

It doesn't require a whole lot of dyslexia to misread the word *united* as *untied*. But no matter how small a mix-up it takes to reverse those two little up-and-down letters, the change in meaning is extreme—from “pulled together” to “pulled apart.”

The church is the same way. One little statement said out of place or interpreted the wrong way can cause a major disturbance. One little budget cut or salary increase. One little decision that leads to another, and another, until the only good decision left is a painful corrective that's sure to offend somebody, maybe everybody.

Granted, every church has its share of people who haven't sought the Spirit's leadership in their lives since the Carter administration. As a result, there's only so much unity you can expect when some are into this thing with a passion and others just for the pancake breakfasts.

But truly the only thing that has the power to oil the differences between you, and me, and all the other square pegs that make up God's church is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So if we can't get along about something, one of us (at least) has to quit wanting his way.

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-14

Some people are really good at making small talk with total strangers. (Some, actually, are a little too good. A guy I once sat next to on a flight from Baltimore comes to mind.) But most of us do much better in conversation when we have some kind of reason for connecting, a shared piece of common ground we can both step out on at the same time, like:

“Has your son decided about college yet?”

“Sure been too wet to do much golfing lately.”

“I ran into someone the other day who knows you.”

But for those of us who've been received into the body of Christ, our primary point of contact with one another no longer needs to be whether we run at the same track, get our firewood from the same guy, or enjoy the same kind of reading, (“Even the pagans do that,” you can almost hear Jesus saying.)

That's because we now have the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” to unite us as believers (2 Corinthians 13:13). And that ought to be our main reason for getting together.

### Signs Of The Spirit

According to Paul's teaching, this “fellowship with the Spirit” should show itself in several different ways inside our church relationships (Philippians 2:1-1).

“*By thinking the same way.*” This doesn't mean we have to agree totally on every little incidental. But when we're actively seeking the Spirit's leadership, we can learn to let a lot of things go. We can remove the “my way” mentality from our menu and not let our personal tastes poison the experience for everybody.

“*Having the same love.*” Maybe this one is the most convicting because it means asking ourselves what our real love is. Is it work? Is it weekends? Is it turkey hunting? Is it our own down time? The “love” Paul was talking about, of course, was our “first love” of relationship with Jesus (Revelation 2:4)—our love for spiritual things, our love for doing the will of God, our love for encouraging one another by talking about what he's doing in our lives. Until that love is truly our real love, we can't all share the “same love” together.

“*Sharing the same feelings.*” As hard as it is for some of us to believe—and as hard as it can be for any of us to put into practice—the Holy Spirit promises that we can indeed enjoy an attitude and atmosphere of like-mindedness in our church. We can submit to him something as nearly uncontrollable as our own feelings and emotions, and experience his power working through us. That's what the Bible says.

“*Focusing on one goal.*” Imagine what could be immediately demoted from irritant status in our hearts if our only desires were to worship, serve, and honor Christ. Through the Holy Spirit this miracle really can occur at your church's street address, as well as throughout the town or city where your members live, work, and pitch in together. One goal: the glory of God.

## Unity Eaters

But certainly there are threats to this Holy Spirit harmony: those who refuse to submit to the Spirit's leadership, who don't make him or his will too big a part of their day.

Not most of those who keep the cart upset aren't acting from motives that are deliberately destructive. They feel strongly about their positions and, in their own way, are probably doing what they think is best. But the Bible says that those who "create divisions" are operating out of hearts that are "merely natural, not having the Spirit" (Jude 19).

This doesn't necessarily mean they're not Christians. Any one of us is more than capable of letting our "natural" man plot itself square in the driver's seat. And every time we do, we assure ourselves an automatic detour from everything the Lord desires to accomplish through us.

But we can pray and seek the Spirit afresh. We can believe the Scriptures when they say that unity is well within his power, even in the most dastardly of congregations. And though it may not happen overnight, we can start seeing some walls come down, and hard feelings being softened, and God returning to his rightful place . . . right in the center of everything.

### **1 Corinthians 12:7 "A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person"**

*No two Christians are alike, but no one Christian is without a spiritual gift. Why is this so important?*

### **1 Corinthians 12:11 "One and the same Spirit is active in all these"**

What are some of the most important results and benefits of having an "active" Holy Spirit at work in us?

### **1 Corinthians 12:13 "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body"**

*"One" is a crucial number in the church. How does this apply when people have legitimate doctrinal differences?*

The Spirit unites the church in mission. Even blood relations—which (depending on our age) only go back thirty, fifty, seventy some-odd years—can never create the connectedness that occurs when the Holy Spirit draws us together in eternal fellowship with Christ. And the bond between us only gets tighter as we learn to love him more. He is indeed the glue that holds the church together.

*Spirit of Christ, I pray for my church today, asking that you'd give us the grace to realize that it's your church, not ours.*