

What is the “One Baptism” of Ephesians 4:5?

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As you know, there are several different kinds of baptisms discussed within the New Testament. [Matthew 3:11](#) mentions three: baptism of water, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and baptism of fire. John the baptizer says, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” There are also several baptisms mentioned under the Old Covenant. These are referred to in [Hebrews 9:10](#) where it says “divers washings.” The word “washings” is translated from the Greek word baptizo. This is probably something similar to what the Pharisees practiced as mentioned in [Mark 7:4](#) and [Luke 11:38](#) where the verb “wash” is also translated from the same word. [Matthew 20:22](#) also speaks of a different kind of baptism—a baptism of sufferings. Finally, we come to [Acts 8:38](#) and we see Phillip taking the Ethiopian down into the water and baptizing him based upon the confession of Christ. So we have at least six different ways in which the word is used in the New Testament. There is baptism 1) in water of John, 2) of the Holy Spirit, 3) of Fire, 4) Washing, 5) of Suffering, and 6) In water of Christ. Which one is the one baptism of [Ephesians 4:5](#)?

The context of [Ephesians 4](#) is religious. So first and foremost it must be speaking of a holy baptism, not a common one. This eliminates #4 above. That is, the “one baptism” of which Paul speaks is not the common baptism of washing plates and cups before you eat out of them. Paul is clearly discussing a holy baptism, given the context of his discussion.

Second, Paul does not indicate that baptism should be taken in any way here other than some kind of literal baptism. In other words, the context does not indicate that the one baptism that Paul is discussing is a baptism of suffering or something like that. Just as there is one Lord, one Father, one faith, one hope, one Spirit, there is one baptism. Those other “ones” are pretty much referring to literal things. So the one baptism must be something equally as literal. This eliminates #5 above.

What about baptism of fire? Well, in going back to [Matthew 3:11](#), we look at verse 12. It says, “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” This does not sound like salvation to me. This sounds like condemnation. Baptism in fire is something that you don’t want. Jesus will baptize in fire those who have not obeyed his gospel at the second coming according to [2 Thessalonians 1:8](#). So, I am sure that this is not the baptism that Paul was discussing in [Ephesians 4:5](#). Paul was speaking of matters that relate to salvation, not condemnation. That eliminates #3.

What about John’s baptism in water? Here was a baptism that many received in that day and age. It was in water and many thought it was related to salvation. We see this baptism in [Acts 19:1-7](#). These twelve men in this passage were baptized with John’s

baptism. But Paul tells them to be baptized with Christ's baptism—the baptism that mentions the Holy Spirit. This is what Christ commanded in [Matthew 28:18-20](#). He said that the disciples were to baptize “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” John's baptism did not do this and so they had never heard of the Holy Spirit prior to Paul. So Paul baptized them properly. From this, we know that the one baptism could not have been John's baptism. Paul specifically dealt with this issue in regard to the Ephesians. This eliminates John's baptism from being the one baptism of [Ephesians 4:5](#) (#1 above).

This leaves us with two different baptisms to discuss: the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and water baptism in the name of Christ. Let's look at Holy Spirit baptism first. Note John's statement in [Matthew 4:11](#). He says, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:” John's point is that he is MERELY baptizing in water, but the one coming after him is going to baptize with two additional elements. A) the Holy Spirit, B) fire. First, we call attention to the fact that these two baptisms are administered directly by Jesus. This is an important point. The contrast that John is setting up is that he baptizes in water, but Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire. No one but Jesus can administer these baptisms. Second, notice that the baptism of fire is limited to the chaff. Would it not make sense to say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was going to be limited as well? Third, notice that in the great commission, Jesus tells his disciples to administer baptism ([Matthew 28:18-29](#) and [Mark 16:15, 16](#)). This baptism was to be administered to all who would believe. The baptism of the commission was baptism in the name of Christ, by water. We know this from [Acts 8](#) and the Ethiopian Eunuch. So we have the following from [Matthew 4:11](#):

1. John baptized in water.
2. Jesus baptizes in fire, and the Holy Spirit.
3. Only Jesus can administer the baptisms of fire and of the Holy Spirit.
4. Baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit is limited.
5. Baptism in the commission is not limited, i.e. it is for the whole world.
6. Baptism in water is the baptism of the commission.

Now, let's turn to [Acts 1:5](#). In this passage, Jesus says, “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” The context tells us that Jesus was talking to the apostles (v.2 and 4). They were going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So we know what baptism of the Holy Spirit looks like per [Acts 2:1-4](#). It is not water baptism. It is not baptism that is for the whole world. It was a limited baptism administered by Jesus to the apostles in [Acts 2](#), per Jesus own words in [Acts 1](#). There is only one other instance of Holy Spirit baptism within the New Testament and that is in [Acts 10](#) when the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius on his household.

Concerning this situation, Peter says in [Acts 11:15, 16](#), “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” So Cornelius was baptized of the Holy Spirit as well. However, you will

notice that in [Acts 10:48](#) Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. They had already been baptized in the Holy Spirit, so now, in what is Peter commanding them to be baptized if not water? Well, if Holy Spirit baptism is the one baptism of [Ephesians 4:5](#), then why was Cornelius and his house commanded to be baptized in water? We conclude from this that while Holy Spirit baptism is an involuntary baptism, water baptism is a baptism of command, that is, a voluntary one. Now, notice the following regarding water baptism in the name of Christ.

1. It is baptism that is for all, not merely limited to some.
2. It is a baptism that can be administered by men, not only by the Lord.
3. It is baptism that all can participated in.
4. It is the baptism of the great commission.
5. It is a voluntary baptism that results from command.

Holy Spirit baptism is as follows.

1. It is a baptism that is limited to a few.
2. It is a baptism that is directly administered by Jesus, not men.
3. Only those who Jesus personally selected participated in it.
4. It is not the baptism of the great commission.
5. It is not a voluntary, but an involuntary baptism and thereby, not a baptism of command.

Now which baptism would the one baptism of [Ephesians 4:5](#) be? It wouldn't be limited because Paul cites it as a unifying factor for all believers. It wouldn't be directly administered by Jesus because Paul says that this is part of our endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It wouldn't be based upon who Jesus personally selects, because the unity of the Spirit is for all Christians. It would be the baptism of the great commission because that is the authority under which Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians. It would be a baptism that was voluntary because the context says that we must endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit and this throws the whole discussion into the area of voluntary obedience. It has to be a baptism that is a uniting factor for the church and so all must have been able to participate in it. Now what is the baptism that fits this context? It must be water baptism in the name of Christ.