

## ***The Church: united by one Spirit*** (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18), not churches, because He had in mind the one true Church, His body, which would be composed of all true believers beginning with Pentecost. This does not deny the existence and divinely regulated character of multiple local churches. But it does emphasize the unity that exists in the total body of Christ, a body which the Lord Jesus Christ by His Spirit is adding to. The apostle Paul brings this into focus in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as he explains Spirit-baptism. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-- and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

### **I. *The nature of Spirit-baptism***

1. As Jesus mentioned in Acts 1:4–5, John the Baptist had prophesied that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit (Matthew 3:11–12; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16–17; John 1:33). The disciples waited in Jerusalem as Jesus commanded; then on Pentecost they experienced the fulfillment in the pouring out of the Spirit. Peter later confirms this in his encounter with Cornelius and subsequent explanation of those events (Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–17).
2. In writing to the Corinthians Paul addresses not only them but all true believers (1 Corinthians 1:2). Therefore, both his switch to the first person in 12:13 and his emphasis on “all” points to its application to all true believers. Mentioning typical ethnic and social distinctions further underscores the inclusive nature of Spirit-baptism.

Spirit-baptism is the experience of every true believer since Pentecost, independent of the gifts given by the Spirit, ethnicity or social status, or even maturity. The only conditions given by Peter at Pentecost was repentance and public confession of Jesus Christ.

### **II. *The result of Spirit-baptism is the union of believers***

1. The immediate result of Spirit-baptism is the joining of all believers into one body. Paul compares this spiritual body with a physical body, both have many members but are only one body (12:12). Likening the spiritual members to gifts such as apostles shows that Paul has in mind the whole Body of Christ and not just the local church. Nevertheless, this body includes all true believers of every local church so that Paul could say to the Corinthians, “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (12:27).
2. Certain consequences are explained in this chapter. They were to act as truly one body because gifts were given for the common good (v. 7) and all empowered by one and the same Spirit (v. 11). God has designed the body for mutual care (vv. 24–25) and to share both suffering and rejoicing (v. 26).

### **III. *The manner of union in Spirit-baptism***

1. In 12:13 there is a repetition of “one”: one Spirit ... one body ... one Spirit. A similar repetition is found earlier with “same” and “one” (12:4–6, 8–9, 11). It stresses that one Spirit is involved.
2. The Spirit is not an impersonal force or substance to be divided. He is the third Person of the triune God. He cannot be divided into parts. The Spirit who is in you is the same Spirit who is in the believer next to you.
3. Baptism pictures each believer being plunged into the Spirit and identified with this new, one body. But adding to the picture Paul adds that “all were made to drink of one Spirit.” They were made to partake or were saturated with the Spirit. Jesus puts the believer in the Spirit and the Spirit in the believer.
4. It is one Spirit, the third Person of the triune God, who connects believers. It is His presence in believers that unites believers into the one Body of Christ. In dealing with the church, you deal both with Jesus Christ and with His Spirit. Ananias and Saphira thought they lied to people of the church, when lying about their property sale. But they were lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3) and testing the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:9).

All true believers since Pentecost have not only received forgiveness of sin and new life in Christ, they have been joined to other believers by one Spirit into one body. Value your part and every other believer’s part in that body. Serve under the same Lord. Trust and give credit to the same God. You are one body by one Spirit.

#### *Questions for further thought and discussion:*

- How does the truth of being joined together into one body by the one same Person enrich your understanding of the unity of the body?
- How should the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of the believers around you affect how you speak to them or relate to them?