

Baptism: Visible Testimony to the Church's Unity

Ephesians 4:1-6

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Scripture readings prior to the sermon:

Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 6:1-11

Good Morning!

Last Sunday, Pastor Mike preached Part 1 of a two-part series on the subject of baptism, and I am blessed to be here this morning to serve you as we open the Scriptures together to see again what they say regarding this topic. I am not at all saying that we will have exhausted this topic in two sermons, but seeing as how we're here in Ephesians chapter 4, we have chosen to hover just a bit over the words "one baptism."

Mike remarked last week that he and his wife, Amy, came to the conviction that they needed to be baptized as Believers upon studying the topic in the Bible, and that they didn't come to this conclusion until several years after their conversion. I personally can relate to that, as it was by way of a study of God's covenants in the Bible that I, too, came to the point of conviction with respect to my need to be baptized in obedience to Christ, and this was also several years after God moved into my life and changed me from the inside out.

And seeing as how just shy of nine months ago, we set off to plant a **Baptist** church here in the middle of Pleasant Hills, and also seeing as how the Elders here at Abiding Grace Church are talking about instituting a New Members Class for the purpose of bringing on-board our first wave of Members – may God grant us many waves – we have decided to spend a couple of weeks talking about this important topic of baptism. In doing so, we hope to stress the importance of being baptized as a Believer – what it

means in the life of the church – so that you don't have to discover it on your own. Of course, at this point, I would ask that you go home and examine the Scriptures for yourself to see if these things that we are saying to you are true, just like the noble Bereans in Acts 17...

You may have heard it said that Biblical truths are like a set of pearls along a string, say, in a necklace, and our responsibility is to – one by one – slide them down the string, and examine them, admire them, meditate on them. And when we're done with that particular pearl, we slide the next one down to examine it. And so on. This is, of course, beautiful imagery.

Other teachers, however, would say that rather than pearls on a string, Biblical truths are better represented by the imagery of links in a chain, fastened together, moving together as they are studied and meditated upon. This, I believe, is the more appropriate image that we ought to have when reading and studying the Bible. We must realize that the sentences in the Bible are not isolated from one another; they are linked with phrases and words like "so that," "in order that," "for," and "therefore."

With this in mind, let's turn to our text for today, Ephesians 4:1-6, and see what we can see. The Apostle Paul writes this:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Did you catch that, there in verse 1? "I **therefore**..."

"Therefore" is a word that implies that what I'm about to tell you is based on what I just told you. I tell my child: "Your room is dusty, therefore go and run the vacuum cleaner." Running the vacuum cleaner logically follows the fact that my child's room is dusty.

So what's Paul's point here in Ephesians 4:1? He says, "I therefore..." The point is this: what he's about to tell us in the rest of this epistle – chapters 4, 5, and 6 – is based on what he's already told us. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 logically follow chapters 1, 2, and 3. Now, what we found during the past 8 months or so is that in the first three chapters of this epistle are a summary of the Gospel! Therefore, because of the Gospel – because God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places – because we who were dead in our trespasses and sins have been saved by grace through faith – because the Jews and the Gentiles have been united through Christ in the Church – **therefore** Paul is now urging us – begging us – to do what? Two things:

1. To walk in a manner worthy of our calling; and
2. To be eager to maintain our unity.

Very simple. Pretty much everything else in the rest of Ephesians is focused on our personal walks with the Lord and our walking together as a church.

Regarding the latter, apparently the Apostle Paul thought unity was going to be difficult: "Be eager!" "Be diligent!"

Unity **is** difficult. We are going to have to work at it..."with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." (as he says in verse 2).

Let's first revisit...

THE CHURCH'S SEVENFOLD UNITY

Back on June 15th, Pastor Mike preached a sermon entitled, "Sweet Difficult Disagreeable Unity," and we are going to briefly review some of the things he said to set up our discussion on baptism. Here in the beginning of Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul is explicit about what he means by unity; he essentially defines it for us. It is a sevenfold unity: (beginning in verse 4) one body, one Spirit, one hope, (verse 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (verse 6) one God and Father of all.

In 1968, a band called Three Dog Night wrote a song entitled... You got it: "One." That song was clearly about the **number** one. (It's not my week to sing, so I'm not going to sing.)

In our context here, "one" not only is just a number, but also stands as a symbol of our unity.

