

The Gospel of Baptism

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The gospel of Christ is a gospel of baptism. It was introduced in baptism, made possible by baptism, and completed through baptism. However, this is not a baptism that can be done by man, but that which is done by God. Man cannot unite another man with God. Only God can unite us with Himself, and He does this through a baptism that only He can perform. Let us take a fresh look at the subject of baptism and ask God for eyes to see things as He sees them. This will allow us to move in faith and know the true salvation that lifts us out of sin and death into the power of His endless life.

The Introduction of Christ

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him" (Matthew 3:13-16).

We are told in the gospels that John was chosen by God to introduce our Lord. I believe that it is significant that he did so in the context of baptism. Baptism was essentially unknown in the Old Testament. There is some mention of partial baptisms (washings) referring to cleansing from disease, but there is no mention of baptism as John used it. It was reserved by God for the introduction of Jesus, and it was done outside of the religious system of that day. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance, preparing the people to receive Jesus. Thus, when Jesus came to be baptized by John, John did not understand what Jesus was doing. John knew he was not worthy "even to loose His sandal strap." However, at the insistence of Jesus, John baptized Jesus "to fulfill all righteousness."

What was really taking place at this baptism of Jesus? Did Jesus need to be baptized for repentance from sin? We know that is not true. If we look at the whole account with some understanding of the plan of God, I believe we can say that God was foretelling His plan of salvation in a simple yet profound way. First of all, by Jesus submitting to John's baptism, He was declaring that it was of God. This question came up later in the ministry of Christ, so it was obviously a question among the religious leaders. Jesus answered the question here, not just in word but in deed (see Matthew 21:25).

Secondly, when Jesus submitted to the baptism of John, He was identifying with the people and their sin. He had no sin of His own, but by submitting to the baptism of John, He allowed Himself to be identified with sinful people. Was that not what He did completely at Calvary? Thus, the waters of baptism typified the real baptism that Jesus would undergo at Calvary to secure our salvation.

Thirdly, as Jesus came up out of the water, John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Him and remain. Was that not what happened on the day of Pentecost? After the baptism of Jesus at Calvary into death, He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He received the "gift of promise" from the Father and poured out the Holy Spirit. Thus, at this baptism of Jesus we see the plan of God in prophetic form. Jesus descends into the water (death) and comes out of the water (resurrection). We see the Holy Spirit coming on Him just as the Holy Spirit would descend at Pentecost when Jesus baptized those first

believers into the body of Christ.

I believe it is important to notice at this point how John saw baptism. *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"* (Matthew 3:11-12). We see a connection between water baptism and Spirit baptism introduced here by John. John was baptizing unto repentance, but in explaining what he was doing, Spirit baptism is foretold and likened to water baptism, but with much deeper spiritual results. In connecting the two baptisms in this way, water baptism represents a beginning way we are to think about Spirit baptism. Starting with John's baptism, it showed a picture of what would take place in reality on the day of Pentecost. We all need a way to think about spiritual realities, and water baptism was given by God to form that initial understanding.

To add the final authentication to all of this, the Father spoke from heaven and gave His approval. *"And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'"* (Matthew 3:17). Thus, we see the role of all three members of the Godhead, working in unison in God's plan for securing our salvation. We see Jesus laying aside His glory and taking the lowly place to be our Savior, we see the Spirit coming upon Him to lead Him in all things, and we see the Father looking on with approval as He gave His Son for us.

Thus, in a very simple but profound way, I believe that God is giving us a picture of His whole plan of salvation in the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan. The account is recorded in all four of the Gospels, so we can conclude this was a very important event in God's eyes. I believe if we will let this account be the framework in which we view baptism, we can fit all things together properly.

