

IN CHRIST —or— A PART OF HIS BODY?

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Shall I join a church? Should my babies be baptized? Will baptism grant me entrance into heaven? Can there be such a thing as “unity in the church” without ecumenicalism? Does it really matter if I am a member of a church? These questions have one thing in common — confusion over what it means to be “in Christ” and to be “a part of His body”. You may be thinking that such confusion really doesn't matter to you. After all, the baby is sick, the telephone bill is due and it is time to gather the tax information together for your accountant! Who cares about a confusion over two Bible phrases? But I suggest to you that it does matter. A multitude of souls are in hell today over the confusion. A great number of Christians are today shirking their duties because of a false comfort generated by this confusion. Just what is at the seat of this confusion?

A troubled preacher posed an interesting question to me while sitting in his office one beautiful, sunny afternoon. “Can I be a member of the body of Christ without being baptized?” The tone of my friend's voice indicated serious concern. His question was carefully worded. I knew that the preacher had students attending a Bible college where I taught. The concern being expressed developed over a statement a student brought home to his pastor. The student had been taught that you had to be baptized before you could be a member of Christ's body. My friend could not believe it — were his students really being taught that you have to be baptized to be truly saved? And at a BAPTIST college, of all places!

Before I answered my friend I thought about this confusion which is so widespread today. It all boils down to one simple, but tragic, assumption. Many today assume, without a shred of biblical authority, that to be “in Christ” is synonymous with being “in the body of Christ”. With that assumption firmly rooted in the mind one can get really mixed up! What is it to be “in Christ”?

When we speak of being “in Christ” we speak of our wondrous union with Him. We are in Him and He is in us. “Therefore if any man be **in** Christ, he is a new creature ...” II Corinthians 5:17. “But now **in** Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” Ephesians 2:13. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are **in** Christ Jesus...” Romans 8:1. This electrifying relationship with Jesus Christ is made possible by the power of His shed blood and is consummated when I place my faith in Him. The benefits are countless! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places **in** Christ...” Ephesians 1:3. Then trace through that passage and enumerate the blessings listed there — chosen, predestinated, adopted, accepted, and an inheritance. Glory! One of the most captivating pictures of this relationship has been framed in the words of Jesus Christ in John 15. The story is of a vine and it's branches. To be “in Christ” is to have entered a dynamic relationship with Him whereby we receive eternal life and blessing upon blessing. Baptism does not make one “in Christ” nor does the lack thereof exclude one from this relationship. But is not that what my pastor friend's student had been taught? “You have to be baptized to be a member of the body of Christ.”

As I looked into the eyes of my friend I thought about the body of Christ. “Paul...unto the church of God which is at Corinth...ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” I Corinthians 1:1, 2; 12:27. “...the church, Which is his body...” Ephesians 1:22, 23. “...he is the head of the body, the church ...” Colossians 1:18. God's Word introduces the concept of the local church as the “body of Christ” in four letters (Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians). In each place this concept is used to illustrate the way the church functions. The church is made up of various members who work together in a coordinated

fashion, not to carry out each members desires, but rather, to carry out the commands and desires of the Head of the body — Jesus Christ. What a wonderful privilege! To be a member of Christ's body, His work force, the apple of His eye! The church is the center of doctrine, evangelism, prayer, ordinances, and world evangelism (Acts 2:41, 42, 47; 13:1-4). God committed unto the church the responsibility of being the guardian of New Testament truth (I Timothy 3:15). In His body I find comradeship, understanding, and concern. The fellowship I enjoy, and the genuine love I receive in Christ's body are sufficient to bring some "heaven" into the "rat-race" of this world. How do I become a member of this wonderful body of believers? "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" Acts 2:41, 47. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ..." I Corinthians 12:13. Membership in Christ's body requires salvation and baptism. At baptism God places the new member into that local body of believers — the body of Christ!

My friend had the two concepts intertwined. Such is the common problem of those whose thinking has been influenced by Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrine. He was concerned that his students were being taught that the benefits of being "in Christ" were only made available to those who are baptized and become members of a church. Such heresy has caused many to trust in a church and its baptism for their salvation. Hell hath enlarged herself.

How did I answer my friend? I started with a question. "What do you think the 'body of Christ' is?" I expected his reply. "All the saved." "Well then," I replied, "according to your definition, my answer is no, I do not believe that you have to be baptized to be a member of the 'body of Christ'. However," I continued, "I think you are mistaken in your definition of the 'body of Christ'. I believe that term is biblically used to illustrate each church, rather than to speak of all the saved."

"In Christ" by faith in His shed blood.
A part of His "body" by baptism.