For example, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30) What Jesus was **not** saying in this regard is that He and the Father are exactly the same person, that is, "Hey, guys, there's only one of us!" No, what He was saying is that He, the Son of God, and the Father are united: united in purpose, and in the context of John 10 where Jesus says these words, they – the Son and the Father – are united in purpose to not lose one of the people who are marked out for salvation.

The Bible also declares that a husband and wife are "one flesh." (We will see this in Ephesians 5 when we get there.) I'm here; Jen is there. Different persons, but now, through marriage, we are **united together** in a supernatural, spiritual way.

So, let's look again at the text. Paul is explicit about what he means by unity...verse 4:

- One BODY (which is mentioned in this epistle in 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4; 4:12; 4:16; 5:23; 5:30) → This one Body is the one Church, established by Jesus Christ, and bound together in union with Him and each other.
- One SPIRIT → The one Holy Spirit Who indwells all Believers, all members of the one Body, is working in us to bind us together. Paul explicitly identifies our unity in verse 3 as unity **in the Spirit**.
- One HOPE → This is our inheritance guaranteed for us in heaven, and we are united in purpose to get there to receive it. (Pastor Mike preached a sermon last December entitled, "Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours" where he talked about this great hope that we have.)

Verse 5:

- One LORD → Of course, there is only one Jesus, but we are **united to Him**; see Pastor Mike's very first sermon here at Abiding Grace Church from last October; it was entitled, "In Christ."
- One FAITH → This is our common set of Doctrinal Truths, what we believe. Paul warns us later in chapter 4 about being "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes..." And Paul says that "we [should] **all** attain to the **unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..." (verses 13 through 16)
- One BAPTISM → (We'll come back to this...)

Verse 6:

- One GOD AND FATHER OF ALL → Yes, there is only one God, and we are united in our pursuit of Him, in our pursuit of His glory as we await the consummation of all things!

It is, of course, true that there is only one universal church, one Holy Spirit, and so forth. But Paul means more than that, doesn't he? He means that we are **united together** in that one Body, the Church. We are united in Spirit. We are united in our Hope for what is to come.

And we are united in baptism.

So, as we talk about baptism, let's begin with...

JESUS' BAPTISM: THE IDENTIFICATION OF CHRIST WITH HIS PEOPLE

Let's set the scene:

The opening chapters of all four Gospels reveal a man named John: John the Baptizer, or John the Baptist. John the Baptist was supernaturally conceived by a priest named Zechariah and a barren woman named Elizabeth, and he was born to be a prophet of God. John was a bit of an

eccentric man, as you know...bit of a strange diet and wardrobe...and it turns out that he was a distant relative to Jesus our Lord.

John appears on the scene near the Jordan River proclaiming in no uncertain terms three things: that the Kingdom of God was near; that the Jewish people were in need of a baptism of repentance from sin; and that after him there was coming another one who would be about the business of baptizing – not with water – but with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Let me pause here for just a moment to say this: We need to feel the weight of the fact that John was calling on **Jews** to be baptized. Prior to John's arrival on the scene, there was indeed a ritual baptism in the Jewish culture, but it was reserved for **Gentiles** who wanted to become Jews – what we would call Proselytes to Judaism. So, a Gentile – for example, the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts chapter 8 (whom we will see again later) – a Gentile, a non-Jew, could desire to be identified with the God of Israel and His people, the Jews, and if this was the case, then three things had to happen. First, the Gentile would need to be circumcised in accordance with the covenant that God made with Abraham. Second, the Gentile would be baptized – immersed in water – as a symbol that he was shunning his old, pagan way of life and now identifying himself with the One True and Living God. Third, he would bring a sacrifice to the Jewish temple to make atonement for his sins via an animal substitute.

The point of this aside is this: Ritual baptism was not entirely new to the Jewish culture of John's day. They were well aware of Proselyte – Gentile – baptism. But John's call to the **Jewish people** to undergo a similar baptism ritual...now that was new. John was in effect saying, "Listen! In the Kingdom of God that is imminent...**even you Jews are like Gentiles**, sinners in need of a spiritual identification with the One True God!"

Now with this in view, doesn't it make sense of some other things that John said to the Jews? At one point, John says to the Jews, "...do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:9-10) In the Kingdom of God – the one that is being brought by the Messiah who

is now on the scene – John is saying that **both** the Jews and the Gentiles are in need of repentance and rebirth.

