

The Community of the Baptized

Introduction

Most Christian groups confess that baptism plays a vital role in the life of God's people. The question, what exactly is the role and function of baptism, invokes a variety of responses. Some suggest that it imparts grace, while others suggest that baptism demonstrates grace already working in the individual. Some insist that baptism is necessary for salvation. Others say it is only an act of obedience to the commands of Christ. Upon reflection on baptism, I propose the following thesis which I seek to defend: The Biblical passages which speak about baptism should be understood primarily as what it means to be amongst those who are baptized. In other words, passages such as Romans 6:3-5 are descriptive of baptized people rather than prescriptive of how to baptize. When and how we baptize are secondary conclusions formulated based on our primary conclusions, not the other way around.

Theological Method

In defending this position, the biblical passages that speak about baptism will need to be studied. Romans 6, Colossians 2, several passage in Acts, as well as I Peter 3 will be of great importance. The four Gospels will need to be looked at, with particular emphasis on Jesus' baptism, his use of the word "baptism," and His command to go and baptize.

Essential to defending this thesis is an understanding of what it means to be amongst the baptized. Therefore, some background of the worshiping community's role and understanding of baptism and community from a biblical/theological and sociological perspective must be examined. For this purpose, I will consult the following resources: *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* by Gerhard Lohfink, *The Baptismal Community* by David F. Wright, *Transformations, Passages, and Processes: Ritual Approaches to Biblical Texts* by Mark McVann, and *Christology As Community Identity In The Philippians Hymn: The Philippians Hymn As Social Drama* by Robert A. Wortham.

For a better understanding of the Biblical text and social setting, I will consult *Baptism and The New Life: A Study of Romans 6:1-4* by Soern Agersnap, as well as *The Biblical Significance of Baptism by Immersion* by Devon H. Wiens. For overall theological understanding of baptism, I will read *Dimensions of Baptism:*

Biblical and Theological Studies by Stanley Porter and Anthony Cross and *A Baptismal Theology with Implications For Evangelism, Conversion, And Church Growth* by Dale W. Brown

For some historical background of baptism from a Baptist understanding, I will read *Down by the Riverside* by Everett Goodwin. *Baptism, Barth, and Born Again* by Frederick Gaiser will be consulted for a Christological understanding of baptism. Additionally, the following will be consulted for the understanding of living out our baptismal identity: *Baptism: Method or Meaning* by Abram Konrad, *Baptism and the Unity of The Church* by Michael Root, and *True Spirituality* by Francis Schaefer.

The Biblical record will serve as a primary source and norm for understanding baptism. Additionally, an understanding that God has redeemed a people through Jesus Christ and has called them to live out a new life in Christ Jesus, serves as an interpreting norm for all sources. Although I am predisposed towards immersion theologians, theologians that focus on the transformation that takes place amongst those who are in Christ Jesus will be given equal voice in defending this thesis. Lastly, as I defend this thesis, I am writing from a Baptist understanding of baptism which mean that I see “baptism is an outward sign of an inward presence of grace.” Furthermore, baptism is not understood to be a “means of salvation but as an initiatory act and a statement of faith.”¹

Contextual Background

I approach this issue from a varied background. As a young child I was baptized in the Catholic Church. In my early twenties, I was immersed in a Christian Church (restoration movement). My understanding was that baptism was for believers and one needed to be fully immersed to be effective. Some within the restoration movement would suggest that baptism is the point of conversion. Later, I joined an independent Baptist church where baptism was important for membership as well as for obedience to Christ. In this setting, it was quite clear that the act of baptism was strictly an outward sign of an inward change. There was nothing unique about the waters or the act. The obedient faith and the method of baptism were key factors.

¹ Goodwin, Everett C. *Down By The Riverside: A Brief History in Baptist Faith*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002) 85

As a pastor, I have found it my duty to study this aspect of the Christian faith. I have studied both the scriptures as well as read many theological discourses on the subject. I believe baptism is an ordinance, although I see some merit in a sacramental understanding. This understanding will be worked out in the paper. As far as mode and recipients, I believe in believer's baptism by immersion when possible. Although, I hold to these beliefs, I believe that what it means to be among those who are baptized is more important than when and how we were baptized. This also will be discussed in the paper. So, as I approach this subject pastorally, I am concerned about the role baptism plays in the life of the recipient as well as the faith community.

