

PNEUMATOLOGY (66)

There are a number of churches and religions who would have God's people believe that water baptism is somehow part of salvation. These misguided and misinformed individuals actually believe that a water baptism performed with sinful hands is part of a divine baptism authorized by Jesus Christ. Such thinking was not found in the mind of John, who is often credited with the concept of baptism, (i.e. "John the Baptist" or "John the Baptizer").

When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the challenge that is often given is that of a need to be baptized in water. A more accurate biblical picture is the need to understand what the Holy Spirit just did to that one who believed; namely baptized him into Jesus Christ. By full authority of God the Father and God the Son, one who believes on Jesus Christ is, at the moment of salvation, placed into Jesus Christ to the extent that he is forever identified with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and at that precise moment he forever becomes a child of God. It is the Spirit of God who carries out this amazing baptism and it is this baptism which ought to be emphasized to the new believer. An understanding of Spirit baptism is life transforming, unlike baptism in water that doesn't transform anything. There are many people who are baptized in water and expect to be totally different after they come up out of the water. It doesn't take long for them to realize they aren't totally different and they don't have anymore power over sin than they did prior to their water baptism. The problem is **power over sin is not achieved by focusing on water baptism, but by focusing on Spirit baptism.** This is clearly how John saw it and it is clearly how we need to see it.

If a believer desires to think about something that can and will revolutionize his Christian life, one should think about the fact that the moment you believed, the Holy Spirit of God placed him into Jesus Christ and identified him with everything Christ is and did. This baptism was totally, completely, and fully authorized by Jesus Christ, Himself. This is Spirit baptism and this is the thinking that will bring power to the Christian life to live victoriously over sin.

Spirit Baptism Heading #2 - Those passages in which the Holy Spirit baptizes into Jesus Christ.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, in speaking of these passages wrote: "These passages constitute a distinct testimony by themselves, which is to the effect that by the operation of the Holy Spirit the believer is organically and vitally joined to the Lord and thus has become a partaker of the standing, merit, and perfect worthiness of Christ" (Vol. 6, p. 142).

Under this particular heading, we will examine seven passages that instruct us concerning the glorious realities of Spirit baptism. It needs to be once again pointed out that Spirit baptism is a real baptism, **not** a ritual baptism. Therefore, Spirit baptism **is not** a symbol, **it is** a reality.

Passage #1 - Romans 6:1-4.

In this context, the Apostle Paul had just concluded informing the believers of the judicial work of God in declaring one righteous in Jesus Christ, no matter what their level of sin (5:18-21).

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Paul had so presented this truth that he knew a question would arise as to whether or not one justified in the sight of God should continue in sin. His answer is “May it never be” or “God forbid.” The defense that he offers for this response is that we have been so united with Jesus Christ and everything He did, including His death, burial, and resurrection, that we should live our lives for God. In other words, the Spirit of God baptized us into Jesus Christ.

The Spirit of God united us to everything Christ accomplished. Since this union with Christ has judicially freed us from sin (6:7), we should in no way live a life which continues to be dominated by any sin.

It is quite evident from this passage that knowledge of Spirit baptism is critical for a believer living a life victorious over sin. No water baptism can ever bring such victory to a believer’s life, but the knowledge of Spirit baptism can do this very thing and this is precisely what Paul writes. As one’s mind begins to recognize the Spirit’s work in uniting one with Jesus Christ in Spirit baptism, one becomes more victorious over sin. If Romans 6 is viewed as referring to water baptism and nothing more, Satan has won a great victory because water baptism cannot ever change one dominated by sin into one dominated by righteousness.

Passage #2 - I Cor. 12:13 .

Here is the closest look we will ever get at one verse that pretty much defines Spirit baptism as being the joining of the believer to Christ’s body. In other words, it is the work of the Spirit in which he places the believer into an organic union with Jesus Christ. This union is so connected to Jesus Christ, that all those “in Christ” are considered one body.

An accurate biblical understanding of Spirit baptism must be one that admits that it is the work of the Holy Spirit in which He so links the believer with Jesus Christ that he becomes part of His body. Notice carefully that Spirit baptism is something “ all ” believers have received. Spirit baptism is **not** a feeling, **it is** a union. It is **not** an emotional reaction, **it is** an actual reality.

