

Three Studies on the Universal versus Local Church Doctrines

God, in Ephesians 4:11-16, says to each local church:

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But *speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*”

I have interspersed studies on the doctrine of the universal church versus the local church doctrine for several years. I have heard preachers teach for and against the universal church doctrine, with variations. I am convinced, from Scripture that there is no “universal church” in this age of Grace and that the doctrine has done tremendous damage to the cause of Christ. That is not to say that some who hold to the doctrine do not love the Lord and seek to glorify Him; it is to say that I am convinced, from the Word of God, that they are wrong. The ministry that God has called me to requires that I study this most important doctrine.

Below are three teachings which I believe correctly, for the most part, correctly explain Bible doctrine on the matter of the universal church. The ministry can help a church that believes in the local church, even if, in some cases, that church also holds to a “universal church” doctrine.

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A Textual Exposition of 1st Corinthians 12:13

By Forrest Keener

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“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.”

This is a verse which has, through the years, received a huge amount of attention. I have read a great deal of material on the subject, and even distributed a lot of tracts with which I am less than totally pleased. I will try, in this brief tract, to state what I feel is the extremely simple and pointed truth of this verse. May I say to begin with, I don't think we need to be an exegetical or a translation expert to understand it; it is just not that complicated. It says precisely and simply what it seems to say.

WHY COMPLICATED APPROACHES

I have read many discourses which approach this verse as if we needed some particular insight into great mysteries, or an ability to dig out very obscure interpretations of other Bible verses, to understand this one. These approaches normally lead to some “necessary implication” of a “universal body.” This wrong interpretation of I Corinthians 12:13, *“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.”* is supported by a wrong interpretation of Ephesians 4:3 and 4, (*“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;”*) and in turn that wrong interpretation of Ephesians 4:3 and 4 is supported by the same wrong interpretation of I Corinthians 12:13. The fact of the matter is that neither of these verses so much as hints at any kind of a universal body. In fact, the words universal and body are so antagonistic to each other, that we should be forced into laughter, by merely hearing them so used. The word body always means something that is localized by union and united by locality, while the word universal, as used in this respect, means something that is everywhere. Infinitude of locality always necessitates a spirit, as opposed to a body. Why the complication then? It is because of the carryover of Catholicism, even through Protestantism, in so much of our “Christian literature.”

If it were not for the Catholic teaching that the “body of Christ” is literally the visible universal (Catholic) church, or the Protestant teaching that the “body of Christ” is literally the invisible universal (“Holy Catholic”) church, no such notion would ever exist among evangelical Christians. They certainly would not, in a million years, arrive at it, merely by

reading I Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:3-4 and Ephesians 5:25-27. The fact is that to arrive at a universal church interpretation of these verses, a man must start with this Catholic presupposition and use these verses as proof texts to support it. I want to take each of the determinative words of I Corinthians 12:13 and show that this passage does not even suggest universalism. Then, I want to very briefly expound the verse in its simple contextual meaning.

THE WORD “SPIRIT”

*“For by one **spirit** are we all baptized into one body.”* It has been argued by some, who realized the error of the Catholic interpretation, that the Spirit here was “a spirit of unity,” and should be translated spirit not Spirit. Such a conclusion is not necessary, and I do not believe it is either accurate or logically justified. The Spirit here is the Spirit of the context. He is the Spirit who, according to verse 3, leads one to confess Christ, in verse 4 bestows diversities of gifts, and in verse 7 manifests Himself for the overall profit of the church. He is the same Spirit who, in verse 8, gives the word of wisdom to one and the word of knowledge to another, and who in verses 9 and 10, gives gifts of faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers tongues, and interpretation. He is the same Spirit who, in verse 11, sovereignly divides gifts to men, individually as it pleases Him. It is, by every contextual standard of interpretation the “Spirit” of the context and thus, the Holy Spirit who is mentioned here.

THE WORD “BY”

*“For **by** one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”* It is thought, by the universalist, that this word, if properly translated, forces us to believe that this verse has the Holy Spirit baptizing us into Christ literally, and thus the baptism could not be water baptism, and the body referred to could not be a local church. This is interpretation either by presupposition, or by panic, or some of both. The word **by** need carry no such meaning. It simply means we are led by the Holy Spirit to unite with that body (local church), exactly as we are led by the Spirit to confess Christ in verse 3. This is how Simeon, in Luke 2:27, came into the temple at the time of Christ’s dedication. (*“And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,”*) He came by the influence of, or the leadership of, the Holy Spirit.

