

# THE SPIRIT IN THE FORMATION, CONSTITUTION, AND BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

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Paul's Epistles reveal a vital connection between the Spirit and the Body of Christ. At the core of this relationship is the Spirit's involvement in the producing of the Body in three progressive stages: the formation, constitution, and building up of the Body. Pentecost, as a visible, remarkable watershed of the divine economy, marks the initiation of the church and is thus a well-known and frequently discussed subject in theological and exegetical studies. However, few pay adequate attention to the profoundly intrinsic nature of the relationship between the Spirit and the believers in terms of their corporate existence, living, and service as members of the mystical Body of Christ.

In order to understand the Spirit's deeply organic operation among and within the believers for the producing of the Body of Christ, we must first see in the divine revelation that the Spirit and the Body are intrinsically related to Christ and the church. In Paul's understanding, to know and experience Christ is to know and experience Him as the Spirit. Hence, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul proclaims that "the Lord is the Spirit." Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul declares that in resurrection the last Adam, Christ, became the life-giving Spirit. This does not mean that Christ ceased to be the Son or is separate from the Spirit but that the resurrected Christ with His person and work is made available to the believers through the Spirit.

Furthermore, in the apostle Paul's understanding, the church is the Body of Christ. Twice in Colossians Paul places *the church* in apposition to *Body*, showing that the church is the Body (1:18, 24). In Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul equates the church to the Body of Christ, saying, "The church, which is His Body." In *Word Studies in the New Testament* Marvin R. Vincent notes that the word *which* in Greek (ἣτις) is "the double relative" and can be translated "seeing it is; by which I mean" (373). This indicates that the intrinsic significance, the spiritual reality, of the church is the Body of Christ. Paul further reveals the significance of the Body of Christ, the intrinsic reality of the church; the Body is "the fullness of the One who fills

all in all" (v. 23). *The One who fills all in all* refers to the all-filling Christ in 4:10, and *all* in 1:23 refers mainly to the believers. The Body of Christ is the fullness, the expression, of the unlimited Christ who *is* all the members of His Body and *is in* all the members of His Body. In other words, the Body of Christ as His fullness is the expression of the Christ who is organically wrought into the believers to become their constituent. The Body of Christ is the organic issue of the unsearchably rich Christ filling the believers with Himself. As such, the church, as the Body of Christ, is the overflow of Christ, or His fullness, that is, the full expression of the believers' participation in Christ's unsearchable riches (3:8, 10). Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of God, for "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and the church as the Body of Christ is the fullness of Christ.

In his first Epistle to the Corinthian believers, Paul refers to the church as an assembly of believers and speaks of the Body of Christ not merely as an elegant metaphor but as the spiritual reality of the church. Paul addresses this Epistle "to the church of God which in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints" (1:2). Here we see that the church is a composition of the saints. Individually, the believers are the saints; corporately, they are the church. However, in 12:27 Paul reveals the deep significance of the church in Corinth and of the saints who compose the church, saying, "You are the Body of Christ, and members individually." This indicates that the church in Corinth, a local church, was not merely a congregation of the saints in that city; more intrinsically, it was a practical expression of the Body of Christ in Corinth. Thus, the believers in Corinth were not only saints, those who have been sanctified in Christ, but more significantly, they were "the members of Christ" (6:15), "members of His Body" (Eph. 5:30; cf. 3:6; 1 Cor. 12:22), who had been joined both to Christ as the Head (1 Cor. 6:17) and to one another as "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). In Paul's mind the organic reality of the church in

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Corinth was a miniature representation of the Body of Christ composed of the members of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27-28). Thus, in the sight of God, if the church in Corinth failed to take the Body of Christ as its intrinsic factor, that is, if the believers in Corinth failed to be built up together as the Body and practice the Body life, the church was meaningless. The real significance of a local church is that it is the Body expressed and represented in a particular locality.

In Ephesians 5 Paul describes the vital relationship between Christ and the church as a great mystery in God's economy (v. 32; 3:9). Instead of speaking of the two as separate entities, Paul regards them as intertwined cords in the divine economy. In Paul's understanding, Christ and the church are not only a universal couple—with Christ as the Husband and the church as the wife (5:22-27, 31)—but also a corporate person—with Christ as the Head and the church as the Body (vv. 28-30, 32). Building upon the decidedly organic relationship between Christ and the church, Paul's Epistles illuminate a similar organic relationship between the Spirit and the Body, since the Spirit and the Body are the intrinsic reality of Christ and the church.