All believers have been baptized into Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. They are so linked with Him that they are actually considered by God as His body. This is a true, sound, doctrinal understanding of what Spirit baptism actually is and this is precisely what this verse teaches.

Passage #3 - Galatians 3:27 .

One of the most beloved verses in all the Bible is Galatians 2:20. The sad tragedy is very few people even realize the doctrinal significance of this very verse. Galatians 3:27 describes a vital union with Jesus Christ which is so profound that this verse says one who has been baptized by the Spirit has actually “clothed” himself or “put on” Christ. This is obviously not some emotional or energizing experience; this is a unique work of the Holy Spirit in which one who believes is completely and totally identified with Jesus Christ and all that He accomplished. In God’s mind, there is a vital link to His Son’s work and Galatians 3:26 makes it clear that this link took place when one believed.

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Passage #4 - Ephesians 4:4-6.

Here is another passage that has been totally misunderstood. There are those who read these verses and without any thought assume that the “one baptism” is a reference to ritual baptism in water in conformity to an ordinance of the church. Those who take this position tend to elevate water baptism to the same level of Spirit baptism.

Those who hold to this interpretation tend to hold strongly to their position, because they conclude that if this is referring to Spirit baptism it completely negates the subject of water baptism from any practice in Christianity (a conclusion we do not accept in this church).

The problem for those who hold that this passage refers to water baptism is seen in the discussion of Dr. I. M. Haldeman, in his article entitled “Holy Ghost Or Water?” Haldeman writes: “If it (Ephesians 4:5) be Holy Ghost baptism, water baptism is excluded. There is no authority, no place for it. No minister has a right to perform it; no one is under obligation to submit to it. To perform it, or submit to it, would be not only without authority, but useless, utterly meaningless. If it be water baptism, Holy Ghost baptism is no longer operative. Baptism must be either the one or the other, Holy Ghost or water. It cannot be both. Two are no longer permissible” (Cited from Dr. Chafer, Vol. 6, p. 148).

Although, as we will demonstrate, Dr. Haldeman’s conclusion is a little extreme; what he did realize is that this passage cannot be referring to both water and Spirit baptism, for that would constitute two baptisms and this text is referring to one ! Paul, in Ephesians 4:5, is referring to one baptism, so it does have to be one or the other. In this observation, Dr. Haldeman is absolutely correct.

The baptism to which Paul is referring in Ephesians 4:5 is the baptism that links one to the Trinity and to the body of Jesus Christ. It is a baptism that is linked to the moment one believes (“one faith”). There can be little doubt from Paul’s similar statement in I Corinthians 12:13, that the specific baptism he has in his mind, which links one to the Trinity and places one into the body of Christ, is Spirit baptism. As Dr. Merrill Unger said, “The Apostle, in speaking of ‘one baptism’ in Ephesians 4:5, to be sure, is speaking of Spirit baptism...” (*Ibid.*, p. 149).

The answer to Dr. Haldeman’s seeming problem is that Paul, in Ephesians 4:5, is contextually discussing the privileged, exalted position one has in Jesus Christ. He is having this discussion in order to motivate the believer to live a life in a worthy, unified manner, which is precisely the same thing he does in Romans 6. The realization that the Spirit of God has so profoundly linked us to Jesus Christ and has forever linked us to the Trinity is great impetus for living a holy life. Paul’s intent is not to discuss two types of baptisms or their purposes, and to read that into this context by way of inference is a major interpretive mistake. There were obviously several types of baptisms and Paul, himself had actually participated in what we would call “believer’s baptism” (Acts 16:14-15, 30-33; 18:8; I Cor. 1:14-16). Paul’s intent in Ephesians is not to discuss the water baptism performed by humans, but to discuss Spirit baptism performed by God.

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To assume, as Dr. Haldeman does, that this automatically means Paul is against water baptism, is, in my opinion, a naive and faulty assumption.

