

Taking It Seriously: Baptism and Membership

REVIEW: This is the second in our series of “Taking It Seriously.” Last week we introduced the series by looking at the what the church is - that it is wider than just the local church. By being in Christ, we are connected to the wider body of Christ throughout the world. After looking at the church universal, as it is sometimes called, we looked at reasons why it is imperative that we take seriously our need to be actively attending church.

All of this, of course, is a practical extension of the series we just finished on the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is in all practicality a book about how God brought the church together, and how the church is to function. We are simply extending out some of the ideas of how the church is to function, and examining them more closely to ensure, as our title says, that we are taking it seriously.

TRAN: So this week we are going to look at two other ways we take the faith seriously - namely baptism and membership.

- I. So to begin with, I want to tell you the story of a man named Giles Pellerin.
 - A. Some of you may have heard of him - he has been written up in several major magazines over the years.
 - B. He was born in 1906, and grew up to become a telephone company executive
 1. This however, is not what made him famous
 - C. What made this man famous was the fact that he was a fan of the USC Trojans
 1. He actually attended the college, graduating in 1930
 2. But it was not that he was just a fan, he was called the “Superfan”
 - D. From the time he attended his first USC football game as a student, until his death, he attended 797 consecutive games
 1. It did not matter if the game was home or away, he was there
 2. In fact, when the Trojans played the Mirage Bowl in 1985 in Tokyo, Japan - Giles was there
 3. In 1935 he delayed his honeymoon by 8 months to coincide with when the Trojans would be playing a road game against the University of Hawaii
 4. In 1949 he walked out of the hospital five days after appendectomy surgery to go to a home game, telling the nurses he was going for a walk
 - E. Giles Pellerin died at the very place he would have wanted
 1. He was at the USC vs. UCLA game in 1998
 2. He began to feel ill and asked his brother (who had a streak of his own - 637) to take him home
 3. He died in the parking lot of cardiac arrest

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4. He died in the same place in which he saw his first USC game
 - F. In 1984 when asked by USA Today why he made such sacrifices to identify with a sports team, Pellerin replied, "That's all just a part of being a fan."
 - G. Admittedly, most people do not go to that kind of extreme for their favorite sports team
 1. However, most will wear the jersey, the hat, cheer and scream at games, or sometimes at the TV
 2. Most people feel deeply about the sports team that they love
 - a) Few would literally fight over their team, keeping things in perspective as they should that it is "just a game"
 - b) But most would defend their team as to why they are the team to cheer for - and why they love them so much
 - H. Let's go back to Pellerin's statement for a second, "That's all just part of being a fan."
 1. We as Christians have someone to be "fanatical" about
 - a) In fact, that is so true that people have fought, defended and even died for the right reasons over Jesus Christ
 - (1) I say for the right reasons, because there were such things as the Crusades which are a huge stain on Christian history
 - (2) But an example of a right reason would be the Christians dying in the Middle East for their faith
 - b) So to stand up publicly and identify with the Savior, Jesus Christ would certainly fall in this wheelhouse
 2. So I want to look briefly at these two ways in which we publicly declare our identity with Christ to the world around us
- II. Baptism - our public display of following Christ
- A. There are some Christians that declare that baptism is never equated with faith or salvation
 1. They are completely correct - it is never equated with faith
 2. But it is closely associated with faith
 3. So allow me to give you a few reasons why baptism is so important for anyone who has claimed the name of Christ
 - B. Jesus gave us a command, and following Christ in baptism is obedience to that command
 1. Turn to Matthew 28:18-20
 2. Jesus tells us to "Go and make disciples, baptizing them..."
 - a) That is a command folks
 - b) Jesus gave this command to the disciples, but by extension, the command comes to us who are disciples of Christ
 - c) We are to be baptizing new believers

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3. Something else is interesting though - the statement before - “All authority is given to me...Go, therefore, and make disciples, baptizing them”
 - a) Jesus really is calling on his right to command us regarding baptism
4. But the final thing here is the statement after - “I am with you always, even to the end of the age”
 - a) It appears as if this command to make disciples and baptize them is to be carried out to the end of the age
 - b) There is no time limit on this command
5. So when we are baptized, it is in keeping with the Lord’s command
- C. A second reason for baptism is that it shows several truths about our faith
 1. For example: God is Triune
 - a) We are baptized in the name of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”
 - b) We are not baptized into Paul, or Moses, or Pastor Keith - but in the name of the Triune God
 - c) This one truth alone, expressed in baptism denies multiple heresies
 - (1) Tritheism - There are three different persons that TOGETHER become God
 - (2) Pluralism - There are three gods
 - (3) Unitarianism - There is only one God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not divine
 - (4) Modalism - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are just three different hats of God - there are never those simultaneously
 - d) Bet you didn’t realize that when you are baptized you were saying so much
 2. A second example: you are declaring that your sins HAVE BEEN washed away
 - a) NOT that baptism is washing away your sins - they were washed away because of Christ’s shed blood on the cross and our trust in His sacrifice
 - b) If baptism were the means of having your sins washed away, my question would be, who wouldn’t get wet?
 - (1) If all you had to do was get wet to gain entrance to heaven, why wouldn’t we just set up sprinklers in the side yard and baptize that whole town?
 - (2) The fact is that it is more than a mere human act that secures salvation - it is trust in what Jesus did for us, because we can’t do it ourselves
 3. The third example: it displays your union with Christ in His death and resurrection

