

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit (4)

Baptized by the Spirit

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “The Holy Spirit”, the fourth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

All of us need to be born of the Spirit to enter into the kingdom of God. When that happens, the Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ, and we become members of the body of Christ, and we learn to work out church life together. We can then build up the body of Christ and fulfil what God wants to accomplish.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

God has created us with a very great potential and this potential can only be realized when we respond well. It is only when we choose the right path in the context of what God has provided and in line with His instructions that we will be able to realize that potential.

All of us chose to go our own way and therefore, we could not benefit from what God desired to do in our lives. But God in His grace made the provision for us to repent, to come to Him, to find forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit helps us and each one of us can be born of the Spirit and enter into the kingdom of God. So that aspect is a personal relationship with God. Each one of us must respond to God personally: We must choose to repent, we must turn to God and we must seek His forgiveness. And the Holy Spirit can then bring about the new birth – we are born of the Spirit.

When that happens, when the Holy Spirit does this in our heart, something else takes place.

And this is a very important aspect for us to appreciate if we want to be faithful to God, if we want to realize what God wants to accomplish in our lives.

The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ and we become members of the body of Christ.

So God does not want us just to be isolated individuals, each one of us knowing Him separately and doing our own things.

God wants us, yes, first to know Him personally, but also to know how to relate with one another in the kingdom of God, in the body of Christ.

Let us turn to **1 Corinthians 12: 4-14**.

1 Corinthians 12: 4-14

- 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.
- 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.
- 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;
- 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
- 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.
- 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.
- 12 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.
- 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
- 14 For the body is not one member, but many.

In this context, the apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthian Christians and explaining to them the issue of spiritual gifts. So we notice that the reference to the Holy Spirit is quite extensive in this passage.

We are told: to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And the Holy Spirit gives various gifts to various ones in the context of the body of Christ.

So in **verse 13**, he tells us: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

In baptism, there are three aspects that are helpful for us to recognize.

First, there is the one who baptizes; then there is the one that is baptized; and there is also the medium into which we are baptized.

For example in water baptism, which is commonly practised after a person responds to the gospel and becomes a Christian, the Christian undergoes water baptism. So in water baptism, the baptizer is a Christian; the one baptized is also a Christian (the one who undergoes that baptism), and the medium is water – so the one who baptizes, baptizes the Christian in water.

In this context, by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, the one who baptizes is the Holy Spirit; the one who is baptized is the Christian – the one who is born again; the medium into which we are baptized is the body of Christ: So the Holy Spirit baptizes the believer into the body of Christ; we enter into the medium of the body of Christ.

This is different from the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which the Lord willing, we may consider subsequently. In the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the One who baptizes is the Lord Jesus Christ; the one who is baptized is the Christian; and the medium in which we are baptized is the Holy Spirit: The Lord Jesus baptizes the Christian with the Holy Spirit; we enter into the realm of the Spirit, in the context in which the Holy Spirit may then empower us and work in our lives.

For today, I want to concentrate on the issue of the Holy Spirit baptizing the believer into the body of Christ and to consider what this means.

The Holy Spirit not only helps us to be born again but also, He brings us into the body of Christ, so that we become members of the body of Christ. Every Christian needs to appreciate this. If we do not appreciate this, it is very easy for us to just do our own things, just be conscious of what we want to do and what we think is good to do, without recognition of our place in the body.

Every member in the body in the physical realm affects other members in the body: We can contribute to the health of the body or we can bring toxins and poisons into the body. We can contribute; we can also receive. So if the body is healthy, what is provided for each member will be something good; if the body is unhealthy, what is provided will not be good.

But the Scriptures also make it very clear that our lives are not totally dependent on the body. That is to say, if we look at the Lord Jesus Christ: The Lord Jesus Christ, He can function as He is without *this* body of Christ.

This body of Christ refers to His relationship with the believers. The Lord Jesus Christ in Himself has life, has meaning, has direction but the body of Christ that is referred to here has to do with His relationship with the believers. So this body of Christ is a context in which we relate with one another.

So too every believer has a life of his own in God.

If we live our lives well, we respond well to God, we can have a meaningful life and walk with God. Even if others in the body of Christ do not function well, we can still function well. There is this aspect of our personal relationship with God and that is very important.