THE WORD “BODY”

*“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one **body**.”* Again the “body” of this verse is the body of the context, that is the church at Corinth. This is what Paul is, throughout the chapter, illustrating by the human body. The first question that should be asked here is this: Is the word “body” in this verse, that is the body of Christ, being used literally or figuratively? Is Paul saying we are literally being placed by this baptism into the physical, fleshly, actual, biological body of

Christ? Of course not! He is using the human body, in this chapter, to illustrate the truth of necessary union and interdependency within the church, and he is using this metaphor, “body of Christ,” to illustrate the relationship that the local church has with Christ as her “head,” which is simply to say He has complete authority over the church. To make the use of the words body or head more literal than that is to violate the whole nature of the chapter and indeed the entire epistle. Let it further be understood that we are to think locally, that is of the church at Corinth, and locally as these truths apply to us in any church. Only in this setting can verses such as 25 and 26 have any applicable reference to the context. Members of a local, visible assembly are to have the same care one for the other, suffer with each other and rejoice when another is honored. If there were such a thing as an invisible, universal body (whatever that might possibly be) this conduct would surely not be possible for them. So the term body here is a metaphorical term describing the relationship that the members of the church at Corinth had with each other under Christ their head. He is talking specifically of the body, that is the church, at Corinth. Oh, but someone asks, does Christ have many bodies? This is a foolish question. Once we see the metaphorical use of the word **BODY** in this passage we understand that the usage is generic or institutional and thus is not numerical in any sense of being either singular or plural.

Let me illustrate this truth in this way: Christ took a piece of loaf of bread on the night before His crucifixion. He broke it and said, “*Take eat, this is my body.*” He was simply saying this piece of bread which you are to eat, pictures my body. But He said “*This is my body.*” Now, are we to understand that this was the only piece of bread about which that statement could be made, or that all pieces of bread are composite parts of one great piece? Absurd! When we see that the statement is a metaphorical one, and could be rightly made of any qualifying piece of bread, that is, unleavened bread consecrated to the purpose of symbolizing Christ’s body, we see the truth that applies in I Corinthians 12:13. Any proper qualifying piece of bread, at any proper time, and in any proper place and setting, could be referred to as “His body,” and in the singular without violence to any other piece. The very same thing applies easily and automatically to any true church, and it does no violence to any other true church, nor does it so much as hint that they are composite parts of the same thing. Moreover, it does not hint at the foolish idea that the local church is only the manifestation or as some prefer to say, the only visible manifestation of the “real thing,” “the true church,” or the “universal church.” Notice this truth as applied to the human body in I Corinthians 12:15: Can the foot say “... *I am not of the body...*” What body? It speaks of the human body as an object, not an individual. So is the normal case in all metaphorical usages.

THE WORD “WE”

*“For by one Spirit are **we** all baptized into one body.”* Some have said the word **WE** here of necessity includes Paul, who was obviously not a member of that local assembly, and thus the usage of **WE**; supports a universal interpretation. Nonsense! If the word **WE** in verse 13 necessarily included him, the word **YE** in verse 27 of the same chapter would necessarily exclude him. The principle, that we are each part of a local body, applies to Paul, and thus he uses the word **WE** in an editorial sense. However, throughout the epistle and especially in the context, he excludes himself from this body of which he is speaking in this chapter. Notice verses 1-3, and 27. In none of these places does he imply that he is including himself in the body to whom he is speaking. To understand his editorial use of the word **WE** in verse 13, notice the use of the word **I** in chapter 13, verses 1-3. His usage here is hypothetical as if he had not love and became as sounding brass, but he does not really include himself in that group. For an example of the use of the word **WE**, which does not include both first and second persons, notice I Thessalonians 3:1. Notice I Thessalonians 5:5, where he, in the same verse, uses **YE** and **WE** referring to the same group. So don't let the word **WE** in I Corinthians 12:13 be used to erroneously point you in a universal direction. It implies no such thing!

