



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Jesus and Baptism

Galatians 3:21-29

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### Introduction

1. In his introduction to the book, *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, John Armstrong wrote:

The NT abounds with clear evidence that baptism mattered to early Christians. And the history of the Christian church for nearly two thousand years demonstrates that baptism has always mattered to Christians in all ages and all contexts. One conclusion we cannot draw, at least from the Bible or church history, is that we can treat baptism as unimportant.<sup>1</sup>

2. The New Testament bears out the truth of Armstrong's conclusion.
  - a. The various forms of the words "baptize," "baptism," etc. appear 108 times in the NT.
  - b. Although its importance is elaborated, we also see a sense that baptism was normal and expected, the reasons for which were well understood by the early Christians.
  - c. Acts illustrates this: see 2:41 (Pentecost), 8:12, 13 (Samaria), 9:18 (Saul; 22:16), 10:47, 48 (Cornelius & his household), 16:15 (Lydia in Philippi), 16:33 (the jailer in Philippi), 18:8 (Corinthian synagogue ruler Crispus), and 19:3-5 (John's disciples in Ephesus).
3. Why is this so? As is usually true in the New Testament, it has to do with baptism's connection with Jesus.

### Body

- I. The Importance of Being in Jesus.
  - A. It was basic in the early church: Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6; 3:16; Acts 4:10-12).
  - B. In the epistles, the emphasis on Jesus may be even more pronounced, being especially seen in the idea of being "in Christ Jesus" (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, *en Christōi Iēsou*).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John H. Armstrong, ed., "Introduction: Division, Differences and a Dream," in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 11.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase appears 46 times in Paul's letters. That number refers to the three-word phrase, "in Christ Jesus," chosen for emphasis because it appears in our text (Galatians 3:26-27). Outside Paul, it is used only at 1 Peter 5:10. The shorter phrase, "in Christ" appears about another 30 times in the letters, again mostly in Paul. The phrase "in Jesus" (ἐν Ἰησοῦ) is seldom used (cf. Acts 4:2; Ephesians 4:21; Revelation 1:9). [The phrases studied are as they appear in the Greek NT; English translations do sometimes have "in Jesus" in passages that actually use a different Greek preposition and phrase. One example is the use of the phrase in most English translations to render the genitive phrase that is literally, "of Jesus Christ" or "of Christ" (see e.g., Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 2:16; 3:22; Philippians 3:9; but see the KJV in each case).]

1. How important is it to be “in Christ Jesus”? That is where we:
  - a) Have redemption (Romans 3:24).
  - b) Are alive to God (6:11).
  - c) Have eternal life (6:23).
  - d) Are in a place where there is no condemnation or punishment (8:1).
  - e) Are in the sphere of God’s love (8:39).
  - f) Are sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2).
  - g) Are among the recipients of God’s grace (1 Corinthians 1:4).
2. The point goes beyond Jesus being a master teacher or greatest role model; it even goes beyond having our sins forgiven and being acquitted (important as those teachings are).
3. Being *in him* is where we realize the greatest possible hopes and blessings (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30).

C. “Since being united with Christ is our only hope of receiving the gospel blessings, our main concern should thus be *how to become one with Christ*.”<sup>3</sup>

## II. A Case Study: the Central Place of Jesus in Galatians 3-4.

- A. Keep in mind the occasion prompting the Galatian letter and its primary issue.
  1. The Galatian Christians were being tempted to turn to “a different gospel” (1:6-9).
  2. We get a sense of the problem in Paul’s autobiographical summary in chapters 1-2 (cf. 2:3, 11-14, 16), but chapters 3-4 make clear that some were trying to convince the Galatians (Gentiles) to become Jews in order to be saved (cf. 3:1-2)?<sup>4</sup>
- B. Paul’s argument against surrendering to the law of Moses is that it does not deliver what all people really need, something that comes only to the heirs of the faith of and promise to Abraham.
  1. Since faith was what counted where Abraham was concerned, it is those who are of faith who will be Abraham’s sons (Galatians 3:6-9).
  2. However, one cannot be an heir merely by having a faith like Abraham’s but, in keeping with the promise he received, must be united to the one descendant who was the only rightful heir of that promise (Galatians 3:16, 22).
  3. Was Moses’ law unimportant? No, it was needed to hold things in check and teach about righteousness until that one descendant came (Galatians 3:19, 23-25).<sup>5</sup>
  4. The point is clearer when we read Galatians 3:22 as it should be translated.
    - a) “But the scripture hath concluded<sup>6</sup> all under sin, that the promise *by faith of Jesus Christ* might be given to them that believe” (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, Inc., 1990), 99.

<sup>4</sup> Whatever the application of the principle involved might be since Paul wrote, or now, in the historical/literary context of Galatians, as originally written, the phrases “the law” and “works of the law” generally refer to the law of Moses. The issue was whether they would follow Christ and “the law of faith” (6:2) or the law that required circumcision, i.e., the law of Moses.