The Baptism of Christ at Calvary

"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:49-50). In this scripture we have a clear reference by Jesus to Calvary, and He refers to the event as "His baptism." It was not a baptism in water, but a baptism in blood, and it is the baptism that was essential to secure our salvation. It was no longer in prophetic form (as at the Jordan) but in reality. It was real death and real resurrection. Because the work of Christ at Calvary is the foundation upon which everything else in the plan of God rests, I believe this is the central baptism to which all other baptisms should be related.

The word "baptism" essentially means "immersion." At Calvary, Jesus became completely "immersed" in Adam's race, even to the point of being made sin for us. Because of His complete identification with sin, He became "immersed" in death, for "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Jesus died, not because of His own sin, but because He became identified with the sin of Adam's race. Because He was faithful to go to His baptism, we are able to "be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with."

"But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father'" (Matthew 20:22-23).

What was the "baptism that He was baptized with"? I think it is clear that the reference to "drinking the cup" is a reference to His death on the cross. *"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will'"* (Matthew 26:39). But while the mention of baptism could also refer to the same thing, notice that while He referred to the cup as a future event, He referred to the baptism as the "baptism that I am baptized with" (present tense). I would like to suggest that He was referring to the fact that the Holy Spirit had come upon Him at the Jordan and that He was being led, and living by, the direction of the Spirit--as our example.

The statement to the disciples was: *"You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."* It was a positive statement by Jesus of what they and we would experience as His disciples. Full identification with Jesus results in death to this world and may even lead to a martyr's death as some of these disciples experienced. We also must be baptized with the Spirit into union with God, so that we may be led of the Spirit to do the will of God. Both the cup and the baptism speak of full identification with Jesus. He was faithful to the will of God in His baptism at Calvary, and because of that, we can be baptized into His baptism in the Spirit.

The Baptism with the Spirit at Pentecost

"And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:4-8).

These are the final words of Jesus, just before He departed from this world. He refers back to John's baptism that foretold what would shortly take place. In between the Jordan and this event were three to four years of ministry and Calvary, but even after all that, He repeats the same thing John said and focuses the disciples' attention on the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Again, water baptism formed the initial understanding of baptism, but now the focus is on the Spirit who will bring the real baptism that they need. The disciples cannot go on in the plan of God without this baptism. It is essential because this baptism will unite them with God. They cannot be "witnesses unto Him" without this baptism.

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). This is undoubtedly the baptism that Jesus said was coming. It was a sovereign act of God, and came as they waited on the Lord together. I think it is safe to assume that all who were present had submitted either to the baptism of John or the baptism of Jesus' disciples, but it is perhaps noteworthy that no mention of additional water baptism was made.

However, when Peter stood up to address the multitude, this was his instruction: *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as*

many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39). Many have taken this scripture as a "formula" or the "standard" that God set forth pertaining to baptism. While I agree that we should accept this instruction of Peter for ourselves, we will see from other examples in Acts that it is not essential for this exact pattern to be followed. What I do think we can see from this scripture is that the focus was on "receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit." This was the promise. Water baptism here was identified with believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, and the resulting promise was that the believers would receive the Holy Spirit. The following scripture records that in response to the word, "about three thousand souls were added to them."

Other Accounts of Baptism in Acts

There is no explicit teaching regarding baptism in the scriptures the way we might like to see it. We must accept the fact that God does all things perfectly, so if God wanted us to have such a teaching, I believe that either He would have given such teaching or led one of the early apostles to do so. However, we do have many accounts that mention both water and Spirit baptism, and we can look at these accounts, asking God to guide us in putting them together and drawing a proper conclusion in truth. I will not comment on every account of baptism in Acts, but try to draw truth from the ones that are recounted in more detail.

The baptism at Samaria: (Acts 8:9-25) The second account we have in Acts that mentions baptism is the account of Philip with Simon and the believers at Samaria. We are told that Philip baptized Simon the sorcerer and some other believers. We are specifically told that the believers did not receive the Holy Spirit when they were water baptized, and from the actions of Simon later, I think we may conclude that he did not either. Peter and John were then sent to Samaria, that the believers there might receive the Spirit. From this account I think we can safely conclude that the Holy Spirit is not automatically given because a person is water baptized. From other accounts I believe we will see that the baptisms can (and should) go together, but that there is no "automatic" connection. They are distinct acts of faith before God.

