

The “One Baptism”



THE "ONE BAPTISM"

PAUL'S DECLARATION that there is "*one* body and *one* spirit, according as you were called also with *one* expectation in your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith", and "*one* baptism" (Eph. 4: 4, 5)—that declaration, had it been understood and heeded, would have meant a far different history in the church, especially as it concerns *faith* and *baptism*. That we would not have had faith and baptism, and the church, in pluralities, but the "*one* body of Christ" in "*the* unity of faith", by now attained "*to* mature manhood, to the adult stature of Christ's complement", in which it would have been possible for us to "*be* attuned to the same mind and of the same opinion", "*endeavoring to keep* the unity of the spirit with the tie of peace"; "*saying the same thing*" and "*no* schisms" among us (1 Cor. 1: 10; Eph. 4: 1-6). For in this "*one* baptism", "*in one* spirit . . . all . . . baptized into *one* body" (1 Cor. 12: 13); God blending the body together and placing the members, each one of them, in the body according as He wills (1 Cor. 12: 18, 24); "*all the* members are rejoicing together" (1 Cor. 12: 26). "*Now, being* true, in love in all we should be growing into Him Who is the Head—Christ—out of Whom the entire body, being articulated together and united through every assimilation of the supply, in accord with the proportionate operation of each single part, is making for the growth of the body, for the upbuilding of itself in love" (Eph. 4: 15, 16).

That is the picture which the apostle gives us as the outcome of the "*one* baptism" to which he has reference.

So it behooves us to examine the subject of baptism in the light of Paul's teaching, and to see whether the practice of baptism, as it has been followed since Paul's day, is *right*, the "one baptism" into "the body of Christ".

In saying that the subject should be examined "in the light of Paul's teaching", this is what must be accepted—as we shall show: that to Paul alone must we look for this "one faith" as well as for this "one baptism". That this stewardship of God's grace "for the nations" committed to him to be "the dispenser, in accord with the gratuity of God's grace . . . to preach the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ . . . as to the secret administration which has been concealed from the eons in God" (Eph. 3:7-9); had it not come we would now be in "ignorance" of it (Eph. 4:18), "having no expectation, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

And that is, saying this: that what is called the Great Commission, to disciple and baptize the nations, is not for us in this era. And saying also that that Commission has never been carried out; that Jesus Christ has never as yet taken His great power (Rev.11:17), to be present and direct this discipling; and, of course, that the apostles never went out to the nations to either disciple them or baptize them. And they never used the formula of baptizing "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit". Therefore the practice of the church, in baptizing in water and using that formula, and saying it is done "by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ", is an unwarranted assumption and taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Having made that assertion, startling though it may seem and sound, let us prove, by Scripture, the right to make it.

First, that the defaulting error of Christendom rests, fundamentally, in never having recognized the place of apostleship granted to Paul, as well as in not adjusting

its faith in keeping with the revelation made known to him alone; that only in his teachings is to be found any right of the nations to have a place before God. This error is like that of the Galatians; a turning back to the evangel of the Circumcision instead of holding to that which Paul preached; that made known to him, "through a revelation of Jesus Christ, for him to be evangelizing among the nations" (Gal. 1:12, 16). A distinction which he made clear; "that I have been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, according as Peter of the Circumcision (for He Who operates in Peter for the apostleship of the Circumcision operates in me also for the nations), and knowing the grace which is being given to me, James and Cephas and John, who are supposed to be pillars, give to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we, indeed, *are to be for the nations*, yet they for the Circumcision" (Gal. 2:7-9).

