

Baptism in the New Testament

One Baptism is the One Salvation.

NOTE: This is chapter 18 of the LCB Commentary, "Believe and Be Baptized", shared here in order to clarify one of the most commonly mis-understood teachings of the Bible.

Unfortunately, most generally the custom is to think of "baptism" as what takes place in the baptistry of the church. Not so in the Bible of Jesus and the Apostles where "baptism" most generally refers to what takes place inside the life of the believer before entrance into the baptistry. All the great teaching scriptures about baptism from Romans, Peter, and Jesus are more concerned with the internal change in the believer when they believe that is created by the Holy Spirit of God. Believe is what we do for salvation: baptism is what God does inwardly in the believer when there is real faith. Granted, baptism in the baptistry **{which could even be a river as in the case of the water baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist}** is instructed by Jesus as an act of obedience, and it does preach a message of salvation that should have already happened inside the believer; but far more important is the inward change of baptism by the Spirit of God, that can be called nothing less than salvation. Why do you think in the seven major doctrines of Ephesians salvation is not in the summary of all the majors such as one God, one Christ, one Spirit, one body, one faith? Well, that is covered by the one baptism. Who is saved above, Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized"? We believe and God baptizes through the Spirit and based on what Jesus did on the cross. Would you not much rather have God's baptism than any other baptism, no matter how outlandish the claim is about the benefits of baptism by this or the other church?

At first it may seem strange to take a verse from the last chapter in Mark to introduce a volume on the life and writings of the Apostle Paul, but not as much so when you consider that these are words from the Great Commission itself from the Risen Christ, just before His Ascension. As Jesus for 40 days made resurrection appearances to disciples, their slowness to believe (Mark 16:11, 16:13, and 16:14) made it evident to Him that another Apostle was needed. In a few years, and after a couple of appearances from the Ascended Christ {on the road to Damascus and later extensive teaching from the Ascended Christ in Saudi Arabia}, that Apostle would be converted from the Saul who persecuted Christians to the Apostle Paul who would practice beyond any all the implications of the Great Commission. This Apostle Paul as a lawyer of the Hebrews would have unique knowledge of the Old Testament once "the veil had been taken away from his eyes, and Paul would later write in Romans of what kept most of the religious leaders—chief priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and Herodians—from understanding the oracles of God of their own nation. The Apostle Paul as a Roman citizen would have the legal protection of the Roman government like was needed later

at Ephesus when they sought to kill him during the Second Missionary journey, would have as a Roman scholar the ability to speak with “new tongues” --one of the signs Jesus predicted would follow those who did “believe” (Mark 16:17), and would have personal and intimate knowledge in high and low places of the members of the Roman Empire to whom Christ commissioned him to take the Gospel, first to the Jews but primarily to the Gentiles.

{Recall that a few years after the Messiah was cutoff, the Jews as a nation were likewise cutoff as the chosen nation of God, going into that period of abomination of desolation where they would no longer have “eyes to see and ears to hear”; and that only approximately 100,000 in the days of Acts and the first few centuries were converted in the short period after the Crucifixion, 5,000 at the first day of Pentecost after the Resurrection.} Paul would be the Apostle of choice by the Ascended Christ, and His “alter ego” – the Holy Spirit--to take the Gospel of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles; at the same time, explaining what both happened to the Jews as the former chosen nation of God, and how the Gentiles would with the “Fullness of the Gentiles” take their place in the kingdom of God. **{That mantle of Gentile leadership we know from history and church history fell on the United States, until recently, as America became the leader among the believers of the world; and as the US sent missionaries to every nation of the world in obedience to the great commission.}**