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- a) When you marry someone, you assume mutual ownership of all that each other possess
 - (1) Debts
 - (2) Assets
 - b) So you did nothing to achieve that wealth, or that debt, but in your union, it becomes yours together
 - c) Just like in our union with Christ, He assumed all of our debt - our sins that we owed for, He took on Himself
 - d) We received all of His righteousness - which we did nothing to earn but unite with Christ
- D. Being baptized is something that each believer should do in publicly confessing Christ
- 1. This series is talking about taking it seriously
 - 2. If you are serious about your faith, and you have never been baptized, this may be the next step that God is calling you to
 - 3. Now I know we have people in here from varying backgrounds
 - a) Some have come from backgrounds in which people were heavy handed about baptism
 - b) Some come from backgrounds in which they were baptized as infants
 - c) If your past includes churches that were heavy handed about baptism
 - (1) First, let me apologize for the over zealous manner in which they handled things
 - (2) We will not be heavy handed, but I will encourage you, that part of taking your faith seriously is taking the step of baptism in a way that is meaningful
 - d) If your past includes being baptized as an infant
 - (1) We are not heavy handed about being baptized again
 - (2) We do believe at this church that baptism, because of the serious nature of it, really needs to be a decision made by the individual being baptized as an expression of their faith
 - (3) Some feel that their baptism as an infant is made real to the world by their faith and conscious following of Christ
 - (4) Some feel that because they did not get a choice in the act, they desire to be baptized again
 - (5) I tell you, commit this to prayer, and follow where God leads you
- III. The second way we can publicly display our following of Christ is through membership
- A. My father was one that used to feel that joining a church was like joining a membership club of some sort - he used to dislike the idea feeling like it was not necessary

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1. I think there are a lot of people that feel this way - like it is not commanded so I don't have to worry about it
 2. But I want to show you a few things that do not make sense in the NT without some concept of "official membership"
- B. The first thing would be church discipline
1. Turn to 1 Corinthians 5:11-13
 - a) What does Paul mean when he says, "Expel the wicked person from among you"?
 - b) Does he mean never to allow this man to come to church?
 - (1) Obviously not, because later in the letter (14:24-25) Paul talks about unbelievers being welcomed at church
 - (2) So he still would be welcome at church - so he could hear God's Word and will preached and taught
 - c) The better way to understand this would be that they removed his membership - and stopped associating with him outside of the church, except to reach out to him and call him back to Christ
 - d) Paul even refers to those "inside" and those "outside"
 - (1) Outside of what?
 - (2) Anyone can attend church as we mentioned
 - (3) Seem best explained as some sort of formal membership
 2. Another example of this that falls under the category of church discipline is found in Acts 5:13 (turn there)
 - a) This is just after Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and were judged by God and struck dead
 - b) One of the results is that "no one else dared join them"
 - (1) The "no one else" are other Jews that witnessed what took place
 - (2) They held the Christians in high regard, but understood that sin was actually dealt with, and in this case severely
 - c) At issue is the meaning of the word "join"
 - (1) In Greek the term means to glue, or bond together
 - (2) I want you to see how this is used so we are going to look at a few other verses
 - (a) Acts 9:26 - Paul tries to join the disciples - this is not hang out with, but become a member with
 - (b) 1 Cor. 6:16 - that is more than a simple union - it is a deep and significant union
 - (c) Matthew 19:5 - to be united to his wife - this is a significant union