This very clearly shows that the apostles for the Circumcision had a very definite idea about their evangel; that it was not that of the Great Commission, to disciple and baptize the nations, but concerned that which looked to the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-8)—just when that should be brought to pass, Jesus had told them it was not for them to know. If any of them ever had a very clear notion, or intimation, *that they would ever be engaged* in that world-wide evangelization, after the kingdom came, or that it was for that that they must be prepared by the new birth and the making with Israel of the new covenant, there is nothing in their writings to show it or suggest it. While on the other hand, their attitude towards Paul's evangelism of the nations and their antagonism against him in it, as recorded in the book of Acts, is wholly against such being the case. And what Peter says about "deeming the patience of our Lord salvation, according as our beloved brother Paul also writes to you, according to the wisdom given to him, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them concerning

these things, *in which are some things hard to understand*" (2 Pet. 3:15, 16), intimates that Peter himself did not apprehend fully the ministry of Paul. The thing hard for him to understand, perhaps, was just what could be the significance of Paul's apostleship to the nations, seeing that he was a Jew. For I think that it can be accepted as true, that just as the Lord in "telling the apostles that which concerns the kingdom of God" did not tell them that the reception of their preaching of it would be unfavorably received, because it would react unfavorably on their proclamation, similarly we can assume that the time was not ripe for either the Lord, or the holy spirit, to indicate anything respecting the proclamation of the Great Commission—just when it should be (cf. John 16:12, 13).

It is, then, definitely certain that the proclamation at Pentecost was not the proclamation of the Great Commission, but that of a literal King and a literal kingdom; both of which the summing up of Acts shows were rejected.

But knowing that this conclusion will be rejected, because it will be contended that the apostles were preaching "a spiritual kingdom", even the proclamation of "the New Testament church"; I pause to give it consideration, for the sincerity of the contention deserves it. There is a sense in which it is altogether true that the Great Commission is indeed a spiritual-kingdom-message, and it was for that very reason a proclamation which could not at that time have been successfully inaugurated. Israel was completely destitute of spirituality, and all the high demonstrations of the holy spirit's activity hardly made a dent on their hard hearts, where there should have been a nation-wide conversion. Peter's accusation, "Let all the house of Israel know certainly, then, that God makes Him Lord as well as Christ—this Jesus Whom *you* crucify!" The response to that should have resulted in "*all* the house of Israel" repenting—a

national spiritual uprising. For only that would have fitted the nation for a world-evangelization; the discipling and baptizing of the nations. Ezekiel prophesies that: "A new heart also will I give you, and a *new spirit* will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep Mine ordinances, and do them" (36: 26, 27).

A spiritual kingdom could not be proclaimed to a people who refused the kingdom-preaching of the King, and then after crucifying Him refused to believe the spirit's testimony of His resurrection, and persecuted those who proclaimed the message. No, the "spiritual kingdom idea" does not fit the circumstances of Pentecost. *Hence there was no baptizing into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit.*

In this fact will be discovered why the baptizing, with all its attendant schisms, is a meaningless rite today; a church ceremony without any authority from the Lord. The church, not correctly partitioning the word of truth, has overlooked the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found in Paul's evangel to the nations, the secret made known to him, by revelation, of the untraceable riches of Christ, and not to be found anywhere else than in his writings. That now "*in spirit* the nations are to be *joint* enjoyers of an allotment, and a *joint* body, and *joint* partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which", said he, "I became the dispenser, in accord with the gratuity of God's grace, which is granted to me in accord with His powerful operation" (Eph. 3: 2, 6, 7).

But before stressing this point—for there is nothing which needs more to be stressed—let us go back a little and lead up to it gradually, in this way: To be set right respecting the teaching of Christ and the apostles; or the gospels, as they are called, and the book of Acts, weighed in a correct partitioning of the word, would

revolutionize the creeds and course of Christendom. And if the writings of Peter, James and John were kept in the place God has put them—indicating the priority of Israel in administering the gospel of Christ's propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), the only channel through which it is to be done—then these overflowing blessings would not be confounded with the transcendent ministry of the apostle Paul: The ministry which has been given to him while this other-to-come mission of the twelve is in abeyance.

But here is that at which we stumble; why, for nearly two thousand years, the church, known as the Christian religion, has been practicing a discipling and baptizing of the world—the *nations doing this to themselves*—with the idea that in so doing it is carrying out the Great Commission, and, too, with the expectation that some day the result will be the realization of the kingdom of God coming to the whole world.

