

Then they will **rebuild** the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

House Pets & Church Persons

When I became a Christian, my greatest and heartfelt desire was to proclaim the Gospel to the world. More than anything, I wanted to see multitudes give their hearts to Christ and zealously live for Him.

That is why I wanted little to do with the Church.

To me, to be a "Church person" was to be domesticated, similar to the way the once ferocious wild animal became a tame household pet.

At one time, the small, agile, tiger-like feline hunted its prey with vigilance and stealth, and would pounce upon its victim with power and speed. Today this animal's counterpart is a girth-laden cat who licks up "kitty-niblets" and then, in a gorged stupor, falls on a puffy pillow and goes to sleep. In a similar way, the ancestor of the 20th century dog once raced with wild packs through mountainous wilderness. Now he lies motionless in a 4'x4' glass compartment at *Pet Palace* — staring at ceiling lights waiting to be adopted. Domestication has settled in; pulsating life has been transformed into "bean-bag" stillness.

The Christian of Pentecost had a heart that burned for God. He or she gave him/herself to spread the flame of the Gospel with Spirit-empowered abandon. The Church was a place which encouraged other-worldly zeal; she was aware of her divine calling to declare God's Kingdom to all of creation. In contrast, the typical



When someone was baptized in the Early Church, three things were clearly embraced by the baptizand [the one to be baptized]. These three perspectives need to be restored among Christian people today...

Rebuild

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The "On-Fire" Church

Church today does not engender such on-fire passion for God. She is content if she can get her members to put some money in the plate and warm a pew.

How Baptism Can Ignite the Church

The Church of the first centuries did not welcome such domestication. On the contrary, membership into the Christian community fanned one's commitment to live for God to an ever increasing brilliant fire. The reason?

The Early Church baptized her members.

"Why is that a big deal?" you might ask. "Baptism is still very much the practice in churches today."

Yes, most people who become church members are baptized, but rarely do you see a person ignited by God's Spirit through baptism. The reason? Few churches *preach the significance and meaning of baptism*. If the Church once again called her members to see baptism as a practical and specific commitment to adopt a lifestyle centered on loving God and His People, baptism would once again arouse a holy passion in God's People.



1) The one who entered into the sacred waters of baptism was making a clear unhesitating declaration that he/she was completely and totally given to Christ. "Those baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death," Paul wrote. What does this mean? The baptized one had made a resolve that his or her life was no longer his/her own to do with as that person pleased; from then on, the person's life was *owned* by God (Romans 6:3-9; Galatians 2:20).

We get more insight into the meaning of baptism when we understand that the very word "baptize" comes from the Greek word which means "to immerse." The one baptized was completely covered over, submerged into a "water grave" of the Spirit. The meaning of the image was unmistakable: The baptizand's right to self rule was to be left "dead and buried" under the sanctifying water.

2) Early Christians not only saw baptism as a grave, but as a womb of life. In place of the spiritual death of self-promotion, self-absorption, and arrogance, a new life was born, one that testified to Christ's resurrection power through a life of sacrificial love.

As early as the second century, and for many years afterwards, people were baptized nude (men and women in separate locations for propriety's sake). This symbol made it clear that to be joined to Christ and His Body (the Church) required him/her to give up all.

The early Christian knew giving oneself to Christ, demanded he or she give one's life to His Family.

There was no other way to view baptism.



After coming up from the baptismal waters, the new believer received a white robe to cover his/her nakedness. The white robe symbolized Christ Himself (Revelation 6:11; 7:13,14). The Christian walked from the waters wearing only one garment - Christ (Galatians 3:27). The words of Paul echoed throughout the entire rite, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me." (Galatians 2:20).

3) Lastly, the newly baptized understood baptism as not only his/her union to Christ, but as union to the brethren of a specific Christian Community (Romans 12:4,5). The early Christian knew giving oneself to Christ demanded giving oneself to loving Christ's brothers and sisters. "Love one another as I have loved you," Christ said. "By *this* all men will know that you are My disciples..." (John 13:33,34).

Let us not pass too quickly on this last point, a point very much at odds with our "loner" culture. When one is baptized one is engrafted into God's Family and called to sincerely, honestly, and practically love those to whom he or she is engrafted.

Baptism is not a private - just between "me and Jesus"- kind of thing.

In the Early Church, a potential convert could not have opted for a more "personal" form of baptism. ... "Oh, you needn't bother to gather the whole church. I'll just baptize myself at home, say a few prayers, and join you next Sunday." The Church would have been shocked by such an idea. To be baptized is to be baptized into Christ, *and* His members (the gathered church). Such a suggestion would have revealed a gross misunderstanding about both baptism and what it means to be a Christian.

The first Christians knew the significance of baptism: It spoke of one's surrender to self-rule and a commitment to unite one's life to Christ and specific members of God's Family. This is baptism. This is the Gospel – alive, fiery, and without hint of domestication.

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