The intimate connection between the Spirit and the church in the New Testament has long been noted in Christian creedal traditions. In "The Holy Spirit and the Church" Klaas Runia notes, "No Christian will deny that there is a close relation between the Holy Spirit and the Church" (304). In "The Spirit and the Church" Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee posit that despite the "pervasive association" between the Spirit and the church, through the centuries "theologians have reflected relatively little on precisely how the two are related" (20). They note that "in the history of Western theology, the distinctive relation of the Spirit to the church is elusive," and that "in the Eastern churches, whose theologians have tended to ascribe a greater role to the Spirit, the Spirit's work in the birth and life of the church remains vague" (20). According to Volf and Lee, at the crux of the theological discussion concerning the role of the Spirit in their view of the church is the "relations between Christ, the Spirit, and the church," and accordingly, "no ecclesiology failing to acknowledge the particularities of all these relations can be adequate to the Biblical testimonies, to the tradition, or to experiences of the divine presence in the church" (22). In *Toward a Pneumatological Theology* Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen agrees:

The only way to construe a viable pneumatological ecclesiology is to reflect very carefully on the relationship between Christ and Spirit on the one hand, and on the relation of the Spirit to the church on the other hand, and then try to see these three as mutual entities that inform each other. (93)

The Spirit makes Christ real to the believers and joins them to Christ in order to not only make them the members of Christ individually but also to make them the church, the Body of Christ, corporately. The Spirit as the realization of Christ is the essence of the church as the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of Christ.

At the heart of the great mystery concerning Christ and the church is God's economy, which is His plan to impart Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers for the producing of the Body of Christ. The Spirit is the ultimate realization of the processed Triune God for the dispensing of Himself into the believers, and the Body is the corporate expression of the processed Triune God who is wrought into the believers. Hence, our experience of the Spirit is inextricably linked to our participation in the Body through the Spirit's involvement in the formation, constitution, and building up of the Body of Christ. The Body is initially formed by the believers' baptism in the Spirit, the Body is gradually constituted by the believers' drinking of the Spirit, and the Body is ultimately built up by the believers' ministering the Spirit into one another.

### The Spirit in the Formation of the Body of Christ

Perhaps no other portion of the New Testament so concisely and clearly captures the relationship among Christ, the Spirit, and the Body of Christ as does 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. These verses reveal that the Body is the corporate Christ, that the Body was formed through the baptism in the Spirit, and that the Spirit is for the Body.

### The Body of Christ Being the Corporate Christ

Paul begins his discourse on the Body of Christ with verse 12: "Even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ." Here Paul uses the metaphor of our physical body to describe Christ's mystical Body produced by the believers' union in life with Christ. In the context of Paul's emphasis, one may expect him to conclude verse 12 with the expression *so also is the church* or possibly *so also is the Body of Christ*. However, Paul was inspired by the Spirit to declare, "So also is the Christ." Paul's identification of the Body of Christ with the person of Christ indicates that *the Christ* refers to the corporate Christ—Christ as the Head in His life union with the believers as the many members of His Body (6:17). Augustine, who understands the human body to be a type for the Body of Christ, says, "Through the Spirit, Christ is organically united to his body, the Church, so that he is with her *totus Christus, caput et membra*, ('the whole Christ, head and members')" (qtd. in Saucy 194). What Augustine calls the whole Christ, Mary E. McDonough designates "the Composite Christ": "Here

we have an organic unity, of which Christ, in His personality, is the head (see Eph. 4:15), and all those who are joined to Him in Spirit and share His Life, are members” (81). The Body of Christ is Christ, and Christ is His Body.

By designating the Body of Christ as *Christ*, Paul implies that Christ is the element of His mystical Body. The church is the Body not of the Father or of the Spirit but of Christ, indicating that the Body bears the identity of Christ and takes Christ as its constituent. This is confirmed by Paul’s words concerning the fellowship of the Lord’s blood and body at the Lord’s table in 1 Corinthians 10:17: “Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread.” Here Paul indicates that by partaking of Christ, who is symbolized by the bread on the table, we are constituted with Him, are identified with Him, and become one with Him in order to be His one Body, the corporate Christ. The one Body, which we, the many believers, are, is the issue of our partaking of Christ, not merely of a common adherence to the truth of creedal formulas. Christ as life is the sole factor that constitutes us His Body (John 6:35, 56-57). We are the one Body of Christ because Christ is “our life” (Col. 3:4) and because we participate in the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is theirs and ours (1 Cor. 1:9, 2).

### *The Body Being Formed through the Baptism in the Spirit*

Immediately after speaking of the one Body of Christ with many members as the Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul begins verse 13 with the conjunction *for*, indicating that this verse explains how the many believers became the one Body of Christ: “For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.” Baptism in this verse refers primarily to spiritual baptism as the inward reality of water baptism, which is the visible testimony of the baptism in the Spirit (cf. Mark 1:8). In *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* Gordon Fee comments on 1 Corinthians 12:13, stating that Paul was probably referring to spiritual baptism, for “it is *not* baptism but the *one* Spirit, repeated in both clauses, that in Paul’s present argument is the basis for unity (cf. vv. 4-11)” (604). At the beginning of his ministry John the

Baptist prophesied that Christ would baptize the believers in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). Echoing this prophecy, the resurrected Christ told the disciples that the believers would be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8). The baptism in the Holy Spirit was accomplished in two sections: Christ baptized all the Jewish believers in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (2:4), and He baptized all the Gentile believers in the Holy Spirit in the house of Cornelius (10:44-47; 11:15-17). By these two steps Christ baptized all His genuine believers in the Holy Spirit once for all.