While we may not know the "why" of this, that should not prevent *some* of us from knowing the facts of this matter as the Scriptures reveal them. And here are those facts, in brief: Paul's mission of evangelism to the nations cannot be understood so long as we fail to recognize the very clear line of demarkation between his evangelism and the evangelism of the twelve apostles; with this particularly in mind, that the twelve never were sent by Jesus to the nations as such, to evangelize them or to baptize them—but that that is in abeyance, and will be, until Jesus returns to inaugurate it.

This is needful for us to know, else we will be led to think that in going to the nations, Paul was working under that Commission. Knowing this we will be able to understand the "one baptism" of which he speaks. This "one baptism" transcends all the circumstances of the malpractice of *baptisms* by men in trying to *make* the unity of the body of Christ instead of endeavoring to *keep* that unity in the tie of peace (Eph. 4:3). For, of

course, only a baptism in "one spirit . . . into one body" and "imbibing one spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13), can do that. Even so this other baptism of men shows in the divisions and schisms which it yields.

Now let us get Paul's point of view. First his very clear and positive statement that his commission did not contain the ordinance of baptism (1 Cor. 1:17). He could not consistently have made this statement if he were acting under the Commission. And when you remember the circumstances under which he made the statement; the character of the baptism, and the nationality of those whom he baptized (Jews or proselytes, beyond question), there is no further room for dispute. The Jews were the ones who were expecting the kingdom. They must have the pardon of their sins, as at Pentecost; while Paul's evangel to the nations did not have that hope, its expectation being "celestial" (Eph. 3:8-10; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

It is this transition, this separation of Paul for this particular ministry, which is slowly developed; this gradually breaking away of Paul from his people (Rom. 10:1, 2), after his call (Acts 13:2, 3) to separate himself from them; this prelude to an entirely new departure in the book of Acts; which must go until it becomes manifest that the Jews outside the land refuse the Messiah, even as did the others.

This accounts for Paul, after fourteen years, going up to Jerusalem by revelation (Gal. 2:1-9), that this matter of his apostleship to the nations (wholly aside from every consideration of the Commission, because that was not any part of the discussion), might be settled. It was "Not from men, neither through a man" (a matter of jealousy mostly upon the part of James, who had no right, not being an apostle, to have precedence over Peter); it was not even through Peter, but "through Jesus Christ and God, the Father" (Gal. 1:1).

This marks the passing of the whole program of the

twelve apostles, and of any present hope for Israel out of the proclamation of the kingdom and repentance and baptism. Israel has now been practically divorced from Jehovah. As the writer of Hebrews points out: "Wherefore, leaving the rudiments of the word of Christ, we should be brought on to maturity, not disrupting again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith on God, of the teaching of baptizings, besides the imposition of hands as well as the resurrection of the dead, and eonian judgment. And this will we be doing, that is, if God should be permitting" (6:1-3).

To the Jews, as zealous religionists, repentance and baptism had never delivered them from their "dead works" nor led them either to the kingdom, or to maturity in the word of Christ. Or, as Paul put it, their "zeal of God . . . for salvation" was "not in accord with recognition", it was "not subject to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:1-3).

I am saying that both repentance and baptism, as rituals, and "dead works", soon passed from the church at Jerusalem and from the whole land.

And why is it, also, that there is no Jewish church today? And why has no preaching of the gospel to them by the nations ever been successful?

There are several answers to this, all of them Scriptural. But there is one in particular: Just as it is not the business of the nations to preach to the nations a discipling, and to baptize, mistaking the Commission to be their authority for it, so it is even more inconsistent to reverse the dispensation and the era of Paul's commission, and evangelize the nations and turn them back upon Israel, when it is Israel that is to be the true channel through which the nations are to be evangelized. This they are to carry through under the Christ after He has returned and has established His kingdom.

There is no Scriptural reason for thinking that any people, unrelated to Christ "in the flesh", would be ac-

ceptable messengers to those who are so related to Him, no matter what their attitude to Him. A Christianity which takes up a Commission which does not belong to it, and yet completely loses sight of the only evangelism of hope to which it has any right—that which Paul dispensed to “the nations . . . of the untraceable riches of Christ”, certainly does not know its own righteousness (Rom. 1: 17; 5: 17), and is not itself mature in Christ and has not attained to the adult stature of Christ’s complement (Eph. 4: 13). If it had it would not have remained in ignorance all these centuries—discipling and baptizing into it knows not what.