Doctrinal Overlap

There is significant overlap into many other doctrinal areas when looking at baptism. If baptismal regeneration is correct, then it has much to do with soteriology. Even if that theology is rejected there seems to be a direct relationship with salvation and baptism. In fact, it is difficult to separate the two in many biblical texts. In the context in which I want to look at baptism we will find implications connected with Christology, sanctification, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

Baptism has Christological implications because Christ is the picture of what it means to live a baptized life. Baptism is about sanctification because it is the symbolic picture of what life in Christ Jesus looks like. It is about ecclesiology because the church is made up of baptized believers. "In the congregations of patristic Christianity an unbaptized Christian was an anomaly, if not an impossibility."² Lastly baptism is about eschatology because it is a picture of all things being made new and the redeemed community God is calling to Himself.

I believe that from both the Biblical record, as well as the readings mentioned, it will be shown that the passages that speak about baptism should be understood primarily as what it means to be amongst those who are baptized. Specifically, we will see who we are in Christ and in the world, as well as get a picture of God's future plans for the world and His people.

² Wright, David F. "The Baptismal Community" *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 160 (Jan/Mar 2003):5

Rituals That Shape Community

Rituals have great potential to shape and inform communities. There can be little doubt that genuine communities have authentic rituals which help them cohere as a group and to appropriate, transform, and pass on their identities and traditions.”⁴ “Rites of initiation are signs of unity when they themselves and their use reinforce . . . the biblical teaching that there is but one baptism which incorporates those baptized into one Lord and thus into one church of God.”⁵ Certainly baptism has great potential to inform the body of Christ of their own identity. The Apostle Paul used the illustration of baptism to speak of the unity and uniqueness of the body of Christ. “Conversion typically was not some private spiritual transaction. It involved baptism. But baptism usually involved a public act, probably a public confession (Rom. 10:9).”⁶ Since it was not a private event, it spoke of community and belonging. As will be shown, it also speaks of God’s mission in the world through His people “Baptism plays such a foundational role in establishing the communion, which is the church, one is tempted to define the church as the assembly or community of the baptized.”⁷

Baptism Defined

In order to grasp the meaning of baptism the following definitions are given. The Greek verb for “baptize” is baptizein is formed from baptein means “dip frequently or intensively, plunge, immerse.”⁸ The word baptismos means dipping, washing or ritual washing.⁹ The word for baptism is baptisma, which consists of “the process of immersion, submersion and emergence . . . is used (a) of John’s baptism, (b) of Christian baptism, . . . (c) of the overwhelming afflictions and judgments to which Jesus voluntarily submitted on the Cross.”¹⁰ The metaphorical use of being overwhelmed, “rests in Jesus’ own use of ‘baptism’ in

⁴McVann, Mark. “Transformations, Passages, Processes: Ritual Approaches To Biblical Texts.” *Semia* no 67 (1994): 7

⁵Root, Michael and Risto Saarinen. *Baptism and the Unity of The Church*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 131

⁶Ibid, 91

⁷Ibid, 29

⁸Freedman, David Noel. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 1.(New York: Doubleday, 1992), 582

⁹Ibid, 582

¹⁰ Vine, W.E., *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 97

reference to his ‘undergoing an ‘immersion’ of suffering in Mk 10:38-39 and Lk. 12:50.”¹¹

The Narrative to Which We Belong

Stanley Grenz’s book, *Theology for the Community of God*, has a section called “Baptism: The Seal of Our Identity.”¹² With this title, Grenz tells us something vital. As we look at our identity from the point of baptism, we understand who we are in the context of who God is and what He is doing in the world. In other words, baptism tells a story! The Gospel is an invitation from God to exchange an old dead story for a new a living one. Baptism visually conveys God’s redemptive story of making all things new including the baptized one. Robert Webber challenges the church to live out this baptismal identity. “May the church not be formed by the world in which it lives, but by the narrative to which it belongs, the story of God. For it is only through God's story proclaimed, enacted and embodied by God's people that the world will learn its own destiny.”¹³

It is from this identity standpoint in which I believe we need to see baptism and from where I want to launch my thesis statement: The Biblical passages which speak about baptism should be understood primarily as what it means to be amongst those who are baptized.

