

Baptized By the Spirit--1 Cor. 12:12-13

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Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

After reading this text, several questions arise:

- 1) What is the body?
- 2) Who are the members of the body?
- 3) Who or what is the "spirit" of verse 13?
- 4) How does this "spirit" baptize us into the body?

The first two questions are basic, but they are important nonetheless. Mainly, I will strive to answer the third and fourth questions which are a little more difficult and controversial.

Let's begin with question number one. "What is the body?" The body under consideration in this passage is the church. Ephesians 1:22-23 says that God "hath put all things under his feet and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." Again, Paul says in Colossians 1:18 that Christ is "the head of the body, the church..." The scriptures clearly identify the body as the church, or the "called out." Jesus Christ is the head of this body. He is the one in control; the "*head honcho*" if you will. Ephesians 4:4 says that there is just "one body." So there is one church.

Who then are the members of the body, which is the church? Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:27 plainly identifies the members of the people as being the individual Christians. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and *members in particular*." That is, the Christians *collectively* made up the "one body," the unit of the saved in Corinth. They were the parts which composed the whole. In 1 Corinthians 12:14-26, Paul discusses at length the importance of every member of the body. Each Christian as a member of the body has a different function, and they work together in a harmonious fashion as the body of Christ (see also Eph. 4:16).

Now, let us address the final two questions which create the most difficulty and strain in the minds of Christians today in the 21st century. Who or what is the "spirit" of verse 13, and how does this "spirit" baptize us into the body? Is Paul here speaking of Holy Spirit baptism? If so, then in order for anyone to get into the body, which is the composite of the saved, they must experience Holy Spirit baptism? Or is Paul speaking of something else?

First of all, the "spirit" of verse 13, I believe, is the Holy Spirit. This point is evident by the context. From the beginning of the chapter, Paul discusses the Spirit. Verse three says, "Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed." The Spirit of God here most definitely refers to the Holy Spirit. In verses 4-11, the apostle then goes on to say that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." The gifts under consideration are the miraculous gifts which were distributed by the Holy Spirit such as prophecy, healing and tongues. Hebrews 2:4 says, "God also bearing them (the apostles, *CH*) witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?" These miracles were given by the Holy Spirit. That is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12, and that is obviously the correct way to interpret the word "spirit" in verse 13. By one "Spirit" (the Holy Spirit) we are all baptized into the body of Jesus Christ!

What a lot of people do at this point is conclude that because the Holy Spirit is mentioned alongside baptism in verse 13, then Paul must be talking about Holy Spirit baptism. While it is easy to see why people come to this conclusion, it is not only an *unnecessary* conclusion, but it is an impossible conclusion (in light of the overall teachings of scripture and the definition of Holy Spirit baptism).

Many people define Holy Spirit baptism as *spiritual* baptism which occurs at the point of faith, but this concept is completely foreign to the scriptures. The Bible does teach that we are saved by faith (Rom. 5:2; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 11:6), but there is no scriptural precedent for *spiritual baptism* at the point of faith. If so, where is the passage? Where does the Holy Spirit ever record anyone being spiritually baptized the moment they believed? Trust me, you won't find it.

Holy Spirit baptism is something very specific. Let's consider some of the scriptural parameters of what is termed the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

