

11. The Book of Philippians 1:27-2:2

Joy in Unity-Part 4

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We have begun a study in Paul's letter to the Philippians—looking at its theme of 'joy' topically.

So far we've looked at:

- I. Joy in Fellowship—1:3-6
- II. Joy in Proclaiming the Gospel—1:12-18
- III. Joy of Faith—1:25
- IV. Joy in Unity—1:27-2:2

Seven times in these verses Paul using various phrases expresses his hope that the Philippian Christians will walk in unity with one another:

1. 'One spirit'—1:27
2. 'One mind'—1:27; 2:2
3. 'Fellowship of the Spirit'—2:1
4. 'Like-minded'—2:2
5. 'Same love'—2:2
6. 'One accord'—2:2

All of these phrases are Paul's way of talking about unity among the Christians in Philippi. Why was the subject of unity so important to Paul? It was important because he knew that it was not only essential for joy—it is essential for dealing with trials, adversity, and for victory in our battle against the devil.

**The bottom line is that we are stronger together than we are alone.
(Hebrews 10:24-25).**

One of the greatest passages on Christian unity in the New Testament comes out of Ephesians 4.

In Ephesians 4 verses 3 and 13 Paul talks about the basis for our unity with one another as believers in Christ—in verse 3 he talks about "the unity of the Spirit" and then in verse 13 he mentions "the unity of the faith."

We are currently looking at the first one:

A. Unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul speaks of the importance of *maintaining* our unity as Christians—but then in verses 4-6, he goes on to give us the 7 spiritual realities that make up our unity and bind us together as one in Christ:

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)

⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

So far, we've looked at 4 of the 7 spiritual realities that unite all true Christians together:

1. **One Body—verse 4a**
2. **One Spirit—verse 4b**
3. **One Hope of your Calling—verse 4c**
4. **One Lord—verse 5a**
5. **One Faith—verse 5b**

Look, if there is only one way to heaven and that is by believing in one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ—then that must mean, there can only be one faith:

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Acts 4:12 (NLT)

¹² There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

There is a set of truths upon which the Church of Jesus Christ is built—a body of truth that is absolute and immutable regardless of the times in which we live or the accepted mores of a society at any given moment—morality changes, truth is a constant.

This body of truth is called "**the faith**" (not "a faith" as in "*one of many faiths that will get a person into heaven*")—the Bible refers to it as "the faith" as in the one and only faith that can save.

Jude calls it, "*The faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.*"

Christians may differ on some matters of interpretation with regard to non-essential doctrine—but all true Christians agree on the basics of the faith:

That Jesus is God, Who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead bodily on the third day, that there is salvation in none other, and that a person is saved by faith apart from works.

These are the essential doctrines of the Christian faith and as such they are non-negotiable—to deny anyone of them means a person cannot be a Christian (or is not a genuine Christians if they claim to be one).

Ray Stedman—

“The one faith is linked to the one Lord, because our faith is centered in the revealed truth about Jesus Christ. There may be many questions on minor details of the life and message of Christ, but there is no disagreement as to the fundamental elements of our faith — that Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose again to save us from our sins. God has not given us different faiths for different cultures — one faith for the Jews, another for the Gentiles. No, there is one faith, one total panorama of truth that God has delivered to us through the prophets and apostles, forming a seamless, self-explanatory truth.

No one can truthfully say, as we sometimes hear, “Well, I have my truth and you have yours. I have my Christ and you have yours. I have my faith and you have yours.” There is only one truth, only one historic Jesus, and only one faith.”

That one faith joins Christian’s together across all barriers of time, nationality, race, gender, and anything else we can imagine.

If we have one faith, then we ought to be able to stand shoulder to shoulder before the world and give united testimony to God’s saving work in Jesus Christ—this is true spiritual maturity leading to true practical Christian unity.

6. One Baptism—verse 5c

The word ‘**baptize**’ comes as a transliteration of the Greek word, ‘baptizo’ which means to ‘*immerse*.’