As the book of Acts shows the passing of baptism in water—the baptism which was not of Paul’s Commission—and as Paul declares that he was not sent to baptize (the nations), “but to be preaching the evangel” (1 Cor. 1: 17); it is high time that we restudy the history of this *passed-baptism*; to discover in that history *why* it fell into decline, as it had been prophetically indicated it should.

Hear John the baptist on this: “I, *indeed, am baptizing you in water*, yet One stronger than I is coming, . . . He will be baptizing you in holy spirit and fire, Whose winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will be scouring His threshing floor and be gathering the grain into His garner; yet He shall burn up the chaff with *inextinguishable fire*” (Mat. 3: 11, 12). Why should John, moved by the holy spirit, make this contrast between his baptism in water and Jesus’ baptism in holy spirit, to carry it over into the days of judgment and indignation, unless it be that that wrath of God would revert to the Pentecostal era as having failed, in its baptism, to bring the kingdom to Israel? For after the days of God’s wrath and indignation — burning up the chaff — the Christ will have gathered “the grain into His garner”. For, seeing that the kingdom of the heavens did not come *after a baptism in water*, the conclusion is that it can

only come after a baptism in spirit, more than that which came at Pentecost; when Jesus, coming in power, shall fulfill the words of the "two men . . . in white attire, who say also, Men! Galileans! . . . This Jesus Who is being taken up from you into heaven shall come in the same manner as you gaze upon Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:10, 11). That coming with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13; Rev. 1:17), with power and great glory (Mat. 24:30), but not until a new heart and a *new spirit* have been put in the house of Israel, and they are caused, by God's spirit (Eze. 37:1-10), to walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances (Eze. 36:22-28).

Jesus had told Nicodemus of the necessity of being "begotten of water and spirit" before anyone should "perceive" or "be entering into the kingdom of God"; that comprehended the baptism in water for repentance as set forth by Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). But since Israel, as a nation, did not submit to that baptism, the baptism that John the baptist said Jesus would baptize in (holy spirit and fire) looks to what Ezekiel prophesied, a spiritual regeneration, the sovereign work of God.

That baptism of spirit will not have a baptism of water for Israel like the baptism of Pentecost; it being a spiritual regeneration, they could do no more to accomplish this than in their natural birth as sons of Abraham. In it the nation shall come forth, gathered out of all the nations, as on eagle wings the might of God first delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage—"baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea". With this difference; that all Israel shall have a new heart and a new spirit, not to be lost in a desert wilderness as before.

Note, then, that when Jesus said to His disciples "that John, indeed, baptizes in water, yet you shall be baptized in holy spirit after not many of these days" (Acts 1:5), He was visualizing to them and telling them "that which concerns the kingdom of God"; paving the

way to answering their next question, "Lord, art Thou *at this time* restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (verse 6). The whole book of Acts indicates the answer. The nation rejecting the kingdom, it will come in the new baptism of spirit and fire.

For remember what is to be Israel's task in discipling and baptizing the nations. A discipling to make the nations believe and know God; a baptizing in water to make the knowledge of Jehovah cover the earth as the waters for the sea floor are a covering (Isa. 11:9).

And what will that knowledge consist of? "The Oracles of God" entrusted to Israel; the laws of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 16:17; Isa. 55:11; Rom. 3:2; 2 Tim. 3:15); the teaching of Jesus as found in the gospels; and the teachings of the Circumcision epistles, Peter, James and John, and Hebrews.

We get this lesson from the temptations of Jesus: "It is written" is the instrument by which Jesus shall judge the world in righteousness; that through which the nations "may be finding Him" (Acts 17:26-41). It took Him to show to the world how important is God's speaking.