This understanding of story is not lost by Dr. Jung Lee. Lee sees Jesus’ ministry as having it’s beginning and ending in baptism. Thus, understanding baptism as dedication to God’s redemptive work in the world as well as our own lives. From this perspective, he gives insight to why Jesus participated in a baptism of repentance. For this understanding Lee writes:

He was concerned about the transformation of people’s outlooks. Repentance involved the radical change of the social, political, economic, religious, and racial orientations which marginalized people. Repentance, therefore dealt with

¹¹Porter, Stanley E. And Anthony R. Cross. *Dimensions of Baptism*. (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 167

¹² Grenz, Stanley. *Theology for the Community of God*. Eerdmans, 2000.

¹³ Webber, R., 2020. *Ancientfutureworship.Com Blog*. [online] Ancientfutureworship.blogspot.com. Available at: <<http://ancientfutureworship.blogspot.com>> [Accessed 12 September 2020].

justice, peace, compassion, and harmony among all people. Because he too, was committed to this kind of repentance, Jesus wanted to be baptized.¹⁴

Jesus' Baptism and Ministry

In order to understand what it means to be amongst those who are baptized, we need to pause and ask an important question. Into whom or what are we baptizing? The New Testament's answer is "into Christ Jesus." To be baptized into someone's name should be understood as being profoundly identified with that person. Thus, Christian baptism must be understood in the light of Christ and His ministry. Robert Wortham contends that, "the early Christian community's understanding of its social identity and social status is expressed symbolically in its Christological expressions."¹⁵ Certainly, baptism is one of those expression.

Baptizing 'into the name of Jesus' (etc.) meant that one saw Jesus as the fundamental reference of the rite. This could involve a negative and a positive definition. Negatively it distinguished Christian Baptism from other similar rites. . . Positively it should suggest what baptism meant with Jesus as its fundamental reference, viz, there should be some sort of Christology behind it.¹³

It seems that we would do well to look at the baptism of Jesus along with a brief overview of His life with attention to His ministry after coming up from the baptismal waters. "Jesus' water baptism and interpretation of his whole ministry under the figure of baptism become a model in the early church of what happens as believers are baptized."¹⁴

The question of why Jesus participated in John's baptism is a question that perhaps has brought some confusion, if not embarrassment, to Christian thinkers. Origen writes, "By this act Jesus showed himself to be 'meek and lowly in heart,' coming to those inferior to him, doing all that followed in order to humble himself and become obedient 'unto death.'"¹⁵ Jerome offers a threefold response.

¹⁴ Lee, Jung Young. *Marginality*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995) 85

¹⁵ Wortham, Robert A. "Christology As Community Identity in The Philippians Hymn: The Philippians Hymn as Social Drama" *Perspectives in Religious Studies*. 23.3 (Fall 1996): 269

¹³Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 1, 586

¹⁴Weins, Devon H. "The Biblical Significance of Baptism by Immersion" *Direction* 14 no.1 (Spring 1985): 11

¹⁵Oden, Thomas C. *Ancient Commentary on The Scripture. New Testament*;6. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 50

First, because he was born a man, that he might fulfill all justice and humility of the law. Second, that by his baptism he might confirm John's baptism. And third, that by sanctifying the waters of the Jordan through the descent of the dove, he might show the Holy Spirit's advent in the baptism of believers.¹⁶

Marcus Barth adds his own threefold answer "(a) an amazing step out of security and hiddenness, into the midst of crowds. . . (b) a shameful, public, binding act by which he declares his solidarity with sinners, (c) the conscious acceptance of and entering into the ministry of the servant."¹⁷ John Robinson writes, "The baptism is the anticipation of the Cross, in which Jesus in Jordan fore-suffered all, and as such it gives to the Cross and all that lies between the two events its own character of a baptism."¹⁸