Fee notes that the prepositional phrase *in one Spirit* in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is less likely to mean that the Spirit is the Agent who “does the baptizing” than to mean that the Spirit is “the ‘element’” in which the believers “have all been immersed, just as the Spirit is that which they have all been given to drink” (605-606). In *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* James D. G. Dunn observes that in Paul’s mind the Greek preposition *into* in verse 13 (εἰς) has “the basic sense of ‘motion towards or into’ some goal” (128). Fee agrees, asserting that the Greek prepositional phrase translated “into one Body,” which may also be rendered “unto one Body,” implies that “the purpose of our common experience of

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the Spirit is that we be formed into one body” (*First Epistle* 606). The Spirit in whom the believers were baptized in 12:13 is the life-giving Spirit, who is identified with the resurrected Christ in 15:45. In such a Spirit the believers are ushered into a union in life with Christ and are formed into an organic corporate entity, the Body of Christ. In other words, in one Spirit, the life-giving Spirit, the believers are joined to be the one Body. In Paul’s view there can be only one Body of Christ because there is only “one Lord, Jesus Christ” (8:6), the unique and undivided Christ (1:13), who is realized as the Holy Spirit. What makes the countless believers the one Body of Christ, irrespective of their race, nationality, or social rank, is their organic union with the resurrected Christ, who is applied to them as the Spirit. Christ is the constituent of His one Body, and the Spirit as the realization of Christ is the essence of the Body.

Apart from the life-giving Spirit as the reality of Christ, the Body of Christ cannot exist as a corporate, organic entity composed of the believers who are united with Christ and constituted with His life. Just as without the



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spirit the body is dead (James 2:26), so also without the Spirit there are only lifeless organizations bearing the name but not the reality of the church. The very existence of the Body is dependent upon the Spirit as its life and essence. The Body of Christ exists in the believers' organic union with the resurrected Christ, who is transmitted to them by the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). This is confirmed by Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 6:17, which says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Here *one spirit* refers to the joining of "he"—the regenerated believer whose spirit is born of the Spirit (John 3:6)—and "the Lord"—the pneumatic Christ, the very Christ who in resurrection became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 6:14; 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). The union of a regenerated believer and the resurrected Lord is carried out by the life-giving Spirit entering, enlivening, and indwelling the believer's human spirit to make the two one spirit—the mingled spirit, that is, the believer's spirit joined to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10, 16). Shortly before speaking of a believer's being joined to the Lord as one spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul equates the believers' bodies to members of Christ in verse 15. Our entire being, including our physical body, becomes a member of the mystical Body of Christ. Christ is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), makes His home in our heart (Eph. 3:17), and gives life to our mortal body (Rom. 8:11). Therefore, the membership of our tripartite person in the Body of Christ hinges upon our being joined to the Lord as one spirit through the mingling of the life-giving Spirit with our regenerated human spirit.

### *The Spirit Being for the Body*

The Spirit's indispensable role in the formation of the Body of Christ reveals that in God's economy the Spirit is for the Body. The Body is formed with many members, each of whom has received particular gifts distributed by the Spirit for the benefit of the Body (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). In 1 Corinthians 12:3-11 Paul underscores the manifestation of the Spirit with nine references to *Spirit*. However, beginning with verse 12, he highlights the Body of Christ, using the words *body* and *Body* for a combined total of eighteen times in the remainder of the chapter. By doing so, Paul indicates that the Spirit who is manifested as the believers' gifts is for the profit of the Body.

Spiritual gifts, the abilities and capacities for the service of God, originate from the Spirit. "All the different gifts are the manifestation of the Spirit, in that the Spirit is manifested in the believers who have received the gifts" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 7, note 1). In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul uses the physical body as a rich illustration of the relationship between gifts and the Body. Each member of our physical body has a gift, out of which comes its function, and every member exercises its

function for the entire body. The eye sees and the mouth eats, not for themselves but for the whole body. In the same principle, every member of the mystical Body of Christ should exercise his gift not for his own personal benefit, but for the building up of the church, the Body of Christ. Neglecting the purpose of spiritual gifts leads to their abuse. It was this abuse by the individualistic, self-seeking Corinthians that the Body-conscious apostle Paul sought to address by emphasizing the Body as the goal of the believers' participation in the Spirit. As believers, we need to realize that spiritual gifts are not for individual edification but for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ.

### *The Spirit in the Constitution of the Body of Christ*

For the constitution of the Body of Christ, the believers must drink the Spirit and, by virtue of their position in the Body, are uniquely positioned to drink the Spirit. This drinking manifests the genuine oneness of the Body.

### *Drinking the Spirit for the Constitution of the Body*

Immediately after revealing the formation of the Body of Christ through the baptism in the Spirit in verse 13, Paul says that the believers "were all given to drink one Spirit."