There can be little doubt that the baptism Paul wanted N.T. Grace Age believers to clearly understand and focus on is Spirit baptism. Paul understood that this doctrine was critical for N.T. believers living a life not dominated by sin (Rom. 6) and living in the church as a loving group of unified believers (Eph. 4). Water baptism will never give anyone victory over any sin, nor will it produce a loving unity in the church. Only God's Spirit does this and that is precisely what Paul is emphasizing.

Passage #5 - Colossians 2:9-13 .

Any honest examination of the context will conclude that the baptism to which Paul is referring in Colossians 2:12 is Spirit baptism. The discussion centers on what a believer has in Jesus Christ without hands (2:6-7) in a comparison to a circumcision of the flesh made with hands. It is clear from the context that Paul is discussing vain philosophies that were the traditions of men, which can harm the believer. Paul wanted the believer to realize that he was complete in Jesus Christ and what put him into Jesus Christ was the baptism of the Holy Spirit (2:12).

Again it may be seen from Pauline theology that a key to conquering sin (Rom. 6), a key to loving unity (Eph. 4) and a key to combating heresy (Col. 2), is a total focus on our positional connection to Jesus Christ accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit when He baptized us into Him, the moment we believed.

Recognizing our positional identification with Jesus Christ by the baptizing work of the Spirit of God was and is, in the mind of Paul, a major key to spiritual victory and development. No focus on any water baptism will ever produce these results and that is why Paul so often brings up the subject of Spirit baptism.

Passage #6 - I Peter 3:21-22 .

Unless one realizes that this passage is referring to Spirit baptism, this passage will forever remain an unsolved mystery. Once Spirit baptism is seen, this passage opens up and becomes very clear. As we come to this verse, we may make two immediate observations:

- 1) The baptism to which Peter is referring actually saves a person.
 - 2) The baptism to which Peter is referring links one to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- In our understanding of N.T. Grace Age doctrine, we should immediately identify the baptism here as Spirit baptism. To state it plainly, the baptism to which Peter is referring in this verse, which actually saves a person and links him to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is Spirit baptism. When we grasp this, this entire section of Scripture makes sound and logical perfect sense.

The Apostle Peter is challenging believers to be willing to suffer (3:17) and he uses Jesus Christ as the ultimate example (3:18). His point is that Jesus Christ suffered for us and even died and then was made alive.

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Peter wanted believers to realize that even in death Christ kept proclaiming the truth of God, something he wanted believers to do in the face of their own suffering.

Believers who are suffering can tend to shy away from proclaiming God's Word and Peter wanted us to realize that Jesus Christ still kept proclaiming God's Word even when physically dead (3:14-15,19). Then Peter gave an illustration of Noah and the eight souls that were in the ark who were saved "through" water. Peter's point is that the eight souls were saved from the judgment of the flood because they were safely in the ark. Verse 21 makes it clear that some baptism does the same thing for the believer. There is a baptism that saves the N.T. believer from the judgment and wrath of God and produces a good conscience in the sight of God and identifies us with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The baptism which does all of this is none other than Spirit baptism.

In other words, to be baptized by the Spirit is to be placed into Jesus Christ in the same way that Noah and the eight souls were placed into the ark. Those in Jesus Christ will never experience God's wrath and will have a good relationship with God. In Peter's mind, this reality should prompt the believer not to waste his life in the flesh, but to invest it doing the will of God (4:1-2). Peter also knew the significance of Spirit baptism.

Passage #7 - Mark 16:16 .

This is one of the key verses used to support the false thesis that one must be baptized in water in order to be saved. However, upon a close examination of the verse, it will be accurately observed that the baptism to which this verse is referring is not water baptism, but Spirit baptism.

Several important observations may be made concerning this verse:

- 1) The baptism being discussed is one closely connected to the Gospel which was to be presented to the whole world (Mark 16:15).
- 2) The baptism being discussed is not one that is classified as a sign that would follow those who believe (Mark 16:17-18).
- 3) The baptism being discussed has saving value (Mark 16:16a).
- 4) The baptism being discussed is closely linked with believing and being saved (16:16).
- 5) The baptism being discussed is closely linked with **not** believing and being condemned (Mark 16:11, 13, 14, 16).
- 6) The baptism being discussed is passive, not active, meaning the subject is in no way involved in the action, but simply is the recipient of the action.