The word was used of ships that had sunk and were ‘*baptized*’ into the sea—and also of a piece of cloth that was immersed into a vat of dye and was now ‘*baptized*’ into the dye.

The word is used 74 times in the New Testament and every time the idea is immersion—the question is into what?

Well, we have to look at the context of each passage to determine that—because the word is used to speak of different kinds of baptisms.

a. The baptism of suffering

Matthew 20:23

So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with...[Explain—2 Timothy 3:12]

b. The baptism of distress or of being overwhelmed

The word is still used this way in Greece today—for example: If they wanted to say, “*I’m overwhelmed with problems today*”, they would use the word “*baptizo*” meaning that they feel as though they are “*immersed*” or “*drowning*” in their problems.

In fact, that is how Jesus used the word in Luke 12:50—

Luke 12:50 (NKJV)

⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Here He was talking about the cross and how He was immersed in His *mission* to die for the sins of the world—but also, of being immersed in the emotional *duress* of wanting to finish the work the Father had given Him to do.

c. The baptism with the Holy Spirit

Acts 1:5, 8 (NKJV)

⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
[This is the baptism of power for service]

d. The baptism of judgment

Matthew 3:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit [salvation] and fire [judgment]. ¹² His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn [the redeemed into His Kingdom]; but He will burn up the chaff [the unredeemed] with unquenchable fire [the Lake of Fire i.e., “Hell”].

e. The baptism of salvation

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...

If you look at the context of this verse, you will see that salvation is in view—so this is speaking of the baptism of salvation. The baptism of salvation is a “dry” baptism where a person who receives Jesus as their Savior is instantly ‘*immersed*’ (baptized) into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Now, if Paul hadn’t already talked about this baptism when he mentioned the unity we have as Christians with one another, and how we are all part of ‘**one Body**’ (the Body of Christ) earlier in Ephesians 4:4—I would have thought that this was the baptism he was talking about here at the end of Ephesians 4:5—the baptism of salvation.

But since the baptism of salvation is not what Paul has in mind here—it leaves us with one final baptism he must be referring to—the one we most often think of when we hear the word baptism—water baptism.

Water baptism is mentioned throughout the New Testament.

Even though I believe that water baptism was what Paul was talking about here in Ephesians 4:5 as one of the things that binds us together as Christians in unity—in the Church of Jesus Christ practically speaking just the opposite has been the case!

The doctrine of water baptism, instead of bringing us together, has become a subject that has divided Christians from one another over the centuries. The reason for this division is because many Christian denominations believe that water baptism is essential for salvation (a doctrine called ‘*baptismal regeneration*’).

While many other Christian churches (like ours) believe that, while water baptism is a beautiful symbol of our oneness with Christ thru our faith in Him—it is not essential for our salvation.

Let me set this up by first of all saying that—water baptism isn't a uniquely *Christian* thing. A lot of Christians don't know that the Jews practiced a form of baptism *before* Christianity.

Before they went into the Temple to worship the LORD, they would undergo a ritual purification in a special cleansing pool or bath known as a 'mikveh.' They would immerse ('baptize') themselves in the waters of this cleansing pool, washing off the dirt from their bodies—which would symbolize a purification from sin and all outward defilements. Then (*and only then*) were they considered *ceremonially clean* and could go in and worship the Lord in the Temple.

In New Testament times, if people wanted to convert (proselytize) to Judaism, they went through a ceremonial washing referred to as *baptism*.

We must be careful to note that the baptism of John the Baptist
was not *Christian* baptism—
but was a baptism connected with *Israel*
and its acceptance of their Messiah.

In Christian baptism we identify with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection which comes *after* we have received Him into our hearts as Savior—whereas John's baptism *preceded* the receiving of the Messiah.

It's important to remember that Jesus submitted Himself to the baptism of John—

Matthew 3:13–15 (NKJV)

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

Of course, the question is: if Jesus was sinless and didn't need to be ceremonially cleansed from any sins and therefore had no need to repent (John's baptism was the baptism of 'repentance'—Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; Acts 19:4)—why did Jesus submit Himself to John's baptism?

He did it to identify with sinners—and to allow us to then identify with Him when we get water baptized.