To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and to be lost in Him; to drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and to have our being saturated with Him. By these two procedures we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 5)

Whereas baptism in the Spirit marks the initiation of our organic union with Christ for the formation of His Body, drinking the Spirit develops this union throughout our tripartite being for the constitution of the Body. This is indicated earlier in verse 3 where Paul says, "No one can say, Jesus is Lord! except in the Holy Spirit." This verse does not say that when we call on the name of the Lord, we are in the Lord but that calling on the Lord's name places us in the Spirit. This suggests that the Spirit is the realization of the resurrected Lord. In other words, the reality of being in the Lord is to be in the Spirit. Since the Spirit is the practicality of Christ, for the believers to drink the Spirit in order to have their being saturated with Him is equivalent to partaking of Christ in order to have Christ formed in them (Gal. 4:19). In other words, because the Spirit is the reality of Christ, the way for the believers to be constituted as Christ's organic Body is to drink the Spirit. By drinking the life-giving Spirit continually, the believers are increasingly mingled with the Spirit, thereby allowing their organic union with Christ

to progressively spread from their spirit (Rom. 8:10) through their soul (v. 6) into their body (v. 11) so that they may be fully constituted as the Body of Christ in reality.

Christian scholars and expositors who neglect the role of the Spirit in the constitution of the Body of Christ often understand the church primarily as a group of adherents to a shared belief system. In *Bound to Be Free* Reinhard Hütter regards the church as being characterized by “a way of life, that is, a distinct set of practices interwoven with normative beliefs, concretely and distinctly embodied” (91). In “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Church in Contemporary Anglo-American Ecclesiological Conversation” Kimlyn J. Bender subscribes to this view and posits that “the doctrines and practices of the church themselves ‘constitute the church’, i.e., truly make the church what it is and provide its uniqueness and defining identity” (101). Certainly the church must hold the common faith, continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and carry out the practices ordained by God in the New Testament (Jude 3; Titus 1:4; Acts 2:42). However, we need to realize that in its intrinsic significance, the church is the Body of Christ; it is Christ’s fullness for His corporate expression.

What distinguishes the church as the Body of Christ from human societies, institutions, and organizations are not her doctrines and practices but her union in life with Christ that is realized by her participation in the Spirit. Having been formed into the Body of Christ through our baptism in the Spirit, we need to drink the Spirit moment by moment in order to participate in Christ and thus become the reality of His Body. The more we drink the Spirit, the more we receive the element of Christ. Since the Body is of Christ and is Christ, the Body of Christ in its intrinsic reality is not merely the totality of like-minded believers but, more significantly, the totality of the Christ who has been wrought into the believers through their drinking of the Spirit.

By means of the baptism in the Spirit, the Body of Christ has been formed and exists as a spiritual reality. However, the realization of the Body has not yet been fully manifested in the church on earth. This indicates that although the Body has come into existence, there is a need for the constitution of the Body by its growth unto maturity. Paul, developing this thought, points out that the believers

as the members of the Body need to grow into Christ the Head (Eph. 4:15) and contribute to the growth of the Body (v. 16). The Spirit is the supply that we need to grow in the Body. It is by partaking of the Spirit as our life supply that we may grow unto maturity in the divine life for the growth of the Body.

In 1 Corinthians, even though Paul affirms that all the believers were formed into the Body of Christ, the apostle indicates that the believers in Corinth, instead of growing in the divine life, remained infants in Christ with the need to be full-grown men” (3:1; 16:13; 14:20; cf. 2:6). The results of the Corinthian believers’ spiritual infancy were the strifes, parties, and divisions among them (1:10-11; 11:19). Paul’s solution to the problem of division is to reveal the all-inclusive Christ, realized as the life-giving Spirit, for the Corinthians’ enjoyment of Him. Paul encourages the believers to be spiritual men, those who

walk according to their spirit and receive the things of the Spirit of God (2:11-15; Rom. 8:4). By drinking the one Spirit, the believers may participate in the undivided Christ so that they may have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and thereby be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion with the fellow members of the Body (1:10).

Furthermore, by partaking of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, the believers may grow in the divine life so that they will be no longer little children carried about by winds of divisive teachings but will “arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13-14). Hence, for the sake of oneness among the believers, there is a need to daily partake of the Spirit for the constitution of the Body of Christ. Realizing that we have begun our Christian life by receiving the Spirit, we should continue to receive the Spirit, whom God bountifully supplies to us, and be filled in spirit (Gal. 3:3, 5; Eph. 5:18). Only by drinking the Spirit and being mingled with the Spirit can we be constituted as the reality of Christ’s one Body, for the Body of Christ is the issue of our organic union with Christ as the life-giving Spirit (cf. 4:3-4).

#### *Positioned in the Body to Drink the Spirit*

According to 1 Corinthians 12:13, having been baptized in one Spirit into one Body, we were “given to drink one Spirit.” Here “to be given to drink is to be positioned to

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drink, which, according to the whole verse, is to be put into the Body” (Lee, *Enjoyment* 32). In other words, the position from which to drink the Spirit is in the Body. This means that the Body of Christ is not only the goal for which we should enjoy the Spirit but also the realm in which we experience the Spirit. The Spirit, which is the essence of the Body of Christ, is not only for the Body but also in and of the Body. On the one hand, we need to partake of the Spirit for the constitution of the Body of Christ. On the other hand, we need to live in the Body in order to participate in the Spirit in an adequate way.