“Believe and be baptized”, words from Jesus Himself, best summarize the message that Paul delivered to the Roman Empire. It also best summarizes the many messages that Paul delivered in Jewish synagogues and Gentile houses throughout the Empire in two missionary journeys; and in the most significant and lasting influence in the Gentile world with a few Jews, the writing of 14 New Testament books and the sponsorship of 3 more. You know how a decision made by early church fathers about a New Testament Canon included the criterion of authorship by an apostle or an associate of an Apostle; but a little known fact which can only come out of the internal evidences of the New Testament is the supposition that Paul left manuscripts and parchments {those same books and parchments that Paul requested Timothy to bring to prison in Rome while Dr. Luke was there, and at the same time to bring John Mark since he was profitable to Paul’s ministry as chief editor of the New Testament (II Timothy 4:11-13)} for John Mark and Dr. Luke to write respectively Mark, Luke, and Acts. Stop to think about it a few moments since hindsight is better than foresight; and since we can look back over the actual history of the last two thousand years, realizing that the total influence the books of the Apostle Paul is much greater, by any measure you might chose, than the influence of his missionary journeys. Instead of extending approximately one century as did the influence of His immediate life and journeys, the 14 letters with three supplements have extended for over two thousand years. And to think that this was not in the plan of God and the implementation in the kingdom of Christ is as foolish as overlooking the ways God has worked and continues to work in history as the Great Maker of History, the same truth noted by the Apostle James at the great Jerusalem conference when after quoting from Amos 9:11,12, says “known to God from eternity are all His works.” (Acts 15:18)

“Believe and be baptized” best summarizes the message that is needed today to explain why the local churches and denominations are about to be overwhelmed by the tares as in the Falling Away of II Thessalonians and Daniel, as “the power of the holy people is completely shattered” (Daniel 12:7). We in the kingdom of God and of Christ have never learned the details of the parable of the seed and the sower, or some of the details of that parable has become part of the time and doctrine we will no longer be endured during the Falling Away. Remember the part where church members, whose hearts like seed sown on stony ground, receive initially the Word with so much enthusiasm {the exact words of the explanation of Jesus in Mark 4:13-20 is “immediately receive it with gladness”} that it is interpreted by the evangelist and local church as a conversion, then how Jesus explains that, having no root and because of persecutions and tribulations for the word’s sake, they endure only for a time and stumble. Like the citizens of Jerusalem during the day of the Prophet Jeremiah, who lived as they wanted during the week then came to the temple on the Sabbath to say “We Are Safe” (Jeremiah 7:10), we also think we are safe in our beautiful, comfortable, and many church buildings, not realizing that the bad behavior of church members, like of the temple attendees, has overtaken us (II Timothy 3:1-9), that our intolerance of sound doctrine has sealed the God determined fate of our demise (II Timothy 4:1-4), that we have completed our usefulness as a nation to God in the evangelization of the world and in the Fullness of the Gentiles, and that our pride in Bible knowledge, Bible teachers, and preachers has really become more the vast “heaping up of teachers with itching ears” (II Timothy 4:1-4) of the end time false prophets and teachers more than any signs of revival. What we really have in our nation is not signs for encouragement among the few truly members of God’s kingdom who remain, sort of like the thousands who had not bowed to Baal during the time of Elijah, is a like in all the times of the OT Prophets a lot of false prophets saying peace when there is no peace, a lot of pastors and teachers convincing their audiences that they are the people of God when there is only a remnant of those people left in the whole nation, and an innumerable heaping up of misleading teachers that help place a fortress of protection and security, and by the way ignorance, around the so-called “people of God” of many churches and denominations. We are far too “tolerant” today and in our country to admit that Satan has placed the tares in the churches and kingdom for the very purpose of subversion and destruction. Look again carefully at the parable of tares and wheat taught by Jesus and as explained by Jesus to His disciples, and if you can not find eyes to see and ears to hear this parable with explanation then you like most religious leaders of Jesus’ day do not have the spiritual understanding of the ASPI **{Authorized Semi-Public Interpretation}**. What you see and hear Jesus saying is that “the enemy who sowed them is the devil” (Matthew 13:39), and if the Devil sowed those tares in the churches as well as in the larger kingdom then like the nature of Satan Himself as destructive and as a liar, then the tares in the local churches and denominations have the same goals as Satan himself, that of THE LIE and lies, deception, and destruction. Of course, if your sound doctrine has never progressed to the extent of believing in Satan as the prince and power of this world, then your doctrine will also “be slow to believe” all the Prophets and Apostles said of both Jesus and Satan!

