

Only One Baptism

extract from Proposition XII § ii, iii

§ ii. . . . Among these “sacraments” (so-called) baptism is always the first in the list. . . . The following things, briefly mentioned in the Thesis, must be discussed and proved:

§ iii. First, that there is only one baptism, as well as one Lord, one faith, etc.

Second, that this one baptism, which is the baptism of Christ, does not mean washing or dipping in water, but rather being baptized by the Spirit.

Third, that the baptism of John was only a symbol of this, and since the symbol gives way to the substance, so the substance continues but the symbol ceases.¹

As for the first point, “that there is only one baptism,” no other proof is needed than the words of Ephesians 4:5, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” There the apostle positively and plainly affirms that since there is only one body, one Spirit, one faith, one God, etc., so also there is only one baptism. . . .

This one baptism, which is the baptism of Christ, is not washing with water. This is evident, first, from the testimony of John, the particular and exclusive² minister of water baptism (Matthew 3:11), “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He

¹ Here the translation follows the Latin text. The English text is very confused.

² Latin: *proprius & peculiaris*; English: proper and peculiar. Both these English words have shifted in meaning since Barclay’s time, when they were closer to their Latin cognates. “proper” meant “belonging to the person in question distinctively or exclusively, distinctive, particular, private” (OED #2) and “peculiar” meant “one’s own private property, belonging exclusively to”

will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Here John mentions two ways of baptizing and two different baptisms: the one with water and the other with the Spirit, the one he himself was the minister of, and the other Christ was the minister of. And those who were baptized with the first were not necessarily baptized with the second: “I indeed baptize you, but he shall baptize you.” Though at that time they were baptized with the baptism of water, yet they were not yet baptized with the baptism of Christ, which would happen later. . . .

Objection: If anyone says that baptism with water was one part and baptism with the Spirit was the other part, or only the effect of the first part.

I answer: This exposition contradicts the plain words of the text: he does not say, I baptize you with water and he that comes afterward shall produce by the Spirit the fruits* or effects of my baptism, nor does he say that he who comes later shall finish or perfect* this baptism in you, but rather “he shall baptize you.” . . .

Secondly, This is further confirmed by what Christ himself says (Acts 1:4-5) “but wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” There can scarcely be any two places in Scripture which are more parallel than this one with the former one, mentioned a little before. Therefore this concludes the same way as the other did. Christ here grants fully that John completed his baptism, both materially and in substance. “John truly baptized with water,” he says, which is the same as saying that John did truly and fully administer the baptism of water. “But you shall be baptized with, etc.” This shows that they were to be baptized with a baptism different from the baptism of water, and that, although they had been baptized in the past with the baptism of water, still they had not been baptized

with the baptism of Christ, which would happen in the future.

Thirdly, Peter observes the same distinction (Acts 11:16): “Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” The apostle applies these words to the time when the Holy Spirit fell upon them. From this he implies that they were baptized at that time with the baptism of the Spirit. . . . From these three sayings related to each other, first from John, the second from Christ, and the third from Peter, it is evident that people who were truly and really baptized with the baptism of water were not necessarily baptized with the baptism of the Spirit, which is the baptism of Christ. And those who truly and really administered the baptism of water did not administer the baptism of Christ along with it. So if there is only one baptism, as we have already proved, we may safely conclude that it is the baptism of the Spirit, and not of water.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XII § ii, iii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) p. 347-350 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 266-269.