Since the Spirit is omnipresent and dwells in every believer, James D. G. Dunn in *The Christ and the Spirit* points out that we should not regard the operation of the Spirit to be confined only to church meetings, recognizing that “the Spirit will always work at the level of individuals” (356). At the same time, we should not “forget the corporate nature of the Spirit’s work,” for “it is only as a member of the body of Christ that individuals can hope to thrive in the life of the Spirit” (356). In order to remain in the full enjoyment of the Spirit, we need to care for the Body of Christ. For instance, in Philippians 1:19 Paul testifies that when he was imprisoned in Rome, he experienced God’s salvation through the Philippian believers’ “petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” By tying the petition of the believers to the supply of the Spirit, Paul reveals that the Spirit was bountifully supplied to him through fellow members of the Body of Christ. Apparently Paul was in prison, but actually he was living in the reality of the organic Body of Christ and was thus enjoying the Spirit of Jesus Christ as his bountiful supply. In order to have the rich participation in the Spirit, we need to set aside individualistic spiritual pursuits and independent spiritual living and instead live with the consciousness of the Body, depending on fellowship with the members of the Body. If we live in, through, and for the Body, care for the Body, keep the oneness of the Body, and contribute to the growth of the Body, we will enjoy the full dispensing of “the Spirit not by measure” (John 3:34) and thereby be constituted as the reality of the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

### *The Genuine Oneness and Intrinsic Constitution of the Body*

Paul’s understanding concerning the Spirit’s role in the constitution of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is developed in Ephesians 4:3-6. In verse 3 Paul speaks concerning the relationship between the oneness of the Body and the Spirit by exhorting the believers to “keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” It is significant that in this verse Paul speaks not of the oneness of any doctrine or practice but of the oneness of the Spirit. In Paul’s view, *the oneness of the Spirit* refers mainly to the Spirit Himself—the Spirit who dwells in all the

members of the Body, thereby making them one. The Spirit, whom all the members of the Body possess, is the reality of the oneness of the Body. The oneness of the Body is not a matter of organization, institution, or movement; it is a wonderful person, the Spirit among and within the believers. This oneness is not produced by the believers’ agreement with creedal statements or by ecumenical endeavors for conciliation. The genuine oneness of the Body is “the one and the same Spirit” who dwells and works in every member of the Body to bring them into one spirit, one soul, and one accord (1 Cor. 12:11; Phil. 1:27; Rom. 15:6; Acts 15:25, 28). In order to keep the oneness of the Spirit, we need to remain in the Spirit and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). If we do not walk by the Spirit but by the flesh, we manifest factions, divisions, and sects, which are the works of the flesh (vv. 19-20). However, if we walk by the Spirit, we preserve the oneness of the Body in the uniting bond of peace, enjoying peace with one another in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul describes the oneness of the Body of Christ in relation to the Divine Trinity while underscoring the Spirit’s application of the Triune God to the believers: “One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” In these verses the sequence of the revelation of the Divine Trinity suggests that the Body is a constitution of the Spirit, who is the realization of the Son, who is the embodiment of the Father. The Spirit is not only the third of the Divine Trinity but also the reality of the Trinity. As the fellowship of the Divine Trinity (2 Cor. 13:14), the Spirit transmits the Triune God to the believers. Hence, it is by the Spirit that the one Lord and one God and Father of all are made real in us.

In this portion of the Word, four parties are mentioned: One Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of all. The Body is mentioned before the three divine persons of the Godhead because the oneness among the believers that is based on the oneness of the Divine Trinity is related to the Body and for the Body. Paul’s emphasis in Ephesians 4:4-6 also speaks of the believers’ experience of the Triune God for the constitution of the Body. In accordance with this emphasis, the Spirit is the first of the Godhead mentioned, because He is the ultimate realization of the Trinity. Paul links one Body with one Spirit because the Spirit as the reality of Christ is the essence of the Body, and the Body is a constitution of the Spirit. *One Body* and *one Spirit* are associated with *one hope of your calling*. Although the one hope of our calling involves a personal, subjective experience of the Spirit, this hope is not an individualistic hope. Rather, it is a corporate hope that encompasses the one Body and the one Spirit. The one Spirit saturates our tripartite being through our daily drinking of Him so that



we may be constituted the one Body of Christ for the glorious expression of the Triune God.

In Paul's view, our unique hope is intrinsically connected to our glorification, for he speaks not only of "the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2) but also of the indwelling Christ as "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The fulfillment of the hope of glory is dependent on the inner working of the Spirit, for our one hope is not mainly physical but spiritual (cf. Eph. 1:3). In Romans 8 Paul associates the unseen hope, which we eagerly await, with the redemption of our body, which we are eagerly awaiting (vv. 25, 23). By doing so, he ties our hope to the mysterious process by which we are glorified with Christ in order to be revealed as the sons of God (vv. 17-22). On the one hand, Paul indicates that the transfiguration of our body, that is, our glorification as the sons of God, will take place instantly at the Lord's second coming (2 Thes. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:50-53; Col. 3:4). On the other hand, Paul suggests that the redemption of our body and our revelation as the sons of God entail a gradual process of glorification accomplished by the Spirit. This process is clearly revealed in 2 Corinthians 3:18, which says that we "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." Glorification is an ongoing process of being constituted as the Body and in the Body from one degree of glory to another.

