

Confirming Your Baptism

Romans 6:1-7; 1 Peter 3:18-22

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Last week, I backed my car out of the garage, wheeled out my gas grill and began to cook. As I stood there, I noticed the unseemly sight of leaves and dirt scattered across the garage floor. I took my push-broom and began to sweep it outside, but I encountered a problem. A breeze blew it back in. I was not about to be whipped. I took out my electric blower that puts out a 250-mph-wind. I blew that stuff about a third of the way down my driveway. I put the blower away with a sense of triumph. I even thought, “This is like the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing out the sinful debris in our lives;” but before I was done grilling, much of the dirt and leaves blew back in. What’s more, any equipment on the floor that I hadn’t moved had leaves and dirt around it. I had to move stuff around if I wanted a truly clean floor.

Now think of that clean garage floor as our personal knowledge of God and life. It is sullied by the debris of sin, pushed by an ill wind. As a result, we do not see God clearly or understand life. The Bible says:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.
(Proverbs 14:12, NIV)

That is our history. The ill wind that obscured Adam and Eve’s vision and heart, eventually took the life of their son Abel, and then filled earth with such violence and deception about God, that rescue was accomplished by a flood. Listen to Peter’s words about Christ’s atoning death:

(Christ) went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also... It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. (1 Peter 3:19-22, NIV)

How can the water of judgment, the water of the flood symbolize our baptism that saves us? What does it tell us about the nature of baptism and confirmation? The water of the flood didn't save Noah and his family from physical death. At least, we don't know if they were personally threatened with murder. Instead, we do know that the flood saved them from a way of life that was destroying creation and rebelling against God. It saved them out of a destructive social, family system. Think for a moment, how much of our understanding and way of life come from the social system, the peer network, the families and culture we live in. All of that changed for Noah and his family because of the water that saved them. How about us?

Isn't it interesting that we baptize people into the name of Christ? We take on a new family identity. We don't lose our earthly name. Instead, we gain a family name that identifies us and our beliefs to the whole world. In the Old Testament *naming* for God's people occurred with circumcision. In Luke 1:59-63 we learn that John the Baptist was given his name on the 8th day at his circumcision. Circumcision was so important that God nearly killed Moses over it. You heard me right. Moses was sent by God to Egypt with this message for Pharaoh:

“Israel is my firstborn son. I commanded you, ‘Let my son go, so he can worship me.’ But since you have refused, I will now kill your firstborn son!”

Then we read:

On the way to Egypt, at a place where Moses and his family had stopped for the night, the Lord confronted him and was about to kill him. But Moses' wife, Zipporah, took a flint knife and circumcised her son... After that, the Lord left him alone. (Exodus 4:22-26, NLT)

I suspect that there are plenty of leaves and dirt on my garage floor interfering with my knowledge of God and my knowledge of life so that I have difficulty understanding what God was doing there. We know Moses nearly lost his life over his son's lack of circumcision, so it can be said that circumcision was pivotal for Moses to live in the will of God. That was true for

the people of Israel when they entered the Promised Land. Before they tried to conquer Jericho or venture into this new land, the males were all circumcised (Joshua 5:1-9). I wonder if circumcision was a sign to the principalities, powers and spiritual forces that the Apostle Paul identifies in Ephesians 6 as the ones with whom we truly struggle.

You see Peter writes that baptism saves us, in the same way that Noah was saved, but now through the resurrection of Jesus who has angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. In other words, baptism has saving power because of Jesus' authority over other authorities

I want you to think of a spiritual world. I want you to imagine a world where what you see and think can be affected by more than biochemistry, by more than physical forces. I want you to imagine a world where angels are actually active, and the thoughts you think can be either prompted by spiritual beings or hindered by them. There is a blessed wind and there is an ill wind affecting us all. As long as our garage door is open to the world, we face this struggle. We don't see the wind, but we sure feel it and observe its effect. There is more to life than what can be measured in a test tube.

Paul writes in Romans that in baptism we identify with Jesus' death. Thus, any claim on us because of sin has been destroyed. We don't keep dead people in prison or strapped to an electric chair. We bury them. In the same way, when we are baptized into Christ, we no longer suffer slavery to spiritual authorities because of our sins. We ride a different boat in life. We no longer belong to the gods of this world, nor suffer their fate; we are rescued and also judged as the family of Christ. We carry the name and fame of Christ.

Now, regarding circumcision, the people enjoyed special provision, special protection, special promises and the special destiny of a land of abundance. However, all but two of the circumcised who traveled with Moses were buried in the desert because of their sins.

Circumcision of the flesh was not the same as circumcision of the heart. Circumcision of the flesh put you with a people who are formed and judged by a different standard. In circumcision you now were identified as the people of God. However, if your heart was hardened full of obstacles that block the wind of God and leave the debris in your heart, you suffered terribly, at the least, the natural consequences of sin. In 1 Corinthians 11:30 Paul wrote that many of the baptized believers of Corinth were weak, sick or dead because they dishonored Christ's body in Holy Communion. They may have died and gone to heaven, but they died early and suffered needlessly. None but the baptized believers of Corinth were subject to that judgment. God disciplines his family who carries Christ's name, so that others won't be repulsed but rescued by that name. The name is critical because it is necessary for a relationship, and it cuts through the deception that clutters hearts through the ill wind of sin.

So what happens when we confirm our baptism? *First, you embrace the identity of Christ* that you belong to him. He is your Savior and authority. *Second, you embrace the responsibility and accountability of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ.* By your choice you welcome God and others to treat you and judge you as a child of God and a disciple of Jesus. *Third, you invite the Spirit of God to purify your life.* That means both outwardly, through relationships that God gives you, and inwardly through conviction of sin and special experiences, God will work in your heart where you foster desires and choose your path.

Your heart right now may be soiled by an ill wind. It may experience the clutter of dirt and leaves about obstacles that need to be moved around or removed. If you come today seeking God to fill your heart, he will do so without finding fault. He will fill you with love and peace, but since the door of your life is open to the world, will you walk each day by the wind of God's Spirit? Will these Scriptures form you? Will his people be your people? Is that what you vow?