

One Baptism

In all seriousness I ask you to reconsider two traditional teachings which we continue to repeat concerning the one baptism of Ephesians 4:4.

"*There is one baptism.*" How can we misunderstand that? It is often explained that there have been a number of baptisms mentioned like that of John the Baptist, Holy Spirit baptism, and the baptism of fire. The one baptism could not be Holy Spirit baptism or the baptism of fire because the one baptism specified by Jesus in the Great Commission is in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Isn't that what Paul is teaching?

Not really! Different types or methods of baptism were not the point of his discussion. He was writing about the unity that God created and how he brought it about. Whether baptism is of water or Spirit, immersion or aspersion, literal or figurative is not being discussed. He is referring to baptism as the means of INITIATION into unity in one body.

If there were different baptisms of initiation, we might better explain how some are baptized into the various Churches of Christ (instrumental, acappella, one-cup, non-institutional, etc.), some into the Christian Churches, some into the Church of God, some into the Assemblies of God, and others into the various denominations.

Paul was begging the Ephesian disciples to be "*forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.*" Have you been taught that these "seven doctrines" are the basis of our salvation which we must agree upon? How sad! Since Paul wrote those words centuries ago, there has never been a time when all agreed on all those points of doctrine. Unity based upon consensus of beliefs is a phantom! The Spirit created unity.

If there were various Spirits we might justify being in different bodies. If there were more than one body, we would expect diversity among them. If we followed different Lords, we would see differing allegiances. Having different Fathers we would not be brothers in the same family. If we have different baptisms of initiation, then we could expect to be initiated into different groups. If we pursued different hopes, that might lead in separate ways. Multiplicity of bodies, Spirits, hopes, Lords, faiths, baptisms, and Fathers would justifiably result in vast diversity among them, but since all of these elements are "ones," there can be no justification for disunity. Isn't that what Paul was proposing?

Since there is only one initiation into Christ and his body, how can we be divided? We are all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). In order for disciples to be divided into our various groups, we have to align ourselves with groups that distinguish themselves from the universal body. Many of my dear brothers and sisters in the Church of Christ still

refuse to admit that they have *joined* a division or *placed membership* in one in addition to being added by the Lord to his universal church at the time of their baptism. And “my people” are not the only ones who fail to understand this.

The other point for us to reconsider regards translating the passage to read "*there is one immersion.*" Although the word "*baptize*" may correctly imply "*immersion,*" that is not what Paul is emphasizing in this passage. Because of the familiarity that our generation has with the word *baptism*, when we read it with the emphasis on the mode, we are actually directing the mind away from what Paul was teaching, that is, that we all underwent the same ceremony of initiation into unity into one body. By this, I am not denying that baptism is by immersion. I am saying that a wrong emphasis may allow persons to think they were baptized Scripturally without recognition that God put them into fellowship with all who undergo the ritual of initiation.

How can we fulfill the exhortation to maintain the unity that the Spirit initiated if we do not accept the truth that we all submitted to the same baptismal initiation into it? []

(Cecil Hook; May 2005)

My 38-page introduction, "*End-Time Prophecies' – All Fulfilled!*" is being read with interest (\$2.00 postpaid). For thorough and convincing reading, I have and recommend "*The Parousia*" by James Stuart Russell (\$20.00 postpaid. 561 pages), and "*The Second Coming: Mission Accomplished*" By Tom and Steve Kloske (\$30.00 postpaid. 621 pages)

Talkin' Texas: Being a republic, Texas entered the Union by a treaty which permits the Lone Star flag to fly at even mast with the Stars and Stripes. All my life, I have heard it repeated that Texas also gained permission to divide into four states if it chooses, but I have never seen authentic information upholding that claim. Have you?