This idea that the Jews also had to be baptized was undoubtedly offensive to some. I mean, the Jews were God's chosen people! The Bible tells us that John's message was quite offensive to the Jewish religious leaders. John had some choice words for the Jewish leaders of his day, calling them a "brood of vipers" and threatening that they were bound for Hell-fire for rejecting the message of the Kingdom of God, which was at hand.

Now, after John had been ministering for some time, Jesus comes to John to be baptized... John is stunned. We're stunned, aren't we? John refuses at first, but Jesus persists, and John finally relents. What's happening here?

First, let's look at Jesus' humility in coming to John. Jesus' humility. I mean, Jesus could have **sent for him**. John knew who Jesus was, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (He says so in John 1.) Is it not enough that Jesus comes down from His heavenly throne and puts on human flesh to walk among those who hate Him? But then He also submits Himself to be baptized by a mere, sinful mortal in the Jordan River. Jesus' humility.

Second, by submitting to John's baptism, Jesus validates John's mission and message as a prophet sent from God. Jesus validates John's standing as a prophet. I note briefly here that the Pharisees, later, could not answer this question when Jesus asked them, "Was John's baptism from God or from man?" (Matthew 21:23-27) So, we see from Jesus' baptism that John the Baptist was sent from God, and John's baptism was from God.

Third, the baptism of Jesus is the initiation of Jesus' public ministry. As Jesus comes up out of the water, the Spirit of God descends on Him as a dove, and the voice of the Father booms: "This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased!" (And off Jesus goes into his three-year ministry.) So Jesus' baptism initiates His ministry.

Fourth, Jesus says in Matthew 3:15 that He needs to be baptized by John "to fulfill all righteousness." What righteousness? Well, God had divinely sent John the Baptist to be the "voice of one crying out in the

wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord!'" And God had sent John to baptize those whose lives were characterized by **an intent to follow after the God of Israel**. This was clearly Jesus' intention, and so Jesus submitted to John's baptism to "fulfill all righteousness"...

Curiously, though, as I mentioned previously, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance from sin...

Did Jesus need repentance? (No.)

Then how should we see this aspect of John's baptism in the life of Jesus?

Here we go... The fifth implication of Jesus' submission to John's baptism is this: **By submitting to John's baptism – though He needed no repentance of His own for His own sin – Jesus goes into the water to identify Himself with those who were in need of repentance.** [REPEAT]

What does the water signify? (Death.)

Who are the ones who have died? (We have died. Normal human sinners. Dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).)

Why did Jesus come to earth? (To die Himself as a substitute for normal human sinners, dead in trespasses and sins.)

So Jesus submits to the baptism of John to identify Himself with sinners as a prefiguring of the Cross upon which He becomes the Divine Substitute for sinners, so that those sinners can be redeemed and forgiven and accepted by God! In Jesus' baptism, there is the shadow of the Gospel!

Now, it's true that not all of this baptism theology is articulated in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism... I mean, if you go home and read Matthew 3 or Mark 1 or Luke 3 or John 1, you won't get all of this prefiguring stuff. So where does all of this imagery come from?

Let's now talk about...

BAPTISM: THE IDENTIFICATION OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE WITH CHRIST

This imagery comes from Paul in Romans 6:1-4.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

There is so much here...and for now, I have to skip over the motivation for the question in verse 1 and its answer in verse 2... Look at verse 3.

Paul asks the Christians in Rome, verse 3, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" And then he explains: "We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death – baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Do you catch those "therefore"s and "in order that"s in there?)

"We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death – **baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

So we can see clearly from the Bible that in baptism, the water represents death. And the coming up out of the water represents a raising again to new life.

Jesus, in His baptism – not needing repentance, of course, because He is the sinless Son of God – Jesus goes down into the water (symbolically dying) and comes back up out of the water (symbolically rising from the dead) to identify Himself with sinners who are already spiritually dead and are in need of a spiritual rebirth, **a spiritual resurrection!** And this prefigures Jesus' actual death on the Cross where His atoning work was completed, and His subsequent resurrection by which His work on the Cross is validated – shown to be accepted by God as payment for human sins.