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- (3) So when Luke tells us that no one else dared to join, he is talking about a significant union - sounds like a form of official membership
- C. A second thing that does not make sense if membership is not in view comes from 1 Corinthians 14:23
 1. "If the whole church comes together"
 2. Who is in view here?
 - a) Certainly not the universal church - all believers in all places
 - b) Does that mean everyone that shows up for worship
 - (1) If so, why does Paul in the same verse distinguish the fact that unbelievers are present?
 3. It seems logical, given the context that some form of formal membership is in view
- D. A third thing that does not make sense is how the leadership of a church knows who they are responsible for
 1. The elders of a church are sometimes called "overseer"
 - a) What are they overseeing? The believers in their care
 - b) How do they know who they are responsible for?
 - (1) Seems like a formal membership would come in handy so they know who they are responsible for
 2. Further, turn to 1 Timothy 3:5
 - a) The local church has just been compared to a family
 - b) People are not casual members of a family - they are usually in or out
 - (1) Membership in a family is a definite thing
- E. One last thing to help us see what Scripture is teaching us here - the biblical metaphors describing the church
 1. The Bible uses multiple metaphors to describe the church - both the universal church, but several make sense for a local church as well
 - a) You have the metaphor of a flock
 - (1) Flocks are well kept - shepherds knew the sheep they were to watch over
 - b) A Temple
 - (1) Can you imagine what would happen to a temple structure if its blocks were not fully committed to the mission for why it was standing
 - (2) Blocks choosing to leave at will, or refusing to do their part in holding the structure together
 - c) The human body
 - (1) Most of us have experienced what happens when one or more of our body parts go crazy and decide to do what they want

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- (2) The whole body has to work together to function properly
- d) The last is a household - a family
 - (1) You are either a part of the family or your not
- 2. A quote from Eric Lane, a British Pastor sums this up well, (READ *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* p.49)
- F. All of these things don't seem to make sense in the Bible unless there is some formal membership in view
- G. And there is benefit in joining a church - often we don't consider this, but these are very true
 - 1. You can rest because you are not being a lone ranger any longer
 - a) You are doing life together with other committed brothers and sisters
 - b) And it is in that formal commitment that you display to your church family, and to the world your serious commitment to Christ and to His family
 - c) Much like when you get married - at that point you are proving the commitment - that you are serious about this person, so much so that you want them all for yourself for a lifetime
 - (1) Along this line allow me to give you a book recommendation
 - (2) *Stop Dating the Church* by Joshua Harris
 - 2. In joining a church, you participate fully in a stronger effort of God's people
 - a) It's like putting your one candle together with many candles
 - b) You are able to shine the light of Christ into the darkness even stronger
 - 3. When joining a church, you have more opportunities to discover and use your spiritual gifts
 - a) There are some positions in the church that we do not hand out to just anyone - particularly teaching positions, but others as well
 - (1) That is done to ensure that teaching especially is kept in line with what the church believes
 - (2) But even other positions hold significant responsibility to which it is incumbent upon the leadership to make sure that those positions are held by people committed to the cause of Christ, and the local church's specific mission for Christ in their community
 - b) When you become a member, more of those positions become a reality for you
 - (1) You are able to explore your gifting for God
 - (2) You are able to make full use of what God has for you
 - 4. When you join a local church, it can be an encouragement to others, especially new believers to join as well

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- a) Hebrews 10 says “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...”
 - b) When we consider others, we realize that our actions have an effect on them
 - c) If we refuse to join the church, that may discourage others from joining the church
 - d) However, if we recognize the call to join the church, we may have the opposite affect and help others join with us as well
5. Finally, you encourage a ministry when you join the church
- a) Go back to that idea of committing to your spouse
 - (1) Imagine if you dated for ten years and never sought a deeper relationship
 - (2) The woman comes to the man and asks, “why haven’t you asked me to marry you yet!”
 - (3) His reply, “Well, I just want to be sure.” - yeah, how do you think she will feel?
 - (4) Obviously she is glad you love her, and you don’t want to see other people, but she will ultimately be discouraged because you don’t want to commit
 - b) Pastors, church leaders are happy and thrilled when you come to church
 - (1) But to keep coming, and never commit - same scenario
 - (2) When you make that commitment you bring joy to the Pastor, but also to the rest of the church family

H. So with membership, how do we respond

- 1. If you are a believer, and follower of Jesus Christ, find a church family and commit
 - a) If you are not a believer, it makes no sense to join a church
 - b) It is not a club
 - c) If you are unsure about your commitment to Christ, you need to get that settled first
- 2. I’ll go so far as to say this, for all our college students, you need to find a church where you go to school, and become a member there
 - a) You spend more time at school than you do here
 - b) And this also sets a good precedent than when you move communities, you seek out a church by you, and commit

IV. Closing

- A. We started this message talking about Giles Pellerin - a deeply committed fan of USC
 - 1. He set the tone for the message - “It’s just what a fan does”

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- B. If we really are fanatical about Jesus Christ
 - 1. Notice what I said - about Jesus Christ
 - a) The church has issues
 - b) Every church has issues
 - c) It has sinners in it - you should feel right at home - so get comfortable
 - 2. If you are fanatical about Jesus Christ, we need to display that fandom to the world
 - a) Not just in the stickers on our car
 - b) Not just or the music on our radios
 - c) Or the shirts we wear
 - d) God was specific in some things that publicly display to the world that we are fans and followers of His
 - (1) If we have not been baptized, than we need to pray and seek that out
 - (2) If we are baptized but have not committed to His family, time to display to the world that we are committed to CHRIST BY committing to His family