churches any longer. However, Peter says that we have “something more sure—the prophetic word” [2 PETER 1:19]. The Apostles whom Jesus chose were appointed uniquely for that singular, exciting transitional period. Their office would cease after the churches were established and the Faith began to spread throughout the world and after we had received the completed canon of the Word of God.

At the time of the events recorded in the text, the Apostles were serving in a pastoral role since no elders had been appointed. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles was not yet appointed, nor had James, the brother of our Lord, begun to serve as pastor of the Jerusalem church. The pericope details the appointment of the first deacons. The churches of this day have “overseers and deacons” [cf. PHILIPPIANS 1:1]. According to the Word of God, overseers are also referred to as elders or pastors. The three terms—*overseer*, *elder* and *pastor*—are used interchangeably to designate the same office.

Peter employs all three terms in one brief passage. “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” [1 PETER 5:1-4]. Note that Peter addresses “the elders” as “a fellow elder.” Elders are “to shepherd the flock of God,” or literally “pastor [*poimainō*] the flock of God.” Also, they are commanded to exercise “oversight” [*episkopéō*] over that same flock. The three terms each refer to the same office within the churches.

A similar passage occurs in ACTS 20:28. Addressing the elders from Ephesus, Paul commands, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood” [csv]. He acknowledges that the Holy Spirit appointed the elders to serve as “overseers,” and he commands them “to shepherd the church of God.” When we speak of the “elders” of a church, we refer to the respect which should be accorded them because of their spiritual maturity. To speak of them as “bishops” or “overseers” is to acknowledge the responsibility that rests upon their office. To call them “pastors” is to emphasise the work they are called to perform. **Elder** refers to the spiritual maturity demonstrated and recognised by the flock. **Overseer** or bishop speaks of the responsibility to God and the divine authority for specific functions. **Pastor** speaks of the work of tending the flock which is assigned these officers of the churches.

The qualifications of an overseer are given in 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7. Specific character traits demonstrate spiritual maturity in an individual; these traits should characterise the individual appointed to pastoral office. “An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

A similar passage in Paul's letter to Titus adds a few characteristics of maturity. "The reason I left you in Crete was ... to appoint elders in every town, if anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of wildness or rebellion. For an overseer, as God's manager, must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick tempered, not addicted to wine, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he may be able both encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it" [TITUS 1:5-9 CSV].

Clearly, the elders of the churches are expected to be mature men. Maturity is gauged by the criteria provided: above reproach, a one-woman man, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not a bully, gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy, not a new convert, having a good reputation with outsiders.

The other officers that serve the churches, of whom less is said in Scripture, are *deacons*. "Deacons ... must be dignified, not two-faced, not given to excessive drinking, not greedy for gain, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And these also must be tested first and then let them serve as deacons if they are found blameless. Likewise, also, their wives must be dignified, not slanderous, temperate, faithful in every respect. Deacons must be husbands of one wife and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" [1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13 NET].<sup>ii</sup>

What is apparent from the Word of God is that the elders of the church are responsible to focus outward, providing spiritual oversight for the Body. Deacons, on the other hand, are assigned to provide immediate care for the physical needs of the assembly. Thus, there is a division of labour within the Body of Christ—elders and deacons serving within specific and defined realms. All the assembly, however, is privileged to participate in seeking out those who will direct the congregation's labours.

In our text, the full number of the disciples is summoned to seek out those who would serve to address the immediate congregational needs. The precise details of how those who would should be selected to serve is not detailed; what is important for us to recognise is that the entire assembly had input into the selection. The sole proviso was that the assembly must seek out "men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom."

Similarly, while a congregation may not hire a pastor (pastors are divinely appointed), that appointment is always verified through the agreement of those pastored. In other words, God does not impose His will on anyone. God does not force a congregation to receive His appointment without agreement. The man of God, appointed by God, will be required to meet the standard of the Word of God and accepted by those over whom he is appointed.

We discern the will of God through submission to Christ through obedience to His Word as we seek the mind of His Spirit. No church holding to Baptist principles would ever submit to any moral or ethical authority outside the express will of the congregation, save for the authority of Christ exercised through the guiding principles given in His Word. A Baptist church can submit neither to denominational nor to civil authority in matters of faith and practise. In a New Testament church (and every Baptist church should be "New Testament" in faith and practise) no higher appeal exists for faith and practise than an appeal to Christ through His Word.

**A BAPTIST CHURCH SEEKS UNITY IN THE FAITH.** All that I have said to this point leads to the question, how does a congregation govern itself? Does the Word of God give us a model for how we are to conduct church business? If we study the Word carefully, do we find a hierarchy of church leaders? The Roman Catholic Church and those communions descended from that church (Orthodox and Protestants such as Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian denominations), would argue that there exists a hierarchy within the church. According to this model, a church consists of rulers and those who are ruled. However, such a model is foreign to the Word of God.

Some, even some calling themselves Baptist and presenting themselves as leaders, have failed to understand this principle—they actually shrink from trusting the assembly. Such individuals demure, “You cannot trust unlearned, ordinary people to make decisions concerning faith and practise.” Why not? Peter and John were unschooled, ordinary men, and their power confounded the religious leaders even as they honoured God.

The popular model relies upon political power to accomplish the work of God. There is always an emphasis upon segregation—if not into political parties and factions, then at the very least into the governed and governors. This represents the Jewish model with which the Apostles had grown up; however, God provided something far better.

In the Word of God, we witness the church as a congregation united in faith and practise, seeking unity through mutual respect and acceptance of each member as we submit to God’s will as revealed through His Word. The overarching responsibility concerning church governance is that we who are the Body of Christ bear responsibility to “be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The reason we are responsible is that “There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” [EPHESIANS 4:3-6]. If you demur, saying we are unable to maintain the unity of the Spirit, I remind you that “Grace has been given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” [EPHESIANS 4:7].