But that can happen only when our walk with God is good and our walk with God being good will include our taking our place in the body of Christ. If we do not properly take our place in the body of Christ, we cannot be walking well with God. So we need to see the relationship: Ultimately, each one of us must be faithful in our personal walk with God and in our part in the body of Christ.

Here, in **1 Corinthians 12**, the apostle Paul concentrates on the gifts of the Spirit, the working of the Spirit in the body of Christ.

But in this context, he also helps us to see the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father. As we see this relationship, it will also help us in the way we respond to God.

The apostle Paul says:

- 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.
- 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.

So the Holy Spirit is the One who gives us various gifts so that we may be able to work out what God may want us to accomplish.

But this takes place in the context of the same Lord – the Lord Jesus Christ. There are varieties of ministries (or the word can be translated as “services”). There are different kinds of ministries, services, that the Lord may want us to be involved in and in all these aspects, the Holy Spirit will enable us to fulfil them.

But what the Lord Jesus does is in the context of what God the Father is seeking to accomplish.

There are different varieties of effects (or the word can be translated as “operations” or “workings”): there are different aspects that God is seeking to work out, to bring about but it is the same God.

He is the One who plans, who decides, who has a direction, who has a purpose to accomplish. The Lord Jesus Christ seeks to fulfil that and the Holy Spirit brings it about when we are responsive to Him.

This is also expressed in **Ephesians 4: 1-7**.

Ephesians 4: 1-7

- 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,
- 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,
- 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- 4 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
- 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The apostle Paul tells us that we are members of the body of Christ and we need to recognize that oneness in the body of Christ.

And in order to maintain, to develop, to nurture the meaningfulness of that oneness, we must develop qualities of humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love in the context of working out in the body of Christ; and being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So the way in which we are to work out that unity, the oneness in the body of Christ, the same direction and purpose that we have, is to learn to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to depend on Him. He is the One who will bring us together; He is the One who will enable us to live in the right way.

So that is why he goes on to say: *There is* one body and one Spirit.

We all belong to the one body and it is the one Spirit that is working in that one body to help us to function as we should. The Holy Spirit gives gifts, but He not only gives gifts. He guides us, He enables us, He teaches us, so that we will know how to live out our lives effectively in the body of Christ. *There is* one body and there is one Spirit: It is the same Spirit who is at work in all those who belong to the body of Christ, who want to be faithful to Him, who want to fulfil their part in the body of Christ.

just as also you were called in one hope of your calling... So when the Holy Spirit called us, when He spoke to us, when He brought us to repentance and faith, He was bringing us towards this direction: the one hope of your calling. God has called us. The Holy Spirit speaks to us and He brings us to experience that reality.

And that reality is in the direction of one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The Holy Spirit brings us to recognize who the Lord Jesus is; brings us to submit to Him, His lordship; brings us to recognize He is the Saviour of the world, He is the One we must acknowledge as our Head, that we must follow Him.

There is one Lord and one faith: our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in what He has done on the cross to save us; our faith in Him that He will lead us in the path of God's calling, He will enable us to fulfil the purposes of God.

The one baptism here I see likely refers to water baptism, which we see commonly described in the **Acts of the Apostles** – when people turned to the Lord, they were then baptized; and the apostle Paul likewise was baptized. So that baptism is meant basically and primarily to be a declaration of loyalty to Christ, of oneness with Him, union with Him, to testify that we belong to Christ. It is an outward expression of our commitment to follow the Lord.

Then all this is in the context of: one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. So our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, our acknowledging Him as our Lord, our testifying to the fact that we belong to Him is in the context of fulfilling God's purposes. God the Father is the Father of all, He is over all and through all and in all.

He is the absolute, the sovereign Ruler; He is the One to whom we must answer. We are seeking to bring about His purposes and to fulfil all that He desires.

So we need to learn to work together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who baptized us into the body of Christ. This will bring about the unity of the Spirit and the meaning of one body and one Spirit. Our faith is directed towards the Lord Jesus, our Saviour and Lord and the Head of the body; and water baptism declares that we are united with the Lord Jesus. This emphasizes the one Lord, one faith and one baptism. In all this we are submitted to the sovereign reign of God and we worship Him: one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

It is helpful for us to ponder over the way in which God works, so that we can more effectively cooperate with Him.

