

Sermon 40: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: Baptism in the Spirit

OUTLINE

United in one body
Baptized into one body

INTRODUCTION

The tendency of the sinful human race is to divide against each other. The history of our race is a history of divisions. We have fought wars over those divisions. And this is not just nation against nation, but we are divided at every level. Left versus right; communist versus capitalist; generational divisions; race; sex; environmental views. Even those who claim to want unity have different grounds for having it. Sin infects every aspect of our dealings with others and makes everything an occasion for division. Our education; our language; our abilities; our friends; our position; our wealth; whether we are foreigners or natives, we divide over everything. Sadly, the church as an institution filled with sinners is not free from these divisions. The Corinthian church was proof of this. A church divided not only along the traditional lines of race; and class; and sex; but we also see that pride caused some to exalt themselves over others because they had certain spiritual gifts. How does one prevent the usual divisions from taking over in the church? The world has attempted many strategies to overcome these divisions, all will fail, how can the church escape these divisions?

Paul employs several strategies in his letters. Sometimes he reminds them of the Holy Spirit that lives within them enabling them to put to death the deeds of the body and produce the fruits of the Spirit enabling them to walk in love, Gal. 5:16-26. Sometimes he reminds them of the way in which Jesus has humbled Himself and become a servant, serving the unworthy, and how we should imitate Him as an act of gratitude, Phil. 2:1-11. In this instance Paul points the Corinthians to certain gospel realities that when understood will change the way they see their brethren and their relationship to them, a relationship the world cannot enter into because it is wrought by the Spirit. In the midst of a discussion about the gifts of the Spirit and the diversity of those gifts given by the Spirit, Paul penetrates beneath these differences to the spiritual realities behind them. 1 Cor. 12:12-13 plays a critical role in Paul's overall argument. 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.' Paul we see is not applying some sort of empty axiom like, 'we have unity in diversity and diversity in unity,' a shallow statement that can be said about so many things. No, rather, Paul points to a profound Spirit wrought oneness, where every single Christian is made to be one by the Spirit of the body of Christ. In other words, the basic problem of our divisions have been solved on the spiritual level by our union with Christ and one another. This new gospel unity is more fundamental and defining than the external differences between us. Paul then uses this unity with one another as the motivating logic behind how the church as a united body ought to function, v15-31. Today as we consider these truths we will be looking at two things, that we are united in one body; and how we are baptized into one body.

United in one body

V12, 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.' Paul has used several metaphors for the church in his letter so far. The church has been portrayed as a field, and a building, 3:9. Here now Paul introduces a 3rd picture, a body. The idea of a group of people, like a city or a nation being a body was a well-known metaphor. Paul's use of the body picture is more than a mere word picture but a way of getting at gospel created realities that are not true of a city or a nation. The verse starts off as you would expect, by Paul emphasizing that there is a basic unity in the body that the members are part of. The plurality of parts shares in the unity of the body. No doubt Paul is once again underlining the point that any differences in gifting do not indicate grounds for unity, for we are all united in one body. Where divisions are often started by us fixating on the differences between us Paul reminds us of the basic unity we share as well. Where in society cultural differences like being part of the Boomer generation or being part of Gen. Z would be seen as fundamental differences justifying gaps and divisions and exaggerating those differences so as to categorize and write off the other as other and wrong. Paul says that this cannot happen in the church. Any external differences like age or race or in the instance of the Corinthians being gifted in all sorts of spectacular speaking and supernatural ways, does not make one a category distinct from others. All Christians even though diverse are one body.

