

Corinthian Schisms: Water Baptism Divides the Church; Paul's Job Is to Teach, 1 Cor 1:10-17; Summary & Conclusions: Baptism Is Legitimate but Optional

VII. The Corinthian Schisms:

1. The importance that God places on the teaching of His Word rather than on the rituals that illustrate its doctrines is brought into stark focus by the events that confronted Paul in Corinth.
2. The various problems that were common in the Corinthian church take Paul sixteen chapters to address. But the first one he challenges has to do with schisms that developed among its members over the subject of water baptism.
3. This ritual has caused so much controversy throughout Christendom that denominations choose to define themselves by their attitude toward baptism rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. It is far worse when these controversies create schisms in the local church so that the Word of God is suppressed as the top priority.
5. We will sum up our study by observing how Paul deals with these issues in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 1:10 - Now I exhort you fellow believers through the name of Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same things, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be of the same disposition and judgment.

- 1) This context quickly reveals that none of these things is going on among these believers. To “speak the same things” means that members of the congregation should be functioning from the same frame of reference and thus when they speak it is from the source of divine viewpoint.
- 2) Failure in this area has brought about “divisions” among them. The word for divisions is **σχίσμα**, *schisma*, the source of the English word “schism.” This refers to factions that have developed in the church each functioning under a competing frame of reference.
- 3) As a result they do not have group harmony, or what the Greeks referred to as **ἐξωτερικὴ ἁρμονία**, *exōterikē harmonia*. This quality was developed by the Lakedaemonian army in fifth-century B.C. Sparta. It is described by Steven Pressfield in his book, *Gates of Fire*, as:

... that single state of union with one's fellows which parallels the musical harmony of the multistringed instrument or of the chorus of voices itself. In battle *exōterikē harmonia* guides the phalanx to move and strike as one man, of a single mind or will. (p. 80)

It is this Greek term for the unity or harmony of a group that is exhibited in a church when all of its individual members simultaneously function under their own spiritual gift from the same inventory of doctrinal ideas developed from systematic Bible study taught by their pastor-teacher.

- 4) We know this group harmony was not evident in the Corinthian church because of the next verse:

1 Corinthians 1:11 - For it has been declared unto me concerning you, my fellow believers, by them who are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

- 1) Chloe was a respected believer in Corinth and it is obvious that Paul trusted her analysis which he knew the believers in the church would not dare challenge.
- 2) Notice Paul has no reticence in calling her name to document *how* he knows *what* he knows: there are contentions among them.

- 3) Also do not assume that Chloe was guilty of gossip or as the ladies refer to it here in the South, "Telling the news." Paul asked her what she knew and she told him the facts but without names.
- 4) The word for "contentions" is **ἐρις, eris** and means strife, discord, quarrels, and wrangling. In other words, civil war.
- 5) Paul now reveals what these schisms are all about and the warfare they have fomented.

1 Corinthians 1:12 - Now this I say, that every one of you says, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas [**Κηφᾶς, Kēphas: Peter's Aramaic surname**]," and "I of Christ."

- 1) There are four factions fighting for supremacy in the church each forming a fifth column that has destroyed church unity. And interestingly enough the major reason given by each group to support its claim was who baptized them.
- 2) Each group is motivated by arrogance. The people chosen as their heroes are not involved in these schisms. They are instead used as rhetorical veils to conceal while advancing each faction's hidden agenda which is to run the church and then get rid of all who disagreed with them.
- 3) Those that drop Paul's name are those who have grown under his ministry but in arrogance are unable to make proper application of doctrine and thus misuse it in order to gain power.
- 4) Those who assert allegiance to Apollo are those who are attracted to the sophisticated oratory of the Greeks. Apollo was such a speaker who was trained in Alexandria and was attracted to the Hebrew Scripture but was not well advanced in the doctrines of the New Testament. But he sounded good from the pulpit.
- 5) Then there were the legalists who wanted to be associated with Peter. Peter was strong on the Mosaic Law but his doctrine was a good ways away from being as sophisticated as Paul's. His advocates were most likely Jewish believers, probably Judaizers, who were attracted to Peter since his ministry was to the Jews.
- 6) And finally the most brazen of all—the bunch that was so self-righteous its proponents had the brass to allege they were of Christ. Now who can argue with that? They had outdone everybody in their campaign to be king of the spiritual mountain by selecting Someone Who trumps all others.
- 7) Paul now turns his rhetorical skills against them by posing rhetorical questions that reveal each schism's human viewpoint rationales:

1 Corinthians 1:13 - Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or, were you baptized into the name of Paul?

- 1) When anyone believes in Christ he is baptized by the Holy Spirit into union with Christ where he becomes a member of the body of Christ, the universal church, possessing top-circle assets. Christ cannot be divided.
- 2) However, those who are in the body of Christ can be temporally divided among themselves and when they are there is discord. Paul refutes this in 1 Corinthians 12:25 where he writes, "there should be no schism in the body."
- 3) Paul is not impressed that he has been chosen by one of these factions to justify its claim to power and asks, "Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

- 4) The answer to all of Paul's questions are resounding no's. Christ is the preeminent personality and should be worshipped by all members of the church. To place emphasis on human personalities is the road to ruin. The Pauline fifth column emphasized the communicator when it should be concentrating on his message.
- 5) Paul next addresses the false issue that motivates these schisms:

1 Corinthians 1:14 - I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus [Acts 18:8] and Gaius [Acts 19:29; 3 John],

v. 15 - that no man should say that I had baptized into my own name.

v. 16 - And I baptized also the household of Stephanas [1 Corinthians 16:15]; beyond that I do not know whether I baptized any other.