The way that many large companies and corporations work bears some similarity with the way that God executes His purposes. In a large company generally, there may be a Board of Directors and this Board will decide on what the company wants to do and it will oversee the overall direction of the company. They have plans, they have objectives and they will also appoint a Chief Executive Officer to bring this about. So the Board of Directors oversees the whole company and they consider and plan what the company is to accomplish.

It then appoints the Chief Executive Officer or the CEO to execute and bring about the objectives. He is then to consider how to work all these things out and he will do whatever he can in line with the objectives.

In many companies, the Chief Executive Officer is assisted by someone called the Chief Operating Officer.

And the Chief Operating Officer oversees the daily operations of the company, including finance, manpower, and equipment, logistics... many different aspects. He oversees all this to assist the Chief Executive Officer, who concentrates on major directions in working out in the company.

The way that God works, basically, we see in the Scriptures is that God the Father plans what to accomplish and He oversees everything. He is the One who considers how things ought to be done, what are the objectives and what He wants to bring about. He plans.

The task is then assigned to the Lord Jesus Christ to execute. He is the Word, the *Logos*, and through Him, God created the world. Through Him, God brought about the plan of redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ executes the plans and the purposes that God has. The Lord Jesus directs the different ministries, areas of service in the body of Christ and all believers bear a relationship with Him.

The Holy Spirit equips and enables all the members of the body of Christ to fulfil their functions. He gives gifts to men and enables them to do what they need to do in day to day situations. He supplies all that is needed so that we can grow well and contribute our part.

In the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus also tells us how He is the vine and we are the branches. And this picture also helps us appreciate how God works. We will come to that in a short while, but first let us consider how God oversees all. God is the One who oversees everything.

1 Corinthians 15: 23-25

- 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,
- 24 then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.
- 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

So God is the One who oversees all, and the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of all that He has done when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power, He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father.

God in His plans and purposes, what He wants to accomplish, He has revealed to us in the Scriptures. God has given the Scriptures to help us understand what He wants to accomplish and if we read carefully, seek His guidance, we will understand what is in His heart.

And the Lord Jesus Christ is the centre of what God wants to bring about and therefore, as we think of Him, as we read about Him, as we ponder over Him and His life and we learn to relate with Him, we will be able to move in the direction of fulfilling what God wants to accomplish.

So the Lord Jesus works in accordance with what God has planned. That is why again and again the Lord Jesus said, "I do not speak on My own initiative... I do not work on My own initiative." He constantly did the things that the Father wanted Him to do, and again and again He will tell us that this is His whole direction of life.

1 Corinthians 15: 28

When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

God works in the situations such that all things will be subjected to Christ. He will be Lord of lords, King of kings. Then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. So He is the One who oversees the whole operation. He is the One who decides all that needs to be done, ought to be done. So the Board of Directors functions something in that kind of direction where they decide on what the company is to do. The Chief Executive Officer works out those plans and the Lord Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God is the One who executes the plans and purposes of God.

God is the vinedresser and the Lord Jesus is the vine and we are the branches.

John 15: 1-5

- 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
- 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.
- 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
- 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.
- 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

The Lord Jesus explains to us that He is the true vine and we are related to Him as branches to the vine. But He also tells us: "My Father is the vinedresser." So He is the One in charge of the vine. He is the One who has planned for the vine to be there and we are related to the Lord Jesus Christ such that if we fulfil our part well, then we will bear much fruit.

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." So God is always watching over all that is happening; even the sparrow that falls to the ground, He knows. Every hair of your head is numbered. God sees everything and He watches over all things. So how we respond to the Lord Jesus Christ, He knows and He will deal with us accordingly. So we must learn to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and He in us and that is how we are to work out His purposes.

And He also tells us that the way in which we are to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ, to honour Him, to live for Him, is through the working of the Holy Spirit.

But first, I want to go on to consider how the Lord Jesus gives gifts of people to fulfil the work. God has a work to be done. The Lord Jesus Christ brings the people to fulfil the work, just as the CEO needs to bring suitable people to the company to do the job.

