

## Prescription for Unity

### One Baptism

Among those items which mark the unity of Christian brethren is the understanding that there is but one baptism required of the faithful. How interesting that some declare there is no baptism while others seek after two or three. The letter to the Ephesians, written long before the no baptism and multiple baptism doctrines arose, declares there is but one. It's important for faithful disciples to carefully study and apply Paul's teachings on the subject. Whatever that baptism is, it must be important for Paul includes among the central doctrines of the church.

Before plunging into the text at hand we affirm the first and only meaning of the word baptism. Strong's declares the meaning as "to dip...to immerse, to submerge...2 to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe, 3 to overwhelm." There is no sense in which baptism ever means a partial immersion or sprinkling. Those who so suggest such by their religious rituals are errant and have, on their own authority, changed the clear meaning of the word.

As we examine Ephesians 4:4-6 we at first wonder why it is necessary to declare a single baptism. Was there at time when baptism occurred in more than one way? If so, we see the possibility of confusion and the need for correction.

As the New Testament opens we see John employing what is certainly water baptism, that is, immersion in water (c.f. Matthew 3:7; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). In this same context, John promises that Jesus will baptize with "*the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (Matthew 3:11). So we are now up to three baptisms, that of water, the Holy Spirit and that of fire. Although some link Holy Spirit baptism and the baptism of fire, such is not the case. Verse 12 of Matthew 3 says, "*His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*" It seems inescapable that the idea of a baptism of fire is to be linked with the burning of the chaff with unquenchable fire. Certainly this speaks of the time of judgment when the unrighteous will be destroyed. (Mark 9:43, 48). Inasmuch as this baptism has not and will not occur until after the Lord returns, a

baptism of fire cannot be in view here by Paul as he writes Ephesians 4:5.

So we are left now to determine whether the one baptism of Ephesians 4 is that of water or of the Holy Spirit. We know that water baptism for the remission of sins was a central part of New Testament faith and practice. It was announced at Pentecost (Acts 2:38) and was still in practice later in Paul's journey's (Acts 19:1-5). Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This baptism came at the hands of the disciples and was not a baptism administered by the Holy Spirit but by men under the directions of the Gospel message (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38 etc). As late as the writing of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter (*circa* 65 A.D.), baptism was uniquely associated with water (1 Peter 3:18-22) not some baptism of the Holy Spirit as some claim today. If Paul declares there is but one baptism then there cannot be one of water and one of the Spirit. Only that of water is attested to throughout the New Testament.

In fact, there are but two occasions of Holy Spirit baptism in Scripture. The first, on Pentecost was a baptism that came upon the twelve apostles only. Acts 2:3 says that tongues of fire appeared to sit upon each of them and, verse 4, "*they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.*" A consideration of the pronouns "they" in verses 1-4 shows that the "*eleven apostles*" of Acts 1:26 is the proper antecedent. Hence, the eleven (plus Matthias who was now numbered among the apostles), are the sole recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Some offer a weak claim that Cornelius received the same measure of the Holy Spirit at his conversion. It is the case that in Acts 10 that the "*the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word*" (Acts 10:44). However the extent or measure of the Holy Ghost seems limited to the ability to speak in tongues as an indicator to Peter and the Jews that the Gentiles were to be accepted into the body of Christ. Certainly there is no suggestion anywhere at anytime that Cornelius could pass along the gift of the Holy Spirit to others or that he could perform the kind of miracles done by the apostles. Truly, the only occasion of unquestioned Spirit baptism occurred in Acts 2 and occurred only to the apostles.

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When Paul writes of one baptism in Ephesians 4, He speaks of water baptism for the remission of sins.