



UNITED WITH CHRIST IN BAPTISM

On August 7, 1967 I was united in marriage to my wife. My father officiated at the wedding. I heard the voice of my father say, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." I kissed the bride. As we turned and faced the audience, my father spoke the words of Jesus: "And what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Evelyn and I were one for life.

Nine years earlier, on June 22, 1958 I was united in baptism with Christ. Again, my father officiated at the ceremony. I heard the voice of my father say, "Upon your confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." I was buried with Christ in baptism. As I came up out of the water, my father spoke again: "Rising to walk in newness of life." Christ and I were one for life.

What would my relationship with Evelyn be if we had not been united in marriage? What if we had chosen to just "live together" without the benefit of marriage? What would my relationship with Christ be if we had not been united in baptism? What if I had just chosen to "live together" with Christ without the benefit of baptism? It seems to me that baptism is essential to union with Christ (see *Baptism: The Believer's Wedding Ceremony*, F. LaGard Smith, Gospel Advocate).

One of the clearest teachings on the importance of baptism (immersion) in the Bible is Paul's teaching in Romans 6:1-7. He paints the picture of baptism as a burial. When I was in college I worked for a funeral home. I knew what a burial was. No state would recognize sprinkling a little dirt on the deceased to be a fitting and proper burial. So Paul writes, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism" (Rom 6:4a).

But we always made sure the person was dead before we buried him or her. That's pretty important in a burial. If you have read Edgar Allen Poe's story "The Premature Burial," you will know what I mean. A death must take place before there can be a burial. So Paul writes, "...we have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into union with Christ

Jesus have been baptized into his death?" (Rom 6:3, Goodspeed). Christ died to sin and so must we. "The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God" (Rom 6:10). The same is true of us in our death to sin, burial in baptism, and resurrection to new life in Christ. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom 6:4).

I hate to use the word "academic" in this editorial but that is what this text is to me. It is so basic, so obvious, so plain. Am I missing something here? Is one truly "united with Christ" if he or she has not submitted to Christian baptism? Of course I am not referring to those who are too young to understand or comply with the command of Christ. Rather, I am thinking of modern evangelicals who want to live with Christ without the benefit of that unifying baptism. Hear Paul again: "If we have

been united with him like this in his death..." (Rom 6:5a). Stop the tape. What could Paul possibly be referring to when he writes, "If we have been united with him like this in his death" other than our baptism into Christ? The context requires that answer. Continue the tape. "...we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Rom 6:5b). There can be no resurrection without a burial, and there can be no burial unless there is death to sin.

I am all for Christian unity. Anyone who has read this magazine for the last quarter of a century knows that. But I am only for Christian unity on biblical terms. The unity for which our Lord prayed was predicated on apostolic truth. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one..." (John 17:20, 21a, emphasis added). The apostles' doctrine on baptism, such as Paul's teaching in Romans 6, makes it crystal clear that to be united with Christ one must be united with him in baptism. This is the unity with Christ that few have, and that even fewer seem to desire.

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