The Lord Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God brings people to fulfil the work and in that context, we need to pay attention to what the direction is that God wants us to move towards. The people are called to come to fulfil a function. They are not called, they are not employed, in a company, just to do whatever they think is best. There is a direction; there is a purpose to work towards. So we need to see the intention, the purpose.

Ephesians 4: 8-16

- 8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."
 9 (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?
 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)
 11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,
 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,
 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Notice it says that "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." This refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who descended and He is the One who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things. And after He ascended, HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.

So what were these gifts? These were gifts of people: He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers.

The word “*as*” that is found in the New American Standard Bible is not present in the original Greek, but is put there to help us understand the meaning. So basically you can say He gave some apostles, He gave some prophets, He gave some evangelists, He gave some pastors and teachers.

So these were people that He gave to the church, to the body of Christ so that God’s purposes can be fulfilled. A CEO calls certain people to fulfil certain functions. Not everyone fulfils the same functions. One may be in charge of human resource; another may be in charge of finance, and so on. There are different people called for different purposes.

So God gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.

And what is that for?

We are told it is for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

This tells us that God’s intention is for the whole body to be involved. He is not just calling a few people to do the work. He is mobilizing, calling the whole body to be involved. He gave gifts of these people so as to equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

So there is a purpose involved in these people being called to fulfil their function. “...the equipping of the saints for the work of service” tells us that every member of the body of Christ must function well then the whole body can be healthy and properly developed. There must be a proper building up of the body of Christ.

Let us look at God's intention. What is the direction that God is working at? What does He want us to move towards? What does He want to accomplish? It tells us very clearly: until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

God wants us to grow to that kind of maturity that our lives, our character, would be like that of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a primary aspect of the function of body life.

In the context of the saints being equipped, in the context of the building up of the body of Christ, there should come about a situation where the believers, the members in the body of Christ grow to maturity, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

If we do not properly do our part in the body of Christ, we will bring about the situation where it will be difficult for people in the body to develop well. If each one of us thinks of what we would like to do, what we think is suitable to do and do not contribute our part properly in the body of Christ, then the way in which God works in the situation will be affected because God works through the body of Christ.

He wants to equip the saints to fulfil their part.

If that happens, then: As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...

Here is a warning. If we do not function well in the body of Christ, what is going to happen is that there can be many believers but these believers may be like children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.

The “deceitful scheming” very likely refers to an aspect of the work of the powers of darkness. The evil one is a deceiver and he operates by deception to a very large extent. He pretends to be God. He pretends to be doing the things that are meaningful before God, but he has his objectives.

So if we are not mature in Christ in the direction of being faithful to Him and listening to Him, then we can be deceived, we can be carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men: men who may have their own objectives, who may have their own desires, who have been led astray by the evil one. So we will be in danger, being tossed to and fro.

But the Lord wants us to function well so that we will not remain in that kind of state, but together in the body of Christ, we will grow to maturity. It is then that we will be able to speak the truth in love and then we can grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ. Christ is the head of the body. We are to relate with Him well, grow up well in Him. It is from Him that the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, can fulfil God’s purpose according to the proper working of each individual part. Then this will lead to the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

God tells us this is the way to work it out. That is how He wants us to fulfil His purposes.

If we do not follow this, if we concentrate on the wrong thing or we do it the wrong way, then there can result serious negative consequences for ourselves, for others, for the kingdom of God. That is why it is an issue that we need to pay close attention to. Ponder over. Search the Scriptures. Consider carefully. If this is what God is telling us, we need to take heed.

Many years ago, I had a friend who was a very keen Christian. He was very eager for spiritual things. He was a leader of a Christian group and he wanted very much to help others to become Christians. He actively sought out people to witness to them. He had come to learn of an approach where he could share the gospel with people, and he did so. And he told me he was very happy because so many people responded. They prayed the “sinner’s prayer” and in his understanding, they became Christians. He was very enthusiastic, very happy that so many people responded.

Some time later, may be some months or a year or so, he spoke to me again and he was very discouraged. He told me: “They have all gone back to the world.” They prayed, they responded, but in time to come there was not that kind of reality in their lives.

And sadly, with the passing of time, he also became discouraged in his own faith and was no longer eager to walk with the Lord. And we subsequently lost contact. It is a sad thing because he was sincere in his belief, he was eager in wanting to help other people; he wanted to grow in his faith and he was a leader in a Christian group.

