

## **FR 242**

### **Baptized Into One Body**

Just before his being received back into heaven, Jesus declared to the eleven, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” (Matt 28:18-19). As we discussed in FR 240, there are numerous purposes fulfilled by immersion, but the one over-riding purpose is to submit to the authority and will of Christ. In doing this one may trust that God will fulfill the promised purposes whether the convert understands all of them correctly or not.

We also pointed to Paul’s declaration, “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*” (1 Cor 12:13). Then we explained that the Spirit never actually saved, converted, or immersed persons but directed and implemented it all. God testified by manifestations of his Spirit to the acceptance of those immersed, including those on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian treasurer, the Gentiles of Cornelius’ household, the Roman jailor, and the rebaptized converts of Apollos in Ephesus. They were all baptized into the same body as the Spirit directed and affirmed.

That truth prevails today. All who seek to do the will of Christ in submitting to baptism are thus immersed into the one – the same, the only -- body. The Spirit does not consult the convert as to which body he chooses. In fact, the convert may not even know he is being made a part of the one body or may have some mistaken ideas about the one body. This transaction is made by the Spirit regardless of the converts correct conceptions or misconceptions. This is not determined by who does the immersing or by his beliefs, whether they are right or wrong. God fulfills his promises offered through baptism.

Since all obedient believers are in one body, it is of vital importance that we determine what the body is. Simply stated, it is all the forgiven people in the world. They are no organized group nor are they in an organized group. It is those who have received the promises offered to those who are baptized that we dealt with in FR 240. They are those in relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are those repentant baptized ones who received the remission of sins and God’s Spirit. They are those who were symbolically dead, buried, and raised with Christ, putting on Christ, being in Christ, and being born again. They are the ones of whom Christ is the head and the Savior. (See these references in context: Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:37-42; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:26-27; John 3:1-15; Eph 5:22-23.)

In the last reference above Paul identifies the body as the church. So all who are in the body are in the church, and visa versa, for they are identical. However, “body” is a figurative term Paul used in instructing about the cooperative functioning of those in Christ. And the word “church” needs some clarification.

The saved ones are Christ’s “ekklesia.” That Greek word essentially means “called out into an assembly.” So it should always be rendered as “assembly” or “congregation.” It

was erroneously rendered “church” in most versions, but that rendering cannot be defended. So when we read “church” let us think “assembly” or “congregation,” though that will mess up some of our cherished denominating names. And it robs me of one of my much quoted prooftexts that I used in my youth from the KJV: “*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*” (Acts 2:47). That rendering would give some credence to the concept of the church being an organization or system in which they would claim membership. We erroneously and commonly speak of being members of the church, but nowhere in the Scriptures are saved individuals referred to as members of the church. Disciples comprise Christ’s assembly, the congregation of God, but they are not members of it, nor is it joined! “*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*” (RSV) is a much more accurate rendition of the passage. One becomes united in the assembly of Christ in the same process by which his sins are remitted, that is, baptism into the one body.

Where is that one body? Or who is that one body? Is it one of the many churches that claim to follow Christ? Is it all of the churches that claim to follow Christ? It is neither one of them nor all of them!

Has the Spirit directed the baptism of persons into various churches that disagree and reject one another? Does He add persons to the factions of the Church of Christ who do not recognize fellowship with each other? By no means! “*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace*” (1 Cor 14:33). The Spirit never sponsors division for it is a work of the flesh.

All saved people make up the one assembly, congregation, body, church. Regrettably, they do not all serve in unity without distinctions. They join separated, organized groups – churches of their choice. Some groups may be organized internationally while others may be congregational. These churches are joined. In our Movement we do not use the term “join the church” but we “place membership”! Same difference, to use a cotton-patch term. The Lord does not add people to dissenting groups. We join them, whether by “placing membership” or just by association. That is how we get “church members.”

So – are you ready for this conclusion? Those who have submitted to the will of Christ in baptism are the forgiven ones composing the one body. Most of them then join some segregated group with whom they worship and serve. They serve in denominations or sects. A denomination is a differing group that claims to be a part of the whole. They choose a name to identify (denominate) themselves. A group that claims to be the whole ekklesia-assembly-church is a sect though no group admits to being a sect. Sectarian groups also choose identifying names. God’s congregation of all the saved ones needs no name so no name is given in the Scriptures. Since there is no “Scriptural” proper name, no name we may choose is “more Scriptural” than another.

Am I saying that God saves denominational churches? No, not one or all of them! Yet he just may save his faithful ones who have served among them. But those groups are in error! Right! There has never been a church free of error, and any group that claims to

be free from all error is deceived and arrogant. Such a claim only adds to its errors! If any are saved, it will be in spite of errors.

One may serve God among people who are imperfect without approving their sins. We all do that. There is no alternative for there is no error-free, sinless society, family, or church. In fact, each of us adds to the imperfection by our involvement regardless of which group we choose to work in. Just think of that terrible “church in error” in Corinth. Who could ever have hoped to be saved working and worshipping in such a congregation? Paul urged reform, but he never encouraged any of them to leave that misinformed and sinful church to start a pure one. We also should urge reform but efforts to start or maintain a pure, sinless church are in vain. None has ever existed. We are not judged as a group but as individuals. The only way individuals can be pure and sinless is to be accounted so by the grace of God rather than by accomplishment or being in the “right” segment of the saved people.

In your sinful surroundings you are not accountable for the sins of others which you seek to reform through loving concern. Reformation is not accomplished if efforts are bad-spirited, polarizing, and divisive. Unity is never accomplished by rejecting others. Unity must have priority over enforcement of personal interpretations. If you are complacent or approving of the sins of others in your congregation, whatever name it wears, that is a different matter. In cleaning house it is more fitting to begin at home even though that may draw arrows instead of “amens.” Churches do not hire preachers to reform them! They want defenders, not reformers.

I know that what I am proposing is considered extremely radical by most of those in the congregations designated as Churches of Christ. Accepting others as God has accepted me does not require me to approve everything they do and teach, not even in my own congregation. We can exercise the good grace of tolerating others who do not meet our approval or are outside our comfort zone. There is no law that says we must meet and serve with those whose teachings and practices keep us upset but we are not allowed the luxury of rejecting them for those causes.

Convictions relate to the conscience rather than comfort. If, for instance, you are convinced that you would be sinning to sing in the congregation where a woman leads the singing or the singing is accompanied by instruments, then meet with a group that does not employ either. Still, that would not give you sufficient reason to judge and reject them as unfit for your fellowship. They would be accountable to God rather than you.

I well understand the mental and emotional roadblocks hindering the acceptance of the things I am proposing for I was nurtured in them and taught them most sincerely for many years. I can only hope that God will be patient with us all without our taking too much license because of his patience.

By the oversight and implementing of the Spirit we are all baptized into one body. It is our solemn task to maintain that unity. []

(Cecil Hook; November 2004)

Talkin' Texas: We have been getting some gulley-washers lately but Alvin, Texas holds the record. In July 1979 Tropical Storm Claudette brought a U. S. rainfall record of 43 inches in 24 hours in Alvin.

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