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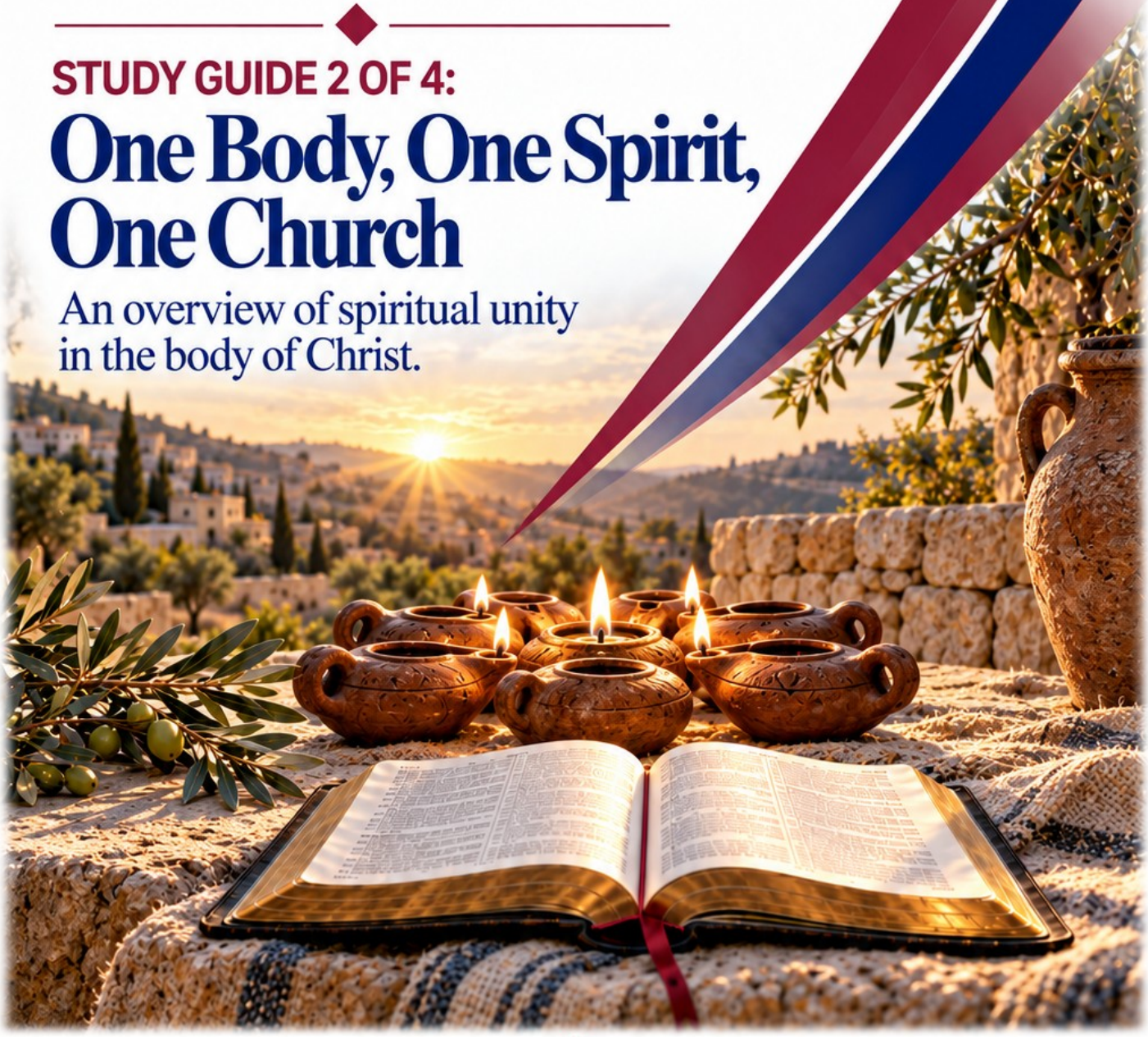
STUDY GUIDE 41 2 OF 4

The New Testament Church

STUDY GUIDE 2 OF 4:

One Body, One Spirit, One Church

An overview of spiritual unity in the body of Christ.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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The New Testament Church is one spiritual body belonging to Jesus Christ. It is not divided into separate spiritual bodies according to denominations, organisations, cultures or locations. Scripture declares that there is one body and one Spirit, and every person who is truly born again belongs to that body.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

These words provide the foundation for this Study Guide. The unity of the Church does not come from human organisation or from placing different religious systems together under one structure. It comes from Jesus Christ Himself because there is one Lord, one Spirit and one spiritual body.

Jesus also made it clear that entrance into His Church is through Him.

Jesus said in **John 10:9**:

> *"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."*

Jesus Christ is the Door. A person does not enter His spiritual body through water baptism, a membership ceremony, acceptance by a congregation or compliance with denominational requirements. A person enters through salvation by being born again and receiving the Spirit of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. The born-again believer does not receive Jesus Christ at one time and then receive another divine Person called the Holy Spirit at a later time. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer by His Spirit.

This truth also determines who belongs to the Church. Human organisations may contain both saved and unsaved people, but the spiritual body of Christ consists only of those who belong to Jesus Christ. The Lord knows those who are His and adds the saved to His Church.

This Study Guide will therefore examine the meaning of one body, one Spirit and one Church. We will consider Jesus Christ as the only Door, the new birth as the entrance into His body, the Spirit of Christ as the life of that body, and the difference between the one spiritual Church and the many religious organisations that exist in the world.

The purpose is not to create another sectarian boundary. It is to allow Scripture to identify those who belong to Jesus Christ and to recognise the spiritual unity that already exists among all who have been born again.

The Church is one because its Head is one, its Spirit is one and its life is found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do one Lord and one Spirit explain the unity of Christ's Church?

Personal Reflection

Have you allowed denominational boundaries to determine whom you regard as Christ's people?

Action Step

Identify one boundary in your thinking. Explain how the life of Christ within should change the way you regard a born-again believer beyond your assembly.

INTRODUCTION: ONE CHURCH IN A DIVIDED RELIGIOUS WORLD

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The religious world presents a confusing picture. Many organisations, denominations and movements use the name of Jesus Christ and describe themselves as churches, yet they often differ in doctrine, membership requirements, worship and government. If we begin with those divisions, it can appear that Christ has many separate churches.

The New Testament presents a very different picture.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Paul does not describe many spiritual bodies belonging to Jesus Christ. He declares, *"There is one body."* That body has one Spirit, one Lord, one faith and one baptism. The unity of the Church therefore begins with Jesus Christ and the spiritual life He gives to those who belong to Him.

This does not mean that all people who use the name Christian understand every doctrine in the same way. Neither does it mean that every person connected with a religious organisation is unsaved. Born-again believers may be found in different religious settings and may possess different levels of understanding. The important distinction is between the spiritual body Jesus Christ created and the earthly organisations within which people may gather.

Division Is Not the Nature of Christ's Church

Division appeared even among believers in the days of the apostles. Paul rebuked the Corinthians because they had begun to gather their identity around particular ministers.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:3-4**:

> *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"*

Paul did not accept division as the proper condition of the Church. He traced it to carnality and to believers placing too much attention upon men. One said, *"I am of Paul,"* while another said, *"I am of Apollos."*

The answer was not to create another party with a better name. The answer was to return attention to Jesus Christ.