THE WORD “BAPTIZED”

*“For by one Spirit are we all **baptized** into one body.”* The universalist's interpretation of this verse is essentially this: The Holy Spirit places (baptizes) us into the “true church,” “The Body of Christ.” They make this a statement of regeneration, that is to say salvation is the Holy Spirit baptizing us into the “true church,” the universal body of Christ. But where in Scripture is salvation referred to as “baptism” either in or by the Holy Spirit? While it is true that baptism is used metaphorically to describe salvation, salvation is never referred to as baptism in or by anything or anyone, unless I Corinthians 12:13 is the only place. No ground is laid for it anywhere in Scripture. The believers of Luke 3:16 and Acts 1:5 were promised the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It was fulfilled to them in Acts 2:1-4, but no one would claim that this was their regeneration. Salvation is not the context of I Corinthians 12:13, the context is conduct in the local church. Again, salvation is not the context of Ephesians 4:4. In reading Ephesians 4:1-3 you find that mutual conduct among the members of the church at Ephesus is the context. This will be the case everywhere in Scripture you see the illustration of the body used. Regeneration is never the context. I thus conclude that no place in Scripture ever refers to salvation as baptism in, or by, the Holy Spirit. These people in the church at Corinth had been led by the Holy Spirit to confess Christ, and had by the same Spirit been led to identify themselves with that particular body, by water baptism. It was by the ordinance of water baptism that they had come into the fellowship of that body (the church at Corinth).

THE SIMPLE INTERPRETATION OF THE VERSE

The message and exhortation of I Corinthians 12:13 and 14 is this: Cease your individual competition in the attempted display of spiritual gifts. Notice the first and last verses of this chapter are clearly this, and every verse in between is right on that line. This verse is simply saying: All of you, whether Jew or Gentile, whether bond or free have been led by the Holy Spirit to, by water baptism, unite yourself with this body (the church at Corinth). Now stop competing for position and pre-eminence, as if you were a unit within yourself, and accept the place in the body to which God has sovereignly appointed you, because you are by the design of God all dependent upon each other.

If this simple truth is missed, we not only entertain a totally wrong concept of Bible doctrine and definition of the biblical word church, we miss the glorious practical appeal for church unity and inter-submission within our church. Any notion of a universal church becomes an escape from the obligation to the local church, and to proper conduct within the local body, the true and only church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

MY NOTE: I am not sure that the baptism with the HG was a one time thing. Some argue that this occurred in Jerusalem (Ac. 2:1-4; Judea (Ac. 10:46), Samaria (Ac. 8:17), and the uttermost part (Ac. 19:6).

Ryan Swope

The Holy Spirit does NOT supernaturally “baptize” anyone into some “mystical universal, invisible church.”

There is only one “proof” text for such a notion and it is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13:

"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."

Universal Protestantism, which began with Martin Luther, teaches that a sinner who trusts Christ as Savior is, at that point, mystically baptized by the Holy Spirit into the universal invisible church. At the moment of salvation they believe you are baptized by the Holy Spirit. They say all believers are a part of the body of Christ. Believers do receive the Holy Spirit (indwelt by) and forever sealed with the Holy Spirit at the moment of Salvation and following (Eph. 1:13, 4:30). But this is not being baptized with the Holy Spirit. It's not meant towards individuals. It was a one time event on the day of pentecost geared towards the church collectively. It was God handing over His work to the local Church. Each and every local church that is. The great commission is a command of each local church. God was empowering and enabling them (particularly the church at Jerusalem) on the day of Pentecost by the Holy Spirit to do this work. Once that happened He then handed down that enabling to each and every local body following that. It was a one time event to the church at Jerusalem on the day of pentecost as a whole, or collectively, but applies to every local church following that).

Since there is no such entity as a “universal” church in Scripture, there is absolutely no need to interpret this passage as such. To make this definition fit, we would have to compromise the common understanding of the church in 114 references for one presumably vague verse. The

proverbial tail begins to wag the dog at this point. The entire “Holy Spirit baptism into a universal church” theory rests upon this one verse.

