

Baptism: Drama, Grace and Inaugural Spirituality

Paul's Perspective

A. Introduction

1. Our theology of Baptism generally is based upon Paul's writings.
2. Paul personally when converted was baptized (Acts 9:18; 22:16).
3. His call to apostolic ministry occurs in the context of this cluster of spiritual events – repentance, conversion, baptism, reception of the Spirit and inclusion in the Messianic community.
4. Paul preached baptism and baptized some converts:
 - a. Lydia and her household (16:14-16)
 - b. Philippian jailor (16:31-34)
 - c. Crispus at Corinth (18:8)
 - d. John's disciples at Ephesus (19:3-5)
 - e. Galatian believers (Gal. 3:26-28)
 - f. Some concern about baptism (1 Corinthians 1:16-17)
5. No indication that his practice differed from that taught by Jesus.
6. As a former Pharisee he knew the Jewish purification rituals, particularly those connected with the *miqvoth* and Temple worship.

B. Paul's Baptismal Theology

1. Need to distinguish when Paul may use the verb *baptizw* and its cognate nouns/adjectives literally (the actual ritual) or figuratively (to represent the experience of suffering, for example, cf. Mark 10:38).
2. Is Paul's use of baptismal language in Romans 6:3-4 literal or metaphorical?
 - a. Paul is referring to a personal experience and expounding its meaning?
 - b. Focus is upon our identity with Christ and what are the implications of this identity.

C. 1 Corinthians 12:13

1. Context – discussion about the nature of the church
2. Imagery:
 - a. metaphor one – plunged in the sphere of the one Spirit (location).
 - b. metaphor two – drinking the one Spirit
 - c. emphasis on oneness that results, eradication of ethnic and social distinctions – one body.
3. Baptism defines our inclusion within the people of God, the church.

D. Galatians 3:26-28

1. Focus on unity created by our inclusion in the Messiah
2. When a person exercises faith in the Messiah, they become “sons of God.”
3. The metaphor of “being clothed with Messiah.”
4. Connection with the possession of the Spirit.
5. Note that in the Galatian context Paul never explicitly links circumcision and baptism.

E. Romans 6:1-14

1. Salvation in Christ frees us from enslavement to sin (6:2). “We have died to sin.”
2. Paul used baptismal language to define the hope we have in Christ and to emphasize the ethical changes that must result from this identity.
3. The connection between death and baptism is significant, enabling Paul to argue that we no longer experience sin's rule. We are in the realm of grace.

F. Summary of Key Ideas in Paul's Theology of Baptism – transition and transformation

1. Uses first person, including himself in this common Christian experience.
2. Relates the imagery of baptism, i.e. plunging, to the death, burial and resurrection of Messiah Jesus and how our repetition of these experiences in baptism declares “newness of life.”
3. Baptism is the Christian’s declaration of freedom from sin’s domination.
4. Baptism signals new creation which has moral implications. The language of kingdom and ruling indicates the transformation we have experienced. Inclusion in the realm of the Spirit is important.
5. The ritual itself does not accomplish this, but it demonstrates what faith has already achieved.
6. Paul emphasizes both the individual and communal implications of being in Christ through the baptismal ritual.
7. Paul does not argue for sinless perfection, but rather a serious pursuit of holiness because of one’s baptismal promise.
8. Eschatological dimension – moves us into the “age to come” and hope of resurrection.

How do we as pastoral leaders enable people to recognize the implications of their baptism?

G. Colossians 2:9-15

1. Paul is developing his apologetic against the false teaching in Colosse, which seems link to Jewish ideas.
2. In a series of five different metaphors (circumcision, burial and resurrection, removal of charges, stripping off clothes, and involvement in triumphal procession) Paul defines what Christ has accomplished. Probably in this he is answering the assertions of false teachers.
3. 2:11 – “circumcision of the Messiah” – refers to his death.
4. Some argue that Paul here compares circumcision to baptism. However, I would argue that he is not doing this. Circumcision refers to Christ’s death. A Christian’s circumcision with hands represents God’s work of salvation in the life of the believer.
5. Baptism represents our death, our burial with Christ, signaling our death to trespasses and “uncircumcision of flesh”, i.e. our Gentile status. No longer are we separate from the people of God.
6. Baptism cannot be paralleled with circumcision because baptism follows a formal faith commitment on the part of a believer who is able personally to engage responsibly in this relationship.
7. The transitions that Jesus Messiah experienced through his death, burial, resurrection and ascension, bring various benefits to the believer. There are cosmic and eschatological.