

One Baptism (Ephesians 4:5)

In Ephesians chapter 5, we are told that there is one baptism which unites all Christians. Those who believe in Baptismal Regeneration believe that this one baptism is water baptism. Some will go so far as to even deny the baptism of the Holy Spirit altogether, some claiming that it was only for the first century church, some claim that it was only for the Apostles, and others coming up with other varied views regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What we want to examine is what scripture says about the one baptism which binds all Christians. Let's start with the verse that speaks of this one baptism

Eph 4:4-5

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

NKJV

We read elsewhere in scripture about water baptism, first we see reference to the baptism of John the baptist.

Matt 3:11-12

11 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.

NKJV

John baptized with water, but here we are told that even John knew about the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus would use to baptize believers. When John Baptized Jesus, he said:

Matt 3:13-14

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

NKJV

John understood that the baptism of Jesus was more significant than His baptism. He needed to be baptized by Jesus - but do you find Jesus baptizing John in water anywhere in scripture? Did Jesus neglect John? No, the baptism that John needed, and that we all need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit which comes as the Holy Spirit indwells us at the time that we receive Christ as Saviour. Without receiving Christ, we do not receive the baptism, but once having received Christ, we immediately are baptized in the Holy Spirit. Thus, if you have that baptism, you are saved, but if you do not you are not saved. Water baptism is only symbolic of salvation and is an act of obedience following salvation.

With respect to water baptism, here is what Jesus said:

Mark 16:16

16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

NKJV

Note that he does not believe is condemned. Nothing is said about lack of water baptism being the source of condemnation, only lack of belief in Christ, thus the first part of the line refers to believing for salvation. Water baptism is an act of obedience, symbolizing the fact that in Christ, we share in the death and resurrection which cleanses us from sin.

Now one could rightly ask, why would you suggest that the reference to baptism does not also refer to salvation? Why would it be added if it was not important? Let's deal with those questions one at a time.

1) Why would you suggest that the reference to baptism does not also refer to salvation?

ANSWER:

There are a number of reasons. For example:

a) As shown above, it would be a strange omission to exclude lack of baptism from being a matter of condemnation if it was indeed an essential

b) Not a single gospel presentation anywhere in the Bible includes baptism. If it was an essential, this would be an odd omission.

c) Paul specifically excludes baptism from the gospel when he says that he was sent to preach the gospel but not to baptize.

1 Cor 1:17

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

NKJV

If baptism was an essential, it would be odd that Paul would say that he was not sent to baptize for fear that the cross of Christ would be made of no effect. Now to be fair, this is not speaking against baptism, but it does clearly separate baptism from the gospel, and appears to suggest that even back in the first century, the church was dealing with those who would overemphasize baptism and thus effectively dilute the gospel of the cross.

d) In Romans 6 and elsewhere, we are told specifically that baptism is symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ. We are also shown that the symbolism goes back to the Old

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Testament when we read the references to the figurative prophetic significance of the Old Testament rituals (which included baptism).

e) Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. It is the blood sacrifice that takes away our sins, not the water baptism.

f) Throughout scripture, we find references throughout which state that if we believe and call upon the Lord, then we will be saved. No requirement for water is added. Examples are:

John 3:16-19

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

NKJV

Eph 1:7-10

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him.

NKJV

There are numerous other reasons, but suffice it to say that the local and overall context of the Bible is clear that baptism does not save. What about the second question?

2) Why would it be added if it was not important?

ANSWER:

This is a good question because often the believers in baptismal regeneration appear to believe that baptism must either be essential or it means nothing. That is not true. There are important rituals in the Old Testament which have significance today, but are not essential for our salvation. For example, Passover was prophetic of the blood of Christ covering our sins. We continue to celebrate a Christianized version called Easter which, instead of Passover which looked forward to the cross, looks back at the cross to celebrate what Christ did for us on the cross.

Likewise with baptism. There were ritual baptisms in the Old Testament which Hebrews 9 tells us were prophetic of the cross, and which were celebrated looking forward to the coming of Christ, while we today are baptized in obedience to God's word and in celebration or as a witness to what God has done with respect to the sacrifice on the cross.

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We therefore cannot say that it is not important, but neither can we go beyond scripture to give it a significance which belongs only to the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.

Well, what does all this have to do with whether water baptism is the one baptism that unites all Christians. At the start of this article, a second baptism was mentioned that would be given by Jesus, and that is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What does scripture say about this baptism? What do we know about this baptism from scripture?

1) We know that the baptism is for those who believe:

John 7:38-39

39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
NKJV

2) We know that it involves the Holy Spirit indwelling and guiding believers:

John 15:26-27

26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.
NKJV

1 Cor 3:16

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
NKJV

3) We know that non-believers cannot receive this indwelling, thus it is exclusive to all believers:

John 14:16-18

17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.
NKJV

4) We know that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is an indicator of salvation:

Rom 8:8-9

8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.
NKJV

Rom 8:14-16

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 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."

NKJV

5) This is the baptism that Jesus said that He would give to those who believed:

Acts 11:16-18

16 Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

NKJV

6) The baptism of the Holy Spirit comes before water baptism. Since it is an indicator of salvation, that also means that baptism of the Holy Spirit and salvation coincide, but water baptism comes afterward.

Acts 10:47-48

47 Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

NKJV

CONCLUSION

With all this in mind, we can see that when a person is saved, they are baptized into the Holy Spirit, and one cannot be baptized in the Holy Spirit unless they are saved. We therefore see that all believers receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism is not an essential and we even see examples in the Bible where the baptism of the Holy Spirit preceded water baptism, thus for a time, those believer had the one baptism. It is also possible to be baptized in water and be a non-believer. Therefore it is neither essential to be water baptized to be saved, nor is water baptism proof of salvation.

The only baptism which is common to all believers is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and thus is the one baptism spoken of in Ephesians 4:5. We have a confirmation of that in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth:

1 Cor 12:12-14

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body,

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being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 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.
NKJV

We who are believers drink of one Spirit when we are baptized into the one body...not water, but Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

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