The Ethiopian eunuch: (Acts 8:26-38) Philip was an evangelist, and under the divine direction of the Spirit preached the gospel to this man. The eunuch received the word and asked Philip if he could be baptized. Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may," and based on the response of the eunuch, he baptized him in water. There was no detailed instruction in special classes, or a long period of waiting, but only a "heart of belief." The conclusion that I draw from this account is that the prerequisite of water baptism is simply a wholehearted response to Jesus as Savior. Water baptism here was a declaration of belief in Jesus.

Conversion of Saul: (Acts 9:10-19, 22:12-16) In the accounts of the conversion of Saul, we see that three things happened: 1) Paul received his sight; 2) he was water-baptized; and 3) he received the Holy Spirit. The exact order is not explicitly stated, but it appears that they all happened during the one visit of Ananias. There was no long waiting for any of them. In my understanding, it is God's intention that water baptism and Spirit baptism should go together. We will see this in other accounts to follow. Later, we will try to see some reasons why they may not be together (as at Samaria), but if there are no hindrances, I believe the scriptures teach that they can be expected to occur together.

Conversion of Cornelius: (Acts 10:1-11:18) This was a critical event in the birth of the church because these were the first Gentiles that were baptized with the Spirit into Christ. The account is recorded with

considerable detail, but let's just note several points relevant to our topic. I think the most important one is that the believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit simply from the proclamation of the gospel. They were also water baptized, but *after* they were baptized with the Spirit. From this I believe we can conclude that water baptism is not a requirement for Spirit baptism. Secondly, even though they had already been baptized with the Spirit, Peter proceeded to baptize them with water. Unless we feel that Peter was wrong, I think this shows that we should not dismiss water baptism even if we have been baptized with the Spirit. (We will look at the reasons for water baptism later.) Thirdly, I would draw attention to the fact that the Spirit baptism is described in various ways as: "the Holy Spirit fell on them," "the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out," "received the Holy Spirit as we have," "baptized with the Holy Spirit," and "gave them the same gift." All of these terms or phrases refer to the same experience.

The disciples at Ephesus: (Acts 19:1-7) We will pass over the accounts of Lydia, the jailer, and the Corinthians, and look in more detail at this account of Paul at Ephesus. I believe this account is particularly important because three baptisms are mentioned (John's baptism, baptism in the name of Jesus, and Spirit baptism). When Paul found these disciples, he asked them a question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Why did he ask the question? I would say it was because he detected a lack in their relationship with God and was probing to find out what was missing. They answered that they did not know about the Spirit, so he went farther back and asked, "Into what were you then baptized?" The implication of this question is that if they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, the baptism with the Holy Spirit should have been known and accompanied that baptism. Although the account does not explicitly say so, I think we can safely conclude that Paul explained the gospel to them, and as a result of their response, he baptized them in water "in the name of the Lord Jesus." He then prayed for them and they received the Holy Spirit. (As a side note, if water baptism was to be done away with, this was certainly a good place for Paul to do that.)

There are several conclusions I think we can draw from this account. First, I think we can say that Paul was most concerned about the Spirit baptism. That was the lack he detected in the beginning. Secondly, Paul obviously expected that if they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, they should also have received the Spirit. Thirdly, we note that just because they were baptized in the name of Jesus they did not automatically receive the Holy Spirit. Paul specifically prayed for them to receive the Holy Spirit. When they did, there was additional evidence that the prayer was answered.

In summary, from the various accounts in Acts I think we can draw the following conclusions:

Water baptism was continued from Pentecost onward. We do not see any indication that it was discontinued by any of the apostles. Water baptism after Pentecost was different from John's baptism. It was not just a statement of repentance, but also a statement of belief in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. Spirit baptism normally accompanied water baptism. However, it was not automatic and there was no specific order. Sometimes Spirit baptism came before and sometimes after water baptism. Where Spirit baptism did not occur with water baptism, action was taken to correct the condition.