“Believe and be baptized” is the message that Jesus wants to spread His influence in this time as in the time of the 12 Apostles. It is the complete message that will go beyond initial “belief” only which can not save to the “uttermost”; that is, can not save to the extent of a corresponding inner change which is nothing less than a 9 month new birth, a progressing sanctification, and then a glorification that is a real visual of Christ in the finalized kingdom of the new heavens and new earth! As I told a Chinese friend recently, one who was surprised that a simple belief could bring salvation, there are two “beliefs” in the Bible as the Apostle James makes clear. There is one belief which the devil has and tremble, knowing the facts of hell and their God determined fate there and of their fall; and then there is another faith, one which shows itself in works and that is a righteousness by faith apart from works. This later faith which saves and converts all the way, and with an adequate concept and more importantly practice of a 9 month new birth as contrasted to an instantaneous new birth of the fundamentalists and of the immediate joy of the seed on stony ground, is the “believe” of Jesus that is coupled with the power of God acting on that individual belief summarized as “and be baptized”. Sorry if you thought “and be baptized” related to water baptism. NO, NO, and NO, NO, and NO. It is the “baptism” that Paul speaks of most often in the book of Romans; it is the baptism that Paul writes of most often in his 14 letters; it is the “one baptism” of Ephesians; and most importantly it is the “and be baptized” that Jesus gives to all His disciples as a great commission. If you do not see this on the positive side of Mark 16:16 where you have the two divisions in “believe and be baptized”, one you do in the exercise of your freedom of choice and then the second which God does on you in response to the proper belief and attitude of repentance and belief which when He sees, He starts an act of God in you; then you should see it in the negative side of Mark 16:16 – that is, in the “but he who does not believe will be condemned.” You know and I know if Jesus had made water baptism necessary for salvation, in spite of all seeing it as a work rather than of grace, he would have said something like, “but he who does not believe and be baptized will be condemned”. Right, you know it to be true even though you must face up to an onslaught on unsound doctrine to the contrary. Popularity of Bible teaching, like a best-seller, is now a bad sign; and the popularity of many Bible teachers, both male and female, is a sign of how far we are into itching ears and the time of itching ears teachers as in “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (II Timothy 4:3,4) I would have to say, like Jesus said of His first disciples who at first would not endure the sound doctrine of His resurrection, that you “are slow to believe” the signs in your local churches, in the denominations, and in particular the signs of the warfare in the SBC, if you can not see in all this, and more, the signs of the Falling Away as given by the Apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit of God in the two verses of II Timothy 4:3,4. What you do see in your local churches, denominations, and the larger kingdom of God is: (1) a vast heaping up of popular Bible teachers in conferences, on television, and in books and on the radio {have you ever seen or heard of so many Bible teachers and preachers, and does it not for even one second make you stop to think of how Jesus and the Apostles,

especially Paul, told you that there would be many false prophets and teachers – and where do you think those are coming from}; (2) the motivation for such church members is twofold – (a) they have passed beyond ignorance of sound doctrine to a point of no return where they “will not endure sound doctrine”, and this intolerance toward sound doctrine is aided by an increased popularity in the churches and denominations which they detect so that they “can come out”, so to speak; and (b) it is motivated by “their own desires” for comfort, security, inertia – in that they have a desire for things to stay like they know them, they like their lack of root convictions, they have become comfortable with their cares of this world and the things of this world, they like the deceitfulness of riches of the Gospel of Prosperity and the corollary of success; (3) the turning of ears away from truth while like the religious leaders of Jesus’ day practicing vain worship with a substitution of the teachings of men for the doctrines of God came so slow and gradual with years as to be unnoticed, and they like the people of Plato who lived under ground so that they thought the reflected light to be the real light, the vast number of church members today do not know that they have turned into fables.

Jesus said certain “signs” would follow along with the believers.

