

MEANINGS OF BAPTISM

- Incorporation into Covenant, which was sealed with a sacrifice. Circumcision was the sign of covenant people. Calvin talked about baptism as the circumcision of the heart promised in Ezek. 36:25:27, which indicates God is taking responsibility for the demand of Deut. 10:16. It is the ultimate sacrifice of Christ that seals the New Covenant. All of this is **God's initiating act**.
- Liberation through chaos/judgment of waters of death (Noah, Exodus)
- Cleansing, purification associated with washing away impurity (sin) and welcome into community. Ritual cleansing in OT is so we can come back into camp. We are welcomed into the community of faith through baptism. We are also washed in the blood of Jesus' sacrifice. (Note: blood is also associated with covenant.) John's baptismal practices notwithstanding, ritual cleansing was generally self-administered in Judaism except for infants and slaves.
 - Baptism was held to make a man [sic] such a new creature that all previous relations and bonds belonging to the old life were cancelled. If a slave were permitted to baptize himself, he would automatically emerge from the water a free man.¹
- If, however, you were baptized by another, your servitude was transferred to that person. Hence, though we are baptized by the church, we are to consider ourselves baptized by the triune God into Christ (c.f. I Cor. 1).
- End of slavery to sin, transfer of servitude to God. Imagery of being ransomed out of captivity and being led home by the conquering victor to whom we now owe allegiance. Yet the irony is that because we are baptized by Christ, we find our true freedom as slaves of Christ (see Romans 6:6, 17-18).
- Transfer of citizenship to God's New Age begun by Christ's death/resurrection as its servants. This gathers up the imagery of being adopted as royal children (Rom. 8), being ordained and anointed for service like prophets, priests, and kings (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9) through the laying on of hands and anointing with oil (see 1 Peter 2:9), and transfer of a slave's master (Rom. 6, 8). "Anyone who is in Christ is of the New Creation" is one possible translation of II Cor. 5:17. This was a primary meaning in the extant baptismal liturgies of the early church.
- Transformation. This is often signified by a change of clothes, which is why people put on sackcloth and ashes to signify their repentance. In the early church, those being baptized were stripped of their old clothes/life, then baptized naked like a body being buried and a new baby being born. Upon emergence from the water, they were clothed in new white garments (a symbol of the resurrection), which we see evidence of in Rev.

6 and 7. See also Col. 3:12, Gal. 3:27. Paul often stresses the transformation that baptism into Christ brings through our faithful discipling/discipline (i.e. Romans 8) in response to God's good gift of grace in Christ Jesus.

- Human repentance and God's forgiveness as response to God's initiation of grace in Jesus Christ. We are to bury the old and rise to the new in Christ (Rom. 6).
- Union with Christ. We are engrafted into him, made members of his body. This union with Christ is also seen in wedding imagery (Rev. 21:2, 9-10, Eph. 5:22-23). God's Reign was often depicted as a wedding feast in the parables (Matthew 9:15, Mark 2:19 and Luke 5:34) with Christ as the bridegroom.
- Gift of new life emerging out of waters of death so that the tomb becomes a womb of new life.
- Adoption. We are made part of the family of God, heirs of God's kingdom as children, not just slaves. (See Romans 8, I Peter 2). Having been engrafted into Christ, we are all members of his body and thus one (Eph. 4:4-6, Gal. 3:27-28).
- Gift of Spirit associated with ordination for service to God, as OT people were ordained prophets, priests, and kings through the laying on of hands and an anointing with oil. In the Old Testament, the gift of the Spirit is conferred for the purpose of getting a job done for the good of the community. Now, through Christ, the Spirit indwells individual and communal life, working sanctification, for the ultimate purpose of executing God's will and the building up of the body of Christ.
- Incorporated into body of Christ/family of God for mission to world through Holy Spirit
- Baptism is our faithful response to Word of God and the announcement of God's salvation in Christ (Acts 2:37-39, Acts 8:26-38).
- Immersion under water by someone else holds threat of death (Exodus, Noah)
- Hidden with Christ (Col. 3:3). This is a play on Adam and Eve's postlapsarian hiding from God. Now we are hidden in Christ by God, reminiscent of God hiding Moses in the cleft of rock so could see divine glory (Exodus 33), which means we live in the light and preach light (I Pet. 2:9)

- Called out to be one of God's people (ekklesia, the word from which we get church (ecclesia, ecclesial, etc.)= "called out." We are blessed through the laying on of hands (see Gen. 48:14 for this tradition) in order to be a blessing to all people (Gen. 12) as part of the people of God.
- Renaming. We're all part of Christ's family and receive the new last name of Christian. Renaming often occurred to indicate a change of life (i.e. Abram→Abraham)
- Sealed. In baptism we are sealed, signed by Christ. Soldiers and slaves were often branded with their owner's sign/seal. o indicate ownership (slave brand, loyalty tattoo). In baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit and are sealed like an envelope was sealed, to keep something inviolate against evil and judgment. This has links with Passover, as God's people received the sign and were thereby sealed against Death.
- Sharing in kingship and priesthood of Christ as one of his anointed disciples. The laying on of hands signified the consecration of priests (Num. 8:10)
- Sharing in Christ's victory over death (crowns and wreaths references in I Cor. 9:25, 2 Tim. 4:8, James 1:12)
- Illumination ("I once was blind but now I see") by the enlightenment of Christ and gift of Spirit, hence the lit candle given at baptism and renewal of baptismal vows after lighting candles from paschal candle (I Peter 2:9).

¹ Church of Scotland Commission on Baptism, *The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1958), 30.