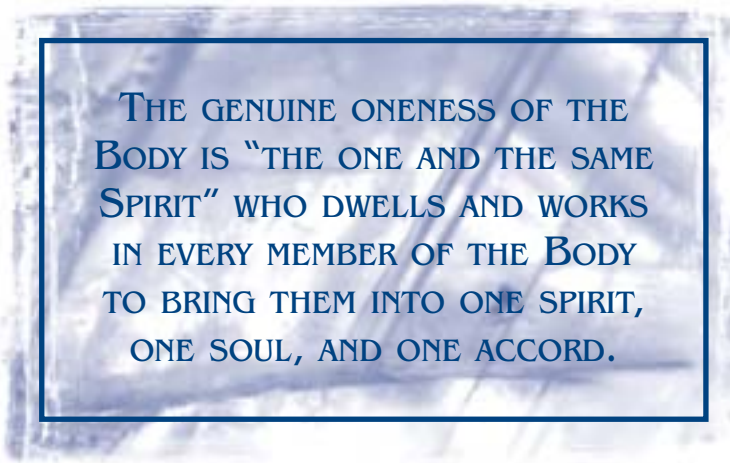
The Spirit's operation within us to glorify us is also shown in Ephesians 4:30, where Paul states that we were sealed in the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption, which corresponds to the redemption of our body in Romans 8:23. Although we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise once for all when we heard the gospel of our salvation and believed in Christ (Eph. 1:13), Paul's remark in 4:30 that the sealing of the Spirit is "unto the day of redemption" indicates that from the time we are saved, we need to allow the Spirit to continually seal us with the divine element of glory until the redemption of our body, the transfiguration of our body of humiliation into a glorious body (Phil. 3:21), a "spiritual" body (1 Cor. 15:44). The sealing Spirit, who "is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession" (Eph. 1:14), guarantees the unique hope of our calling—God in Christ as the Spirit mingled with and expressed through us as the Body of Christ in glory. In brief, the one Spirit

continually works within us in order to constitute the one Body with ever increasing degrees of glory unto the consummation of the one hope of our calling in glory.

Just as the expression *one Body and one Spirit* implies the mingling of the believers as the Body of Christ with the Spirit as the essence of the Body, the expression *one Lord, one faith, one baptism* implies the union of the Body with Christ the Lord, who is the Head and the element of the Body. The one Lord is the object of our faith and baptism. Through faith we believe into the Lord (John 3:16, 36; Phil. 1:29), which is "to have our being merged into His that we two may be one organically" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, note 1). Through baptism we are baptized into the Lord (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3); that is, we are immersed into Him so that we may be united with Him as one. By faith and baptism we are united with Christ and are thus joined to Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Faith and baptism are the means by which the Body is joined to Christ the Head.

Our union with the Lord through faith and baptism is effected by the Spirit's work within us. In Paul's understanding, the Lord to whom the Body is joined through faith and baptism is the Spirit, or the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18). The believers' union with the resur-

rected Lord is realized by the mingling of the life-giving Spirit with their regenerated human spirit, the great truth which Paul enunciates in 1 Corinthians 6:17: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Further, Paul's Epistles unveil the vital connection between the faith that joins us to the Lord and the Spirit. In Galatians Paul says, "We by the Spirit out of faith eagerly await the hope of righteousness" (5:5). Witness Lee in *Elders' Training, Book 6: The Crucial Points of the Truth in Paul's Epistles* points out that since "in this verse *the Spirit* and *faith* are in apposition, the Spirit is the faith and the faith is the Spirit" (66). In 2 Corinthians 4:13 Paul links the Spirit with faith by speaking of "the spirit of faith." Concerning the expression *the spirit of faith*, Vincent says, "Not distinctly the Holy Spirit, nor, on the other hand, a human faculty or disposition, but blending both" (313). The spirit of faith is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with our human spirit. In the phrase *the spirit of faith*, Paul identifies the mingled spirit with faith. This implies that our faith is not only related to the mingled spirit but also is, in a sense, the mingled spirit itself (Lee, *Elders' Training* 47). Faith is not a nat-



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ural ability generated by our own effort; rather, it is the divine element of the God of glory infused into us to be our believing ability (Acts 7:2). This faith is produced by the life-giving Spirit, who is the realization of the Lord Jesus as the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Hence, faith is inseparable from the Spirit in the believers' experience. Moreover, Paul reveals that baptism, which unites us with the Lord, is intrinsically related to the operation of the Spirit. This is evidenced by the fact that Paul speaks of both our being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3) and our being baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Since the Spirit is the application of Christ, the reality of being baptized into Christ is to be baptized in the Spirit. In Paul's mind baptism into Christ and baptism in the Spirit are not two separate events but one divine reality. Hence, the believers' organic union with Christ the Lord through faith and baptism is realized by the work of the Spirit.