Paul continued in **1 Corinthians 3:5-7**:

> *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."*

Ministers have an important place, but they do not create separate bodies around themselves. God gives the spiritual life, and Jesus Christ remains the Head of the one body.

The Question Is Who Belongs to Christ

This Study Guide therefore does not begin by asking which earthly organisation has the strongest claim to be the Church. Scripture directs us to a more important question: Who belongs to Jesus Christ?

Paul provides the determining principle in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

A person belongs to Christ when the Spirit of Christ dwells within. This immediately moves the question of Church membership away from human records, denominational names and outward ceremonies and places it where Scripture places it: in the new birth and the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. There are not different Spirits creating different spiritual bodies. The same Jesus Christ dwells within every person who has truly been born again.

Christ Is the Centre of Unity

The unity of the Church is not created by persuading all religious organisations to unite under one human structure. Organisational union and spiritual unity are not the same thing. The unity of the body already exists in Jesus Christ because every genuine member receives life from the same Head and the same Spirit.

This Study Guide will examine that truth carefully. We will consider Jesus Christ as the only Door into His Church, the new birth as entrance into His body, the Lord's work of adding the saved to His Church, and the meaning of Paul's declaration that there is one body and one Spirit.

We will also examine why receiving the Holy Spirit is not a later experience added to salvation, why human membership conditions cannot determine who belongs to Christ, and how Scripture can speak of local *"churches"* while still teaching that Christ has only one spiritual body.

The religious world may appear divided into many churches, but the Word of God directs us beyond the divisions of men.

There is one body, one Spirit and one Lord: Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must unity begin with Christ rather than with an organisation?

Personal Reflection

When you meet a believer from another congregation, is Christ or the congregation's name your first consideration?

Action Step

Examine an attitude towards another assembly. Describe a response that recognises your shared life in Jesus Christ.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE DOOR

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If there is one spiritual body belonging to Jesus Christ, then an important question follows: How does a person enter that body? Scripture does not leave the answer to human tradition or religious organisation. Jesus Christ Himself declared that He is the Door.

Jesus said in **John 10:7-9**:

> *"Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."*

Jesus does not point to a ceremony, denomination or membership process and call it the door. He says plainly, *"I am the door."* Entrance into the spiritual people of God is therefore through Jesus Christ Himself.

There Is No Other Entrance

Earlier in the same chapter, Jesus warned against trying to enter another way.

Jesus said in **John 10:1**:

> *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."*

The picture is clear. There is a rightful entrance, and there are attempted entrances that do not pass through the Door. Spiritually, no human method can replace Jesus Christ.

A person cannot enter Christ's Church because a congregation has accepted them. Neither can a minister, committee, denomination or religious institution place someone into the spiritual body of Christ. Human beings may recognise a profession of faith, but only Jesus Christ can give spiritual life.

The Church belongs to Him, and He determines the entrance.

Jesus Connects the Door With Salvation

Jesus explains what happens when someone enters through Him: *"by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved."* The Door is therefore directly connected with salvation.

This is important because earthly religious membership and salvation are not the same thing. A person may be accepted into an organisation without being born again, while a person who has genuinely been born again belongs to Jesus Christ even if no earthly organisation has placed that person's name upon a membership roll.

Jesus stated the necessity of the new birth when speaking to Nicodemus.

Jesus said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

Jesus did not present the new birth as an optional spiritual experience for certain believers. He said, *"Ye must be born again."* The person who enters through Christ receives new spiritual life from God.

The next section will examine this new birth more fully. At this point, the essential truth is that salvation and entrance into Christ's spiritual body cannot be separated.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is Jesus Christ the Door to salvation and His Church?

Personal Reflection

Have you depended on an outward membership process rather than the new birth to identify the Church?

Action Step

Consider Jesus' words, 'I am the door.' Explain what assumption needs correcting and how it changes your view of membership.

Outward Requirements Cannot Become Another Door

Religious organisations often establish conditions by which people are formally received into their fellowship. Some may require particular doctrines, ceremonies or outward practices before recognising someone as a member.

Administrative requirements may determine membership in an earthly organisation, but they cannot determine membership in Christ's spiritual body. No outward act can become another door beside Jesus Christ.

Paul warned against being moved away from the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:8-10**:

> *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The believer is complete in Christ. Salvation does not need to be completed by water baptism, communion, feet washing, a later spiritual experience or acceptance into a religious organisation. None of these can add to the spiritual life received in Jesus Christ.

Complete means complete.

No Person Can Open or Close Christ's Door

Because Jesus Christ is the Door, no human being has authority to shut out someone whom Christ has received. Neither can a person be made part of His spiritual body simply because human leaders have accepted them.

Jesus said in **Revelation 3:7-8**:

> *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."*

The authority belongs to Jesus Christ. What He opens, no man can shut. Ministers may faithfully teach the Gospel and recognise those who profess salvation, but they do not control entrance into the body of Christ.

This protects the Church from human ownership. The Door belongs to Christ, and entrance into His spiritual body remains under His authority alone.

Jesus Is the Way

The same truth appears elsewhere in the words of Jesus.

Jesus said in **John 14:6**:

> *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Jesus does not simply show the way. He is the Way. He does not simply stand beside the entrance. He is the Door.

The spiritual Church therefore cannot have several entrances depending upon denomination, culture or religious background. There is one entrance because there is one Saviour. A person does not enter through a preacher, a sacrament, an ordinance, a church name or a human organisation.

A person enters through Jesus Christ.

The Door Leads Into One Body

Because Jesus Christ is the one Door, everyone who truly enters comes into the same spiritual body. There is not one entrance for one denomination and another entrance for another group.

This prepares us to understand why Scripture can declare that there is one body and one Spirit. The same Christ saves every believer, the same Spirit gives spiritual life, and the same Lord adds the saved to His Church.

The doorway into the New Testament Church is therefore neither complicated nor controlled by man. Jesus Christ is the Door.

Through Him a person is saved, born again and brought into the spiritual body that belongs to Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does entering through Christ lead into one body?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever withheld fellowship because another believer gathers somewhere else?

Action Step

Identify any such hesitation. Explain how you will receive a born-again believer as a fellow member of Christ's body.

BORN AGAIN INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

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Jesus Christ is the Door into His Church, but Scripture also explains what happens when a person enters through Him. The person is born again. The new birth is not admission into a religious organisation; it is the work of God by which a person receives spiritual life in Jesus Christ and becomes part of His spiritual body.

Jesus made the necessity of the new birth unmistakably clear when He spoke with Nicodemus.

Jesus said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

Jesus distinguished natural birth from spiritual birth. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh,"* but *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* Entrance into the kingdom of God therefore requires a spiritual birth that only God can give, and the controlling statement is clear: *"Ye must be born again."*

The New Birth Gives Spiritual Life

A person may become religious without being born again. Someone may attend worship, learn Christian teaching, adopt moral standards and become a recognised member of a congregation, yet none of those things can produce spiritual life.

The new birth is God's work within the person. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Paul does not describe someone who has simply adopted a new religious identity. He speaks of a *"new creature"* who is now *"in Christ."* The change reaches far deeper than an outward association because God has given new spiritual life.

This is why membership in Christ's Church cannot be produced by an earthly membership process. Human beings may receive someone into a local congregation, but only God can make that person a new creature in Christ.

