

In a book I read not too long ago on the Holy Spirit there was a discussion about the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit in a volume in the NAC series, and on one of the pages I saw a footnote which suggested that **1 Corinthians 12:13** was irrelevant to the discussion since it "looks" like it refers to water baptism. However, I have good reason to believe that it does not refer to water baptism, and would like to here explain my reasoning on that. I also believe that

Galatians 3:27-28

and

Romans 6:3-4

are relevant to the discussion based on their similarity to

1 Corinthians 12:13

, so they will receive due attention as well.

A Look at 1 Corinthians 12:13

I would like to start by discussing **1 Corinthians 12:13** briefly below. I think it is most instructive and enlightening to compare side-by-side the terminology used in

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

and

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

since they are written in the same epistle, by the same writer, are in relatively close proximity to one another (even in the same thematic context - as I will show), and both use similar terminology (some of which is seldom used elsewhere).

I conducted a careful terminological study of 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and noticed a few of the following things.

First, the recurrence of the word "same" and occasionally "one" (indicating unity) as in:

- "*same Spirit*" (**vs. 4**)
- "*same Lord*" (**vs. 5**)

- "same God" (**vs. 6**) *Side note:* Who can miss the Trinitarian overtones at this point with Spirit, Lord, and God used like this?
- "same Spirit" (**vs. 8**)
- "same Spirit" x2 (**vs. 9**) Now Paul really starts emphasizing the Spirit in connection with this "sameness".

Then we see **vs. 11** using the same terminology: "*But **one** and the **same** Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills*."
." There we now see the use of "one" and "same" together.

Then comes **vs. 12-13**: "*For as the body is **one** and has many members, but all the members of that **one** body, being many, are **one** body, so also **is** **Christ** . For by **one Spirit** we were all baptized into **one body**—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into **one Spirit***

" In these verses we see the use of "one" recurring and a baptism that is "by (Greek:

εἰς [en]) the Spirit", by which we are baptized into the Body. The language here is evident enough that this is not a literal baptism being spoken of, since you cannot be physically baptized into a '**soma**

' (Greek for 'body'), but rather that it is speaking of a spiritual action here of the Holy Spirit spiritually baptizing us into the collective Church and Body of Jesus Christ.

But let's compare this terminology to **1 Corinthians 10:1-4**:

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

First let us note that the subject is the collective of Israel "all our fathers" just as the subject in **1 Corinthians 12:12**

is "one body" with "all the members" (cf. "as the body is one and has many members").

1 Corinthians 12:12

is obviously referring to the members of the Church as being placed together into a metaphorical "body" with the body's "members" standing for the individuals united together into that single entity.

Next we see something that happens to "all" in both groups:

- "all were baptized unto Moses" (**1 Cor. 10:2**) - 'unto' = Greek: εἰς [eis] (into)
- "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (**1 Cor. 12:13**) - 'into' = Greek: εἰς [eis] (into)

Just as the Israelites were metaphorically "baptized" into Moses (many individuals being baptized "into" a singular entity) so Christians are metaphorically baptised "by the Spirit" (meaning by means of the Spirit) "into" (eis) a singular body. See the parallel?

You can see the parallels side by side in the table below:

1 Corinthians 10	1 Corinthians 12
Israel	
Church	
(many members - "whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free	
Moses	One Body (Jesus' body)

"all were baptized"		(1 Cor. 10:2)	"we were all baptized"	(1 Cor. 12:13)
"into Moses"	(1 Cor. 10:2)	"into one body"	(1 Cor. 12:13)	

Oh, but the parallelism doesn't stop there! There are even further observations which seal the understanding that the terminology between chapters 10 and 12 is parallel.