**T**he phrase *One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all* implies the union of the Body of Christ with God the Father as its source (Eph. 4:6). Here *all* refers especially to all the believers in Christ, the members of His Body. God is the Originator of all things, including His eternal purpose and economy, and the Creator of all the believers as human beings in the old creation. The Father is the source of life for the Body, the Begetter of all the believers as His children in the new creation who possess His life and nature (John 1:12-13; Eph. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:4) (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 4:6, note 1). God the Father is over all, overshadowing all the members of the Body to care for them (cf. Deut. 32:11); He is through all, passing through them to join them; and He is in all, dwelling within them to abide in them. This indicates that God the Father is over, through, and in all the members of the Body in order to dispense Himself as life into them so that He may be organically joined to them. Again, our union in life with God the Father is realized by our being mingled with the Spirit, who is the transmission of the Triune God. In the New Testament the Spirit is spoken of as "the Spirit of God" (Rom. 8:9; 1 John 4:2) and as "the Spirit of your Father" (Matt. 10:20), indicating that the Spirit incorporates the existence and operation of God the Father. This is confirmed in 1 John 4:13, which speaks concerning God and the believers abiding in each other through the Spirit: "In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit." We can experience the reality of the mutual abiding with God because His Spirit, who has been given to us, applies this reality to us. Further, in Galatians 4:6 Paul suggests that it is the Spirit in our hearts who affirms our intimate relationship with God, crying, "Abba, Father!" Ephesians 4:4-6 confirms that the intrinsic constitution of the Body of Christ is a group of believers mingled with the Spirit, who unites them in life with Christ the Lord and God the Father. The Body of

Christ is a living organism of the Triune God, an organism saturated with the Spirit as its essence, joined to the Son as its element, and begotten of the Father as its source.

### **The Spirit in the Building Up of the Body of Christ**

The goal of God's New Testament economy is to produce, constitute, and build up the Body of Christ as His corporate expression. In Paul's view, the building up of the Body is dependent upon the growth of the Body. In Ephesians 4:16 he writes that the growth of the Body is unto the building up of itself. Whereas Ephesians 4:16 points to the Body's building up as the issue of its growth, Colossians 2:19 unveils the way the Body grows: "All the Body... grows with the growth of God." According to this verse, to grow with the growth of God is to grow with the increase of God as life within us. Since God is infinite, He cannot grow in Himself. However, God can and should grow in the Body of Christ in the sense that the element of God needs to increase in the Body. Since Paul speaks of Christ as the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead in 2:9, the growth of God in the believers may be understood as the growth of Christ. Because the life-giving Spirit is the reality of Christ, for the Body to grow with the growth of God is also for the Body to grow with the increase of Christ as the life-giving Spirit. The growth of the Body requires not only the believers' participation in the Spirit but also their impartation of the Spirit to one another. Therefore, the building up of the Body of Christ issues from the growth of Christ as the Spirit within the believers and requires ministry that dispenses the Spirit into the believers.

### **The Ministry of the Spirit Producing a Letter of Christ, His Expression**

In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul declares that the ascended Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to His Body "for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." Here there are four kinds of gifts, that is, those who have been endued with a special function and have been given to the Body for its building up. *The ministry* here refers to the unique ministry of the new covenant—the service of all the ministers in God's New Testament economy for the carrying out of the new covenant (Acts 1:17, 25; 2 Cor. 4:1). *Unto the work of the ministry* is in apposition to *unto the building up of the Body of Christ*, indicating that the work of the New Testament ministry is to build up the Body. Whereas Ephesians 4:12 reveals that the goal of the new covenant ministry is to build up the Body, 2 Corinthians 3:8 unveils that the essence of this ministry is the Spirit. Here Paul speaks of the ministry of the Spirit. According to Fee, *the ministry of the Spirit* means that Paul's ministry to the Corinthians was one "that brought to them



the life-giving Spirit" (*Empowering* 308). This thought is confirmed by verse 6, which describes the ministers of a new covenant as ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit who gives life. What qualified Paul and his fellow apostles to be sufficient as ministers of the new covenant was not an accumulation of doctrinal knowledge but the constitution of the life-giving Spirit wrought into their being for their impartation of the Spirit into others. The function of the new covenant ministry, which is composed of many ministers, is to dispense the life-giving Spirit into others for the producing of the Body of Christ as His corporate expression.

The role of the Spirit in the new testament ministry is revealed in 2 Corinthians 3:3, which records the apostle Paul's words to the believers in Corinth: "You are being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone but in tablets of hearts of flesh." This verse reveals that the apostles, as ministers of the new covenant, inscribed the Spirit of the living God into the believers' hearts and thereby produced them as a letter of Christ. "The Spirit of the living God, who is the living God Himself, is not the instrument, like a pen, but the element, like ink used in writing, with which the apostles minister Christ as the content for the writing of living letters that convey Christ" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 3, note 3). According to the context, the Spirit of the living God is not associated with power, gifts, abilities, or miracles; rather, the Spirit who gives life (v. 6) is referred to as the ink of the apostles' inscribing ministry and is thus revealed as the very essence of the new covenant ministry.