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:17,18)

Instead of these signs in our churches today, we have the signs of the Falling Away such as (1) distortions of God’s concept of marriage among church members; (2) the taking of God’s name in vain as a common practice among church members so that like in Romans 1, men consider by themselves as teachers of the law have become something else, the name of God is blasphemed throughout the world; (3) the popularity of Bible teachers with itching ear teachings, especially as related to the Gospel of Prosperity, success, the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, in churches and outside in the larger kingdom; (4) the rebellion against the authority of Christ in churches as trusted in the pastors with the unheard of large number, in the name of democracy, who run off their pastors, choosing ones less demanding in the preaching of the Word; (5) the accepted but bad church behavior of church members like that enumerated in II Timothy 3:1-9 where they exhibit a form of godliness but deny the power and presence of God; (6) the unrighteous and rebellious gap between churches and Christ that most see with any spiritual understanding at all; and (7) the warfare between “fundamentalists” and “moderates”, between the Texas State Baptist Convention and the present leadership of the SBC, a warfare that started in this largest Protestant denomination in the world 20 years ago as Criswell announced for his cohorts like Stanley, Rogers, Falwell, and Lahaye that “they would keep fighting until one side or the other won”, and which the fundamentalists did until they took control of the SBC, the kind of fighting which shows a bad spirit even if you can not see the non-conservative nature of the fundamentalist’s superficial, hunt and peck method of Bible interpretation, a method based more on Scofield notes than on real ASPI Bible. **{You don’t think this has hurt the SBC; well, it is**

all over in a matter of a short time for the SBC unless the real southern Baptists rise up to take control of their own convention, which can hardly take place during the time of the Falling Away as the Holy Spirit is withdrawn and as the power of the holy people is completely shattered. In other words, don't plan for it to happen! Granted that some of the signs which follow legitimate believers mentioned above are still going on with a very small scale and hidden from most, even like the healing work of God that Jesus said He saw God doing before His life on earth and which is still going on. Granted likewise that many tares and the leaders of tares have learned to simulate the signs of Jesus, like Jannes and Jambres to simulate the works of God up to a certain point, and then join the people of God when they can no longer simulate. However, these signs did follow the life, teaching and preaching of the Apostle Paul as we will look at in this volume from the book of Acts.

The ASPI.

One last piece of housekeeping remains in the Preface before we continue in chapter 1 with the Ministry of the Apostle Paul as chief editor of the New Testament. That is an explanation of ASPI for Authorized Semi-Public Interpretation. You have suspected that there is one legitimate interpretation of the Bible based on the Scripture, "no prophesy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Peter 1:20); and therefore that we come closest to that one interpretation when we chose a "public" method of interpretation over a "private" method of interpretation such as the exclusive method of Scofield and the living legends in their own minds of the fundamentalists. However, an understanding of parables as Jesus taught it, and in particular an understanding of how "all things are given in parables" as Jesus also taught in order that only real disciples, not the tares, would understand, then we are led beyond "private" and "public" to Semi-Public. Hence the "S" of Semi-Public in the ASPI. Yet this is only the beginning of the ASPI method of interpretation which you must come to appreciate more fully in this volume, even as in the other "from the Apostles and Prophets" approach of the LEARN CHRIST commentaries and first developed in all the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament of volume 1, "The Prophets and Apostles"; and here in this volume where you will find Paul often quoting from the OT, explaining what they said under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and before that in the so-called seven silent years at Tarsus as he read back through the Law and the Prophets according to what the Ascended Christ taught him in Arabia, recording on a parchment OT quotes for future NT writings, his and those for John Mark and Luke. I don't know how to explain the comfort of the ASPI to you, except to say that it can change your life and your Bible study to extensively correlate what the Prophets said with what Jesus and the Apostles said {at the same time just letting the Bible say what the Bible wants to say, the Bible is a consistent whole from the mind and heart of God so that if you miss that consistency you miss the truth of God, and remembering that the sum of the total is greater than the sum of the individual parts}, and vice versa; and while a few minor problems may remain in your Bible study, you will pass far beyond that popular attitude of not reading the Bible because there are too many interpretations and denominations, if not all the way to an extreme comfort in the soundness of the doctrines to which you hold! **{Don't fret over it at this point in the**

volume, we will continue to discuss and explain it, according to Jesus, the Apostles, and the Prophets!}

The Word "Baptism" in the New Testament.