Born of the Spirit

Jesus said that the person who enters the kingdom must be *"born of the Spirit."* The new birth therefore cannot be separated from receiving the Spirit of God.

Paul gives us the same test in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Paul's statement is decisive. If someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ. The person who is genuinely born again therefore possesses the Spirit of Christ.

There is no period after the new birth when a believer truly belongs to Jesus Christ but has not yet received His Spirit. The Spirit is not an additional experience required later to make the believer complete. Jesus Christ comes to dwell within at the new birth.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and His indwelling presence is the spiritual life of the believer.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does new birth by the Spirit bring a person into Christ's body?

Personal Reflection

What have you relied upon as evidence that someone belongs to Christ?

Action Step

Compare your answer with Jesus' teaching on the new birth. Describe any correction needed in your judgement of others.

Brought Into Christ's Body

The new birth does more than change the individual in isolation. The person who receives spiritual life in Christ is brought into the one body that belongs to Christ.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:12-13**:

> *"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Paul tells us both how many bodies there are and how believers enter that body. The body is one, and believers are brought into it *"by one Spirit."*

This is spiritual baptism. The Spirit of God brings the born-again believer into Christ and into His body. No outward ceremony can perform the work that Paul attributes to the Spirit.

Water baptism cannot place a person into Christ's spiritual body. A church membership ceremony cannot do it, and a minister cannot do it. God brings the believer into the body through the new birth and the work of His Spirit.

Salvation Is the Rule of Membership

This gives us a simple biblical principle concerning membership in the Church Jesus built: those who are saved belong to His body. The Church does not establish additional spiritual conditions after salvation before a person can truly belong to Christ.

If Jesus Christ has received someone through the new birth and His Spirit dwells within that person, the essential question of spiritual membership has already been settled by God.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:4-6**:

> *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"*

Those who were spiritually dead have been *"quickened"* together with Christ. The word describes the giving of life. Salvation therefore brings the believer into a new spiritual position *"in Christ Jesus."*

This is not something an organisation can confer. It is the work of God.

Complete at the New Birth

Because the believer receives Jesus Christ at the new birth, salvation is complete in Him. Nothing needs to be added later in order to make the believer spiritually whole or finally qualified to belong to Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The believer is *"complete in him."* Spiritual growth will follow, understanding will deepen and the believer will learn to walk faithfully according to the life of Christ within, but growth must never be confused with receiving more of Christ in order to become complete.

The born-again believer possesses the Person.

Human Membership Cannot Replace New Birth

A religious organisation may establish practical conditions for participation in its activities, but such requirements must never be confused with entrance into the body of Christ. A name on a membership roll cannot produce the new birth, and the absence of a name from a human roll cannot remove someone whom God has brought into Christ.

The distinction is fundamental. Earthly membership is administered by people, while spiritual membership is created by God.

The Church Jesus built is therefore not composed of everyone who attends Christian meetings or identifies with Christianity. It consists of those who have been born again, received the Spirit of Christ and been brought by that one Spirit into the one body.

Jesus said, *"Ye must be born again."* The new birth gives spiritual life, the Spirit of Christ dwells within the believer, and by that one Spirit the believer is brought into the body of Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can a human membership record never replace new birth?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed that a church name or membership list proves a person is saved?

Action Step

Examine that assumption before God. Explain how the new birth should govern the way you speak about spiritual membership.

THE LORD ADDS TO HIS CHURCH

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Jesus said, *"I will build my church."* If Jesus Christ is the Builder, it follows that He also determines who belongs to the spiritual body He is building. The New Testament does not present Church membership as something created by human approval. It presents the Lord Himself as adding the saved to His Church.

Luke recorded what happened after the Gospel was preached on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:46-47**:

> *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*

The important words are *"the Lord added to the church."* The apostles preached the Gospel, but they did not possess the power to place anyone into Christ's spiritual body. The Lord added those who were being saved.

Christ Builds by Giving Spiritual Life

This agrees with what Jesus had already promised: *"I will build my church."* Christ builds His Church as people hear the Gospel, believe, are born again and receive His Spirit. Human ministers have an important part in proclaiming the Word, but spiritual life comes from God.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:5-7**:

> *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."*

Paul and Apollos served faithfully, but Paul refused to give human ministers credit for what only God could do. One planted and another watered, but *"God gave the increase."* A preacher can explain salvation, a congregation can welcome a believer, and ministers can teach and care for those who have been saved, but none of these actions creates membership in Christ's spiritual body.

God gives the life, and the Lord adds to His Church.

Human Recognition Is Not Spiritual Membership

Local congregations need practical ways to know those who regularly fellowship and serve among them. Records and orderly arrangements may be useful for administration, but they must never be confused with God's spiritual membership.

A person's name may appear on a religious membership roll while that person has never been born again. Another person may genuinely belong to Jesus Christ even though no earthly organisation has formally accepted them as a member. The determining question is not whether human beings have recorded someone's name, but whether that person belongs to Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The Spirit of Christ within the believer shows that the person belongs to Christ. Human recognition should acknowledge what God has done; it cannot produce what only God can accomplish.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What is the difference between human recognition and belonging to Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you judged someone by a membership record rather than by the truth that Christ knows His own?

Action Step

Identify a judgement you may need to correct, and explain how you will speak of that person's place in Christ more carefully.

The Lord Knows Those Who Are His

Human beings cannot always see the heart, but the Lord knows perfectly those who belong to Him. Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:19**:

> *"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."*

The statement is clear: *"The Lord knoweth them that are his."* Christ's knowledge of His people is not dependent upon denominational records, institutional boundaries or human recognition.

This should also guard us against claiming that every born-again believer must belong to one particular earthly organisation before that person can be recognised as part of Christ's Church. If the Lord has saved a person and His Spirit dwells within them, that person belongs to Him. The Church is larger than any one earthly organisation because the Church consists of all those whom Christ has saved.

No Human Being Can Add to the Spiritual Body

This truth places ministers and congregations in their proper position. They may receive believers into fellowship, but they cannot make anyone a member of Christ. Neither can they remove someone from Christ simply by removing a name from an earthly record.

Matters of fellowship and discipline within a local congregation are important, but the spiritual body itself remains under the authority of Jesus Christ. He is the Head, He is the Door, He gives spiritual life, and He knows those who are His. The Church therefore remains His possession from beginning to end.

Salvation and Membership Belong Together

Acts 2 connects salvation with the Lord adding people to the Church. This is why the New Testament does not place another spiritual membership requirement between salvation and belonging to Christ.

A person does not first become saved and then wait for a second process before becoming part of Christ's body. At the new birth, the believer receives the Spirit of Christ and belongs to Him.

Paul's teaching concerning the body confirms this. Paul wrote 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."*

The work is accomplished by the Spirit. The believer is brought into the one body by the one Spirit. This leaves no room for another human doorway into the spiritual Church. Religious organisations may establish their own conditions for earthly membership, but those conditions cannot determine who belongs to Jesus Christ.

The Church Remains Christ's Work

The Church does not grow because human beings successfully enlarge an organisation. It grows as Jesus Christ saves people and gives them His Spirit. Ministers preach, believers witness and congregations serve, yet God gives the increase.

This keeps the glory where it belongs. No leader can claim ownership of those whom Christ has saved, and no organisation can claim exclusive authority over the body that belongs to Jesus.