The Purpose of Water Baptism

If Spirit baptism is the most important baptism, why was water baptism continued? Before Pentecost, it appears that water baptism was an open statement of response to the message being preached (repentance). After Pentecost, it is a statement of belief in Jesus as Savior. But if men can be baptized

with the Spirit without water baptism, what is the purpose of water baptism?

From scripture, I think we can say that water baptism today is for the following three reasons:

First, it was commanded by Jesus. *"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen"* (Matthew 28:18-20). The baptism here is obviously water baptism, because men cannot baptize with the Holy Spirit. If we had no other reason to baptize in water, this would be enough. There is no indication in scripture (either by teaching or example) that this direction from the Lord was changed.

Secondly, as we have seen from many accounts in the book of Acts, water baptism is God's chosen way for a believer to declare their faith in Christ as Savior. It is an open act, before God and men, of faith in the heart. God could have chosen some other way, such as signing a confession or some other act. But from the teaching and accounts we have, we see that this is God's chosen way for a person to declare their decision to turn their back on the world and follow Jesus.

Thirdly, it is very symbolic of what God does in reality. It symbolizes death and resurrection with Christ. It also symbolizes submersion into God in the Spirit. Water is used throughout scripture as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Submitting one's life into the hands of another symbolizes a release of control and complete trust in another to raise us from the waters of death. It also symbolizes a washing that God does within. It has value if it is done in faith with a clear conscience before God.

The act of baptism itself is only a symbol, similar to the cup and bread of the Lord's table. Apart from moving in faith before God, the actual act of water baptism accomplishes nothing. No outward act can do what can only be done by God as we respond to His word in faith. We partake of the elements of the Lord's table as an outward testimony of what we are doing inwardly before God. Water baptism has the same value. It is an outward testimony of an inward reality.

There is a statement by Peter concerning baptism that I think helps to clarify what we are saying. *"There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him"* (1 Peter 3:21-22). An "antitype" is the reality which the "type" represents. So to put this in other words, we could read this scripture as: "There is a real baptism that saves us, not water baptism, but a clearing of our conscience before God, based on what Jesus obtained for us through His resurrection." What is the real baptism? It is a baptism into union with God in the Spirit. It is in this way that we experience the life of God by which we are saved. *"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"* (Romans 5:10).

Water baptism as a testimony of our faith in Christ has benefits to us and to God. I see it as an evidence of faith in Jesus that is expressed by an act of our will (i.e., faith revealed by works). It is also an open testimony of faith before others that has value in God's eyes. As already mentioned, it symbolizes what takes place in the spirit when we experience spiritual baptism. It may have other benefits, but these are the main ones that I see.

Our Baptism into His Baptism

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:1-11).

How do we benefit from the work of Christ on the cross? Paul tells us in this scripture that it is by baptism (or immersion) into Christ. When Christ died on the cross, He put "our old man--Adam's race" to death so that the "body of sin--the sin of the whole human race" may be put away from God. He then rose from the dead, proving his mastery over death, and in doing so destroyed him who had the power of death: the devil (see Hebrews 2:14-18).

When He rose from the dead, however, He rose alone as the head of a new creation or "new man" (see Ephesians 2:15). In so doing, He opened the door for every man to benefit from His work on the cross, but for us to personally benefit from the work of Christ, we must be baptized with the Spirit into Christ or this "new man." This is the essential baptism for us, that brings us into union with God. As we are united with God through this baptism in the Spirit, we experience death to this world and are resurrected with Christ into a new life with God. Everything that Christ did is now ours because of our union with Him in the Spirit. The first ones to experience this baptism (union) were the hundred and twenty on the day of Pentecost. They were joined to Christ in His resurrection, and then this new family of God began to grow.

