

Baptism of the Spirit (2nd)

(This episode is Part 2 of our study of I Corinthians 12:13. As previously stated, this passage is often used by both Baptists and Protestants to teach what is considered “spirit baptism” or “regeneration.”)

In our last study, we began looking at I Corinthians 12:13. We did not discuss this verse when we went through the New Testament looking at the five Greek words for baptism as they related to water baptism. Since this verse is often used (along with Romans 6:3-6, Colossians 2:11-13, and sometimes Galatians 3:27) to teach about “spirit baptism” or “regeneration,” we wanted to study it separately. Previously, we discussed somewhat about the difficulty of the passage. We further gave a couple of quotes showing how it is often believed that this verse is teaching “spirit baptism” or “regeneration.”

We also presented some things to consider about the subject. First, how the Greek words for baptism were translated and used in the Scriptures. Second, how the Greek word βαπτίζω (none of the other Greek words for baptize are used in I Corinthians) is used in this letter written to the congregation at Corinth. Third, the pattern for baptism; that is, how baptism is performed.

We ended our lesson by saying there is much discussion as to whether what took place at Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), at Caesarea, in Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:44-47), or at Ephesus (Acts 19:6) was the same thing as on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. We also said that our study is not to answer the questions regarding those incidents or if such continues to happen today. However, assuming (for arguments sake) they are one and the same, the pattern is identical: Christ as the administrator; believers as the subjects; the Holy Spirit as the element. However, this is not the pattern that is presented regarding “spirit baptism” with I Corinthians 12:13. Today we want to look at the pattern that is generally presented for “spirit baptism” or “regeneration” and see if it fits the pattern of water baptism and the pattern of baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

As a follow-up from our conclusion regarding Christ being the administrator for Holy Spirit baptism see Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16. Time does not permit us to look at each verse individually, but since they all essentially say the same thing, we will quote Matthew 3:11 where John said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me (speaking of Christ) is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” Scripture plainly declares that it is Christ that baptizes with the Holy Ghost or Spirit. Christ is the Administrator of Holy Spirit baptism. Let us see if this fits the pattern of I Corinthians regarding “spirit baptism” as is considered by many.

John Gill said of this baptism of the spirit, “Now this is wrought by the Spirit of God, and is owing to his divine power and energy; not to water baptism, which has no regenerating virtue in it; nor to carnal regeneration, or a being born of blood, or of the best of men; nor to the will of any man; nor to the will of the flesh, or the power of man’s freewill; but to God, to the Spirit, who is Lord and God, and the only sanctifier of the sons of men; by which spiritual baptism, or by whose grace in regeneration and conversion they are brought into one body: the mystical body of Christ, the universal and invisible church; that is, openly and manifestatively; for otherwise it is the grace of God in election, and in the everlasting covenant, choosing them in Christ, as members in their head, and constituting them such, that puts them among that number; but spiritual baptism, or the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, makes them appear to belong to that body, and makes them meet for, and gives them a right unto, a particular Gospel church, and the privileges of it, which the Spirit of God directs and brings them to.”

You will notice that this “baptism,” according to Gill, is (1) “wrought by the Spirit of God,” (2) “by whose grace in regeneration and conversion they are brought into ... the mystical body of Christ, the universal and invisible church,” (3) it is a “spiritual baptism” that “makes them appear or belong to that body, and makes them meet for, and gives them a right unto, a particular Gospel church.” He makes it clear that prior to this “spiritual baptism” the subjects were previously in the everlasting covenant elected and chosen in Christ. Here we see that it is the Holy Spirit that is the administer, and the elect (though dead in sin) are the subjects, but into what are these elect baptized? What is the element? He says it is the “mystical” and “invisible” church. By this are we to infer that tangible and concrete dead sinners are made spiritually alive and put into an intangible, invisible, mystical, and abstract object? If so, this gives a dual meaning of regeneration because the Scriptures teach that regeneration (or the new birth) is making a dead sinner spiritually alive. His will and desires are changed. Something concretely happens to him in a spiritual way. But in “spiritual baptism” the dead person is (by regeneration) put into the invisible congregation or body of Christ. To me, this does not fit the pattern of baptism as taught in the Scriptures—not the picture of water baptism or the picture of the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost as administered by the Lord Jesus Christ. This “spirit baptism” has to be read into the context of I Corinthians 12:12-27. Another thought to consider is, if this is regeneration when the Holy Spirit comes into a person to make him spiritually alive to God, is the Holy Spirit somehow performing a “spirit baptism” whereby He (the Spirit) is “baptizing” a dead sinner into Himself (i.e., into the Holy Spirit)? As you can see many questions are opened with this view. And, as Gill rightly says, they are put into Christ before the world in election. And for dispensationalists, they are put into this invisible church when they exercise their free will and believe.

