

Into Christ's Name Only

While "faith" is the primary act in bringing about union with Christ, just how far it carried one along the way to the ultimate goal is not clear. Certainly the rite of baptism by which one "put on Christ" had a place in the process by which one became a full-fledged spiritual person.

Paul's remark to the Corinthians about not being sent to baptize but to preach, when isolated from its context, may seem to be a depreciation of the rite. But if it is read in the light of the context the exact reverse is true. Paul is glad that he had himself not baptized many of the Corinthians, just because baptism was so very significant.

To have been baptized into the name of an individual made one belong to that individual, hence had Paul baptized any large number of the Corinthians they might the more plausibly have claimed to be "of Paul" and so might really have had some justification for forming a distinctly Pauline party.

But since all had been baptized in the name of Christ, there was no ground for schism. "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" Of course not!

It was only Christ who had been crucified for them, it was into Christ's name only that they had all been baptized, and so they were all one in Christ. For Paul baptism was universally observed by Christians, and was primarily significant because it effected or consummated the believer's union with Christ: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit." Believers took Christ into them as realistically as though they had drunk down the baptismal waters.

(The Evolution of Early Christianity: A Genetic Study of First-Century Christianity in Relation to its Religious Environment by Shirley Jackson Case, Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1923 [1914], 347-348, Paragraph Structure Modified)