On the basis of this new relationship, we can now "reckon" ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in this union with Jesus our Lord. We are baptized into His death and His life in one baptism. He died to sin once for all at Calvary, and we die to sin as we are united with Him. We cannot die to sin on our own. If we could, Christ died in vain. But our baptism into union with Christ is the way we benefit from all that Christ did for the whole human race.

This spiritual baptism is when we are made sons of God by being born of the Spirit. *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).* Now we can be led by the Spirit in all things. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:14-17).*

This baptism is also when we are baptized into the body of Christ and united with our brothers and sisters in the Spirit. *"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). We are made one with God, and thus are one with each other. Our ability to function in the body of Christ is dependent on this baptism. The body of Christ is all spiritual, designed to function under the headship of Christ to express the life of God. To do this, we must be united with Christ in the Spirit and then walk under His authority in all things.

To be led by the Spirit, we must be alive in the Spirit, united with God, and under his authority. *"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:3). God's purpose is that we would be brought near to God in the Spirit, to know Him in an intimate way. Now we can "lay our heads upon His breast" and know Him as our Father in reality. This relationship is only possible in an intimate union with God in the Spirit. The door was opened at Calvary by Jesus, and our place is to enter in by yielding ourselves to God in faith, without reservation. He is the One who will come to abide, and to do in and through us what we cannot do in ourselves.

The Evidence of Spiritual Baptism

This question is sure to arise: how do we know that we have been baptized by Jesus with the Spirit? We know when a person has been baptized with water. We see them go down into the water, and we see them come up, and they are all wet. There is no question whether or not they have been physically baptized. It may not be so obvious whether the act of their baptism represents the true spiritual condition of their heart. That must be discerned not only by themselves but also by others who assist in the baptism. For their physical baptism to have meaning, the spiritual reality of repentance and believing in Jesus must be genuine.

But how do we know that we have been baptized by Jesus in the Spirit? I believe these two passages of scripture are particularly applicable: *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'"* (John 7:37-38).

These two scriptures are clearly in reference to the Spirit baptism that only Jesus can perform. Both are statements from Jesus Himself. He said that the result of this baptism would be power to be a true witness unto Him (that is, that we are alive with the life of God) and that "rivers of living water" would flow from the inner man. In my words, there should be a power in the inner man that we clearly recognize as divine, and that divine presence of the living God within will result in an overflow that is unmistakably God Himself.

Many of the accounts we have already quoted from the book of Acts record the presence of divine spiritual manifestations when believers were baptized with the Spirit. Peter said that is how he knew that the believers in the household of Cornelius received the Spirit. Many say that these manifestations have passed away, but I cannot find any evidence in the scriptures to support that statement. If we are looking for a way to justify our present condition without such manifestations, we will probably find it,

but I personally do not want to find myself in that position. Instead, I want all that God has provided, and I trust that is the attitude of all of us. Paul exhorts us to *"Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy"* (1 Corinthians 14:1).

As a further amplification of this "living water," I believe that the whole book of 1 John is a good place to go. John tells us very clearly why he wrote this letter. *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God"* (1 John 5:13). John says that we can *know* that we have life from the Son of God. I believe an honest heart that is hungry for God will receive the answer from God that will stand the test. If we make excuses or try to defend ourselves, we are on shaky ground. If we are not honest before God, allowing the Spirit to bring a solid witness, we are the ones who will suffer loss, and the loss may be eternal.

Using the example of physical baptism, should not a person be "wet all over" with the Spirit of God if they have been baptized in the Spirit? Can God's presence within be hidden? Do we even want it hidden? How can a union between God and man be hidden? A person who has been baptized by Jesus is a new creation. Old things have passed away; all things are new. The reality of this union will manifest in unmistakable evidence: the gifts and fruit of the Spirit. To settle for less than this is to settle for less than God. Who wants that? Let us not listen to man but to God. He wants to bless us with the fullness of His presence. His presence will be obvious, bringing joy unspeakable and full of glory. Do not be denied!