The verse does not end how you would expect though, and this is Paul leading us into those gospel realities we spoke about earlier. Where you would expect Paul to write, and so it is with the church, he in fact writes, 'so it is with Christ.' This is a unique aspect of Paul's theology where he equates the church with Christ because we are the body of Christ. Paul is in no way falling into some New Age teaching where we are all divine christs. No he is pointing out a new and profound reality brought about by the gospel. This central idea was impressed upon Paul from the day of his conversion. Remember how Paul was a persecutor of the church, and how he vociferously volunteered to persecute the church beyond Jerusalem. And while on his way to Damascus, Christ appeared to him in a vision. Do you remember what Jesus said? Acts 9:4-5, 'And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.' Here is Paul acting against what he takes to be a group of heretics, and Jesus reveals that Paul is not merely attacking people but persecuting Jesus Himself. Twice in these two verses the point is made that to persecute the church is to directly persecute Christ. This connection between Jesus in the church would not have been fully understood at this point, but as Paul writes his letter we see the various details and realities that he was originally confronted with being expounded.

There are other verses where Paul betrays this deeper perspective. 1 Cor. 1:13, 'Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?' You will remember that Paul in chapter 1 was dealing with divisions, and instead of saying, is the church divided, he says 'Is Christ divided?' By implication he is saying that to divide the church is to divide Christ. If this thought is horrific to you, and it should be; we can see how this basic truth carries implications for how we behave towards one another, in this instance that we must not create divisions in the church. Paul also speaks about Christ as the head and we as the body, Eph. 4:15-16. 1 Cor. 10:17, 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.'

Discussing the Lord's Supper Paul moves from talking about the body of Christ in v16, to the bread that represents that body, and then from the idea of Christ's body to the church which is the body of Christ, and then the appropriateness of the body the church partaking of one loaf a sign of our union with Him and each other, that bread speaking of His body given for us. Rom. 12:5, 'so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.' This is another surprising verse where you would expect Paul to say we are individually members of Christ, instead he says we are 'individually members one of another.'

How you see the church will determine how you act towards it. Do you see the church as the body of Christ? Like Paul do you have to learn that to attack the church is a personal attack against Christ; that to divide the church is as unthinkable as mutilating Christ Himself? The basic unity we share implies that we must include each other, must serve each other, must preserve and nurture our unity with each other. In fact this unity which creates an eternal bond calls for us to love each other as Christ has loved us and to prioritize our identity as one in Christ above every other external distinctive. I want you to see the two staggering truths Paul always works with that flow from our union with Christ. If we are united with Christ all the benefits of being His and in Him become ours. This living union makes us partake by the Spirit of all the resurrection and new creation benefits of our salvation even now. Our union with Christ is a channel through which many blessings flow to us. This reality undergirds all of Paul's thinking. But there is a complimentary truth that flows from this reality, if we are all individually members of Christ, then by virtue of our union with Him we become also members of one another. Any thinking that says I don't need the church, don't need to go to church, don't need to serve in and be served by the church is put to death by this oneness.

Baptized into one body

Where v12 describes what we are, v13 explains how we are what we are, 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.' I don't know about you but as a younger Christian I was aware of a group of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches who believed that if you cannot speak in tongues you are not saved. This verse played into their thinking. Because everyone who receives the Holy Spirit bears evidence of it by speaking in tongues; and those who do not have the Spirit are not saved, it follows that those who do not speak in tongues are not saved. If you don't have the Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues you are not part of the body of Christ and therefore are not saved. Now it is true to say that those who do not have the Spirit are not in Christ/part of the body of Christ/saved, Rom. 8:9 makes this clear, 'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.' The problem in their thinking is presuming that every person who receives the Spirit speaks in tongues. 1 Cor. 12:30 clearly tells us this is not the case. Paul teaches us that we receive the Spirit when we believe, Eph. 1:13, 'In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.' Gal. 3:2, 'Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?' So look again at 1 Cor. 12:13 and you will notice the 'all' language. Every person who hears and believes is one who has received the Spirit and is one who is baptized into the body, the church. Water baptism which is the outward symbol of this inner reality is applied then to those who believe not to infants. Paul was telling the Corinthians to not despise their brethren, not despise their less spectacular and miraculous gifts, not

exclude them because every other believer in their church is one body with them by the Spirit. Paul was not including those without the Spirit in this description.