<sup>5</sup> Note Galatians 3:19, 23-25 from the NLT: “<sup>19</sup> Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. . . . <sup>23</sup> Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. <sup>24</sup> Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. <sup>25</sup> And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.”

<sup>6</sup> “Concluded” reflects an older meaning common in the time of the KJV. Cf. “confine” (NKJV), “imprisoned” (ESV).

b) “But the scripture imprisoned everything and everyone under sin so that the promise could be given—because of *the faithfulness of Jesus Christ*—to those who believe” (NET).<sup>7</sup>

C. Paul’s point is that Jesus is the *only* one to fulfill the promise to Abraham and *only* those who are brought into union with Christ are able to be heirs of Abraham (cf. Galatians 4:4-7 where a distinction is made between being the true heir and adopted sons).<sup>8</sup>

### III. Entering into Union with Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

A. We should pause to reflect on the need for verses 26-29 in the argument of Galatians.

1. As we have seen, Paul is arguing that the way of faith that unites us with Christ is what makes us [adopted] heirs of the promise given to Abraham.
2. He wanted to show that if they accepted the “different gospel” (1:6-7) of the pro-circumcision party, they would be forsaking access to the promise of Abraham (3:2-3).
3. In the course of such an appeal, we would expect reassurance that they had indeed entered into the union with Christ where the blessings were.

B. Verses 26, 28-29 declare that reassurance.

1. The law had clearly served its purpose of guardian, “for (γάρ, *gar*) you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (v 26, NASB).
2. That did what nothing else could (v 28): “It does not matter if you are a Gentile, or a woman, or a slave—none of whom could inherit property according to Old Testament law. If you are in Christ and one with Him, you will be *treated* like a *son* and therefore will receive the inheritance anyway. This is summed up in 4:7, . . .” (Cottrell, 101)
3. Verse 29 thus clinches the argument and their reassurance.

C. Verse 27 shows how they could be sure.

1. Notice first the connection with verse 26: “For (γάρ, *gar*). . .” - verse 27 is designed to explain the entrance into the sonship of faith.
2. The figure is vivid, we are “clothed with” (NASB) or “put on” (ESV) Christ, the point being that we enter into union with Christ: “When we are clothed with Christ, we are identified with Him; we are in Him; in a sense we are a very part of Him” (Cottrell, 100).
3. Notice that Paul spoke of this “putting on” in terms of an established event that happened at a point in time (Greek aorist tense).
4. When did it happen? Whenever any of them had been baptized (also an aorist tense).
  - a) Notice that baptism is said to have put them “into Christ.”
  - b) Notice, too, the order: “Being clothed with Christ is the necessary result or effect of being baptized into Christ” (Cottrell, 103).
  - c) The two ideas are practically equivalent, very close together, but remain in a cause-effect relationship.

<sup>7</sup> “Faith of Jesus Christ” (KJV) reflects the genitive phrase, ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou*). The phrase uses a different preposition and case than the phrase usually translated “in Christ Jesus.” It is used in several places in Paul’s presentation of the gospel of Jesus as the only way to God (Romans 3:22, 25; Galatians 2:16 [twice]; 3:22; Philippians 3:9). Taken as a subjective genitive (i.e., “Christ’s faith”), it bolsters the argument that *only* through what Christ did in obedience to God do we have hope. The KJV (except for Rom 3:26) and New English Translation (NET) consistently translate the phrase in a way that brings out the genitive case. For more discussion of the issue, and a case for the subjective interpretation, see Luke Timothy Johnson, “Romans 3:21-26 and the Faith of Jesus,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982) 77-90.

<sup>8</sup> For more discussion of this point, see Cottrell, 98-99.

5. Paul's affirmation is that the Galatians could be sure they were sons of God, and heirs of Abraham through the faith of Jesus because they had been baptized into union with him.

### *Conclusion*

1. In the introduction to his study of important New Testament baptism texts, Jack Cottrell pleads for a commitment to take the Scriptures at their word:

The main problem underlying the modern confusion on baptism thus is not paucity of Biblical material, but rather an *a priori* commitment to certain theological presuppositions. It is extremely difficult . . . to be objective when we try to interpret the Bible. We tend to read it, especially its references to baptism, with preconceived ideas of what it "must really be saying" or what it "surely cannot mean."

With full awareness of the difficulties involved, our goal in this study is to examine the main New Testament passages on the meaning of baptism as if we were hearing or seeing them for the first time. How would the original hearers of certain key statements have understood them? (Cottrell, 7).

2. The language of Galatians 3:26-27 is straightforward. Paul intended to remind the Galatians that they had entered into the all-important union with Christ at the point of their baptism. God has not changed. We can be assured that when we do what they did, we will receive what they received.
3. So, we ask, have you entered into this precious union with Jesus? If so, are you rejoicing in what that means for your life?

July 26, 2009  
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