

Baptism, As an Oath of Allegiance

Introduction:

1. During the days of the mighty Roman Empire, serving as a soldier in Caesar's legion was a highly honored privilege.
2. To the Romans of the early republic, serving in the legion and war itself, was the same thing. For Rome, there was no army unless it was at war. As long as there was peace, people stayed at home and there was no army. But Rome was almost constantly at war.
3. Only tax paying landowners were subject to military service. The idea was that only these had a reason to fight. Only those between the ages of 17 and 46 could serve. Men were chosen first from the wealthiest, most privileged and only secondarily from the poorest and least privileged. To be deemed unfit for service no doubt would have been dishonorable in the eyes of one's fellow countrymen.
4. Those deemed fit and worthy had to swear an oath of allegiance in order to be transformed from simple Roman citizens into Roman soldiers.
5. This swearing of oath changed the status of the man entirely. He was now utterly subject to the general's authority. . He laid down all restraints of his former civilian life. His actions became the will of the general. He would bear no personal responsibility for the actions he would commit for the general.
6. In the Roman mind the legionary was a tool, a machine. Though it possessed dignity and honor, it abandoned its will to its commander. It ate and drank only in order to function. It required no pleasure. It would neither feel cruelty nor mercy. He simply did what he was ordered to do.
7. In many ways Christians are like Roman soldiers.
 - a. Paul uses this image as he speaks to Timothy. "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4).
 - b. He spoke of Epaphroditus and Archippus as his fellow-soldiers (Phil. 2:23, Philemon 1:2).
 - c. In Eph. 6:10ff he admonishes us to put on the full armor of God including the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.
 - d. Today we sing songs with this same image.
Examples: Soldiers of Christ Arise (231); Onward Christian Soldiers (376); I Surrender All (332); King Of My Life (179); None of Self and All of Thee (431).
8. In this lesson I want to talk with you about baptism as an appropriate initiation into the army of the Lord. I find its similarity to the Roman oath of loyalty striking.

Discussion:

- I. Baptism, like the Roman soldier's oath of loyalty, involves a new relationship with the king (Rom. 6:1-5).

- A. Paul's argument in this text is that since you have been baptized you cannot let sin reign in your mortal body (see 6:12-14).
- B. The reason for this is you have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.
 - 1. The Roman soldier was united together in life and death with his general.
 - 2. Whatever the general commanded that is what he did.
 - a. His commands may have involved the risk of his life.
 - b. But generals did not want to destroy the lives of their soliders. Thus, the soldier entrusted his very life to the general.
 - 3. Those who are baptized into Christ Jesus have entrusted their lives to the king.
- C. This harks back to the matter of our acknowledging him as Lord.
 - 1. The confession of Jesus as Lord is the foundation of the church (Matt. 16:13ff).
 - 2. Each Christian makes Jesus Lord in their life. Each Roman soldier made the general lord over their life.
 - 3. Although the language is that of slavery this emphasis is evident in Rom. 6:15-22. "Master" is equivalent to "Lord."

II. Baptism, like the Roman soldier's oath of loyalty, involves a death to the old self (6:6-7).

- A. Paul's argument here is that in baptism the old self is crucified; therefore you can not keep on sinning.
- B. Upon taking the oath of allegiance the Roman soldier, left his family, his home, his property. He was no longer simply a Roman citizen, he was a Roman soldier. It was a radical transformation.
 - 1. It was not that he was no longer concerned for his family, his home, his property. The reason he was a soldier was for their protection.
 - 2. He had laid aside these things in order to join the legion.
- C. When we are baptized we lay aside the old self and join a new life, united with a new body (Col. 3:5-15).

III. Baptism, like the Roman soldier's oath of loyalty, involves a new beginning (6:8-11).

- A. Paul's argument here is that since you have been baptized consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- B. The strength of the Roman military was based upon their unity. Citizens joined together under a common leadership to fight their enemies. The Roman phalanx was designed around many soldiers fighting in unity. They moved together as a unit, shield to shield, spear to spear. The new relationship they shared with one another provided them life.
- C. When we are baptized we are brought into a new relationship. We are "alive to God in Christ Jesus."
 - 1. Baptism establishes a new relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit

(Matt. 28:19-20).

2. United together under God, sin cannot be master over us.
3. In order to be so united we must resign our will to His (Gal. 2:20).
4. Like Roman soldier's we are obedient, almost like a machine.
 - a. Hardship is suffered (2 Tim. 2:3).
 - b. We are poured out in our fighting (2 Tim. 4:6-7).
 - c. But we have put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10) and having done everything to stand we stand firm (6:10ff).

IV. Baptism, like the Roman soldier's oath of loyalty, incorporates one into a new body (Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Cor. 12:13).

- A. Once a Roman citizen took the oath of allegiance as a soldier, nationality, economic status were no longer relevant. They were united together in one body.
- B. Baptism, like the oath of allegiance, incorporates people into the body of Christ.
 1. There is unity.
 2. There is commonality.
 3. There is singleness of purpose.

Conclusion:

1. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin? Are we to continue in the old way of life?
2. Certainly not! We have taken the oath of allegiance to Christ. We have been baptized. We are united under the leadership of the King.
3. We have died to the old self.
4. We have started a new life.
5. We are incorporated into the one body.
6. Under the leadership of our new King there is victory.