Obviously, the context of this passage has to do with the body of Christ, the congregation of the Lord. The Greek word for body is used nineteen (19) times in I Corinthians and eighteen (18) of the nineteen times is found in our passage of I Corinthians 12:12-17. What the Lord is teaching the congregation at Corinth in this passage is not what the church/congregation is. Neither is He teaching us what baptism is. Because of the friction and division in this congregation over the use of gifts, chapters twelve (12) through fourteen (14) is given to correct the improper use of those gifts and to promote unity within the congregation. In our passage (I Cor. 12:12-27), the Lord inspires Paul to use the human body to demonstrate how the different parts work together for the good and harmony of the whole. Likewise, the congregation with its different gifts is to work together in peaceful harmony for the good of the entire congregation. In verse 12, Paul begins by using the human body as a standard of unity as to how the congregation should be. In other words, Paul was saying that Christ is not divided, but is in perfect unity like a human body. Verse 13 is to be understood by the context. Verses 14-25 are definitely referring to the human body. Verse 26 may, or may not, be referring to the human body. In either case, it is speaking of the care that the members in the body (the congregation) should have for each other. In verse 27, it clearly states that the congregation at Corinth is “the body of Christ.” Actually, the definite article is absent before body in the Greek text and the verse can be rightly read “a body of Christ.” So out of the 18 times the word body is used in the text, 16 of them clearly refer to a human body. And when Paul said that the congregation at Corinth was “the body (or a body) of Christ” he did not include the congregation at Cenchrea (Rm. 16:1) which was only a short distance down the road. Nor did he address his epistle to the “church/congregation” of Galatia but to the “churches/congregations” of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) when he wrote to a group of congregations. And when there were more than one congregation at Rome (see Romans chapter 16), Paul did not address the epistle of Romans to the church at Rome, but to “all that be in Rome ... called ... saints,” Rm. 1:7. I believe too much is made of the idea of “the church” being the “body of Christ” as something invisible and mystical. Clearly the teaching of the church (congregation) of God in the New Testament is focused on the individual congregations and it is there the Lord meets with His saints in

worship and it is in the congregation that the truth is sustained, I Tim. 3:15. Therefore, it is essential that the congregation be of one mind and one spirit in everything. The strength and life of the congregation is in the unity of the members and this is what Paul stressed at Corinth regarding their issues with the gifts.

In conclusion of our study today, those who believe I Corinthians 12:13 is “spirit baptism” maintain that it is the Holy Spirit that does the baptizing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit that John preached (Mt. 3:11 and related passages) clearly stated that Christ was the administrator; therefore, this “spirit baptism” that is advocated by many in I Corinthians 12:13 is something different. They teach that it is regeneration. They further teach that it is when “believers” are added to the mystical or invisible body of Christ. Scripture never designates a group of churches or a group of believers from different churches as a church or body of Christ. The Scriptures do designate a single congregation as the (or a) body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27) and Scriptures plainly show that when a letter is to be addressed to a group of churches it is plainly declared, Gal. 1:2.

Sadly, our time has run out for today. The Lord willing we will look at I Corinthians 12:13 in a more detailed way to declare what we believe it is teaching in our next study.