- 1) It was a promise, not a command (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 24:49). Nowhere is Holy Spirit baptism commanded to anyone.
- 2) Christ was the sole administer of Holy Spirit baptism (Mt. 3:11; Jn. 1:33). It is not something that can be administered by man. Man is the recipient, but it is divinely administered.
- 3) Holy Spirit baptism was promised to the apostles, not to all future Christians. Jesus said to the apostles, "I send the promise of my Father upon you" (Lk. 24:49). Many assume that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised to all because when John spoke of it, he was speaking to an audience that included more than the apostles. But just as the "baptism of fire" of Matthew 3:11 is limited (to those who are disobedient), so also is the baptism of the Holy Spirit limited (to whom Christ would choose).
- 4) The only recipients of Holy Spirit baptism were the twelve apostles as well as the Gentiles of Cornelius' house (that we have record of). In Acts 11, as Peter defended his actions towards the Gentiles, he told the Jews in verses 15-16: "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." It is interesting to note that Peter had to go all the way back to the events of Acts 2:1-4 to cite another instance of Holy Spirit baptism. Clearly, it was not a common occurrence. NOTE: The Gentiles in Acts 10 received Holy Spirit baptism only to prove to the Jews that the Gentiles had been granted repentance unto life (Ac. 11:18).
- 5) As proof of the limited nature of Holy Spirit baptism, consider Acts 8:12-18. The Samaritans believed and were baptized, but they did not receive the Holy Spirit. The apostles came down from Jerusalem in order to impart the Holy Spirit unto them. It says "then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." These Samaritans were saved, but the Holy Spirit hadn't descended upon them. This same point is seen in Acts 19:5-6. *Holy Spirit baptism wasn't administered to all.*
- 6) Finally, we must recognize that Holy Spirit baptism was a very specific occurrence. In Acts 2:1-4, the Holy Spirit descended suddenly upon the apostles and they spoke in tongues. Likewise, in Acts 10:44-48, the Holy Spirit descended unexpectedly upon the Gentiles who then spoke in tongues. These are the only two recorded instances of Holy Spirit baptism. It was divinely administered, suddenly imparted, and was always followed with the miraculous speaking of other tongues.

There can be no doubt that Holy Baptism did occur in the first century, but it was certainly not a common occurrence. So can it possibly be what Paul is discussing in 1 Cor. 12:13? No, it cannot be! The baptism of verse 13 is something that can be experienced by all. If one is saved, then they have been baptized by the Spirit into the body! So there are some clear differences between Holy Spirit baptism and the baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13.

I would argue that the baptism of 1 Corinthians 12 is water baptism. When one is immersed in water for the remission of sins, they are transferred by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, which is the church. Let's consider a few scriptural points to cement this point.

In Acts 2:38, Peter commanded the Jews to "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." What was Peter doing here? He was telling the Jews what they had to do to be saved, that is, to receive the remission of sins. They were commanded to repent and be baptized. As we noticed above, Holy Spirit baptism is a promise, not a command. Nowhere do the scriptures say "Get baptized by the Holy Spirit." When baptism is commanded, then, it must be water baptism. That is something that man can do in obedience to God. So the Jews on Pentecost were told to be immersed in water unto salvation. But what I want you to notice is verse 47: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." In other words, when the people were saved, they were added by God to the church. Now, the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), so the Lord was adding the saved to the body. When did He do this? When they were saved. How were they saved? By repentance and baptism.

Compare Acts 2:47 to 1 Corinthians 12:13. Acts 2 identifies baptism as the means of entrance into the body of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are baptized into the body of Christ. If it is water baptism in Acts 2, then certainly it is water baptism in the latter passage. It has to be. Both passages are referring to the same basic thing.

Someone might respond, "But the Holy Spirit is the one who is transferring us into the body of Christ, so how could it be water baptism in 1 Corinthians 12?" This question assumes that the Holy Spirit can only work apart from the baptismal waters. Is anyone willing to say outright that the Holy Spirit cannot possibly be at work when we are baptized in water? Who will limit the Holy Spirit in that way?

The fact is, all three members of the Godhead are active when we are baptized. Colossians 2:12 says that when we are baptized we contact the "operation of God" where He cuts away our sin and destroys the body of sin. Romans 6 teaches that we are baptized *into Christ* where we contact His precious blood. And 1 Corinthians 12 confirms that the Holy Spirit conveys us into the body when we are baptized. So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all at work when we are buried in the watery grave of baptism.

Finally, let us address one last question- "How does the Holy Spirit convey us into the body when we are baptized?" Some would contend that the Spirit Himself directly places our newly-redeemed soul into the body of Christ. Perhaps. Or perhaps it is that the Holy Spirit works through the word of God (Eph. 6:17). In other words, because the Holy Spirit inspired the word, when we obey the command of the word to be baptized for the remission of our sins, we are conveyed indirectly by the Spirit into the body (because the Spirit inspired the command). Either way, it is the work of the Spirit.

I hope that this article has helped you to understand a difficult Bible passage. This passage shows us the work of the Spirit as well as the necessity of water baptism. The body of Christ consists of the saved, and we get into the body by baptism.

Have you been baptized into the body of Christ by the Spirit?