

## THE BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

The first epistle to the Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to address some problems which had arisen in the church at Corinth. In the early chapters of the epistle, Paul addressed the Corinthian believers concerning unity, fornication, discipline, and marriage. The Corinthians also appear to have had some problems in the area of public worship, for Paul moved on to address the subjects of the Lord's Supper and the use of spiritual gifts within the local assembly.

His discussion of the administration of the Lord's Supper and the Corinthians' lack of discernment for the Lord's body provided a natural transition to the topics of spiritual gifts and the body of Christ. After addressing the diversity of gifts from the Holy Spirit, Paul discussed the diversity of individual Christians and how they compose the unified body of Christ:

“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. For the body is not one member, but many.”<sup>1</sup>

The baptism into the body of Christ is this: Each born-again believer is baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit of God at the moment of his salvation. This doctrine is easily understood by examination of both the *body* and the *baptism* by which this body is established. Examination of *body* will reveal its definition, its members, and its unity; and examination of *baptism* will reveal its definition, agent, nature, purpose and result.

The word translated *body* in this passage is the word *σωμα* (*soma*). Its basic definition is: a body; especially that of a person. Paul uses this word to establish an easily understandable comparison of the literal, physical body of a

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<sup>1</sup>1 Corinthians 12:12-14

person to the literal, spiritual body of Christ which he is introducing. As Paul describes the body of Christ, one is able to look at his own physical body to gain better understanding of Paul's teaching.

That Paul is emphasizing the reality and identity of the body of Christ is evidenced by the use of the article with *σωμα*. "As the body is one . . . so also is Christ." (1 Corinthians. 12:12) "The function of the article is to point out an object or draw attention to it. Its use with a word makes the word stand out distinctly."<sup>2</sup> There can be only one body which is Christ, and it can therefore only be composed by means consistent with the teaching of this passage.

The study of the remainder of this context reveals sufficient proof for the following definition of *σωμα* by Arndt and Gingrich: "The Christian community, the church as a unified body, esp. as the body of Christ."<sup>3</sup> The basis for their definition is examination of the "members" which compose the body.

*Members* is the translation of the Greek word *μελη* (mele.) The physical body is made up of many limbs or *members* such as eyes, hands, legs, etc.; yet it remains an individual, unified body. So also, the body of Christ is composed of many members, yet maintains its unity. Vine describes the relation of *μελη* to the body of Christ.

As with the natural illustration, so with the spiritual analogy, there is not only vital unity and harmony in operation, but diversity, all being essential to effectivity; the unity [of many members into one body] is not due to external organization but to common and vital union in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>H. E. Dana, and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: The Macmillian Company, 1955), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 800.

<sup>4</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers (Old Tappan, NJ: Flemming H. Revell Company, 1966.), p. 58.

There arises at this point the question of the possibility that these members may be individual local churches rather than, or in addition to, individual believers. The definition of the word translated church in the New Testament and its use in the Bible will discount this possibility. The word translated *church* is *εκκλησια* (ecclesia), and comes from two words meaning “to call out.” Its New Testament usage is typically that of a called out group or assembly. An attempt to substitute an assembled group as *a member* would be inconsistent with the individuality *μελη* expresses by definition.

The members of the body then are limited to individual believers of this dispensation. Paul makes this very clear by his statement, “We are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free.”<sup>5</sup> He includes himself in the group of people who are baptized into the body, and the Scriptures reveal plainly that Paul was a born-again believer in Christ. The phrase *whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free* is descriptive of the dispensation of the church age where there is no longer that “middle wall of partition” between Jew and Gentile.<sup>6</sup> Identifying individual Christians as the members which compose the body of Christ, Walvoord writes, “Without regard to race or culture, all true believers are united as a living union in the body of Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

That many members may comprise one unified body is evidenced by the physical body, and the analogy easily transfers to a unified body of Christ comprised of many individual believers. There is in the text, however, additional proof of the unity of the body of Christ. This proof is the word *one* in verse twelve.

The Greek word *εν* (hen) is translated *one* in this passage. It is defined as

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<sup>5</sup>1 Corinthians 12:13

<sup>6</sup>Ephesians 2:14

<sup>7</sup> John F. Walvoord, The Holy Spirit, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), p. 141.