Since we have discussed "believe" more than "baptism" in the chapters since chapter 4 on BAPTISM, this would be a good point at which to look at all the references in the New Testament where "baptism" is used. The word in the King James Version is found 23 times in the New Testament, and it is easily grouped into several major divisions.

1. The Baptism message from John the Baptist, both a water baptism and an immersion (baptism) in repentance before water baptism.

(1). Matthew 3:7. When John the Baptist saw Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious leaders of the day, coming for his baptism (s), he called them "vipers" and told them to bring to the water baptism a prerequisite of "fruits worthy of repentance."

(2). Matthew 21:25. (also repeated in Mark 11:30 and Luke 20:4) When later some of these same religious leaders, this time the chief priests and elders, questioned the authority of Jesus to deliver His teachings, asked them whether the "baptism of John" had the authority of being from heaven or from men.

(3). Mark 1:4. (also repeated in Luke 3:3) You have in this verse the two distinct baptisms of John, not unlike the two baptisms into Jesus of water baptism with a prerequisite baptism of salvation: (a). Water baptism, "John came baptizing in the wilderness"; and (b) Baptism of repentance, "and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins". Since there is some repentance in real faith and some faith in real repentance, you would have to say that the two baptisms of John the Baptist were almost the same as the two baptisms from the Apostles. However, where there is any element of doubt such as Paul encountered in believers who had only know the two baptisms of John, then they were more carefully instructed on salvation and then baptized.

(4). Luke 7:29. There were cases of people, like the tax collectors, who having participated in the two baptisms of John the Baptist, were doubtless saved in that they "justified God", those two baptisms having, Jesus taught, come from God; and there were the opposite cases of the Pharisees and lawyers who rejected "the will of God for themselves" by rejecting the baptism of John the Baptist.

(5). Acts 1:22. This baptism of John was as much a part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that an Apostle selected to take the place of Judas Iscariot must know about as well as all that Jesus did and said in the presence of the disciples, from that beginning time of the Gospel until the Ascension, and witness of the Resurrection.

(6). Acts 10:37. We must be careful that those who know only the baptism of repentance of John, sorrow for sins toward God, know also the baptism of faith of the Gospel. What is most important again, is not the two water baptisms, but the inward baptism of both repentance and faith. The Apostle Peter does in this verse in telling what

has just happened in Israel make a fine point of distinction between “the preaching peace through Jesus Christ” and the start of that preaching that God gave Jesus “after the baptism which John preached”.

(7). Acts 13:24. You can also see in the early preaching of the Apostle Paul in Antioch in Pisidia that fine point of distinction between before the coming of Jesus, when “John first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel”, and the point in history after that when Jesus made His public appearance to John and Israel, where the message of John became more that he was not the Christ but the Christ came shortly after Him. In order to participate in the One Baptism of salvation, it is important to know both repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ; and then water baptism is to be an enacted sermon and act of faith in a work that comes behind it. And then if there was any question as to whether that one baptism of salvation actually happened in the individual because they did not hear all the words of faith necessary for that salvation to happen, then after they really hear and believe, let them be baptized again. Baptism by water and immersion is so easy; and while it has nothing to do with salvation; it should be done properly and only after sufficient faith baptism.

(8). Acts 19:1-5. When Paul rebaptized disciples at Ephesus, it was after they admitted that they did not receive inwardly the Holy Spirit which always comes with the One Baptism. In other words, it was obvious that there was no real salvation in their life. Unfortunately, the Pentecostals in just one of their major departures from sound doctrine--and they have many similar violations of Scripture as given in I and II Corinthians all generated by a unjustified pride in the uniqueness of their church membership such as “the Word came out of them”, “the Word came to them only”, “everyone has a song, a prophecy, or a word”, worship that draws attention to themselves, has an uncertain sound and breeds confusion, and a speaking in tongues which are not really languages, always of questionable motivations--have run amuck with a baptism for salvation and then a second blessing baptism of the Spirit. No, the consistent message of the Bible is that the One Baptism of Salvation is also an immersion of the Holy Spirit, most often called the new birth. Of course, the work of the Spirit does continue through the many years, however not instantaneous, as He works to make the believer more Christ-like. In all these cases sound doctrine dictates: first comes the Baptism of Salvation, and then comes Water Baptism.