One Baptism

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Paul says that there is "one baptism." How can that be, since we have already looked at several baptisms? Are they all one, and if so, how are they one?

In a very simple way, I believe we can say that there is "one baptism" in the same way that there is "one faith" or "one God." There are not many ways to God. There is only one name under heaven by which we may be saved. There is only one salvation, and therefore there is only one baptism: that is, baptism with the Spirit into union with Jesus.

However, I think we can expand the meaning a little to see that all of the baptisms we have been discussing are in a sense "one baptism." They are different aspects (and come at different times) but they all point to Jesus and the foundation baptism that He underwent. Consider the various baptisms as follows. John's baptism was a preparation baptism, preparing the people to receive Jesus. It was used to announce the true Baptizer and the "one baptism." The baptism that the disciples performed was really a continuation of the baptism of John. It was also a baptism of repentance. The main difference was that Jesus was with them, but it still prepared the hearts of the people for Jesus. The baptism of Jesus at Calvary is the foundation baptism, because in this baptism Jesus paid the price of our sin and secured our salvation. The believer's baptism today is a testimony that we have believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, and the baptism with the Spirit by Jesus is the central baptism for us that brings us into union with Jesus and His baptism. Are not all of these "baptisms" simply different aspects of the "one baptism" or the "one faith" in Jesus our Lord?

However, I think the most important point to be seen is that in God's mind there are not "two baptisms," namely: 1) water baptism, and 2) Spirit baptism. In God, these are one. Many men have often divided these in a wrong way; thus, many today depend on the fact that they have been water baptized, but they have not known Spirit baptism. They are depending on water baptism, thinking that by submitting to that baptism they are thus brought into union with Christ's death and resurrection. I believe this is the most deadly error. It is like partaking of the elements of the Lord's table and thinking that by doing so we are literally eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood.

The elements of the Lord's table have meaning in the testimony of God if they represent the actual spiritual condition of the member. But "eating of the flesh of Jesus and drinking of His blood" are spiritual issues. The words of Jesus are "spirit and life." If the actual elements of the Lord's table are not used for some reason, their testimony and purpose will be lost. But not remembering the Lord in this manner does not change the condition of the heart (unless it is direct disobedience to God's command). The spiritual condition of the heart is essential, and outward elements have value to God only as they represent the spiritual reality.

In the same way, water baptism is a symbol of a heart condition before God. As has already been stated, it has value to both believer and God as it is done in faith. But just entering into water baptism as an act in itself has no value to God. Actually, if it is done for the wrong reason (i.e., thinking that this act unites us with God), it will have a negative effect because it creates a false security. As I already said, I feel this is the most detrimental condition. God intended that water baptism and Spirit baptism should go together. I think they normally will, if the message is proclaimed properly.

Another example of an outward sign is the sister's head covering. A sister puts a symbol on her head as a testimony of her heart submission to God and her place in God's creation. But I think we can all agree that just putting a symbol of authority on her head does not make her submitted in her heart. The symbol only has meaning if the heart condition is true. If for various reasons she does not wear the symbol (i.e., ignorance, wrong teaching, etc.), the value of the symbol will be lost. However, absence of the symbol does not affect the heart condition (unless, of course, the symbol is rejected in disobedience after light has come). The symbol has value if done in faith, but the most important issue is the condition of the heart.

Let me quote a scripture from 1 John for our consideration. *"This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one"* (1 John 5:6-8).

I think it is clear that when John refers to the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit in heaven, he is speaking of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). He says that these *are* one. But what does he mean by the "three that bear witness on earth"? He says that Jesus came by water and blood. Where was Jesus introduced? Was it not at the baptism of John (water)? We have already said that the real baptism that Jesus underwent was at Calvary (in blood). This opened the way for Pentecost (a baptism in the Spirit). John says that these three (Jordan/water, Calvary/blood, and Pentecost/Spirit) *agree* as one. In other words, they are three parts of one baptism.