We are not called to create unity; we are called to keep “the unity of the Spirit.” We received grace according to Christ’s determination of our need. Note one further passage of the Word. Paul states that, “As God’s chosen ones” [COLOSSIANS 3:2], we are called to put on “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” [CSV]. These are qualities each of us can choose to embrace. Beyond this we must “accept[] one another and forgive[] one another if anyone has a complaint against another.” Underscore this great thought. “Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive. Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity” [COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 CSV].

In the first Corinthian letter, Paul presents the church not as a democracy, but as the Body [see 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31]. The various members of your body do not take a vote each time a task is required. Instead, the brain directs the various parts of the body in a co-ordinated fashion to perform whatever task is required. Babies must think carefully before acting. With maturity, however, we no longer need to weigh carefully each action—we act smoothly and with purpose. The body of a mature individual is co-ordinated, responding smoothly to the stimulus of the brain. Just as a body which fails to move and act in a co-ordinated fashion is spastic, uncoordinated and weak, so the Body of Christ cannot help but be uncoordinated and weak should the members fail to have respect for one another—respect which is expressed through an attitude of co-operation.

I have already alluded to the principle of unity, growing out of an attitude of mutual respect and acceptance, as the foundation for church governance. Elders provide spiritual guidance; deacons provide practical service. However, all the members together seek the unity of the Spirit and treat one another with dignity and courtesy. This is a principle which has been too often forgotten in this day to the detriment of the Faith. If we understand the teaching of the Word of God, the business meeting of the church just may be the most spiritual meeting of all. Outsiders, witnessing the church acting in harmony, cannot help but be impressed, and God is certainly glorified. If we truly understand our individual roles, and if we understand the importance of a united congregation, and if we prayerfully unite to seek the will of God for every task, we will advance together with His Spirit leading us in all things.

My great concern is that this congregation is united in purpose and in service. I am concerned that each member of the Body function powerfully, finding the place of work God assigns and endeavouring to serve others in a spirit of love. When we each work and when we each invest our lives in one another we reveal that we are truly convinced that God is sovereign over life and service. When we exert the effort to maintain the bond of peace, we reveal that the Spirit of God is truly among us.

When we hold ourselves back from identification with Christ, when we hesitate to be baptised, we bespeak a desire to reign over our own spirits. When we fail to unite openly with the congregation, when we refuse to join readily with the people of God, we demonstrate a desire to continue in control of our own destiny. When we fail to find a place of service and when we refuse to witness and to work, we demonstrate that we know little of the purpose for which God placed us within the congregation. When we hold ourselves apart from membership, we weaken unity. Where is the spirit of submission then? Where is the gentle spirit which emulates that of the Lord Christ?

Unity is such a rare commodity among the churches of this day. Have you noticed how frequently the Apostle urged the people of God to labour to ensure they were united? The reason for this continual litany of unity is that unity is so very fragile. A united people are rare among the churches of this day. Therefore, work to preserve the unity of the Faith. Do this by learning to accept one another and to rejoice in the presence of each individual as a precious gift from God. Together, as we prayerfully seek His will we will discover just how very powerful we are.

Listen to the Word. "Love must be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lack diligence; be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honourable in everyone's eyes. If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone" [ROMANS 12:9-18 CSV].

"May the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Jesus Christ, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" [ROMANS 15:5, 6 NET].



“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].

“I ... urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us” [EPHESIANS 4:1-3 CSV].

“[Christ Jesus] personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness” [EPHESIANS 4:11-13 CSV].

“Above all ... put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” [COLOSSIANS 3:14].

“All of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling” [1 PETER 3:8, 9a].

Though we are not specialists, we have the one great resource of Heaven itself directing our thoughts, for “We have the mind of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:16].

Paul writes, “To each person the manifestation of the Spirit **for the benefit of all**” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:7 NET]. It is not simply that we Christians are gifted individuals; rather, each Christian is a gift to the congregation wherein he or she is placed. The Apostle lists a variety of possible gifts which a given believer may possess: **THE MESSAGE OF WISDOM, THE MESSAGE OF KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, GIFTS OF HEALING, PERFORMANCE OF MIRACLES, PROPHECY, DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS, DIFFERENT KINDS OF LANGUAGES** and **INTERPRETATION OF LANGUAGES**. He then says, “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:11].

Upon becoming a believer in Christ the Lord, the Spirit of God took up residence in your life: “We were all made to drink of the one Spirit” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:13 NET]. We know that the Spirit has gifted “each [believer], **as He wills**” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:11], and that His gifts are given “for the common good” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:7]. The gifts of the Spirit are intended to build up the Body of Christ; the spiritual gifts entrusted to you are meant to enrich others. The vital point is that we remember that each believer is situated within a particular congregation by Divine design and is to be received as God’s grace gift. At the practical level, if you are a Christian you are responsible to unite with and exercise your gift in the local congregation where God assigns you. As a member of that particular body, you are responsible to seek to participate through building up the people of God in unity and in harmony.

To you who are yet outside the Faith, the message of Christ is that you have no unity in this world; however, in Christ is found not only unity, but also peace and joy. Accept Him and you shall have these precious commodities that you now lack. The Word urges, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be set free. For with the heart one believes resulting in a right standing with the Father, and with the mouth one confesses and is set free.” The passage concludes by citing the words of the Prophet Joel for emphasis, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9-13]. Believe and be saved today. Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Scripture passages marked CSV refer to the **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009).

<sup>ii</sup> Scripture passages marked NET refer to **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006).