Why have we begun to talk about water baptism where the verse clearly speaks of baptism in the Spirit? One word, Synecdoche! This simply means, part for the whole. The writers of the NT did not separate water baptism from receiving the Holy Spirit, or faith, or repentance, or forgiveness, or becoming a disciple of Christ or joining the church. Conversion to Christ, repentance of sin, being saved were all linked to the historical act of baptism. This does not mean that baptism saves. The early church did not look back to an altar call, or a confirmation, or a sinner's prayer, but their baptism as the moment of their confession, faith, repentance, receiving of the Spirit, washing and the moment they were added to the church. Water baptism is the symbol and the ceremony where these realities are pinned in the minds of the authors of Scripture. Salvation, baptism and church membership were not all split apart as they are today but all bundled together. As you read through the NT you will see that when salvation is spoken of all of these elements are seen as part of the moment, though they do not all have the same function. Faith is the instrumental means by which we are justified, repentance is the necessary accessory to faith, but not a co-instrument for justification; receiving the Spirit, or as Paul puts it here being baptised in the Spirit, is the invisible benefit, or not so invisible in the first occurrences of it; baptism being the formal moment of confession, and incorporation into the church and which brought all the ingredients together in a single historical moment.

Paul does not separate Spirit baptism from water baptism. Look at Gal. 3:7-28 and notice the same ideas, notice the social distinctive destroying language, 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' Here Paul is talking about water baptism and is saying that water baptism is putting on Christ and this new identity overcomes those traditional social distinctions like Jew and Gentile. Then compare that to 1 Cor. 12:13, 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.' Spirit baptism and water baptism are linked in Paul's mind. By application if water and Spirit baptism make irrelevant the massive differences between Jew and Gentile, then from the greater to the lessor, differences of gifts cannot be grounds for division.

This connection between water and Spirit baptism helps us to better understand what baptism is and what it means. Firstly, we can say that baptism is a word-act. This might be a new notion to you, but the bible is full of significant actions which have a clear message. For example, in Gen. 15 Abraham was asked to cut several animals in half and create a corridor between the halves, this was in preparation for cutting a covenant where the parties of the covenant would walk between the pieces in a solemn word-act. This action was a way of saying, may what has happened to these animals happen to me if I do not keep this covenant. Baptism in the same way is an action that speaks.

In baptism there are three voices that are speaking; God's, the Church's and individual believer's.

What is God saying? Well in 1 Cor. 12:13, Paul says 'we were baptised.' In Greek this is in the aorist passive, in other words, it is a single past event, and it

was something God did to us not something we did to ourselves. God is saying, this is something I have done to you not what you have done for yourself. I have raised you from the dead, I have cleansed you from sin, I have given you the Spirit, I have joined you to the church, I have fulfilled the promises of the new covenant and circumcised your hearts, I have caused you to participate in the New Creation power of Christ's resurrection, I have made you a citizen of that new age, I have made you one as a new people. Baptism tells a long story about what God has done for us.

God is telling us about a past, a present and a future that is now ours in Christ. God is saying to us in baptism: 'I have sent my Son into the world to live and die for you. He died on the cross in payment for your sins, He died so that you might not die. Then is raised Him from the dead overcoming satan, sin and death. His resurrection is a proof of sins having been paid, and the beginning of new creation life breaking into the present evil age.' God speaks about past historical facts and things realised in Christ.

In the present God says, 'I have drawn you by the power of my Spirit to faith in Christ, I have united you to my Son by the Spirit, I have caused you to partake of His death and resurrection so that all your sins are seen as paid for, you are now alive in Him, all your sins are paid for in Him, I am uniting you eternally to Him and to His church/bride/body.' A big difference between paedobaptists and credobaptists is that we actually believe that the sign and thing signified are joined, and not separated by time. Infant baptisers wrongly apply something that speaks about participation in present realities to those who are not experiencing them. If baptism means that I am a believer, have repented, have the Spirit, am forgiven, and am joined to the Spiritual body of Christ, then it is misapplied to babies.