1 Corinthians 10:3-4a *"And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink"*

Firstly, note the word "same" here (same meat, same drink) as also occurs often in chapter 12 as noted above. Paul is trying to illuminate the commonality of the things which God's people have experienced and partaken of together in both chapters. Essentially the "all", in each passage, partake of the "same" in both chapters 10 and 12

But note even further that there is additional similarity in the metaphorical terminology for partaking: **drinking!** **1 Corinthians 10:2** also includes eating, but we see the basic similarity of theme in the sharing and use of the term "drinking" in **1**

0:3

and

1 Corinthians 12:13

. And it is not just ordinary drink, but drink that is connected to what is spiritual in nature:

- "and did all drink the same spiritual drink " (1 Cor. 10:4) □ □
- "all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13)

The "Spirit"/"spiritual" word-coupling with this word "drink" is no accident! It indicates that the partaking of the baptism into 'one' is experienced THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Holy

Spirit communicates to us the life of Jesus, whose body we are if we are united through spiritual baptism by the Spirit into Him. And **1 Corinthians 10:4** says that most clearly: "*for they drank of that*

spiritual

Rock that followed them: and

that Rock was Christ

".

So Paul sets the stage for understanding this spiritual partaking of Christ in Israel in chapter 10 only to later take up the same terminology, and line of thought, in chapter 12 to apply to the Church. This is also why the warning in chapter 10 about how God was "not well pleased" with them, because of their conduct afterwards, most certainly is an applicable warning to the Church and not just the Israelites! In short the terminology Paul uses sets these two passages up for parallel reflection about the two congregations that believed in God for salvation and whom God had called out as His own people. Their experiences were similar in many ways and Paul draws on those similarities thematically in his epistle.

The terminological parallels are utterly undeniable, and just as **1 Corinthians 10:1-4** is not speaking of water baptism but a spiritual baptism that enabled them to partake of "spiritual drink", so too

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

is not referring to a water baptism but a Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

So why this spiel on those two passages? I believe that once you understand that **1**

Corinthians 12:13

is speaking of a spiritual baptism that it becomes clearer that

Galatians 3:27

and

Romans 6:3-4

use the term in a similar fashion - speaking of spiritual realities.

A Look at Galatians 3:27

Galatians 3:27 says "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*"

This "baptized into" parallels **1 Corinthians 12:13** quite closely:

- "baptized into Christ" - **Galatians 3:27**
- "baptized into one body" - **1 Corinthians 12:13**

We know that the body is Christ's body as **1 Corinthians 12:12** tells us (if it wasn't evident already), so "one body" and "Christ" have the same referent. But wait! There is another similarity to these passages. What comes right after

Galatians 3:27

? We read that

vs. 28

says "

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

" Wow! Have we seen that terminology before? Well, let's see:

- "neither Jew nor Greek" - **Galatians 3:28**
- "whether Jews or Greeks" - **1 Corinthians 12:13**
- "neither slave nor free" - **Galatians 3:28**
- "whether slaves or free" - **1 Corinthians 12:13**
- "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" - **Galatians 3:28**
- "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body,

being many,

are one body: so also is Christ

."

1 Corinthians 12:12

&& "all baptized into

one

body" && "been all made to drink into

one

Spirit"
(vs. 13)

These two passages obviously have the exact same topical context of uniting Jew and Greek and Slave and Free into "one" in Jesus - and mean the same thing - so it manifestly makes sense to see the "baptism" in both passages as referring to the same thing: Baptism of the Spirit.

A Look at Romans 6:3-4

Once we see the linkage between those two passages then perhaps we can see **Romans 6:3-4** clearer I believe:

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. "

We have here a somewhat different context that is not focusing as much on unity of believers in the body of Christ, nor do we see mention of the Spirit explicitly. However, the truths discussed here are spiritual in nature and "baptize" is also used in a non-literal, metaphorical manner. Death is not a substance one can be physically immersed in, so we know then that the use is metaphorical. Paul's limited use of this term "baptize" in a metaphorical sense obligates us to compare it to the few other instances in which he does the same: **1 Corinthians 10:1-4, 1 Corinthians 12:13**, and **Galatians 3:27**

. When we do, if I am not mistaken, we can see this as a more forensic and "zoomed in"

description (magnified specifics) of what happens spiritually for the believer when they are associated with Christ's work on the cross through faith.

Believers are described as having been "baptized into his death" which means our old self, which is judged under God's condemnation of sin, is made dead with Christ through his burial and then we are given his resurrection life because of Jesus being raised from the dead. These are spiritual truths which are not communicated by ritual water immersion but by identification with Jesus through faith to regenerate us (the "new life" [birth] image that is present here - through Christ's resurrection). Such new birth and eternal life only come through the Spirit, as Jesus made clear in the full context of **John 3**, and regeneration itself comes by the Spirit as shown in **Titus 3:5**.