The words of Acts remain the controlling truth: the Lord adds to His Church. Jesus Christ saves, Jesus Christ gives spiritual life, and Jesus Christ adds the born-again believer to His body.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is adding people to the Church the Lord's work?

Personal Reflection

Where have you given human organisations credit for spiritual life that only the Lord can give?

Action Step

Consider **Acts 2:47** *and identify any assumption to change. Explain how you will honour Christ as the One who adds to His Church.*

ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT

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The New Testament does not describe the Church as a collection of separate spiritual bodies joined together by agreement. Paul presents a much stronger truth. All who belong to Jesus Christ are members of one body, and that one body lives by one Spirit.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Paul repeatedly uses the word *"one."* There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God. The unity of the Church therefore comes from God Himself, not from an agreement created by religious organisations.

Christ Has One Body

Scripture has already identified the Church as the body of Christ. Paul now tells us plainly how many spiritual bodies Christ has: one.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:4-5**:

> *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

There are many members, but they do not form many bodies. They are *"one body in Christ."* Different believers may have different responsibilities, abilities and places of service, but those differences do not divide the body spiritually.

A hand and an eye do not become separate bodies because they perform different functions. Their diversity exists within one living body. In the same way, believers are joined together in Jesus Christ while serving according to the place God has given them.

Paul develops the same picture in **1 Corinthians 12:12**:

> *"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."*

The emphasis is clear. The body is one, even though its members are many.

One Spirit Gives Life to the Body

The unity of Christ's body cannot be separated from the one Spirit. Paul places the two truths together: *"There is one body, and one Spirit."*

The body does not live because its members have agreed to belong to the same organisation. It lives because the same Spirit of Christ dwells within every born-again believer.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Every genuine member of Christ's body possesses the Spirit of Christ. This gives the Church a spiritual unity that no earthly organisation can manufacture.

The same Christ dwells within believers in different nations, cultures and circumstances. They may never meet one another on earth, yet they belong to the same spiritual body because they possess the same Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the one Spirit give life to Christ's body?

Personal Reflection

How does sharing one Spirit challenge your attitude towards believers in different assemblies?

Action Step

Identify any distance you have created and describe how Christ's indwelling love should be expressed towards another believer.

Brought Into One Body by One Spirit

Paul explains how believers are brought into this body.

Paul wrote 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."*

The verse contains the same two controlling truths: one Spirit and one body. The Spirit brings the believer into Christ's body.

Paul also removes distinctions that might otherwise divide people spiritually. Jew and Gentile are not placed into separate covenant bodies, and bond and free do not enter different Churches. All who are born again are brought by the one Spirit into the same body.

This spiritual baptism is the work of God. It does not depend upon an outward ceremony performed by man. At the new birth, the believer receives the Spirit of Christ and is brought into His body.

The Church therefore has one spiritual source of life and one spiritual means of entrance.

Unity Is Already a Spiritual Reality

Christian unity is often spoken of as though believers must first create it. Scripture presents spiritual unity as something God has already established in Christ.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:1-3**:

> *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

Paul does not tell believers to create the unity of the Spirit. He tells them to keep it. The unity already exists because the same Spirit dwells within all who belong to Christ.

Believers are therefore called to walk in a way that expresses and preserves that spiritual reality. Unity cannot be produced simply by joining religious organisations together. Organisational union may bring institutions beneath one structure, but it cannot create the unity of the Spirit.

Only Christ can give that unity because only Christ can give spiritual life.

Human Division Does Not Create Another Body

Religious history contains many divisions, movements and denominations. These divisions are real at an organisational level, but they do not cause Jesus Christ to acquire additional spiritual bodies.

Christ still has one body.

A born-again believer may presently worship among people who carry a denominational name, while another believer may gather in a completely different setting. Their organisational circumstances may differ, but if both possess the Spirit of Christ, both belong to the same spiritual body.

This does not mean that doctrinal differences are unimportant. Truth matters, and every teaching must be measured by the Word of God. Spiritual unity must never become an excuse for accepting error as though all doctrines were equally true.

At the same time, disagreement in understanding does not give us authority to deny that someone belongs to Christ when that person has genuinely been born again and possesses His Spirit.

The Body Receives Its Unity From the Head

The Church is one because Jesus Christ is one. There are not several Heads governing several spiritual bodies. The same Jesus Christ is Head over all who belong to Him.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

The body receives both its life and direction from its Head. Its members do not become one by copying Jesus from the outside or by attempting to create religious uniformity. Jesus Christ

dwells within His born-again people by His Spirit, and His indwelling life is the source of their spiritual unity.

This is why genuine unity must always remain centred upon Jesus Christ.

One Body Because There Is One Spirit

The New Testament leaves us with a simple but powerful conclusion. Christ does not have one body for one denomination and another body for another. He does not have separate spiritual bodies for different nations, races or cultures.

There is one body because there is one Spirit. Every person who is born again receives the Spirit of Christ, and by that one Spirit every believer is brought into the same spiritual body.

Jesus Christ is the Head, and His indwelling Spirit is the life shared by every member. Paul's declaration therefore stands as one of the clearest descriptions of the New Testament Church: *"There is one body, and one Spirit."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is there one body when there is one Spirit?

Personal Reflection

What personal boundary between believers does the truth of one body challenge?

Action Step

Consider Ephesians 4. Name a boundary you need to reconsider and how you will seek fellowship without setting aside truth.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

The unity of the Church depends upon the truth that there is one Spirit. Scripture does not present the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of Christ as different Spirits dwelling within different believers. These expressions identify the one Spirit of the one God who dwells within all who have been born again.

Paul makes this especially clear when describing those who belong to Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Within the same verse, Paul speaks first of *"the Spirit of God"* and then of *"the Spirit of Christ."* He does not describe two Spirits. The Spirit dwelling within the believer is the Spirit of God, and that same Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.

The Holy Ghost Dwells Within the Believer

Paul uses another expression when writing to the Corinthians.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**:

> *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

Here the indwelling Spirit is called *"the Holy Ghost."* Elsewhere Paul calls Him the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. These are not separate divine beings entering the believer at different times. They describe the one Spirit dwelling within God's people.

Paul makes the same truth clear in another verse.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

The believer is called the temple of God because the Spirit of God dwells within. This agrees perfectly with Paul's statement that the believer is the temple of the Holy Ghost and with **Romans 8:9**, where the same indwelling Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ.

The terminology changes, but the Spirit does not.

The Lord Is That Spirit

Paul gives an even more direct statement concerning the identity of the indwelling Spirit.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 3:17**:

> *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*

The statement is simple: *"the Lord is that Spirit."* Jesus Christ is not separated from the Holy Spirit as though the believer receives one divine Person at salvation and another divine Person later. The Lord who saves is the Lord who comes to dwell within His people as Spirit.

This is why the New Testament can speak naturally of Christ dwelling within the believer. Paul does not describe Christ as remaining permanently outside His people while another Person takes His place within them. He describes the mystery of the Gospel as *"Christ in you."*

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:26-27**:

> *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The indwelling reality is Jesus Christ Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Bible connect the Spirit of God with the Spirit of Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you thought of the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of Christ as different divine presences?

Action Step

Compare **Romans 8:9** *with the teaching on one Spirit. Explain what you must correct in your understanding of Christ within.*

Jesus Promised to Come to His People

Before His death, Jesus prepared His disciples for the coming indwelling presence of the Spirit.