We need to take care that we work out God’s purposes in His way, that we learn to submit to His guidance so that we can function well; and in the context of healthy church life where each one of us, we do our part properly, it will be a context where God will help us to grow well.

God is the One who places us in the body of Christ in the manner that He sees fit. We do not select which part we like and prefer.

1 Corinthians 12: 18

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

So the Holy Spirit is the One who baptizes us into the body of Christ, but God is the One who decided where to place us, each one of us in the body. He knows what is best and most suitable for us. We must learn to look to God to understand what He desires of us in the body of Christ: not isolated individuals; not doing things our own way; not because we think it is a good idea; not because people tell us what to do, what is more popular; not because people will appreciate us. We must be careful that we do so because it is meaningful to God, we are walking with Him, we obey Him.

So God is the One who places us in the body of Christ where He desires. The Lord Jesus gives gifts of people to do the work in the body of Christ, so we must recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the body. He is in charge, so we need to submit to the head, take our place in obedience to Him.

He gave some *as* apostles... some *as* prophets... some *as* evangelists... some *as* pastors and teachers. But that is not all that is in the body of Christ. These are described to help us understand that there are some of these people who have a particular function, where He may send them out to do things in a manner that may be different from the majority of people, but everyone in the body of Christ is important.

And that is why we are told the Holy Spirit gives gifts to us appropriate for us to function.

1 Corinthians 12: 7

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The Holy Spirit gives the manifestation of the Spirit to each one. All of us are equipped to fulfil our part. There is no one who is useless, who is incapable, who cannot contribute anything.

If our hearts are right, if we are willing to obey God, all of us can contribute and must contribute something meaningful. We should not be looking at other people and say, "They can do that; I cannot." We concentrate on what we can meaningfully do.

I want now to emphasize an aspect that is important for us to be aware of when we think of the Holy Spirit baptizing us into the body of Christ.

Let us recognize that this operation of the Holy Spirit baptizing us into the body of Christ is a spiritual operation. It takes place in the realm of the spirit.

So much of Christian work is actually done in the realm of the flesh: our own abilities, our own ideas, what men can physically do without God in terms of dependence on Him for His life and enabling.

The baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ is a spiritual operation where we are brought into the body of Christ. And it is not a physical entity; it is a spiritual reality. It is the realm where we worship God and we serve Him. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

We must learn to develop our lives in the realm of the Spirit. But many people are concentrating on developing their intellect, developing their physical abilities, developing how well they can speak in the physical realm. Such aspects can at times be useful but never primary.

If we do not submit to God and our lives are not properly one with the Lord in spirit, then all that we do will be of no value. If we do not learn to abide in Christ and He abide in us, then all the works that we have done will be burned up. It will be like wood, hay, and stubble.

So we are united with the Lord Jesus Christ in the spiritual realm.

1 Corinthians 6: 17 tells us:

But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

That is the realm in which we must develop our lives. We must concentrate on the spirit if we want to function well in the body and receive and give in the body – that is the realm that we must concentrate on.

But there is a very significant danger if we concentrate on the realm of the spirit. We ought to, but we must recognize that there is a great danger in that because not everything in the realm of the spirit is good.

The evil spirit is also spirit and works in the spiritual realm. Satan operates in the spiritual realm. We are fighting a battle against the spiritual host in the heavenly realm. So it is a spiritual battle.

To concentrate on the spirit is right, but we must do so in the right way. We must make sure that our hearts are right, our motives are good; we are following the Lord's ways, we are willing to do what is truly pleasing to Him.

So in order to fulfil our part in the body of Christ, we must develop our spirit so that our hearts are in line with God's purposes, our character is developed according to what is honouring to God and consistent with His being.

In that situation, we must learn to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to work together with other members of the body of Christ.

If we are not sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can very readily be sensitive to the opinions of men, we can be very readily sensitive to our own emotional inclinations, we can be sensitive to situations that seem so right.

The apostle Paul learnt and he recognized the leading of the Holy Spirit as he went on his mission to preach to the Gentiles. He was called by the Lord Jesus Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles and he was sent out from the church in Antioch to fulfil the work that the Holy Spirit said He had set apart for him to do.

