

Holding Baptism Hostage

I have accepted Christ Jesus as my savior, and I have had a deep desire to be baptized for some time. The denomination I attend would also like me to be baptized. They have given their approval that I am "ready." That sounds like everyone is in harmony, and the baptism should proceed with no issues. Sadly it is not that simple. The denomination I attend requires me to join the church in order for me to be baptized. We are not necessarily talking about the church as in the "body of Christ." We are talking about a particular religious institution. This denomination is not the only denomination which practices this combining of church membership and baptism. Many denominations do this, and it often comes down to a numbers game which has little to do with God.

Most denominations teach that the saved will come from many different denominations, and every denomination will have some members who are not saved. Many denominations teach this, but do their actions support it? If the saved will come from many different denominations, then those people who are saved will make up the true "body of Christ." The line which separates the saved from the not saved will not be drawn along denominational lines. Many denominations teach this doctrine, but their actions teach something else.

If a denomination believes the saved will come from a variety of different denominations, then how can they withhold baptism for those who wish to join the "body of Christ" but not their particular denomination? It seems they hide behind these verses.

Mat 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Mat 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have

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Baptism and Church Bullying



This informational pamphlet examines the issue of attaching baptism to church membership.



commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The key being the phrase "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Many apparently see this as a license to hold hostage the baptism ceremony of a true believer unless they also join the particular denomination where baptism is desired. This is so the denomination can continue to oversee the individual and guide them on their spiritual journey. This may be a noble concept. But is this concept biblical?

Take a look at these verses.

Act 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? Act 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Act 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. Act 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Philip baptized the Eunuch he had just met, and then they went their separate ways never to see each other again. What was the requirement to be baptized? The requirement was that the Eunuch believe with all his heart Jesus Christ is the son of God. There were no other strings attached.

Many denominations also teach baptism is a requirement or is extremely important. They teach this, yet they withhold baptism from those who will not become members of their denomination. If they teach baptism is required and then withhold baptism from non-members, they are in effect saying their denomination will be the only saved denomination. They are also taking upon themselves the power which is reserved for God alone. The power to decide who is saved and who is not. If a denomination teaches baptism is required and then

refuses to baptize non-members, they are giving themselves authority over God to withhold salvation.

Is this combining of church membership and baptism truly biblical? Let us take a look at what our Bible tells us. First we will go to Acts 10. Here Peter is given a vision by God which instructs him to not call unclean that which God has cleansed. He is then sent for by Cornelius who was a Roman. This group of gentiles desired to be taught about Jesus. They desired to be baptized. What was Peter's response?

Act 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? Act 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Remember, at this time Jews were not even to associate with the Gentiles. If, however, a Jew could receive and baptize these Gentiles at this point in time, then should an Adventist today withhold baptism of a Baptist or vice-versa? Is the name of the denomination the deciding factor, or is it the belief in God that determines our salvation? Now we will go to 1 Corinthians.

1Co 1:11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 1Co 1:12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 1Co 1:13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? 1Co 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; 1Co 1:15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

These verses very clearly speak to us on this very subject. We can easily replace the name of Paul or Apollos or Cephas with the name of any denomination.

There is often a list of vows a person must agree to in order to be a member. Since the baptism and

membership are combined and cannot be separated then these vows automatically become a requirement of baptism also. These same membership vows sometimes also include concepts which may be difficult or impossible for some people to even understand. I am going to pick on the Adventist faith here. Although, they are not the only denomination who have something like this. One of their vows which must be agreed to in order to become a member, which is part of the baptism process, is "Do you believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy, and that people of every nation, race, and language are invited and accepted into its fellowship? Do you desire membership in this local congregation of the world church?"

I suggest there are a fair number of people baptized into the Adventist faith who cannot explain the bible prophecy concerning the remnant church. A person could easily have the mental capacity to understand salvation and Christ Jesus and still be incapable of comprehending the prophecy concerning the remnant church. Should these people be denied baptism? By combing membership and baptism these same people are being required to agree to something which they do not even understand. They are in actuality perjuring themselves before God. Is this their sin, or has the denomination caused their brother to stumble for the sake of membership numbers?

These denominations which combine membership with baptism are claiming authority over God. If the baptism and membership are combined, then every vow taken for membership by default becomes a requirement for baptism. If the denomination adds to the requirements for baptism as set forth in the Bible, then that denomination is claiming to have power to change the requirements of God for baptism.

The requirements for baptism in the Bible are repentance of sin and a belief in Christ.