N.T. Wright sees Christ's baptism as a subversive picture of Christ's eschatological rule and reign as the True King of the world. "Here is God anointing his true king under the nose of the old one, somewhat like Samuel anointing David with Saul still on the throne—and the beginning of the confrontation with, as well as the welcome for, the whole world." "Baptism is an Imperial affront to Rome, as well as to Rome's puppet-king, King Herod, the ipso facto 'king of the Jews'"¹⁹

Each of these theologians offers us something to understanding Jesus' baptism as well as our own. Jesus shows that He is united to what the Spirit of God was doing in the world through John's ministry, whose call to repentance is right in line with Jesus' own thinking. This instance of Jesus' baptism only seems strange in isolation. Taking in the entire Gospel account, it presents a picture of the humble and suffering servant who becomes highly exulted as the True King. His baptism, in many respects, mirrors the Philippian Hymn 2:5-11.

Jesus' baptism perhaps is less problematic of those with an ordinance understanding of baptism. From this perspective this is an ordination for Jesus' public ministry and mission. "Jesus too was about to change his ways, to turn

¹⁶Ibid, 51

¹⁷Brown, Dale W. "A Baptismal Theology With Implications For Evangelism, Conversion, and Church Growth" *Brethern Life and Thought*. 28.3 (Summer 1983): 154

¹⁸Weins, "The Biblical Significance of Baptism by Immersion", 11

¹⁹Wright, N. T. (2001). *Twelve Months of Sundays: Reflections on Bible Readings, Year A.* London, England: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. 17-18

from his past, let go, and take a new direction, not that there was anything wrong with his past but because this was what, for him, obedience meant.”¹⁹

If one were to read only the Pauline Epistles to understand the life of Jesus, one would soon discover they know very little about the details of His life. Paul seems to be fascinated with the crucified and resurrected Christ. It could be argued that Paul saw Jesus from a baptismal perspective. Both Paul and Jesus understood baptism as more than a ceremony with water. Paul saw Jesus as one who committed Himself to the Cross. Thus, in the life committed to carrying His cross, along with dying and resurrecting, we very well can describe Christ’s life as a picture of baptism. Devon Wiens describes Jesus’ ministry well when he writes, “So crucial to an understanding of Jesus’ mission is his baptism that he can categorize his whole life’s work under the rubric ‘baptism’ (Mk. 11;28,39; Matt. 20:22,23; cf. Lk. 12:50).”²⁰ In Luke 12:50, Jesus Himself proclaims, “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!”

Jesus’ baptism was not an isolated event. Jesus invites us to join Him in baptism and the baptized life. He told His followers, “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”²¹ At another time, He asked some of His disciples, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”²² They responded that they were able. With this, Jesus affirmed that they were to live a baptized life. “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.”²³

Our Baptism

As we look to our own baptism, we need to look at some key verses that shape our baptismal identity. For that purpose, we will begin with Romans chapter 6 and use that passage as a launching ground into other passages.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 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,

¹⁹Hamilton, David S.M. *Through the Waters: Baptism and The Christian Life*. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark Ltd., 1990), 29

²⁰Ibid,11

²¹Luke 14:27 NASB

²²Mark 10:38 NASB

²³Mark 10:39 NASB

so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin,²⁴

Paul begins this chapter with a possible objection or misunderstanding to what he has written in the previous chapter. The objection is, “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” The obvious answer is no. No, that is neither the life nor the story you have been invited to live out. In answering the phantom objection, Paul begins to unpack what it means to be amongst those who are baptized. He reminds the hearer they have died to sin through their immersion into Christ Jesus and His death. Origen wrote the following in regard to dying to sin: “If we have not died to sin, then we cannot be buried with Christ . . . Then too, anyone who is not buried together with Christ has not been validly baptized.”²⁵ Similarly, Augustine wrote, “To be baptized into the death of Christ is nothing else but to die to sin just as he died in the flesh.”²⁶ This is important to understand the community that the church is called to be. Jesus’ invitation seems clear. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”²⁷ The baptismal picture is of dying to self, sin, and an old way of life.

