

# **‘Poplar trees by flowing streams’**

The work of the Holy Spirit in His church

*“I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground: I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams”*

[Isaiah 44.3f]

This short series of studies looks at some significant aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ’s church, as He brings into being and nurtures a new community of faith which anticipates the glory of the age to come.

You can find the background to this series [here](#).

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## 2. 1 Corinthians 12.1-14 [w/b Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2018]

*“.. except by the Spirit ..”*

We saw in the previous study that at the heart of all that the Holy Spirit does is His gracious work of bringing together what otherwise is disjointed, fragmented and disparate. In the same way, though, as stones require to be both quarried and shaped if they are indeed to be brought and fitted together, so the Holy Spirit must ‘quarry’ us out of the stony hardness of our sinful humanity into newness of life and grace us with His varied gifts.

In this study, therefore, we’re thinking through that basic work of the Holy Spirit in our lives - the work of ‘*regeneration*’, whereby we are ‘born again’ and made new people. There can be no real unity apart from that: and we do well to remember that the reason we’ve been renewed by the Spirit is always with that unity in view. Bear that in mind through these studies - and strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit!

*[There may not be time for all the questions to be addressed in your Community Group - but try and ensure that in this study you cover questions 3, 4 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer - and let the passage inform your praying together!]*

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**1. Read 1 Cor.12.1-14.** Read the whole passage. Corinth was the port of Athens, and a point where east, west, north and south converged. Everything you’d associate with a port was there - and more!

Do you think that Christians are taught enough about the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in His church?

What are you unclear or unsure about?

**2. Read 1 Cor.12.1-3.** Many of those at Corinth who had trusted in Jesus at had come from an essentially pagan background where the worship of idols was commonplace.

What would be modern day equivalents of the 'idols' to which Paul refers?

Think yourself into a pagan background (this may be difficult if you grew up in a Christian home): how does Paul describe that pagan background and what would it be like?

**3. Read 1 Cor.12.1-3.** The church at Corinth, like the population, was very cosmopolitan, with a rich array of spiritual gifts in evidence: Paul is clarifying the importance of the *content* of what they might be 'prompted' to say.

From what Paul writes here what would you say is the first great evidence of the work of the Spirit in a person's life?

'Jesus is Lord' was a highly dangerous thing to say: why?

In what ways have you known a boldness from the Spirit?

4. **Read 1 Cor.12.4-6.** In these verses Paul is underlining the great diversity there is within the Christian church - at least in terms of the gifts and ministries that are exercised.

How would you describe the 'gifts' *you* have, the 'service' *you* give, and the 'working' in which *you* engage?

How might we make it easier for individuals to 'find their particular place' within the life of Christ's church?

5. **Read 1 Cor.12.4-6.** The diversity reflected amongst God's people, not least in relation to their ministries and gifts, is never at odds with the very basic unity we have in Christ.

What does Paul suggest comprises that essential unity?

Why is the diversity in the gifts we have and exercise sometimes put a real strain on our unity?

How can we be careful to 'maintain the unity' (Eph.4.3)?

6. **Read 1 Cor.12.7-14.** Paul now gives examples of the diversity of gifts and has some very important things to say about their exercise.

How would you describe what Paul means by the phrase *'the manifestation of the Spirit'*?

What general principles does Paul stress in relation to the exercise of these Spirit-given gifts?

7. **Read 1 Cor.12.7-14.** This is more an *illustrative* list of gifts given by the Spirit, rather than an exhaustive one. **Read Rom.12.3-8** and **Eph.4.7-13** for examples of similar 'lists'

Why is the picture of 'the body' a helpful and significant one?

**Read 1 Cor.1.4-10:** whatever our gift or gifts may be, what does Paul want to keep as the priorities in our living?