One other thing to notice here is that it is the Spirit who connects heaven and earth. As we have already emphasized, God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to bring us into the realm of God, that we may have true fellowship with Him. Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be spiritual and we cannot worship God as He has designed. Natural ability cannot help. It must be by the ability that only God can give, and Jesus died to give us that ability.

A Final Encouragement

If God intended that water and Spirit baptism go together, why do we not see this in experience in many (or most) cases? I think the first answer lies in the message that is being proclaimed. People respond to the message they hear. If they are told they must wait a long time for Spirit baptism, they probably will. But if they are told that they can be baptized in water and the Spirit at the same time, faith will rise in the heart of an honest seeker, and I believe many (maybe most) will experience Spirit baptism at the same time. I believe this is what God wants. My own observation is that most of the time, the message is not declared in such a way that the Holy Spirit can anoint the message in the hearts of the people and bring faith to receive from God. I encourage us to search the scriptures in this matter, so that we can be convinced before God of His purpose. Then we will be able to move in faith and proclaim the truth in the anointing of God.

I think we would all agree that it is possible for a believer to enter into water baptism apart from faith. Of course we try to make sure this does not happen, but we can err. We may baptize somebody in water when they are not really dealing with God. But a sure sign that they have believed in reality is "rivers of living water flowing from the heart." This is something that only God can do, but if we do not labor with this intent, I think we are doing both God and the believer a great disservice. Let us not be found in error on these things. Our place is to proclaim the truth so that the Holy Spirit can anoint that truth in the heart.

Obviously, there may still be hindrances in the heart of an individual which they alone must deal with before God. We cannot do this for another person, but we can be faithful to teach properly, to care, and to encourage. We dare not leave people with only water baptism. Every believer needs Spirit baptism. It is not optional, or only for workers, or only for those who preach the gospel. It is for every believer to establish a proper relationship with God. Let us ask God for wisdom and grace to hold truth in love, that all may partake of everything that Christ died for.

Why has the issue of baptism been the focus of conflict over the last 2000 years? I think there is one answer. It is the natural versus the spiritual mind. It is much easier to work and live in the natural, but natural thinking will take us off course every time. There is no way that we can know truth with the natural mind. *"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth'"* (John 4:21-24).

The same natural thinking that leads people to believe the elements of the Lord's table become the actual body of Christ will also conclude that water baptism saves us. It appeals to the pride of man, thinking that we can do what only God can do. The same mind may also conclude that certain words

must be said in exactly the right way at the baptism (such as "In the name of Jesus") or that people must be baptized by our special group or denomination. I see the same element in all of this: the natural mind trying to comprehend the things of God and trying to do something for Jesus instead of letting God work within us, both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). God is Spirit, and there is no way around this. Jesus said the words He spoke were "spirit and life." Let us not come down to the natural level. When we do, we become a great hindrance to those who want to enter into what God is doing in this hour.

If you are among those who have been water baptized but have not experienced Spirit baptism, can I strongly encourage you to go to God and let Him show you where you are? I have searched the scriptures on this matter again and again, and I see only one requirement on our side: faith to receive what God has provided. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. God wants to indwell every believer and bring each one into a full relationship with Himself. If something is hindering faith, let us stay before God until the hindrance is revealed and removed. In the scripture we have already quoted from John 7:37-39, the direction from Jesus is simple: "Thirst, come, and drink." Jesus promised that if we would come believing, He would give the Holy Spirit to be a river of living water flowing from within. Let us not be robbed of the simplicity that is ours in Jesus our Lord.

Brethren, I really believe that if we will allow God to wash our minds with His word, we will see that there truly is only "one baptism." There is no conflict in scripture, and we need not fear to proclaim the truth. Let us be those who love the truth, walk in the truth, and proclaim the truth. God will do His work in all of our hearts, and will be glorified in His church.