About the future God says: 'As surely as Christ is risen from the dead so certain can you be that you will be resurrected. Your baptism is appointed by me as a promise of what I will one day do when Jesus comes again. I will cause you to be resurrected into eternal glorified embodied life in a new creation. I will destroy satan, sin and death and eradicate them from My universe.'

The word-act oath-sign of the OT was circumcision and it demarcated the covenant community of the OT which was a politico-religious group of believers and unbelievers. It included children and slaves and the only way to be part of it was to repatriate to Jewish nationality on a culturally and religious level. Circumcision was a self-maledictory oath. In other words it promised judgement upon those who did not keep the conditions of the covenant. They would be cut off from God's people like the foreskin. Baptism is the word-act oath-sign of the New Covenant. It speaks of the passing of the OT and an inferior covenant of a mixed group where all were not believers. A people of all nations not merely one. This word-act pictures new covenant realities fulfilled, that each one of God's new people will have the Spirit, know Him, and walk in His ways. Therefore baptism is not a self-maledictory oath that says if I do not keep the conditions of this covenant I will die. Instead it says, that Christ has died and kept the conditions, therefore I am guaranteed life. Circumcision says, 'circumcise your own hearts,' baptism says, 'I have circumcised your hearts.' It is also for this reason that we no longer apply this word-act to children.

The second voice of baptism is the church. Christ as the king of the kingdom gave the keys of the kingdom to the church, we see this when Jesus gives them

to Peter as an apostle and part of the foundation of the church on earth in Matt. 16:19. The church was given the power to bind and to loose. Binding and loosing is explained by Jesus not as praying to the devil and telling him he is bound, but rather as part of the church's power in church discipline in Matt. 18:18-20, 'Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.'" The church has been given the power by God to bind members to itself visibly recognising their faith as real and identifying them through baptism as part of Christ. And the church has the right to loose people from the visible church when they live in impenitent sin.

Today many view baptism as a personal event, it is not. There is more than one voice in baptism. On the spiritual level God is uniting you to Christ and the universal church, but on the formal level, you are being added to the local church. We are dysfunctional and sub-biblical if we think that the church properly administering baptism is optional. To deny the church through the God appointed officers of the church has the right to define its external identity is to deny God has given the keys to the church and to say you have them as an individual.

Please notice the close relationship between baptism and being put into the body in 1 Cor. 12:13. 'For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.' The sign and the thing signified must agree. Invisibly the Holy Spirit is uniting you to Christ, but visibly the church is adding you to its number through baptism. Remember that membership and baptism were connected in the mind of the early church. Not merely because of culture, but because they saw the sign and the thing signified as united not separated.

So when the church baptises you they are saying: 'We have heard your confession of faith and judge it credible; we recognise the work of God in uniting you to Christ spiritually so we will reflect His will and unite you formally to the visible local church; we as God's representative body/embassy openly identify you to the world as a follower of Christ; we receive you into the fellowship and accept care for your soul.'

Then there is a third voice speaking in the word-act of baptism. It is the voice of the person being baptised. Not only is God saying something in baptism, and not only is the church saying something but so are you. You are giving an answering voice to God's call to believe in Christ and are saying I believe, you are giving an answering call to God's command to repent and pursue holiness and you are saying I commit myself to the commands of Christ. You tell the word by this act that you are dead to the person you were and are committing yourself to a new life. You are telling the church that you accept the responsibilities of being part of a new community and being under authority and submitting to church discipline if necessary. You are embracing the new identity and responsibilities that come with it that necessarily flow from God making us into a spiritual whole. Someone has compared it to the oath of citizenship when receiving a new citizenship. When you get baptised you are saying, I have died and been raised with Christ, I believe that I am one of His people and that I will experience resurrection of the body when He comes again. You are bearing testimony to His work, your trust in it, and the new community He has brought you into. It is your yes to God and the church.

The gospel has made us a single people, the body of Christ and this demands unity and love and a symbiotic interdependence where we serve and honour each other. Inwardly the Spirit has done this, outwardly we signal this newness by our baptism into the church. Are you one with Christ? Are you expressing this outwardly by being one with the church?