Here are just a few thoughts concerning 1 Corinthians 12:13:

“By one Spirit,” is easily interpreted within the context of this chapter. Notice that 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 is directed towards the church at Corinth and is dealing with spiritual gifts by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, causing the body of Christ to be able to function properly:

1 Corinthians 12:1 "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant."

1 Corinthians 12:4 “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 12:28 "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

1 Corinthians 12:31 "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."

The Apostle Paul is not dealing with the doctrine of baptisms in this Chapter, he is addressing gifts from the Lord Jesus via the Holy Spirit. By the enabling of the Holy Spirit that is. The Holy Spirit isn't the actual one doing it but He is the one who enables. The enabler! For this doctrinal truth we can simply compare Ephesians 4:3-8 with 1 Corinthians 12:4, 28:

Ephesians 4:3-8 "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; (5) One Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (7) But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

1 Corinthians 12:4 "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."

1 Corinthians 12:28 "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

Many “scholars” are confused because they associate the word, “by” with John the Baptist’s statement that the Lord Jesus would baptize “with” the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:11). It must be made clear that the Holy Spirit has not been seen in holy writ to be the administrator of any kind of baptism, whether spiritual, or of water, or otherwise. The Baptist’s statement in Matthew Chapter 3 clearly reveals that the Lord Jesus is the administrator of the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The Lord is seen to be the administrator and the Holy Spirit is the substance, as a local church pastor is the administrator of baptism while the water is the substance. In other words, just as we are baptized by the pastor with water, the church (as a whole or collectively) was also

baptized by Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit. This baptism was a one time event handing over Christ work to the Church at Jerusalem at that particular time. But it would then carry over and be handed down to each and every local body following that. Just like parents are required to train and bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and the next generation following that, each and every local body is authorized to carry out and do the great commission. It's each local bodies job to do this and do all of the counsel of God. That's what the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (a one time event on the day of Pentecost) was for. Handing over the job of Christ to His local body as a whole (each and every one) just before he was leaving earth to ascend to the Father.

Notice how the words, “with” and “by” are used in other verses concerning the Holy Spirit:

“With” the Spirit or Holy Ghost:

Mark 1:8 "I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."

Luke 1:15 "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."

Luke 1:41 "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:"

John 1:33 "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

Acts 1:5 "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

Acts 2:4 "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

2 Corinthians 3:3 "[Forasmuch as ye are] manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

Ephesians 1:13 "In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,"

None of these references reveal that the Holy Spirit is an administrator, but is the substance. We are clearly shown that we are filled, baptized, etc., WITH the Holy Ghost (substance), not BY the Holy Ghost (administrator). Once again we must repeat: the Holy Spirit is never seen as the administrator of any kind of spiritual baptism, but is seen as the substance of that baptism. We will discuss Holy Spirit baptism in the, “Church’s Anointing,” section of this chapter.

“By” the Spirit or Holy Ghost:

Matthew 12:28 "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."

Acts 13:4 "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."

Luke 4:1 "And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,"

Romans 8:14 "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

2 Timothy 1:14 "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."

Romans 5:5 "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

2 Peter 1:21 "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

In every instance we see that when “by” the Spirit or “by” the Holy Ghost is used, it refers to the Spirit’s leadership, power and/ or enabling. This doctrine becomes clear when we understand the fact that when the, “...Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth...” (John 16:13). Enable and empower you to understand and comprehend and act upon it and more.

Looking specifically in the book of 1 Corinthians, we can see that the word, “by” when used with the word, “Spirit” is simply defining the leadership, power and/ or enabling of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life, specifically in and through the (local) church:

1 Corinthians 2:10 "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

1 Corinthians 6:11 "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

1 Corinthians 12:3 "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and [that] no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

1 Corinthians 12:8 "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;"

1 Corinthians 12:9 "To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;"

Now we arrive at the previously cited “proof” text of the Universalists:

1 Corinthians 12:13 "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."

This verse, just as all of the ones formerly listed, applies to the Holy Spirit's leadership, power and enabling. It is the Spirit of God who guides the new believer in all truth.

1 Peter 3:21 tells us that water baptism is the, "...answer of a good conscience toward God..." How else are we led to the baptismal waters if not by the Spirit of God Himself? He led us by reproving our hearts concerning sin, pointed us to faith in the Lord Jesus' finished work on the cross, renewed us, cleared our conscience of offense toward God, so He has also guided us by His Truth into the local church through the baptismal waters. The same baptism that was handed down by God to John the Baptism.

The one and only Baptism (water baptism that joins you to the local body) that Ephesians 4:5 speaks about. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism,"

Acts 2:41 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

"Baptized into one body." The door to church membership is opened through scriptural water baptism. Paul has been addressing this local church throughout the entire First Epistle to the Corinthians in particular, so, in order to maintain the correct perspective and avoid introducing a false doctrine, we must stay true to the context. It was written to the Corinthians in particular but applies to each and every local body of Christ. He was speaking to the Corinthians in particular but it applies and is meant and directed towards every local body. Just because we weren't there when God was writing the Bible through men doesn't mean it doesn't apply to us. Who it was to at that particular time also applies to us today. Each and every individual Christian but also each and every local body as a whole.

