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## God's Will and the Church



### QUESTION 1:

*What's a piece of advice you're glad you didn't ignore?*

## THE POINT

God often reveals  
His plans for us  
through His church.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I once spoke with a Christian businessman whose job ended dimly. After only working a few months he resigned in frustration. Exasperated, he complained, “I prayed and asked God to show me if I should take that job, but I never heard anything. So I took it.”

I asked, “What did your wife think about you taking that job?”

“She was against it from the beginning,” he said.

“Did you have friends praying with you about this decision?” I asked.

“I had some friends from church pray with me about it. Several of them raised concerns, but none of them had led a company that size. My teenage son said he hoped I didn’t take that job. But he’s a teenager. What does he know about corporate business?”

“So,” I said, “you asked God to guide you and then you ignored everything He said through the believers He placed around you!”

One of the great gifts God has given us is His church. God uses our fellow believers to help us grow in Christ—and to know His will.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts: brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be unaware. <sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans, you used to be enticed and led astray by mute idols. <sup>3</sup> Therefore I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

One of the primary ways God speaks is through people. We can be so set on what we want, or be so confused by our circumstances that we don't recognize God's guidance. In those cases, He may use someone else to help us see His will.

This is not to say that just anybody else can speak for God. Just because someone says, “I know what God wants you to do,” doesn't mean that person really knows. An acknowledgment of the lordship of Christ must be present—both in the person's words and life. Even then, we want to see that his or her words line up with other ways God is speaking to us, especially through His Word.

The Corinthian Christians to whom Paul was writing used to worship idols. Even though these idols were mute, they led the people astray. How could speechless idols mislead people? Because people fashion idols to satisfy their own desires. When your god can't talk, you tend to hear exactly what you want!

In contrast, the Holy Spirit is a real person who actively guides people. He doesn't always tell us what we want to hear, but He always tells us what we need to hear. If we tune in our spiritual senses, we can receive His unerring, loving guidance.

### QUESTION 2:

*Where do people often look for guidance today?*

The Holy Spirit's first role is to convince us that Jesus is Lord and Savior. We will never come to that belief apart from the Spirit's work. Conversely, anyone who is led by the Spirit cannot blaspheme or reject Christ. Once the Holy Spirit enters a person's life, there is no evidence in Scripture that you can make Him leave! We can grieve Him with our sin (Eph. 4:30) and we can stifle His work (1 Thess. 5:19), but He is here to stay! Therefore, when a person professes to be a Christian but then

later renounces Christ, it is evidence that he never truly had the Spirit residing within him in the first place.

God speaks—He speaks through His Word, He speaks to our hearts by His Holy Spirit, and He speaks to us through those who acknowledge and live out the truth that “Jesus is Lord” (v. 3).

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## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-6

**<sup>4</sup> Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> There are different ministries, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are different activities, but the same God produces each gift in each person.**

God has an infinite capacity to relate to people. Each individual's walk with God is unique. Yet it is the same Holy Spirit who works in every person's life. The Spirit doesn't change, yet He fashions relationships with individuals that suit their personality and particular assignments. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon people to equip them for a divine assignment. The Holy Spirit equipped Samson with great strength to achieve victory against the Philistines. The Spirit equipped David to lead as a king. The Spirit equipped prophets to prophesy. Because people had different assignments, God prepared them uniquely.

In the New Testament, God placed His people in the church. Today, that universal church is seen in countless local churches all across the globe. Each local church is a part of the body of Christ with individual members, and each member has an assignment. The various parts of our own bodies are quite distinct, but they depend on and support each other. In the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit equips each of us for the part we play in His body. The gifts are not for our own individual use; they are for the building up of the body.

## SAME BUT DIFFERENT

Choose one of the following examples and explain how it illustrates the idea of many parts with different functions but the same purpose.

**An automobile engine**  
**The branches of government**

**An orchestra**  
**A sports team**

**The human body**  
**A dramatic production**

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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*“One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always.”*

A. W. TOZER

When God wants to reveal His will to you, He may use other parts of the body to alert you to what He wants to do. The other believer is different from you, but the Holy Spirit in you is the same Holy Spirit in him or her.

**QUESTION 3:**

***How does your church represent a balance of ministries and activities?***

The same Holy Spirit who indwells you inhabits other believers. Never underestimate what the Holy Spirit can communicate to you through someone else! Learn to hone your spiritual senses so you can detect when the

Spirit is offering you guidance through a fellow believer.

The Holy Spirit will never tell you something through another Christian that contradicts what the Spirit is personally telling you or communicating through His Word. Many a young lady has faced the confusing dilemma in which a young suitor claimed God wanted the two of them to marry, even though the Holy Spirit had never informed the woman herself!

The Holy Spirit might confirm what a believer is telling you, and He might alert you to be cautious about what someone is saying. Pray for discernment and learn to heed the promptings of the Spirit.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11

<sup>7</sup> A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: <sup>8</sup> to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills.



When you become a Christian, you do not merely receive a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit; you receive the Spirit Himself. The Spirit can express Himself any way He chooses, yet He typically works by equipping you for the assignment God has granted you.

**QUESTION 4:**

***Where have you seen different spiritual gifts at work within your congregation?***

The Holy Spirit equips me and He equips you, yet the way He equips us can be incredibly different. We need the diversity of the gifts, because it is through that diversity—each one of us carrying out our unique ministry and service—that the body grows and Christ is glorified.

Paul proceeded to list some spiritual gifts, but this is not an exhaustive list. Over the years, people have attempted to group the gifts in various ways, but perhaps the simplest way is to put them in four broad categories:<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **Gifts that support.** Gifts such as helping and managing guide the work of the church and help get it done (1 Cor. 12:28).
- ▶ **Gifts that share.** Gifts such as showing mercy and hospitality are tangible ways of communicating God's love to others (Rom. 12:8; 1 Pet. 4:9).

▶ **Gifts that speak.** Gifts such as teaching and prophecy ground the church in God's Word (Rom. 12:8).

▶ **Gifts that supplement.** Gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, and faith support the other gifts.

The wonderful thing about the list of gifts is their variety. And as God gives individuals more than one gift, the combination and use of those gifts together adds more ways we can serve Christ and His church.

How we choose to categorize the gifts is not important. Paul never categorized the gifts, nor did he create one exhaustive list of all the spiritual gifts. Paul focused on the purpose of the gifts:

"A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).

My wife Lisa and I are polar opposites on every personality test we have ever taken. I am a "thinker" and she is a "feeler." As a result, we approach life entirely differently, yet we've learned that, by working together, we are able to do far more good for others than if we worked alone. So it is with the church.

**QUESTION 5:**

***How can our group help one another discover God's will?***