And now, we are commanded – yes, commanded – by the Bible to identify with Christ in **our own baptism** when we realize that we have, in fact, died to our old self and have been born again by the Spirit of God –

spiritually resurrected from death and sin. Look quickly again at Romans 6, verse 4 – what do we see there? I mean, isn't baptism assumed with the members of the Roman church? Paul says, "Look, brothers and sisters. You – your old life – has been buried with Christ...by what? Baptism into death. And, by God's grace, you have come up out of the water – again, baptism is assumed – you have come up out of the water for what? So that...**so that** we might walk in newness of life."

And it happens over and over again in the book of Acts. People believing and being baptized.

Acts 2: When the Jews in Jerusalem heard Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost, they were "cut to the heart," having been convicted of the fact that they – their generation of Jews – were responsible for the death of the Son of God. In response to this conviction, they said to Peter, "What should we do?" Peter's answer was simple, "Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..."

Acts 8: Philip was preaching the Gospel in Samaria, and it says that men and women and even Simon the Magician believed Philip's message...and were baptized.

Later in Acts 8: Philip was led by the Spirit of God to come alongside the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch – a Jewish Proselyte who had likely been baptized into Judaism – Philip comes alongside his chariot to explain the text that he was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Upon explanation of the text, that is, when Philip explained to the man that the Scripture he was reading and the rest of the Scriptures were about Jesus and His saving work, the Ethiopian eunuch believed...and was baptized.

Acts 9: Saul (whom we know as Paul, the author of Romans and Ephesians) was converted on the road to Damascus, and when Ananias goes to see him as a messenger from the Lord, Saul (Paul) believes, receives his commission as the Apostle to the Gentiles...and is baptized.

Acts 10: Peter administers baptism to Cornelius and his household after they hear the Gospel and receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 16: Paul and Silas and Timothy arrive in Philippi, and a woman named Lydia and her entire household believed the Gospel...and were baptized.

Later in Acts 16: The Philippian jailer and his entire household, upon believing the word of the Lord that Paul spoke to them, were "baptized without delay." (NRSV)

Acts 18: Many of the Corinthians who heard Paul preach became believers...and were baptized.

And so on...

What does all of this mean for us here at Abiding Grace Church? I argue that it means that...

BAPTISM: VISIBLE TESTIMONY TO THE CHURCH'S UNITY → (Sermon Title)

Let's work backwards through the list in Ephesians 4:4-6.

The one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all, **cannot be seen**. Just for reference, I give you statements to this effect in John 1:18; 5:37; and 6:46.

For now, let's skip over baptism.

The set of Doctrinal Truths that we believe, however true, are not something that can necessarily be grasped with our hands, or seen with our eyes. But they are to be embraced and believed, grasped by the heart and seen not with our physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith.

Jesus Christ, our one Lord, though at one time manifest in human flesh, is ascended to the right hand of the Father and is **no longer to be seen** during these last days. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:8-9, "Though you **have not seen** Him, you love Him. Though you **do not now see Him**, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

The one hope that we have – to see Jesus in all of His glory and to be rid of these miserable bodies of death and sin – we do not yet see it.

Paul says in Romans 8:24, "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?"

The one Holy Spirit, though He indwells us, cannot be seen, for He is a...Spirit!

The one Body of Christ: Well, it can be partially, but imperfectly, seen. But it's not like you can drive down the street in your town, saying to yourself, "Ah, there it is! There's the Body of Christ, the church!" And by God's grace, there are even many among us – our friends and families and co-workers – who are **not yet seen** as being in the Body of Christ... But we take the Law to them in the hope that they would be convicted of their sin. And then we present the Gospel to them, and we pray that they would repent of their sin and trust wholly in Christ and His death on the Cross on their behalf... And then...? What happens next?

It's simple: They are baptized...and we say, "Aha! **There** is the church!" The people of God – the Body of Christ – gathering around and rejoicing over the salvation of a human being who was destined for Hell and God's wrath forever. One has been added! Another sinner has declared, "I have turned from my sin! I identify with Christ in his death and resurrection! I will follow Him!"

In baptism, the Body of Christ is revealed – it becomes visible.

One brief comment before I conclude...

