

Baptism and Unity

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

This morning seven people will be baptized. In preparation for these baptisms, let's consider briefly what Paul writes about baptism in 1 Corinthians 1.

10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul had gotten a report that there were divisions/factions within the church at Corinth and that there was "quarreling among [the Corinthian believers]." In our day many Christians just take it for granted that there will be divisions and quarreling within the church; it's sort of like the church's version of intramurals. . . "We're all part of the same body, but we like to divide up into teams and go after each other." For Paul, dividing up into teams was very troubling; actually, such divisions distorted the message of the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

Apparently they had formed factions with loyalties to different teachers in the Corinthian church. That was a way that they differentiated themselves from each other; they tried to make themselves look superior to one another by accentuating their differences. By saying, for example, "I follow Paul's teaching," they were implying, "I am superior to those who follow Apollos." They did this same type of thing with their spiritual gifts; some saw themselves as superior to others because of their gifting.

Paul's conviction was that their only hope for unity was to focus on their common loyalty to Jesus Christ. Beginning in verse 13 Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions to make his point:

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

The answer to each of these questions, of course, is "NO!" Christ is not divided; and therefore the body of Christ shouldn't be divided. Paul wasn't crucified for them; therefore their identity (the thing that defined them) shouldn't be Paul or any earthly leader. Finally, they weren't baptized in the name of Paul; they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. . . or "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Corinthians' perspective on baptism must have been especially distorted because Paul continues driving home his point.

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

Paul could recall two individuals and one household that he'd baptized in Corinth. Apparently Paul's practice was to baptize the first few believers that had come to Christ in any location and then allow others to baptize those who subsequently came to Christ. Again, he never wanted their identity to be in him. No, Paul wanted the cross of Christ to be front and center.

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Of course Paul didn't disparage baptism in any way. Jesus Himself had given the mission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. . ." F.F. Bruce made the memorable statement that "The New Testament knows nothing of an unbaptized believer." Baptism isn't some random, optional practice; it's a foundational way believers publicly declare their faith in Christ.

Paul said that when he preached the gospel he didn't try to impress people with eloquence because ***the gospel itself is powerful***. The gospel is the good news about Jesus: He took on flesh and blood to identify fully with us, He lived a sinless life, He willingly went to the cross to die for our sins, He was raised bodily from the dead, and is now enthroned at the right hand of God.

When a person is baptized s/he is declaring, "I trust in Jesus alone for my salvation. I believe that on the cross He died the death I deserve. My sin has been forgiven and I have experienced the new birth. With God's help I will follow Jesus throughout this life and into eternity."

Whereas the Corinthians wrongly emphasized how they were different from each other, baptism emphasizes how all Christians are exactly the same. All Christians believe the gospel of Christ crucified. Therefore, ***baptism is an expression of our unity in Christ***. Whatever differences we may have in non-essentials or in applications of Scripture, we have this in common: **the cross of Christ**. As Paul said in Ephesians 4:5, "[there is] one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Baptism is an expression of our unity in Christ.

In a couple minutes, you will see a video of those being baptized today talking about their faith - how they came to believe in Jesus, who influenced them, what they're learning, etc. After the video we'll have the baptisms themselves.

Once in the water, the person being baptized will answer these three questions:

- Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of evil in the world? **I renounce them**
- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? **I do**
- Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love? **I will, with God's help**

After the person is baptized, we as the church have the opportunity to respond:

- People of God, what is our response? **We receive you into the family of God! Live and proclaim the gospel of Christ, and share with us in life everlasting!**