Acts 16: 5-8

- 5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.
- 6 They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;
- 7 and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them;
- 8 and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.

This is a short description but it tells us that the Holy Spirit guided the apostle Paul as to where he should go and what he should do. He was not insistent on wanting to go to speak the word in Asia when he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. He did not continue to go into Bithynia because the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. God had a work for him to do, so he moved in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is true for the apostle Paul in the kind of work that God assigned to him, but this is also true for each member of the body of Christ. We must learn to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our contribution, participation, involvement in working out church life.

The apostle Paul tells us in the context of open worship, all of us can contribute something and we must be careful to do so in a spirit of submission to God.

1 Corinthians 14: 26-33

- 26 What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.
- 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret;
- 28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.
- 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.
- 30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent.
- 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;
- 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;
- 33 for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

We are to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit but this is not a passive exercise – we just stay there and ask the Holy Spirit: “Just do everything in us” – speak in us, move us, do whatever He wants. That is not what God wants.

God wants us to exercise our spirits. He wants us to consider before God. He wants us to say and do the things we believe are meaningful before God. That is why he says: “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”. We exercise ourselves to regulate our spirits to say and to do what is meaningful before God.

Each one has something that he can contribute. It does not have to be verbal, outwardly done, but he has something in his heart, there is something meaningful he can contribute. It can be praying, it can be pondering, it can be affirming, but all these are meant to be moving in the direction of all things be done for edification.

There is a purpose, there is a movement; we are concerned for the body of Christ, we seek to edify the body of Christ.

It is not self-centred; it is not to project your abilities, it is not in order to enjoy yourself, it is not to be comfortable but to do what is right and what is good.

So all can participate and this includes children. Do not think that just because you are young, you are excused. You are not excused if you are a member of the body of Christ. If you are not a member of the body of Christ, that is different. But if you are born again, you are a member of the body of Christ, you are not excused.

Everyone has a responsibility. So we need to look to God, pray, consider.

If a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. We are conscious of one another. We are not just saying things and doing things on our own, but we are conscious of one another, we are sensitive, we are prayerful, we are looking to the Lord to edify the whole body. So if the Holy Spirit grants a revelation to someone else, he can contribute. We let the person contribute; we do not insist on saying what we want to say. We can regulate our spirit.

But neither should we be passive, just waiting for others to participate, for others to do their part.

Many may think: "I do not know very much. I may say the wrong things. I am very afraid." And so we keep silent, we do not say anything. That is not right. If we love the Lord, we will prayerfully consider. At the right time, in the right situation, as the Holy Spirit leads, we contribute our part.

So let us recognize that the Holy Spirit baptized us into the body of Christ and we have become members of the body of Christ.

As such, we should no longer live by ourselves but recognize that we are part of the body, although we are still separate individuals with a personal responsibility. God does require each one of us to respond well in our own lives, but He also wants us to work together corporately. So both responsibilities are important.

The body of Christ involves the local context as well as the worldwide context.

God wants us in the local context to work together, to express church life as best as we can. But in our hearts, we are also united with the body of Christ worldwide and we contribute to that as we function well in church life and as God may send out those who are suitable to do the work. If we function well in the local context, we will contribute towards the universal context.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the body. He is the vine; we are branches related to the vine. So we must be conscious of what He wants to accomplish and we support Him, we move together with Him. There can be many, many branches that relate to the vine. Each one of us must relate with the head, be responsive to Him; we must learn to know who He is, what is in His heart, what is important to Him.

The Holy Spirit guides us and He empowers us. We have to learn to listen to Him, not the voices of the world or majority opinion, or our own ideas.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must ensure that we choose to worship God and give our lives fully to Him to fulfil His purposes.

And we learn to properly abide in the Lord Jesus, so that He may abide in us. And we learn to be led by the Holy Spirit as we live our lives each day in every situation that we go through.

That is what God desires and if we do our part well, then the Holy Spirit will not be grieved. He will have the freedom to work in us and together, the body can be properly built up.

Let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us understand these issues more clearly. Let us seek Him that He may speak to us and teach us His ways. Let us ask Him to reveal to us through the Holy Spirit's guidance what He has written in the Scriptures for our learning. And let us learn to respond well, to obey Him.