

2006.06

Baptism

Last month, as we began this series about seeking a Biblical approach to unity within the Christian Church, we saw that the Church is a group of people called by God to be holy, the body of Christ here on earth. This month we will look at baptism, commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19, as the way we become members of His body.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul says, *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...* And in Ephesians 4:4-5 he speaks of one body and one baptism. We start with this thought. It is clear that God's intent is for His people to be united, to be one within the one body of Christ. We enter this unity through the waters of baptism.

Paul also tells us in Romans 6:3-4 that baptism is a dying and a resurrection to new life.

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4)

And, in Colossians, he says,

"In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands... having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God." (Colossians 2:11-12)

We see from these passages that baptism is a transition—a death and rebirth that brings us into a new family, the body of Christ. You will note that in Colossians 2:11, Paul connects it with circumcision. It was through circumcision that each descendent of Israel became an heir to God's promises, became fully a member of that family. In the same way, through baptism, we are born into the New Israel, the family of the Church and become heirs to God's promises to us.

This brings us to Titus 3:5-7,

"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit… so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Paul writes that we are made heirs through God's mercy by the washing of new life—baptism. He also points out that this is a work of the Holy Spirit. Similarly,

Peter says in 1 Peter 3:21:

"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you… through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Baptism saves us by washing us clean, giving us new life and bringing us into a new family, the body of Christ. This happens by virtue of Christ's resurrection in which we participate through baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We also learn that this work of baptism is not something automatic or magic. For us to benefit from it, it requires our faith as we see in Galatians 3:25-26:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

A problem remains, however. Not all who are baptized believe and obey. How about them? Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13 helps here. He speaks clearly of both the righteous and the unrighteous being in the Kingdom of God in the world. He also points out that the distinction between the good and the bad is something that will be known only at the end of the age. Any attempt to distinguish before then will condemn some falsely, will do more harm than good. God is the one who will sort all this out at the end, not us. So, this means that all who are baptized are fellow members of Christ's body, this new family into which we are born through baptism. It is not just those whom we think are "Christians" or who happen to follow the same leader that we do. We are all members of this same family, members who are to care for one another, even our wayward brothers and sisters. Let us keep this in mind as we seek the basis for true unity within the Church. Over the next few months, we will explore the implications of this point further.

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