Jesus said in **John 14:16-18**:

> *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Jesus did not tell the disciples that He would leave them permanently and that another separate divine Person would replace Him. After speaking of the Comforter, He immediately said, *"I will come to you."*

That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost in A.D. 31. Jesus Christ returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The One who had been with them would now be in them.

The Person had come.

God Himself Dwells Within His People

Paul also describes believers collectively as the temple of the living God.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 6:16**:

> *"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

God says, *"I will dwell in them."* This is the spiritual reality of the New Covenant Church. God does not dwell within His people through a Spirit separate from Himself. He personally dwells within them.

The Spirit of God is therefore not an influence, force or lesser power sent from God. The Spirit is God Himself dwelling within His born-again people. This is why the Church is a spiritual habitation rather than simply an organisation. Its members share the same indwelling life because the same Spirit dwells within them.

One Spirit, One Indwelling Christ

The New Testament uses several expressions for the Spirit, but these expressions must not be turned into separate divine Persons or separate spiritual experiences. Scripture speaks of the

Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Lord and the Spirit of Christ while consistently presenting one indwelling Spirit.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

There are not several Spirits producing several Churches. There is one Spirit giving life to one body.

This truth is essential to understanding the Church. Every born-again believer receives the same Jesus Christ. He does not dwell more fully in one believer because that person belongs to a particular denomination, has performed a particular ordinance or claims a later spiritual experience.

Jesus Christ personally dwells within all who belong to Him by His Spirit.

The Life of the Body Is Christ Within

Because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, the Christian life cannot be separated from the indwelling Jesus. Believers are not left to copy His life from the outside through human effort. His own life within them becomes the source of spiritual fruit, holiness, love and obedience.

This also explains the unity of the Church. The same Christ lives within every genuine member of His body. Their unity does not begin with an organisation or a shared denominational name; it begins with the one Spirit dwelling within them.

The Scriptural testimony is therefore consistent. The Spirit of God dwells within the believer, the believer is the temple of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, the Lord is that Spirit, and the mystery of the Gospel is *"Christ in you."*

There is one body because there is one Spirit, and that Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is Christ within His people the life of the body?

Personal Reflection

Have you relied on organisation or outward agreement to create the unity that comes from Christ?

Action Step

Identify one attitude that overlooks Christ's presence in His people. Explain how His life within should shape your fellowship.

NO SECOND SPIRIT EXPERIENCE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, a born-again believer does not receive Jesus Christ at salvation and then wait for the Holy Spirit to come at a later time. Scripture presents one Spirit and one new-birth experience in which the believer receives the Spirit of Christ.

Paul gives a clear test of belonging to Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Paul does not describe someone who genuinely belongs to Christ while still waiting to receive the Spirit. He says plainly that if a person does not have the Spirit of Christ, *"he is none of his."* The Spirit of Christ is therefore not an additional blessing given sometime after salvation. His indwelling presence is essential to the new birth itself.

The Believer Receives the Spirit at Salvation

When the Gospel is believed and a person is born again, that person receives the Spirit of Christ. Paul connects believing the Gospel with being sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote in **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,"*

The believer hears the Gospel, trusts in Christ and is sealed with the Holy Spirit. Paul does not insert a second stage of salvation in which the believer remains without the Spirit until a later spiritual experience.

The Holy Spirit is God's seal within the believer. He is not a later addition to someone who already belongs fully to Christ without Him. This agrees with **Romans 8:9**: to belong to Christ is to possess the Spirit of Christ.

One Spirit, Not Two Experiences of Different Persons

Some religious teaching separates conversion from receiving the Holy Spirit. In that framework, a person may be taught that Jesus is received first and that the Holy Spirit comes later through another experience. Scripture does not support such a separation.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

There is one Spirit. The believer is not first joined to Jesus Christ through one Spirit and later completed by receiving another. Jesus Christ Himself is the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of Christ are not separate divine Persons received at different stages of Christian experience.

At the new birth, the believer receives Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does new birth not require a later second Spirit to enter Christ's body?

Personal Reflection

Has a teaching about receiving the Holy Spirit later caused you to question the completeness of the new birth?

Action Step

Use **Romans 8:9** *and* **Colossians 2:10** *to examine that belief. Explain how your confidence in the indwelling Christ should change.*

The Spirit Baptises Into the Body

Paul also connects receiving the Spirit directly with entrance into Christ's body.

Paul wrote 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."*

The believer is brought into the body *"by one Spirit."* This spiritual baptism is not a later experience for someone who has already become part of Christ's body. It is the work by which the believer is brought into that body.

The same Spirit who gives new life also unites the believer with Christ and His Church. Holy Spirit baptism therefore belongs to the new birth. It is not a second blessing required after salvation to make the believer complete.

The Born-Again Believer Is Complete in Christ

If the believer had to wait for a later reception of the Holy Spirit before becoming spiritually complete, Paul's words to the Colossians would lose their force.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The believer is complete in Christ. Complete does not mean partly saved, partly indwelt or waiting for another divine Person to arrive. The person who has been born again possesses Jesus Christ by His Spirit.

This completeness does not mean that spiritual growth has ended. Believers continue to grow in understanding, maturity, obedience, wisdom and fruitfulness. However, growth must never be confused with receiving more of Christ because the believer lacked Him at the new birth.

The believer possesses the Person.

Growth Is Not a Second Reception

The New Testament speaks often about believers growing, walking in the Spirit and yielding themselves to God. None of these expressions means that the believer must receive the Holy Spirit again as though He were absent.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:16**:

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

Paul's instruction is to walk in the Spirit, not to seek a Spirit who has not yet been received. The believer already possesses the Spirit and is called to live according to His indwelling life.

The same principle applies when believers are encouraged to become spiritually mature or fruitful. Spiritual maturity is the life of Christ increasingly governing and being expressed through the believer. It is not a second work that supplies a missing Christ or missing Holy Spirit.

Pentecost Does Not Create a Two-Stage Pattern

The Day of Pentecost was the fulfilment of Jesus' promise to come to His people as the Holy Spirit. It was a unique point in the unfolding of the New Covenant, when the Church was revealed as the Spirit-filled body of Christ.

Jesus had promised in **John 14:18**:

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost in A.D. 31. After that fulfilment, the Gospel does not establish a permanent pattern in which every believer must first be born again without the Spirit and then later repeat the disciples' historical transition.

The Person has come.

Those who are born again now receive the Spirit of Christ at salvation.

One New Birth, One Spirit, One Body

The teaching of Scripture is consistent. A person must be born again. At the new birth, the believer receives the Spirit of Christ. By that one Spirit, the believer is brought into the one body and is complete in Jesus Christ.

There is no need for a later experience to supply another Spirit or complete a salvation that was previously unfinished. The spiritual life of the believer begins with Christ dwelling within, and everything that follows, including growth, holiness, obedience, service and fruitfulness, flows from His indwelling life.

Paul's words therefore remain decisive: *"Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The born-again believer belongs to Christ because the Spirit of Christ dwells within. There is one Spirit, received at the new birth, and that one Spirit is the life of the one body.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are new birth, the one Spirit and the one body connected?

Personal Reflection

What does receiving Christ's Spirit at the new birth mean for your assurance of belonging to Him?

Action Step

Identify any belief that treats salvation as incomplete. Explain how the one Spirit and one body correct that belief.

ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM

BACK TO CONTENTS

Paul's description of the unity of the Church continues beyond the words *"one body, and one Spirit."* He shows that every part of New Covenant life centres upon the same Jesus Christ and the same saving work of God.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

The Church has one Head because there is one Lord. It possesses one saving faith because there is one Gospel centred upon Jesus Christ. It has one baptism because there is one spiritual work by which the believer is brought into Christ and into His body.

One Lord

The Lord of the Church is Jesus Christ. He does not share His headship with another spiritual ruler, nor are believers divided among several Lords.

Peter declared in **Acts 2:36**:

> *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

The Jesus who died and rose again is both Lord and Christ. Every person who belongs to the Church belongs to Him.

This immediately removes human personalities from the centre of Christian identity. Paul had already rebuked the Corinthians for saying, *"I am of Paul"* or *"I am of Apollos."* The Church cannot be divided spiritually around ministers, founders or movements because all born-again believers belong to the same Lord.

Jesus Christ must therefore have the preeminence in every congregation and in every believer's life. Ministers serve under Him, but they cannot take His place. There is one Lord.

One Faith

Paul also declares that there is *"one faith."* The faith of the New Testament is not faith in a religious institution or confidence in a set of outward ceremonies. It is faith centred upon Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation found in Him.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:16**:

> *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."*

Salvation rests in Jesus Christ, not in human works. The Church therefore shares one saving faith because every genuine believer has come to God through the same Lord.

This does not mean that every believer immediately possesses the same degree of understanding. People grow in knowledge and may need correction as they learn the Word of God. Yet their spiritual life does not originate in different Gospels.

Paul warned in **Galatians 1:8-9**:

> *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."*

There is one Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is one faith upon which the Church stands.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does one faith unite those who belong to the one Lord?

Personal Reflection

Have differences in understanding made you overlook the saving faith shared with another believer?

Action Step

Consider one doctrinal difference. Explain how you will hold to biblical truth while recognising faith in Jesus Christ.

One Baptism

Paul then makes another definite statement: *"one baptism."* The baptism that places a person into Christ's spiritual body is identified elsewhere by Paul.

Paul wrote 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."*

The agent is plainly identified as *"one Spirit,"* and the destination is *"one body."* This is the baptism that belongs to New Covenant entrance. It is the inward work of God by which the believer is born again, receives the Spirit of Christ and is brought into His spiritual body.

Physical water cannot perform the spiritual work that Paul assigns to the Spirit. A minister may place a person into water, but only God can place a person into Christ.

The Baptism Occurs at the New Birth

Spirit baptism is not a later experience for someone who has already become part of Christ's body. It occurs when the person is born again.

Paul says that *"by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body."* If someone has not yet been brought into the body by the Spirit, that person has not yet entered the spiritual Church.

This agrees with Jesus' teaching concerning the new birth. Jesus said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

The entrance is spiritual. A person must be born of the Spirit.

Paul describes the same saving work in **Titus 3:5**:

> *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"*

Salvation is not produced by outward works. It is *"the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,"* the inward work of God giving new spiritual life.

Water Cannot Add to the One Baptism

This distinction is important because water baptism is often treated as though it places someone into the Church or completes an entrance that began at salvation. Scripture assigns that work to the Spirit.

The believer is already complete in Christ at the new birth. An outward ordinance cannot place the believer more fully into Jesus or make the believer more complete.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:10**:

> *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

If the believer is complete in Christ and has already been brought by one Spirit into the one body, no later water ceremony can complete that spiritual work. The one baptism of New Covenant entry is therefore the baptism of the Spirit into Jesus Christ and His body.

Complete means complete.

One Saving Reality in Jesus Christ

The three expressions belong together: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is one Lord because Jesus Christ alone is the Head and Saviour of His people. There is one faith because salvation rests in the one Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is one baptism because the one Spirit brings every born-again believer into the same body.

None of these truths depends upon denomination, nationality or religious background. Jew and Gentile enter through the same Christ. Every believer receives the same Spirit and is brought into the same body.

The unity of the Church is therefore not created by combining religious organisations. It already exists in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

There is one Lord: Jesus Christ. There is one faith: the Gospel faith centred upon Him. There is one baptism: the work of the one Spirit bringing the born-again believer into His body.

Everything returns to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does salvation in Jesus Christ make one people?

Personal Reflection

What have you treated as necessary for salvation in addition to faith in Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Compare that idea with the one Lord, one faith and one baptism. State what you will now believe about completeness in Christ.

CHURCH OR CHURCHES?

BACK TO CONTENTS

The New Testament declares that there is one body, yet it also uses both the words church and churches. At first, this may appear contradictory. If Jesus Christ has one spiritual body, why does Scripture sometimes speak of several churches?

The answer becomes clear when we distinguish between the one spiritual body of Christ and local assemblies of believers. There is one Church in the spiritual sense, but members of that one Church gather in many different places.

The Church Is One Body

The controlling truth must remain Paul's statement concerning the body of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

There is one body because there is one Spirit and one Lord. Human geography cannot divide that spiritual reality. Believers living in different cities or nations do not belong to different spiritual bodies when the same Jesus Christ dwells within them.

Paul had already identified the Church as Christ's body.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

Jesus Christ has one body of which He is the Head. The word churches therefore cannot mean that Christ possesses many separate spiritual bodies.

Local Assemblies of the One Church

The Greek word translated church is EKKLESIA, which can refer to an assembly or congregation. The context determines whether Scripture is speaking broadly of the body of Christ or of believers gathered in a particular locality.

Paul demonstrated this when writing to the believers at Corinth.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:2**:

> *"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:"*

Paul speaks of *"the church of God which is at Corinth."* He is identifying a local assembly by its location, not describing another spiritual body with a different Head or Spirit.

Notice also that Paul immediately connects those believers with *"all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord."* The believers at Corinth were local, but their spiritual identity was shared with believers elsewhere because all belonged to the same Jesus Christ.

"The Churches of Galatia"

The New Testament also uses the plural when referring to several local assemblies within a region.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 1:1-2**:

> *"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:"*

The plural *"churches of Galatia"* refers to local assemblies in different places throughout that region. Paul was not teaching that Galatia contained several independent spiritual bodies of Christ.

Each local assembly consisted of believers gathering in a particular place, while every born-again believer belonged spiritually to the same body. Scripture may therefore speak of the Church when referring to Christ's one spiritual body and of churches when referring to local gatherings of believers.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can the Bible speak of many local churches and still teach one Church?

Personal Reflection

Have you mistaken several local churches for several spiritual bodies of Christ?

Action Step

Compare **Galatians 1:2** *with* **Ephesians 4:4**. *Explain how that distinction will change your view of believers in other places.*

Location Does Not Create a Different Body

A congregation may gather in Brisbane, Nairobi, Rome, Corinth or another location. The geographical name helps us identify where those believers meet, but it does not create another spiritual Church.

The same principle applies whether believers gather in a house, hall or larger meeting place. Their location does not determine their spiritual membership. Jesus Christ determines that membership through the new birth.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:4-5**:

> *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

"We, being many," are still *"one body in Christ."* The many members may be scattered across many places, but they remain spiritually joined to the same Christ.

A Denomination Is Not Another Body of Christ

This distinction is especially important when considering denominations. A denomination is an earthly religious organisation with its own name, structure, membership requirements and administration. It must not be confused with another spiritual body belonging to Jesus Christ.