Some might ask: "I was baptized as an infant in (whatever) tradition; do I need to be baptized again as a Believer?" To this, I would simply refer you to the beginning of Acts 19, where Paul meets up with some disciples of...John the Baptist. The Bible calls them "believers," but they had only been baptized into John's baptism. What does Paul do? Does he say, "Oh, OK. You're good. You've been baptized once; no need for anything else"? No, the Bible says that Paul said to them, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized (again) in the name of the Lord Jesus. Baptized in **obedience** to Christ, as **converts** to Christ, as those who **willingly identify** with Christ in His death and resurrection.

As I close, will you join me in a brief...

MEDITATION ON CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Here we are. Not quite nine months into the life of Abiding Grace Church. Rolling right along, right?

And as I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, the Elders have been thinking about and discussing the installation of our first wave of Members.

Time does not allow me to provide an exhaustive discussion as to why Membership in a local church is so crucial to our spiritual health – to your spiritual health – or to our witness to the world, but just let me say this:

Over the next few weeks, we will be continuing on in our study of Paul's epistle to the Ephesian church. We will be talking about the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has provided to everyone who believes. We will be talking about speaking the truth in love and growing up into maturity in the faith. We will be talking about doing honest work. We will be talking about being kind and forgiving.

Let me ask you just a couple of simple questions:

In what context have you been called to exercise your spiritual gifts? To whom are you called to speak the truth in love, and with whom are you called to grow up into maturity in the faith? And when you do honest work, to what purpose will you work? (Paul says that it is so you may have something to share with anyone in need.) Therefore, I ask, in what primary context are you to observe those who are in need and thus share what you have? And in what primary context are you to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven you?

The answer is simple, brothers and sisters: The primary context for all of these things is...the local church – the Body of Believers that God Himself has placed you in. And we delineate ourselves – we separate ourselves (in a sense) – from the world through...baptism leading to Membership. In Membership, we covenant with each other to bear one another's burdens, to speak the truth in love, to love one another and to live with one another and to encourage one another unto good works. This is the only truly Christian context that the Bible knows.

We're a Baptist church, you know? (It says so right on our website!)

So, this whole baptism thing, it's kind of important to us...

How will we and the world know that you are part of the One BODY?

How will we and the world know that you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

How will we and the world know that you are looking forward to our One HOPE – the glorious inheritance of the saints?

How will we and the world know that you have identified yourself with the One LORD: Jesus Christ?

How will we and the world know that you affirm and defend the One FAITH, once for all delivered to the saints?

How will we and the world know that you worship the One TRUE GOD and FATHER OF ALL?

The answer, again, is simple. Join the Church Universal in baptism: the public identification of yourself with the Living Lord, Jesus Christ. Just as He died and was buried, so by going into the water you identify with His death. And just as He was raised from the dead for the justification of sinners, so by coming up out of the water you identify with His resurrection and declare to the universe – all the saints, all the sinners, all the angels in Heaven, and all the demons bound for Hell – that **you are His**. That you love Him, that you love others as yourself, and that you are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Baptism is the Gospel in a visible form, and this is why it is so precious to us. And this simple act, when obediently done, demonstrates a heart that seeks to honor Jesus our Lord. **Like Jesus**, Believers should submit to water baptism to fulfill all of the righteousness that God has ordained for His people.

One of the last things that Jesus said to His disciples before He left them on Earth and ascended to Heaven for the last time was, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Let us together be resolved to be obedient to this, our Lord's command.

[Pray]

COMMUNION: A REMEMBRANCE

As Pastor Mike talked about last week, please know this: We are not saved by our being baptized. The Apostle Paul tells us in this very epistle to the Ephesian church that we are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ (2:8-9). All of our salvation is a gift: the grace, the faith, the giving of the Son of God as a ransom for sinners. All are gifts from a Heavenly Father who loves to put His grace and His glory on display.

God has given us baptism as a gift. Through baptism, we enter into fellowship with one another, having declared that we – together – have identified with Jesus: trusting in His work on the Cross and living out this new, resurrected life even as He Himself was resurrected from the dead. Baptism is a gift to be received by God's people.

The meal that we are about to celebrate together – the Lord's Supper – is also a gift, given by God to us, His people, that we might regularly remember Jesus and what He has done for us as our Substitute.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Two ordinances – two commands – that God has graciously given to His church. The former: a one-time event whereby we identify with Jesus in His death and resurrection. The Supper: an on-going meal whereby we remember Jesus and His great love for us.

Let us now enter into a time of silent reflection and confession of our sin...

[STOP]