Here is the introduction to 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:1-2 "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, (2) Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:"

Notice the comparison between, "the church of God which is at Corinth," and, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." The Apostle is simply saying that this epistle is specifically written to the local church at Corinth, but its teachings are applicable to all local bodies that exist today and all believers in every local church today. The word, "place," in the Webster's 1828 Dictionary is defined:

“A particular portion of space of indefinite extent, occupied or intended to be occupied by any person or thing, and considered as the space where a person or thing does or may rest or has rested, as distinct from space in general.”

Concerning the word, “place,” in this verse, Strong’s Concordance says:

- 1) place, any portion or space marked off, as it were from surrounding space
 - 1a) an inhabited place, as a city, village, district
 - 1b) a place (passage) in a book
- 2) metaph.
 - 2a) the condition or station held by one in any company or assembly
 - 2b) opportunity, power, occasion for acting

Obviously this word points to certain localities wherein saints are designated to assemble, also known as church meeting houses or other places of assemblage.

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 5 (along with Matthew Chapter 18) we see the authority given to the (local) church to expel its wayward members. In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we also find that this same erring brother had repented and was accepted back into the fold. It was written then explaining what should happen not just at that particular time with the local church but throughout all generations following that to each and every local body. What God was written to those local churches and members within those local churches at that time applies to us today too.

1 Corinthians 5:13 "But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Galatians 6:1 also admonishes us, "Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

Most would agree that these verses cannot apply to the “universal” church. There is no means of discipline in the so-called universal church. Also, there is an extreme doctrinal problem with applying these passages to a universal mystical body: this would mean loss of one’s salvation! According to the universal proponents, when we are saved we are “baptized” by the Holy Spirit as an administrator into the substance of the universal invisible “church.” To be expelled would mean that one would have to be saved again in order to be restored. In other words, we would have to be un-baptized by the Holy Spirit and re-baptized into the mystical body when we repent. As nonsensical as this may be, it is just as fallacious to try and fit a universal, invisible “body” into 1 Corinthians 12:13.

It is also drivel for us to believe that a body can be invisible or mystical. As seen previously, by definition a body has to be visible, real and made-up of members, just as a husbandry, building, fold or assembly.

1 Corinthians 3:9 "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."

1 Corinthians 12:27 "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

If a "body" is universal, mystical and invisible, then verses 25-26 make no sense at all:

1 Corinthians 12:25-26 "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. (26) And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."

The word, "We."

Protestant Universalists believe that the use of this word by Paul supports a universal invisible "church" because he was not a member of the Corinthian congregation. This is an attempt to build a (false) doctrine from one word which is a primary characteristic of the cults. It is true that Paul was not a member of the Corinthian church when this epistle was written, but that certainly does not mean that the use of the word, "we," has to express inclusivity. As addressed earlier, Paul is using this word in an editorial sense. For example, one could say, "We get right with God when we repent of sin and confess it to Him." The use of the word, "we," does not automatically tell us that the speaker is not right with God, but means that he is simply speaking in an editorial sense concerning repentance. Besides, if the "we" in verse 13 would have to necessarily imply that Paul was included, then the "ye" in verse 27 would inevitably indicate that Paul, as well as all others, would have been excluded:

1 Corinthians 12:27 "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

This would have to be interpreted as the Apostle Paul not being a member of a local church. By default, it would also make us to believe that the city of Corinth held the only church. Both ideas are nonsense.

In order to gain a better understanding of the editorial use of, "we," in verse 13, we can compare it to the editorial use of the word, "I," in Chapter 13:1-3.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. (3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

Obviously, the Apostle is not saying that all of these hypothetical examples apply to him exclusively. Again, this is an editorial usage of the word, "I."

As another example, we can see where Paul editorially uses the words, "we," and, "ye," sometimes when referring to the same group:

1 Thessalonians 5:5 "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness."

The Universal Protestant interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13 has spilled over and caused much confusion in the Baptist ranks. Each and every local body of Christ (Bride of Christ) is God's called-out people. Therefore each local body should hold to the old way and the true doctrines of God within the contextual confines of Scripture. Why would we desire to take one verse (1Co 12:13) out of context at the behest of baby-baptizers in order to make it fit into a Protestant pattern? There are several motives for this, such as promotion, avoiding persecution, etc., but whatever the reason, it is costing us the inheritance that we will soon see the Lord has for us specifically through His church!

I believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a one time event at pentecost. it was Jesus baptizing (empowering) His local church. Before He was ascending to the Father He was handing over His command to each and every local body to carry out his great commission. They didn't need to happen when he was here because He was here on earth. But he promised He would provide the comforter (the Holy Spirit) once He left. He is the one who built and started the local church when He was here on earth during his earthly ministry. But once he was leaving He baptized sk as empowered and enabled the church of Jerusalem (collectively as a whole, the church as a whole.. not individuals themselves) to then be required to carry out His will and do all of the great commission. It's the responsibility of each and every local body. That's what the baptism of the Holy Spirit signified. handing over his work (the great commission)to each and every local body. Empowering and enabling them to carry out His work. The baptism of the holy spirit was a one time event for that reason but as a result of that it extends to each and every local body today.

Individuals aren't baptized by the holy spirit at the moment of salvation. Again that was a one time event on the day of pentecost geared towards the local body (the church of Jersualem that existed at that time to carry out his great commission because he was going to the Father) but then extends to each and every local body today too.. It's a requirement of each and every local body to carry out God's great commission. That's what the baptism of the Holy Spirit signified. We receive and are indwelt by the holy spirit at the moment of salvation..

1 Corinthians 12:13 refers to water baptism. It allows us to join a local body after we testify and show fruits of repentance. We are ready to die to self and put out old life behind us and walk in newness of life. It also pictures that death, burial and resurrection and how we are ready to live that new life in Christ and put our old life behind us. Just like all other passes like Romans 6, Colossians 2:12, Galatians 3:27, Acts 8, with the ethiopian eunuch, Acts 2:41 and others 1 Corinthians 12:13 refers to water baptism into the local body. It extends to any born again believers whether jew or gentile. God broken down the middle wall of partition between Jew and gentile as Ephesians 2 says. Anybody who is born again no matter if they come out of Judaism or anything else (Gentile) is welcomed and commanded of God to be baptized by water and join a local body.. This comes through water baptism. Water Baptism pictures several things. God is no respecter of persons. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. And once they do they get saved to follow the Lord in water baptism and join a local body.

Two-Church Doctrine

Dr. Ronald L. Tottingham

Many believe the church is an "invisible body" like a land mass under a sea and islands pushing up above the waters are like local churches pushing out of the water. The island is all one sees of this great land mass and all a boat might land on and all one might find water, food, etc. Many, many Baptists and fundamentalists hold that the church is like this with local churches as islands pushing up out of the universal church into view of the world. They see the local church as the only places where men may "land" and find the water of the word and food for their souls - but that the local church is only the visible island out from a greater church which is invisible to this world. Is this true to what the Bible says??

The by-word among fundamentalists and "independent" Baptists today is "I'm local church," or "we are local church." Is being local church enough? Does this make one a Baptist? Is this the "flag" definition we wave to show one our being of the truth?

Many times claiming to be local church only means a pastor or church holds that the Lord uses or works through local churches today. Some will even go so far as to believe that the Lord uses and works only through the local church today. These go so far as to believe that missions, magazines and all ministries including educating should be only in local churches.

Now I ask again, is this enough? Since I likewise hold this to be biblical practice of a local church position, why do I still ask, is this enough? Because it is not enough. To be local church is not a reference to origin. I ask all who claim to be local church, when did that church (the institution as a New Testament doctrine) originate? Many fundamentalists and "independent" Baptists hold this from loosely to strictly practiced but believe the church (as a New Testament institution or doctrine) originated the day of Pentecost.

To be local church is only one's position on the practice of the church, but one may practice correctly and of an incorrect institution.

Two-church theology? Could you explain? Over the years I've heard good preachers declare to me that they are "local church." They even go on to explain their position which identifies actually as mine, not that I am the measuring stick, but to the biblical measure we both seem to hold.

However, I still do not find comfort. "Why?" I ask. Well, I believe it's because we hold to different doctrines of the church. But how could that be when we are both "local church?" It's the "two-church" doctrine. Let me explain.