Christ does not have a Baptist body, a Pentecostal body, a Methodist body, a Catholic body and a Church of God body as separate spiritual Churches. Scripture gives us no such picture. There is one body.

This does not mean that everyone associated with a denomination is unsaved. Born-again believers may be found within different religious organisations. If the Spirit of Christ dwells within them, they belong to His one spiritual body regardless of the organisational name surrounding them.

Neither does this mean that doctrinal truth is unimportant. Every teaching and practice must still be tested by Scripture. However, an earthly organisational boundary cannot become the boundary of Christ's spiritual body.

The Church Is Not Limited by an Earthly Name

No earthly organisation can rightly claim that every saved person must belong to its structure before that person can belong to the Church Jesus built. Such a claim would place human organisation above the new birth and the indwelling Spirit.

Paul gives the determining principle in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Belonging to Christ is determined by the Spirit of Christ dwelling within. An earthly organisation may carry a biblical name, including the name Church of God, but the name itself does not make that organisation identical with the whole spiritual Church.

The Church consists of all those who genuinely belong to Jesus Christ.

Many Assemblies, One Church

The New Testament therefore uses church and churches without contradiction. There are many local assemblies because believers live and gather in many places. There is one spiritual Church because every born-again believer belongs to the same Jesus Christ, possesses the same Spirit and has been brought into the same body.

Local assemblies are important. Believers need fellowship, teaching, service and mutual care. Yet no local gathering becomes a separate body of Christ.

The spiritual reality remains unchanged:

Many assemblies may gather in many places, but Jesus Christ has one body, one Spirit and one Church.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are many assemblies related to Christ's one Church?

Personal Reflection

Has the location of a meeting ever affected how fully you regarded someone as part of Christ's Church?

Action Step

Identify one practical barrier in your fellowship. Explain a Christ-centred step you will take to overcome it.

UNITY WITHOUT SECTARIANISM

BACK TO CONTENTS

The New Testament teaches that there is one body of Christ, yet human religious divisions have often separated people who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Scripture does not present those divisions as the source of Christian identity. The Church receives its unity from Jesus Christ and from the one Spirit dwelling within those who are born again.

Paul confronted this problem directly at Corinth.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:3-4**:

> *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"*

The Corinthians were beginning to identify themselves around particular ministers. Paul did not encourage those identities. He described the resulting envy, strife and divisions as carnality.

Christ, Not Men, Is the Centre

Paul immediately redirected attention away from himself and Apollos.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:5-7**:

> *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."*

Paul and Apollos were ministers, not competing heads of separate spiritual bodies. Their work was important, but God was the One who gave spiritual life. The same principle applies whenever believers begin to gather their identity around a particular preacher, movement, founder or organisation.

Ministers may serve faithfully, but they must never become the centre around which the Church is defined. Jesus Christ alone occupies that position.

Sectarianism Draws Human Boundaries

Sectarianism occurs when human boundaries are treated as though they were the boundaries of Christ's spiritual body. A religious organisation may establish its own name, structure and membership requirements and then begin to assume that those who stand outside its organisation also stand outside the Church.

Scripture gives no human organisation the authority to make that determination.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The determining line is spiritual. Those who possess the Spirit of Christ belong to Him. An earthly organisation may recognise that reality accurately or imperfectly, but it cannot create it.

Neither can its organisational boundary become the boundary of the one body of Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do human boundaries divide people who belong to Christ?

Personal Reflection

Is there an organisational label that has limited your love or respect for another born-again believer?

Action Step

Examine that attitude. Describe how the love of Christ within you should change your response to that person.

Unity Does Not Mean Ignoring Truth

Rejecting sectarianism does not mean that doctrine no longer matters. Spiritual unity must never be confused with the idea that every belief is equally true or that Scriptural differences should simply be ignored.

Jesus Christ remains the truth, and the Word of God remains the plumb line.

Paul warned Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

Believers must still study, rightly divide the Word and allow Scripture to correct error. Love for other believers does not require us to abandon truth, and commitment to truth does not require us to deny the spiritual relationship created by the new birth.

The two must remain together. We can recognise that another person belongs to Jesus Christ while still disagreeing with that person's present understanding of Scripture. Fellowship in Christ does not require pretending that doctrinal differences do not exist.

Human Creeds Cannot Define the Whole Body

Religious groups often use creeds, statements of faith and membership rules to define their organisational boundaries. These may sometimes summarise sincerely held beliefs, but they become sectarian when they are treated as though they determine the boundaries of Christ's spiritual Church.

The authority must remain with Scripture.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:11**:

> *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

No creed can become another foundation. No movement can claim a spiritual monopoly upon Jesus Christ, and no denomination can place itself between Christ and every believer whom He has saved.

The foundation remains Jesus Christ.

The Unity of the Spirit Must Be Kept

Paul did not tell believers to create spiritual unity. He told them to preserve the unity God had already established.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:1-3**:

> *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

The words *"lowliness," "meekness," "longsuffering"* and *"forbearing one another in love"* describe the way believers are to live with one another. Unity is not maintained by pride, control or insisting that every believer must submit to one human organisation.

It is kept as the life of Christ within His people produces humility, patience and love. The unity belongs to the Spirit because the Spirit of Christ dwells within every genuine member of the body.

Division Around Men Is Contrary to the Body

When believers define themselves primarily by human leaders or organisational names, attention is drawn away from the one Head.

Paul asked the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 1:12-13**:

> *"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"*

Paul's question reaches directly to the heart of sectarianism: *"Is Christ divided?"* Christ is not divided, and His spiritual body is not divided into separate bodies belonging to different men.

Human organisations may divide, congregations may separate and religious movements may develop different names and structures. Yet none of these events divides Jesus Christ Himself.

One Body Under One Head

The answer to sectarianism is not to establish another organisation and then claim that it alone is the Church. That simply repeats the problem under another name.

The answer is to recognise Jesus Christ as the Head, Scripture as the authority and every born-again believer as a member of the one body. Truth must still be taught clearly, and error must still be corrected from Scripture. Yet the boundaries of Christ's spiritual Church must remain where Christ places them.

Paul's question therefore continues to challenge every generation: *"Is Christ divided?"*

He is not. There is one Head, one Spirit and one body. Unity is found in Jesus Christ, not in a sectarian religious identity.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Christ remain the one Head of His one body?

Personal Reflection

Have you felt pressure to defend one religious group instead of honouring Christ as Head?

Action Step

Identify one situation where loyalty to people may compete with loyalty to Christ. Explain the response His Word requires.

FELLOWSHIP WITH ALL WHO BELONG TO CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

If every born-again believer belongs to the one body of Christ, then our understanding of fellowship must begin with what Jesus Christ has already done. We do not create the spiritual relationship between believers. God creates that relationship through the new birth and the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The question is therefore not first whether another believer belongs to our organisation, congregation or movement. The deeper question is whether that person belongs to Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

If the Spirit of Christ dwells within a person, that person belongs to Christ. The same Spirit who lives within us also lives within every other genuine member of His body.

Fellowship Begins in Christ

Christian fellowship does not begin with organisational agreement. It begins with shared life in Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 1:3**:

> *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."*

John connects fellowship directly with Jesus Christ. The spiritual bond between believers exists because they share the same life in Him.