“Paul does not present any direct teaching on baptism as such, . . . he argues other matters by making use of ways of thinking about baptism.”²⁸ It is probable that Paul has baptism by immersion in mind, “but while this is admitted, it is also certain that his main scope and intention was not to describe the mode of baptism; nor to affirm that that mode was to be universal.”²⁹ It is not that we or Paul are to be unconcerned about the method. “Of course the method matters but meaning is more important.”³⁰

²⁴Romans 6:1-6

²⁵Oden, *Ancient Commentary on The Scripture. New Testament*;6, 154

²⁶Ibid 154

²⁷Luke 9:23-24 NASB

²⁸Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 1, 587

²⁹ Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible Albert Barnes electronic ed.(1798-1870)

³⁰Konrad, Abram. “Baptism: Method or Meaning.” *Direction* 14.1 (Spring 1985): 7

What becomes very important here is the phrase “baptized into Christ.” Into Christ becomes an identity understanding. “Baptism, whether ancient or modern, is the hinge upon which Christian identity turns.”³¹ It is important to note that Paul uses the pronouns “us” and “we.” This is not just my identity; it is our identity. It’s about the community and the story to which we belong. “To be baptized then meant not merely a new identity for oneself, but also a new relationship to other members of the community of the baptized, including some whom society usually separated from others.”³² The community of the baptized serves as a signpost to the eschatological future. To be baptized is to be a part of this new community. The events of Pentecost declare this reality. “So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added (Acts 2:41). To be baptized is to be added to the community.”³³ To be added is to be welcomed! It should be noted that this community extends across all structures of humankind, time, and people groups. This new community is made up of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. We are called to make disciples and baptize from all Ethnos.³⁴

This same phrase, “baptized into Christ” is also in Galatians 3. Paul writes in Galatians 3:27-28, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Soren Agersnap writes the following concerning these verses, “It is not the actual immersion during baptism that is in fact thought of as implanting into Christ.”³⁵ He, furthermore, states that verse 28, “makes it clear that ethnic, social and gender characteristics are of no significance after clothing in Christ.”³⁶ Thus, the picture of the church or the community of the baptized is one of equal standing before Christ. What an incredible contrast to our racially, culturally, politically, nationalistically, and economically divided world of which the church in complicit. When we forget our identity and the story we belong to, we transfer our loyalties to a lesser story rather than God’s.

³¹Finn, Thomas. *Early Christian Baptism and The Catechumenate*. Collegetown, Mn.:(The Liturgical Press, 1992), 1

³²Hamilton, *Through the Waters: Baptism and The Christian Life*, 92

³³Root, *Baptism and the Unity of The Church*, 13

³⁴Matt 28:19

³⁵ Agersnap, Soren. *Baptism and The New Life: A Study of Romans 6:1-14*. (Oxford: Aarhus University Press, 1999),104

³⁶Ibid,106

This reality of a new united community, a new humanity, if you will, is one that Paul expects to manifest itself in the relationships of God's people. In similar language from I Corinthians 12:13 Paul wrote, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." "It brings unity of the ones baptized. This unity is constructed by one life which is given from and in community with the one Christ."³⁷

The picture here seems to be a picture of Christ's high priestly prayer. "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."³⁸

In Romans 6:4 Paul writes, "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." Here again as Barth reminds us, "The use of the formula buried . . . with (Christ) by . . . baptism' . . . does not describe the form but the meaning of the rite, because Christ was not buried in water."³⁹ This is not prescriptive on how to baptize. It is descriptive of what it means to be amongst those who are baptized. Mark Heim describes our participation in Christ's death and resurrection in the following way:

If baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection; if the model of baptism is not primarily circumcision, so much as it is Jesus's own baptism by John in the Jordan and his 'baptism' in death and resurrection; then the true meaning of baptism is most full expressed in a practice in which the believer participates through a voluntary personal identification with Christ."⁴⁰

The description given here in Rom. 6:4 is of God's people who have been co-crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20). Thus, through identification with and faith in Christ we become recipients of this new life in Christ Jesus. The baptized life is not just of dying, but that of rising with Christ. It is a new life that participates in God's redemptive work within His community. When examining the metaphors and formulas of baptism in the New Testament, Arland J. Hultgren expressed, "Though the data are varied, all point to baptism as a radical