Please understand, Christian water baptism does not in any way *wash* us of our sins—"But didn't Peter say it does in Acts 2:38?"

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest (and others) have said that in the Greek, what Peter actually said was, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of the fact that your sins have been put away...*" Salvation precedes water baptism.

So, water baptism doesn't wash sins away—nor is it a necessary part of salvation (baptismal regeneration)—so then what is the purpose for doing it? It acts as an outward sign, symbolizing the washing away of sin through the blood of Christ, and identifying the new believer with their Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

1 Peter 3:21 (NKJV)

²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Water baptism is the sign of the New Covenant just like a wedding ring is the sign of the marriage covenant. A wedding ring isn't essential for marriage—even as water baptism isn't essential for salvation.

The thief that died on the cross next to Jesus professed Him (and received Him) as Lord and Savior—at which time Jesus said to him, *"Today you'll be with Me in paradise"* acknowledging that he was in fact saved—without being water baptized.

The Philippian jailer, in Acts 16, asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved—and Paul said, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..."* He didn't say, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized in water and you will be saved."*

Romans 10:9 (NKJV)

⁹ ...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Notice that water baptism is not mentioned. Then, in my mind, the greatest testimony against baptismal regeneration (that water baptism is essential for salvation)—comes from the mouth of Paul the Apostle himself in 1 Corinthians 1:

1 Corinthians 1:14-17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. ¹⁶ Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...

Notice how Paul separates *water baptism* from the *gospel*—indicating that they were separate and distinct things that were not working together to secure a person's salvation.

Look, if water baptism was essential for salvation it would be part of the gospel and therefore Paul (the quintessential evangelist) would never have said that the Lord didn't send him to baptize—if in fact baptism was necessary for a person to be saved!

If Paul believed that water baptism was essential for salvation, he would have rushed everyone who received Jesus as their Savior down to the river as quickly as possible to *throw* them into the water and 'seal the deal' before anything happened to them, and they died before they could be baptized and would therefore be forever lost!

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved...³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

So here Paul gives us the Gospel which he preached to save sinners—and notice that water baptism is not mentioned.

“O yeah? What about what Jesus said in Mark 16:16—‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved...’ Doesn’t that prove baptism is essential for salvation?!”

Please read that whole verse—

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. [Comment]

The Lord Jesus connected the two (faith and water baptism) together because water baptism is an important symbol of our commitment to Jesus. So important that it became part of the command (the great commission) that Jesus left His Church with before ascending back to His Heavenly Father—

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."

Going, baptizing and teaching are all essential elements of the disciple-making process.

We can see the importance of *evangelism* and *teaching* in making disciples—

- *But why does Jesus include the act of water baptism in this process?*
- *What is the purpose of water baptism in the Christian life—since we have just proven it doesn’t save?*

As I just said, it is the outward *sign* of the New Covenant. A sign *points* to something—water baptism is a public sign that points to our relationship with Jesus—that we now belong to Him.

However, water baptism not only speaks of our *belonging* to Jesus—it also speaks of us belonging to one another.

As Christians we’re called to belong—not just to believe!

We belong to the family of God and are members of Body of Christ—His Church. This speaks of unity—and unity among the people of God brings great joy!

As one pastor put it,

“(Water baptism)...not only declares a person’s allegiance to Jesus but also their acceptance into the Body of Christ. It says to the world—‘This person is now one of us! We have fellowship with each other.’”

Water baptism is not only a symbol of salvation—it’s also a symbol of our oneness with other believers in Christ—that’s why we do public baptisms.

Unity among the people of God is from the Holy Spirit—division is of the devil.

Isaiah 54:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ No weapon formed against you shall prosper...This *is* the heritage of the servants of the Lord...

Jesus said that against His Church the gates of hell would not prevail (Matthew 16:18)—that is unless Christians open those gates to let the devil in.

Christians do that all the time through gossip and backbiting each other and thus allowing the devil to *form* them into weapons to use against other Christians.

God said that if you allow the devil to do this—you are not going to prosper in your Christian life.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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