The Psalmist expressed it thus:

The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul:
The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart:
The commandment of Jehovah is pure, enlightening the eye.
The fear of Jehovah is clean, enduring for ever:
The ordinances of Jehovah are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is Thy servant warned:
In keeping them there is great reward. (19:7-11)

The Scriptures are showing that the message of the apostles, with which they shall disciple the nations, is not to be a new one, similar to that which Paul preached, but that, since the nations have rejected his evangel—"walking, in the vanity of their mind, their comprehension being darkened, having been estranged from the life of

God *because of the ignorance which is in them*, because of the callousness of their hearts, who, being past feeling, greedily give themselves up with wantonness to all uncleanness as a vocation" (Eph. 4:17-19)—that administration of the kingdom will be another era when the nations will be "apart from Christ, being alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and *guests* of the promise covenants, having no expectation, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12): their "salvation will be of the Jews", the people they will be judged for persecuting (Mat. 25:31-46), and they will be compelled, as "foreigners", to bring their wealth to the priestly nation before whom their kings will be led captive (Isa. 60:10-12).

These things we should know to appreciate the meaning and the place of the "one baptism", "in one spirit baptized into one body". Or, to enforce its truth, what it means to believe God (i. e., take Paul's teaching as the very word of God), and how to "correctly partition" that Word. How that with the kingdom door locked and Israel set aside *nationally* (so that there cannot be any Commission of discipling and baptizing of the nations), what should be appreciated is this Secret Administration, revealed through Ephesians and Colossians, characterized and empowered by God's dispensation of transcendent grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7; 3:2; Col. 1:5, 6, 13-20). How *that* not being appreciated, "at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with His powerful messengers, in flaming fire dealing out vengeance to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of the Lord Jesus Christ", there shall be those "who shall incur the justice of eonian extermination from the face of the Lord, and the glory of His strength; whenever He should be coming to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all *who believe* (seeing that our testimony to you was believed) in that day—" (2 Thes. 1:7-10).

It is the baptism "in one spirit", not in water, that makes for a unity possible to be kept in the tie of peace (Eph. 4:3). Or, at the expense of repetition (a worthy expenditure), it serves well to note that Paul's correction of the Corinthians, seemingly temporary and local at the time (?), still is the spirit's guidance in the matter of schisms and divisions, and, as it happens, exposes the carnality and prevailing lack of spirituality as it exists in creedal Christianity today. For to be "attuned to the same mind and of the same opinion"—a thing possible in being baptized in one spirit into one body—is not possible as things now are.

And it is this, the imperative of the "gratuity of God's grace, . . . with His powerful operation . . . to preach the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ *to the nations*", that makes Paul's commission to be without *baptism in water* (1 Cor. 1:17), but in spirit instead.

And in view of the fact that John the Baptist prophesied that a baptism in spirit and in fire must precede and prevail in Israel to perfect Israel's entrance into the kingdom, that too is indicative of a prime necessity for the nation of Israel to fit them for discipling and baptizing "the nations" "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit". Consistency in contending for "a spiritual kingdom" ought to make that evident, if true "spirituality" is to have any place in either thought or practice.

So if we keep this distinction in mind we will not fall back into the error which has lost that to us in present day preaching; the error of thinking the Commission a command to "the nations" to be discipling and baptizing *themselves*.

The *discipling* and the *baptizing* is to come of Him, Whose *baptism in water* was "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mat. 3:15); that "apart from law, a righteousness of God . . . *through Jesus Christ's faith*" might be "for all and on all who are believing, for there is no

distinction, for all have sinned and *are* wanting of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:21, 22). He was willing to submit to another baptism, "to be baptized with" (Luke 12:50); it is that baptism which gives meaning to the baptism of the Commission. It gives meaning to the word *baptism* because it is not limited to the element of water nor to the office of the baptizers, but to the powerful operation of God's spirit in it all.

This, I say, makes Paul's word about the "one baptism" "in one spirit into one body" emphatic. One spirit, within and without, "and all made to imbibe one spirit," binds us together and unites us to Christ; an invisible unity composed of all who have God's spirit (1 Cor. 3:16), by which they are vitally joined to the living organism of which Christ Himself is the Head. "One body and one spirit, according as you were called also with one expectation in your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

R. H. LAMPKIN

Concordant Publishing Concern

P.O. Box 449

Almont, Michigan 48003