- 1) What was happening in the Corinthian church is what continues to go on in the various denominational churches today. Baptism continues to divide, form factions, create schisms, cause disharmony, and foment discord within the body.
- 2) Paul was glad that he had very little to do with baptizing any of them. He was adamant that those he had baptized were not done in his name but that of Christ.
- 3) Paul's job was to teach doctrine to a church that was ignorant about its obligations before the Lord. They were stressing to the point of conflict secondary issues at the expense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.
- 4) Regardless of who baptized any of them they are all out of line, in status quo carnality, and in rapid descent through reversionism.
- 5) Why? Because they were emphasizing a ritual over the reality it portrays.
- 6) Paul makes this crystal in the next verse:

1 Corinthians 1:17 - For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should be neutralized.

- 1) The top priority in a local church is communication of the Word. When false issues encroach on this responsibility then the cross of Christ is neutralized.
- 2) This is made evident today in so many churches. There are those who will turn away believers from the fellowship simply because they have not been baptized in the desired fashion.
- 3) There are denominations who, like the Pharisees of old, "shut off the kingdom of heaven from men" by attaching baptism to the Gospel of salvation.
- 4) It is astounding to observe churches that make a big deal over loving Jesus yet shun believers who have not been baptized from their fellowship.
- 5) Even more ridiculous is for a church to forbid a child who is a member of the royal family of God from entering its Christian school for no other reason than he has not been baptized.
- 6) Baptism continues as a controversy today as it was in the first-century. There are entire denominations structured on the same arrogance that formed the four fifth columns in Corinth and it divides Christ in the sense that the temporal church is torn asunder.
- 7) Little concern is given to the accuracy of the Gospel but meticulous emphasis is placed on whether one is baptized and, if so, how.

- 8) Majoring on this minor is one of the reasons that the unbelieving world has a legitimate reason to fear the influence of the Christian church on human government.
- 9) Paul was in town to preach, not baptize. If converts wanted to be baptized then he let others perform the task.
- 10) What the members of the church at Corinth needed far more than the washing of literal water was a washing of their souls by the cleansing water of the Word of God. (1 John 1:9)
- 11) This was Paul's mission and objective. Baptism and the person who performed it had accomplished nothing in Corinth but foment schisms and Paul was determined to expose the irony.
- 12) Apparently all the members of the Corinthian church were baptized by somebody but the body of Christ that met there was torn asunder.

VIII. Summary & Conclusions:

1. Water baptism is a ritual that has several applications in Scripture:
 - John's baptism prepared Jewish believers to enter into the millennial kingdom.
 - The baptism of Jesus announced His public ministry. His immersion illustrated His substitutionary death on the cross and His emersion illustrated His resurrection. The appearance of the dove symbolized the enabling power of the Holy Spirit for the mission and the confirmation by the voice of God verified that He was the Messiah.
 - The Great Commission was given to the apostles as a tool to teach the baptism of the Holy Spirit prior to the completion of the canon of Scripture.
 - The baptism of the Jews at Pentecost was the first transitional baptism and dealt with the guilt of the generation that was responsible for the crucifixion of Christ, and following their salvation resulted in their forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - The baptism of the Samaritans was performed by Philip as a teaching aid for the baptism of the Holy Spirit however the reality of the Spirit's baptism did not occur until Paul and John arrived and laid their hands on them.
 - The baptism of Cornelius and his household was an ex-post-facto event that followed the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the very moment they believed in Christ and it too was designed to teach the doctrine.

- The baptisms referenced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 were all performed as a ritual to illustrate the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit although the assets that accompany this imputation were not being used.
- 2. Water baptism is still a legitimate practice today. However, ritual without reality is meaningless. If the candidate does not understand the doctrine it represents then it is meaningless. If he does then it can be a helpful teaching aid.
- 3. Water baptism is also a ritual that when performed before others is a witness testifying to the person's salvation while illustrating the reality of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- 4. Water baptism is never a means of salvation, it is never a qualification for church membership, and it is even unnecessary unless the new believer desires to participate.
- 5. Baptism is not a sacerdotal function that is exclusive to church leaders such as pastors or his associates. Anyone can perform a baptism. All believers are royal priests and may conduct the ritual for any convert who wants to do so. For example, a father can baptize members of his family who are believers.
- 6. A pastor's job as emphasized by Paul is to teach his congregation. He should not be distracted from his primary duties of studying and teaching to perform a ritual that any member of his congregation is qualified to conduct.
- 7. Consequently, there is nothing wrong with water baptism. It is a legitimate practice and useful in teaching the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and as a testimony of one's salvation through faith alone in Christ alone.
- 8. Therefore, if you want to be baptized then do so. But its purpose is simply instructive. It is an illustration, a teaching aid, an elucidation.
- 9. The real issue for the believer is spiritual growth which requires Bible study, and Bible study that is consistently presented by a pastor-teacher who leads his congregation in such a way that "there be no divisions" (1 Corinthians 1:10) and that "there should be no schism in the body" (1 Corinthians 12:25).
- 10. Unfortunately, baptism continues to be a major cause of divisions and schisms among Christians and the bane of churches that emphasize this ritual at the expense of the *exōterikē harmonia* of not only their local church but also the body of Christ.
- 11. To quote Paul, "I thank God that I baptized none of you." But it has been my honor to teach the Word of God to the members of East Ridge Bible Church for this our tenth renewal of the Shreveport Bible Conference. Your hospitality knows no bounds.

(End 2005 Shreveport Bible Conference.)

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