³⁷Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 1, 590

³⁸John 17:20-21 NASB

³⁹Weins,. "The Biblical Significance of Baptism by Immersion" 13

⁴⁰Root, *Baptism and the Unity of The Church* 154

transformation in the life of the baptized. This biblical move from old life to new will color all subsequent talk about baptism in the church's life and practice."⁴¹

This new life is to be manifested in this new community. It seems the modern evangelical movement has emphasized the individual to the neglect of community. Dale Brown expresses this neglect in this way:

This movement has been congenial to contemporary 'popular' religion which focuses more on saving 'souls' from this sinful world than on converting people to participate in God's redeeming activity in the world . . . There has been a failure in presenting the fullness of biblical shalom which means at once personal well-being, harmonious relationships with God, others and all of creation, justice, righteousness, and peace. And because of this failure, we have ignored some of the fundamental meanings of new Testament Baptism. . . . we should, nevertheless, boldly proclaim a theology of baptism which empowers people to participate in biblical shalom.⁴²

Gerhard Lohfink describes the new community that we share as those immersed into Christ Jesus in the following way:

Jesus understood the people of God which he sought to gather as a contrast-society. This in no way means that he envisioned the people of God as a state or a nation, but he did understand it as a community which forms its own sphere of life, a community in which one live in a different way and treats others in a different than is usual elsewhere in the world. We could describe the people of God which Jesus sought to gather as an alternative society. It is not violent structures of the powers of this world which are to rule within it, but rather reconciliation and brotherhood.⁴³

Again, in Jesus' high priestly prayer Jesus prays for his followers, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the

⁴¹Gaiser, Frederick J. "Baptism, Barth, and Born Again." *Word and World* 14 (Winter 1994): 4

⁴²Brown, Dale W. "A Baptismal Theology With Implications For Evangelism, Conversion, and Church Growth", 152-153

⁴³Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 56

⁴⁴John 17:15-18 NASB

world.”⁴⁴ The prayer here seems to indicate that they are to be connected to the world but, in some sense, to form a different reality for their community with the hope that they would transform the society around them. The church cannot meaningfully tell a better story if it doesn’t live a better story. The best thing that the community of the baptized (the Church) can do for the world is to show the world what it means to be the church.

In Romans 6:5, Paul continues his discourse. “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” He writes similarly in Colossians: “having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,”⁴⁵ Certainly this is the blessing of forgiveness and the hope of the resurrection from the dead for the Christian. As one commentator writes, this should affect our present behavior “which must reflect present status and anticipate the future ontological reality.”⁴⁶ Ambrosiaster wrote the following in regards to this resurrection, “Therefore baptism is the sign and symbol of the resurrection, which means that we ought to abide in the commandments of Christ and not go back to what we were before.”⁴⁷ The New Testament tells us, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”⁴⁸ This is probably why early Christian believers were stripped naked before baptism and given white robes upon emerging from the waters. The picture taken from baptism is one who rises from the waters clothed with Christ. Old worldly identities, alliances, and narratives have been put to death, and we rise with a new identity, purpose and story.

Our key passage closes with, “knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;”⁴⁹ The baptismal picture is that of a new identity in Christ. We are no longer slaves to sin but live to righteousness through the One we are immersed into. “The imagery around baptism includes incorporation into the body of Christ, but also evokes the crossing of the Red Sea in the wilderness

⁴⁵Colossians 2:12-13 NASB

⁴⁶*The New Interpreters Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997) 539

⁴⁷Oden, *Ancient Commentary on The Scripture. New Testament*;6, 155-156

⁴⁸Galatians 3:27 NASB

⁴⁹Romans 6:6 NASB

wanderings. The first speaks of community, home, fellowship, safety; the latter of journey into risk, danger and unknown territory.”⁵⁰

This baptismal identity appears to shed some light on a verse in 1 Peter that is troubling for those of us that take an ordinance view of baptism. Peter writes, “baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁵¹ We should understand that baptism is not just a one-time event in which we enter baptismal waters, but a life that is committed to a baptismal life. That is a life in which we are reconciled to God through faith alone in Jesus Christ, which manifests itself in dying to self and sin as we rise anew in community, serving God’s redeeming purposes in the world. That is a baptism that saves. “For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”⁵²

Sources

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⁵¹1 Peter 3:21 NASB

⁵²2 Peter 1:9-11

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