“one in contrast to the parts of which a whole is made up.”<sup>8</sup> It is found grammatically in a position of emphasis in verse twelve as a predicate nominative to *body* which contextually pictures the body of Christ. It is also anarthrous (without an article), which would emphasize the *oneness* or unity of the body.

The unity of this one body composed of many individual members is also demonstrated by the exclusive means of entrance or placement into the body. It is by *one* Spirit that the members are baptized into this *one* body. There is no other baptism into any other body.

What exactly then, is this baptism into the body? *Baptism* and its derivatives are transliterations of the Greek word βαπτίζω (baptidzo). Arndt and Gingrich define βαπτίζω “to dip, immerse, mid. dip oneself, wash.”<sup>9</sup> Just as physical baptism finds a subject placed into and surrounded completely by another medium (such as water), baptism by the Spirit finds the member (an individual believer) placed into the body of Christ. Walvoord writes, “Baptism is, then, the work of the Holy Spirit forming and adding to the living unity of the church.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the Holy Spirit is not identified as such in verse thirteen, it is clear from the context of the chapter, that it is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Verse three mentions the *Spirit of God* and the *Holy Ghost*. Verses four, seven, eight, nine and eleven also speak of the *same Spirit*.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of verse three, these uses of Spirit are all articular and therefore particularize *Spirit* and identify it as the Holy Spirit. In verse three the article is not used, but the Spirit is specifically identified by *of God*, and *Holy*. This is also the case in verse thirteen. The use of the adjective in its grammatical position asserts the individuality and identity of the Spirit. The Spirit of verse thirteen is most assuredly the Holy Spirit of God.

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<sup>8</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, p. 230.

<sup>9</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Walvoord, p. 141.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

The word in this passage translated *baptized* is the verb *εβαπτισθημεν* (ebaptizthemen), and its passive voice reveals the necessity of an outside agent to perform the act of baptism upon the receiver of the baptism. This passive voice also directs the nature of the preposition *εν* (en) to reveal the agent of the baptism, the Spirit of God.

The preposition *εν* is “a preposition that may be causal or instrumental, introducing the means or instrument.”<sup>12</sup> When used as an instrumental, *εν* is properly translated *by means of*. This, coupled with the agency demanded by the passive verb, results in a translation reading, “For *by means of* one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

Evidence of the spiritual nature of the baptism is seen in its agent. As the body of Christ is spiritual in contrast to the physical body which illustrates it, the baptism into the body of Christ is a spiritual rather than a physical baptism; and although spiritual, it remains literal.

It is decidedly literal because of the purpose of the baptism. The purpose of the baptism is to establish the literal, spiritual body of Christ by the placing of individual believers into that body. Again, the body is literal because it is composed of literal members.

The results of the baptism are evidenced by the verb *εβαπτισθημεν* (ebaptizthemen). Above, the voice of the verb was examined, but to understand the results of the baptism, the tense of the verb is pertinent. This verb is in the aorist tense, which basically leaves the time of the action undefined. The only sure thing about the aorist tense is that the action has occurred.

As a result of the baptism, the believer is forever placed into the body of Christ. This can be seen by examining the aorist verb either as *ingressive* or *culminative*. An ingressive viewpoint would focus on the *initial baptizing* of the member (believer) into the body where he remains. A culminative viewpoint would focus on the fact that the member *has been* baptized into the body and that is his

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<sup>12</sup> William F. Ardnt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, p. 260.

new state of being. Either view is acceptable and both offer a correct interpretation of the result of the baptism: permanent placement of the believer into the body of Christ.

The concept of the baptism of the Spirit having permanent results contrasts the result of the filling of the Spirit which is temporary and limited to the submission of the individual to the Spirit. A brief comparison of filling and baptism would reveal the following differences: Filling involves the will of the believer, baptism does not. Believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, but never to be baptized with the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is repeated, but the baptism is not.<sup>13</sup>

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 reveal an essential aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation: the building of the body of Christ by the baptism of Christians into that body. Walvoord states the importance of this work. "All vital Christian experience flows from the realities which have been brought into being by this work of the Spirit."<sup>14</sup> That each born-again believer is baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit of God at the moment of his salvation is evident in this text. This truth should motivate the child of God to seek to fulfill his place in the body of Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> A more thorough discussion of the contrast between the filling of the Spirit and the baptism of the Spirit is found in: *The Holy Spirit*, John F. Walvoord, pp. 189-195.

<sup>14</sup> John F. Walvoord, p. 149.

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