Many fundamentalists and fundamental Baptist brethren hold a two-church theology of the church. They do hold a "local church" position but not as the only or original church. Actually they believe the "church" is all the blood washed saints from Pentecost to the rapture, so that this is the "body of Christ." They hold that the saved are "baptized of the Holy Spirit" unto salvation using I Cor. 12:13 as their proof text. They believe at the moment of salvation they are baptized

by the Holy Spirit. Those who believe this then claim to hold to the "local church" as God's agent upon earth during this Age. In other words they hold a "two-church" theology. They hold a "universal invisible church body of Christ" position as the originating and true composition of the biblical church, but hold that God has local churches, as agencies through which He works in this Age. Now that is a two-church theology. Those which hold that are able to hold a strong "local church," God only works through the local church practice. Many who are two-church are Baptist, historically. Meaning, they believe in Baptist's history (to a point). They may even lean against para-church ministries boards, etc. in holding strongly to the local church only agency through which God works now.

However, this "acting agent" doctrine of the local church does not necessarily believe that Jesus established His church during His ministry. Often it believes that the Holy Spirit established the universal body - church on the day of Pentecost.

You see, those who hold "two-church" theology believe the local church is an issue of "church practice" rather than "church origin." They are local church in the present practice of the church but universal church in the origination of the church. Personally I believe this is due to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the church.

Evolutionists and Creationists argue over models of origin and so do Universalists and localists argue over models of origin. As Creationists have the evidence substantiating their model or Evolutionists hold illusionary "proof," so the localists - those holding a local church origin position can show the sure Word of God to prove their model of origin for the church when the Universalists hold only logic and tradition.

The one model says Christ established the church, the whole church institution, during his own personal ministry upon earth as a local congregation then out of that single congregation birthed all other true churches down through the ages as a family is generated of an original "father." Such as Abraham fathered all Jewish people, and Noah all post-flood peoples, etc.

The other model says the Holy Spirit established the church at Pentecost as a universal body of all bloodwashed Christians born again between Pentecost and the rapture.

One model says the church is spiritual and universal. The other says it is both physical and spiritual, and local, or single congregations (plural).

One claims that universal body includes all the truly saved and that any and all Christian ministries (Let's qualify as fundamentally saved, ok.) are parts within the body of Christ/universal church and qualify as an arm, eye, etc. and is the Bride of Christ.

The other says that it is the local congregation made up of born again, properly baptized persons holding to doctrines true to the scriptures and that only ministries out of single congregations of such faith and practice are sound and acceptable to God. And that the members of such churches are the arms, eyes, etc. within their local "body of Christ," and is the Bride of Christ.

Obviously, these two positions could become enemies to each other as opposing models. While each could and often do voice a claim to the local church as God's practicing agent on earth now, only one holds that that same "local" church is also the originated church too. One holds that the local agent church is the physical practice element of the "true" church universal.

True Historic Baptists have always believed that the church is local in nature, origin, and practice. Protestants have always believed that the church is inclusive - a universal body in origin and practice. True Historic Baptists have always held that the purity of the church-body-bride is doctrinal correctness, not just blood washing. However, Protestants and Protestant fundamentalists, (even those who are Baptist "Baptists") have always held that the church-body-bride's purity is only blood washing (new birth), and that doctrinal correctness was essentially non-essential. These have been, for the most part, inclusive of varieties of doctrine. It does make a difference what you believe concerning this model issue.

As for those who are "two-church" in their theology (you will find it in their ecclesiology section of theology described as two-churches) let me personally state that I would hold that the two-church theology not of like faith nor practice with myself. As I personally believe the scriptures teaches accurately only one model of church - that being that it originated a local congregation and continues as such.

They misunderstand the context and the difference of being indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit with being baptized by the Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was a one time event on the day of Pentecost (took place upon the church of Jerusalem in particular; collectively that is) handing over and empowering the Work of the Lord Jesus Christ to each and every local body before he ascended to heaven. He did it upon the church of Jerusalem that one and only time. It was Him enabling and handing His power and earthly ministry work to them but applies to each and every local body from there on.. Each and every local body is authorized to carry out the great commission (Matt:28-18-20; Luke 24:47, Mark 16:15, John 20:21, Acts 1:8). This is what the baptism of the Holy Spirit brought and enabled for each and every local church to do the great commission. It was God's way of handing over Christ earthly ministry work to each local body. It was a one time event handing over his requirements while also enabling them to do so. Then from there on God would allow that one time event of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to enable each and every other body that would ever exist to be able to do Christ earthly work and great commission before he ascended into heaven.