I believe the baptism indicated here is the spiritual Baptism of the Spirit that brings new life and regeneration, and which identifies a person as belonging to God and the body of Christ (**Romans 8:9**)

Ultimately the possession of the Spirit and not water baptism identifies a person as belonging to God, and is what God's seal and mark of ownership is based on

(2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13)

as with a spiritual signet ring. That baptism by the Spirit is the true and essential baptism.

Concerns and Concluding Thoughts

I will lastly try to address one concern here that such an interpretation of these verses unduly leaves out consideration of a reference to water baptism being present.

Thomas Schreiner in his contribution to the collection of papers collated into the NAC Studies in Bible & Theology book

Believers Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ

in the chapter titled "Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers" says on 1 Corinthians 12:13:

"Baptism, as in Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 12:13, is mentioned to underscore the unity of believers" (pg. 71)

"Paul is almost certainly speaking of the time of conversion here, for Jesus immerses in the Spirit so that his people are incorporated in the body of Christ. The second half of v. 13 expresses the same reality. At conversion, believers drink of one Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the mark of induction into the people of God (Gal. 3:1-5), and hence Jesus' work of baptizing with the Spirit occurs at the threshold of the Christian life ." (pg. 72)

On **Galatians 3:27**:

"Paul's main theme here is not baptism. His point is that all believers are clothed with Christ. We see incidentally, however, that baptism was universal in the church (and hence central!), since all those who are clothed with Christ (i.e., all Christians) are baptized. " (pg. 74)

And on **Romans 6:3-4**:

"To say that those who are baptized have died with Christ is just another way of saying that all Christians have died with Christ. There was not a serious problem, as there is today, with Christians being unbaptized in the NT period... Those who restrict the reference to Spirit baptism in Romans 6 truncate the baptismal message, for separating water baptism and Spirit baptism introduces a false dichotomy into the Pauline argument. Paul does not drive a wedge between Spirit baptism and water baptism, as if the former is what really matters and the latter is superfluous. Such a viewpoint may suffer from reading the text through modern experiences in which water baptism often occurs significantly before or after conversion

;

"

(pg 74-75; emphasis his)

Now, Schreiner is right to see the clear terminology of the Spirit baptism in Romans 6:3-4 (as well as 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and

Galatians 3:27)

but he in the rest of the chapter argues for a kind of synecdoche (where a part of something stands for the whole) for the implied inclusion of water baptism, since it seems he feels that leaving out a reference to it is harmful to developing a doctrine for water baptism. In other words, he notes that "

Jesus' work of baptizing with the Spirit occurs at the threshold of the Christian life

", and yet is not satisfied if he cannot additionally find a reference to water baptism in those same verses. The NAC commentary, in the same series, on 1 Corinthians explicitly states that

1 Corinthians 12:13

should not be read as a reference to water baptism

(contrary to the comment found in the other NAC volume that I mentioned at the beginning of the article): "

The baptism here should not be equated with water baptism, although water baptism depicts what Paul describes. Paul's emphasis on baptism into one body in one Spirit strongly emphasizes the unity of the body

."

Also Schreiner is no doubt correct that probably all Christians at the time were water baptized, such that there was no occasion for Paul to really mention it. I, however, would put the burden of proof on Schreiner to show where the emphasis lies in Paul's usage in each case of the verses examined above: the water rite or the spiritual accomplishment and reality? He is justifiably trying to (in general) defend the importance of water baptism doctrinally, but at the cost of diffusing the clear emphasis on the spiritual accomplishment in these passages.

Paul is not trying to drive a wedge between water and Spirit baptism, but Paul's usage of "baptize" in those passages is clearly - as determined by their context and terminology - metaphorical, since he is emphasizing the spiritual realities. I am afraid that reading into these passages a simultaneous reference to water baptism here misses Paul's emphasis. You may draw your own conclusions from scripture, but my main concern in this study has been to show the spiritual reference of "baptism" in **1 Corinthians 12:12-13**, Galatians 3:27, and Romans 6:3-4 . I

hope that overall these observations will bring you closer to a true understanding of the meaning of the scriptures as you diligently search them!

Soli Deo Gloria