The Spirit of the living God, or the Spirit who gives life, is the realization of Christ, who in His resurrection became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Hence, the writing of the Spirit into the believers' hearts issues in a letter of Christ, just as the mingling of the believers with the Spirit produces the Body of Christ. Since the Spirit is the essence of the Divine Trinity (1 John 5:6) and the Son is the expression of the Divine Trinity (Col. 1:15), the Spirit as the divine ink produces a letter of Christ. Christ is the heavenly alphabet (cf. Rev. 22:13), the content and expression of this letter. As the new covenant ministers inscribe the life-giving Spirit as the spiritual ink into the believers' hearts, the believers are made into a letter of

Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). Such believers are being transformed into the image of Christ through the operation of the Spirit by beholding and reflecting His glory (3:17-18).

It is significant that Paul speaks of the believers in Corinth not as letters of Christ but as a letter of Christ, which suggests the thought of a corporate organic entity. Certainly, the Corinthian believers, as the beneficiaries of Paul's inscribing ministry, individually became letters of Christ that conveyed Christ to others. Nevertheless, when Paul and the apostles imparted the Spirit of the living God into the Corinthians' hearts, they were produced as a singular *letter* of Christ, one corporate expression of Christ. This is reminiscent of Paul's words in Ephesians 3:17 that through the operation of the Spirit of God, Christ makes His corporate *home* in our hearts. In this verse there are many hearts but only one home, indicating a mingling and joining of the believers' hearts into one corporate home. The corporate letter of Christ inscribed with the Spirit as its ink is the Body of Christ constituted with the Spirit as its essence. The corporate epistle of Christ is the issue of the apostles' ministering the Spirit into the believers.

THE FUNCTION OF THE  
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CORPORATE EXPRESSION.

***Ministering God in Christ as the Spirit for the Building Up of the Body***

The ministry of the new covenant is not unique to the apostles; rather, it belongs to all the believers who have allowed God in Christ as the Spirit to be thoroughly wrought into them. In 1 Timothy when the apostle Paul speaks of himself as one appointed by God to the New Testament ministry (1:11-12), he presents himself as a pattern to all the believers (vv. 15-16). The apostles, the new covenant ministers, gave themselves to the believers as a pattern so that the believers might imitate them (2 Thes. 3:9). Hence, all the believers are called to have a portion in this ministry by being constituted with the life-giving Spirit. In 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of himself and his fellow apostles as ministers of God (6:4), ministers of Christ (11:23), and ministers of the Spirit (3:6). In Colossians 1:24-25 Paul presents himself as a minister of the church, Christ's Body. In carrying out the new covenant ministry, the apostles ministered God in Christ as the Spirit into others for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. In following their pattern, all the

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believers should aspire to participate in the same, unique ministry of dispensing the Spirit as the realization of the Triune God to build up the Body of Christ.

## Conclusion

In the New Testament revelation Christ and the church are vitally related to the Spirit and the Body. The Spirit is the realization of the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of God; and the Body of Christ, His fullness, is the intrinsic significance of the church. The focal point of God's economy is His intention to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers so that they may be the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of the Triune God. In the divine economy the Spirit is not mainly a matter of gifts, power, ability, or impact, nor is He only for our personal edification. More significantly, the Spirit is the application of God in Christ and the life, life supply, and essence of the Body of Christ. The Body, as both the realm and goal of our experience of the Spirit, is not an organizational structure but a divine-human constitution composed of the believers mingled with the Spirit, the reality of the Triune God in Christ. As such, the Body cannot be organized or institutionalized merely by assembling the believers. The Body can be produced only by the operation of the Spirit in the believers.

The formation of the Body of Christ is accomplished by our baptism in the Spirit. The constitution of the Body of Christ is carried out by our continued enjoyment of the Spirit. The building up of the Body is completed by the mutual impartation of the Spirit into the fellow members of the Body. In carrying out God's economy, we should partake of the Spirit in the corporate life of the Body and for the benefit of the Body. Even though the Body of Christ as a spiritual reality has been formed, the Body still needs to be constituted through growth unto maturity in order to be fully built up, until we all arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In order to participate in the growth and building up of the Body, we need to drink the Spirit to be constituted with the Spirit, and we need to dispense the Spirit into others so that they too may be saturated with the Spirit.

This truth should govern our living and work as the touchstone that determines the integrity of our Christian life and service. If we are not partaking of the Spirit, no matter how apparently spiritual, pious, or godly our living may be, our life will be ultimately meaningless. If we are not ministering the Spirit to the saints, no matter how seemingly zealous, successful, or productive our work may be, our service will be in vain. A life and service devoid of the Spirit do not result in the growth of the Body unto its building up. The significance of both our existence and labor as believers is bound up with

becoming new covenant ministers—Spirit-constituted, Spirit-dispensing, Body-conscious, and Body-centered members of the Body. In order for our Christian life and service to contribute to the accomplishment of God's economy, we must be filled with Christ as the life-giving Spirit and impart Him into others. In this way the desire of God's heart to have a Body for His Son as His corporate expression will be realized. **AFC**

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