



Restoration and the church

Part 2

Introduction

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

—*Through the Looking-Glass by Lewis Carroll*

It is clear from his conversation with Alice that Humpty has a sharp wit and a keen mind, but his individualistic approach to language would obviously make meaningful communication impossible. It is self-evident that only those who share an understanding of language have any chance of engaging in productive dialogue. Imagine a customer saying to a shopkeeper: “I asked you for a dozen eggs, but you only gave me twelve.” Understandably, the man behind the counter would be somewhat bemused.

Given my understanding of Scripture, I find it equally confusing when I hear statements like the following: “I obeyed the Gospel, but I don’t belong to any church.” Or: “You don’t have to belong to a church to be a Christian.” In my view, these and similar statements that dissociate the church from salvation reveal a faulty understanding of what Scripture teaches on both subjects. I hope the following discussion will clarify our position.

Salvation in the church

We have argued that man is lost in sin and is saved by the grace of God when he chooses to obey the Gospel (See *On Salvation*). It is at the point of baptism, a non-meritorious work of faith, that the repentant believer’s sins are washed away by the blood of Christ. Baptism thus marks the beginning of a new relationship between God and man, and scripture has a great deal to say on this topic.

In Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 Paul speaks of those who have been “baptised into Christ” or “baptised into Christ Jesus.” The apostle’s words emphasise union with Christ through baptism. Elsewhere, Paul reminds his brethren at Corinth: “by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). So scriptural baptism is “into Christ” and “into

one body." These verses align well when scripture defines its own terms. Listen to Paul again:

And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22, 23).

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything (Col 1:18)

So, to be baptised into Christ (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27) is to be baptised into one body (1 Cor 12:13) - Christ's body. Scripture calls Christ's body "the church" (Eph 1:22, 23; Col 1:18) and from this we conclude that when repentant believers are scripturally baptised, they are immersed into the church.

Christ is head of the church (His body), and according to the New Testament, Christ has but one body or church. Again, hear Paul:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:4-6)

It is not bigoted or sectarian to insist that Christ founded only one church— "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Nor is it narrow-minded to affirm that those "purchased" or "redeemed" with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18, 19) are collectively designated as *the church*. Scripture speaks of Jesus as "Saviour of the body," (Eph 5:23) the church, but knows nothing of salvation outside of the body/church. By using the terms "body," "church," and "the saved" interchangeably, we are adhering to a slogan associated with restorationism: "Let us call Bible things by Bible names and let us do Bible things in Bible ways."

Lord willing, we will continue this study on the church of the Bible. Please feel free to make comments or ask questions. You are most welcome to attend our worship services and Bible study sessions. (Continued Part 3)

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