2. Jesus used the word “baptism” for immersion to refer to the blanketing of persecutions that would come His faith in rejection and crucifixion, which also would be the type of immersion that the Apostles would have.

(1). Matthew 20:22 and 20:23 (also repeated in Mark 10:38 and 10:39 and Luke 12:50) refer to this kind of baptism of the cross and suffering that the Apostles would share with Him.

3. The Baptism of Salvation, the One Baptism.

(1). Romans 6:4. As Paul’s great treatment and definition of the One Baptism in Romans 6 and Romans before he refers back to it in Ephesians as the One Baptism, and

where by the way as discussed in this commentary where all the great basic doctrines of the Bible are mentioned as "ONEs" and where there is not One for salvation. There is no need, that is the One Baptism. Read Ephesians 4:4-6 and then come back to Romans 6 to define the one baptism. Well, here is some of it: (1) when we are "baptized into Jesus" we are baptized into the death of Jesus--another way Paul says this in Galatians 2:20 is that "we are crucified with Christ". How are we crucified with Christ? When we go down into the river or the baptistry to be immersed, or even when we have a nudge to start speaking in tongues? No, how can we be crucified in water or speak tongues in water! (2) Even as Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, so are we in the new birth raised by the power of God to walk the style of a new life.

(2). Ephesians 4:4-6, the Great Major Doctrines of Faith. Ephesians is a condensed summary of all the 10 letters that Paul wrote before it with the great truths, teachings, and doctrines of the Christian Faith, and Ephesians 4:4-6 summarizes in turn Ephesians.

"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)

Is there only one baptism in Scripture; certainly not, there is only one major baptism that exceeds all the others in importance because it is the salvation of God.

(3). Colossians 2:12. In this similar language of Romans 6, "buried with Him in baptism"--by the way the message of Ephesians is also repeated in Colossians, so that Colossians like Ephesians is a summary of the first 10 books including Romans--you have a comparison of this salvation not only in terms of a one baptism but also for emphasis in terms of a "circumcision without hands". Even as the one baptism is a baptism without any words and any hands, so also is the one baptism like an inward circumcision where no hands work on the flesh and there is no work on the flesh. You are reminded again of Peter's statement about "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh"--in other words no water involved in this baptism--but rather the inward answer of a good conscience toward God. So much of this distortion of water baptism as part of salvation, or as necessary for salvation, has come from the desire of church leaders, primarily at first the Catholics and then the Episcopalians and Lutherans and Anglicans and now the church of Christ and even others, to have control over and a part in your salvation. Do not let them!

(4). Hebrews 6:2. This talks of the "doctrine of baptisms" {plural for baptisms} in such a way as to visit up to the realities of many baptisms in the Bible; but also, in such a way with "doctrine", the singular, to note how they are related. Does this allow for any such deceptive thing as a "baptism in the Spirit", so called by the Pentecostals, which comes after the one baptism of salvation and even after water baptism. No! However, it does allow as you read the context of the rest of Hebrews for a complete immersion in the Spirit over a period of time which most generally in Scripture is "sanctification"--a lifelong process--most often referred to, especially in Ephesians, as a growth into the full

stature of Christ. The problem with these Pentecostals is that they want sanctification instantaneously; they want to have the pride of a second blessing as unique Christians beyond what others have as they like the Gnostics gain a spiritual knowledge not possessed by other church members; and they want instant and easy evidence that they are the real children of God. {You see that over and over in I and II Corinthians.}

(5). I Peter 3:21. You saw the exegesis of this in chapter 4 in this famous Scripture from the Apostle Peter of how the One Baptism is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, therefore having nothing to do with water baptism. Well, not nothing; they are related as one doctrine of many baptisms to the extent that the opposite of salvation, the immersion of the whole world in a flood, is related to the one salvation.