This means that fellowship cannot rightly be restricted to those who carry the same denominational name or belong to the same earthly structure. If Jesus Christ has received a person through the new birth, we must not treat that person as standing outside His body simply because they stand outside our organisation.

Saved People May Have Different Levels of Understanding

Born-again believers do not immediately understand every doctrine with equal clarity. Some have studied Scripture for many years, while others are newly saved. People also come from different religious backgrounds and may carry understandings that still need to be examined in the light of God's Word.

Paul recognised that believers can differ in understanding while still belonging to the Lord.

Paul wrote in **Romans 14:4**:

> *"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand."*

The believer belongs first to Jesus Christ. This does not mean that every belief is correct or that error should be left unchallenged. It means that differences in present understanding do not give us authority to redefine who belongs to Christ.

Truth must still be taught patiently and clearly from Scripture.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can believers belong to Christ while differing in understanding?

Personal Reflection

How do you respond inwardly when a believer disagrees with your understanding of the Bible?

Action Step

Consider a real disagreement. Explain how Christ's humility and love within you should govern your listening and speech without compromising truth.

Fellowship Does Not Require Doctrinal Compromise

Recognising another person as a brother or sister in Christ does not mean accepting everything that person believes. Fellowship and doctrinal agreement are related, but they are not identical.

Paul instructed believers to grow into greater unity of understanding.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:13-15**:

> *"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:"*

Paul holds truth and love together. Believers are not to be carried about by every doctrine, but neither are they to use truth as a reason for pride or unnecessary separation. They are to speak *"the truth in love,"* with the goal of growing up into Christ.

Sectarian Fellowship Draws a Smaller Circle Than Christ

Andrew Byers, writing in 1921, warned against refusing fellowship to someone who is genuinely saved and against trying to confine all truth within one religious group. The principle remains important: if Christ has placed someone within His body, we must not draw an organisational boundary that excludes a person whom Jesus Himself has received.

Paul asked a searching question concerning divisions.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:13**:

> *"Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"*

Christ is not divided. Our fellowship should therefore never suggest that Jesus has created separate spiritual families based upon human names or organisations.

Fellowship Is Not Control

True fellowship does not require one believer to come under the control of another believer or organisation. Neither does it mean that everyone must gather in one earthly institution. The Church is already one in Christ.

Local congregations may have practical responsibilities concerning teaching, conduct, ministry and orderly fellowship. There may also be situations where Scripture requires correction or separation from sinful behaviour. Recognising the whole body of Christ does not remove these biblical responsibilities.

Such matters must be governed by Scripture rather than by sectarian loyalty. We must never confuse loyalty to Christ with loyalty to an organisation.

Love Reveals the Life Within

Jesus gave a visible evidence by which His disciples would be recognised.

Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**:

> *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

This love is not produced by agreeing to ignore truth. Neither is it sentimental acceptance of everything another person believes or does. It is the love of Jesus Christ expressed through those in whom He dwells.

His life within enables believers to recognise, care for, serve and receive others who belong to Him.

Christ Determines the Family

No congregation, denomination or movement contains all those who belong to Christ. The spiritual family is determined by the new birth.

This should produce humility. We should be willing to test our own understanding by Scripture, willing to learn and willing to recognise the work of God beyond the boundaries of our own local fellowship.

At the same time, our openness towards other believers must never move us away from the authority of God's Word. Fellowship must remain in Jesus Christ and in the truth He has revealed.

The balance is clear. We do not compromise truth in order to create unity, and we do not deny genuine believers in order to protect an organisation. Jesus Christ determines who belongs to His body.

If a person truly belongs to Christ, that person is our brother or sister in the one body of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Who determines the members of God's family?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated agreement with your group as the measure of whether someone belongs to Christ?

Action Step

Examine that judgement in the light of **Romans 8:9**. *Explain how you will show fellowship without overlooking the truth.*

CONCLUSION: ONE BODY BELONGING TO ONE CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

This Study Guide has established a simple but far-reaching New Testament truth: Jesus Christ has one spiritual body. That body is His Church, and every person who has been born again belongs to Him through the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Everything begins with Jesus Christ. He is the Door through whom the sinner enters. The new birth gives spiritual life, and by the one Spirit the believer is brought into the one body. The Lord Himself adds the saved to His Church.

Membership in Christ's spiritual body therefore cannot be created by a denomination, membership roll, outward ordinance or human decision. These things may belong to earthly organisations, but only God can give spiritual life. Those who possess the Spirit of Christ belong to Him.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. The born-again believer does not receive Jesus Christ first and then wait for another divine Person called the Holy Spirit. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within by His Spirit, and the believer is complete in Him.

This one Spirit gives life to one spiritual body. Local assemblies may gather in many places, and believers may presently be found within different religious organisations, but those circumstances do not create additional bodies of Christ. There is one Church because there is one Head.

This truth also governs fellowship. We must not draw a smaller spiritual boundary than Jesus Christ has drawn. If a person has genuinely been born again and possesses the Spirit of Christ, that person belongs to the same body.

At the same time, recognising that spiritual relationship does not require us to compromise truth. Scripture remains the plumb line, and believers are called to speak the truth in love. Spiritual unity and faithfulness to the Word of God must remain together.

Sectarianism places human names, leaders or organisational boundaries where Christ alone should stand. The answer is not to create another organisation and claim that it alone contains the whole Church. The answer is to return to Jesus Christ.

The New Testament Church is therefore united by something far greater than human organisation. It is united by the indwelling life of Jesus Christ.

There is one Lord. There is one Spirit. There is one body.

And that one body belongs to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What makes many local assemblies one body belonging to one Christ?

Personal Reflection

Which human boundary has most limited your understanding of Christ's one body?

Action Step

Name that boundary and explain the change needed in your attitudes or fellowship because Christ's Spirit dwells in His people.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do Jesus as the Door, new birth by the one Spirit and the Lord's adding people to His Church explain the one body? Explain why a human membership list cannot make someone part of it.

2. Understanding

How can the Bible speak of many local churches while teaching one body? Explain how 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' helps you understand their relationship.

3. Personal Reflection

Have a church label or a belief about a later Spirit experience shaped how you recognise believers? Explain what the teaching on new birth and the one Spirit has corrected or strengthened in your understanding.

4. Response to Truth

How should you respond to a believer whose understanding differs from yours but who belongs to Christ? Explain how the one Spirit and the one Head guide both fellowship and faithful teaching.

5. Action Step

Examine any hesitation you have towards a born-again believer beyond your usual assembly. Explain how Christ's life within should change your attitude and what response you intend to make.

6. Early Response

Have you begun to respond differently towards that believer? Describe what changed in your attitude or fellowship, or explain what is holding you back.

7. Ongoing Practice

How will you continue to recognise Christ's one body across different assemblies without treating doctrinal truth as unimportant? Describe a habit that will guide both fellowship and the careful use of the Bible.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why is a later second Spirit experience not required for a born-again believer to enter Christ's body? Connect the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ and new birth, using a verse to explain your answer.

9. Living the Truth

Suppose two assemblies disagree about a teaching. How can you seek fellowship with those who belong to Christ while still examining the teaching by the Bible? Explain what you would say or do.

10. Final Response

Bring together Christ as the Door, the one Spirit, new birth and many local assemblies. What has become clearer or been corrected in your view of the Church? Explain how this will change your fellowship with Christ's people.