

The Significance of Baptism (part 1 of 2)

WSC 94 Q. What is baptism? A. Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.

I. Baptism represents our union with (“ingrafting into”) Christ

A. We are baptized into Christ

- Especially, we are united with him in his *death and resurrection*.
- Jesus identifies his cross as his baptism!
 - Mark 10:38: “But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’”
 - Luke 12:50: “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!”
 - Note how both of these texts are *after* his water baptism with John!
- If we are baptized into his death, we will also be one with him in his resurrection:
 - Rom 6:3–5: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”
 - Col 2:11–12: “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”
 - The circumcision of Christ here refers to Christ’s death on the cross, when he was “cut off” (in his whole body!) for us
- Our baptism says: “You were there! When Jesus died, you were there with him! Now that he’s alive, you’re alive too! You share in his death and you share in his resurrection life. You’re one with him.”

B. We are baptized into Christ’s body, the church

- To be one with Christ is to be one with his people. You can’t have the head without the body.
 - Rom 12:5: “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (See 1 Cor 12:12)
- There’s no salvation outside of Christ’s body, any more than you can be saved outside of Christ.
 - Eph 4:4–6: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”
- Our baptism says: you are one with everyone else who is in Christ.
 - 1 Cor 12:13: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

C. We are baptized from the old creation into the new

- In the first creation, the Spirit hovers over the chaotic waters (Gen 1:2). God speaks (Gen 1:3, etc.). Word and Spirit make a new world through the waters.
- Because of sin, God must recreate the world with the waters of judgment.
- But through the waters of judgment, a new beginning will come!
 - Noah's family survives the waters of judgment to bring them to a new dry land.
 - Moses leads Israel through the waters of the Red Sea (which would later judge Pharaoh) to a new beginning with God at Sinai.
 - Joshua leads Israel through the waters of the Jordan to a new beginning in the promised land.
- Two parts: 1. Surviving the judgment on the old creation and 2. Entering the blessedness of the new creation.

1. Surviving the Judgment on the Old Creation

- Other OT pictures of surviving a water judgment ordeal:
 - Jonah in the fish: Jonah 2:5–6
 - The psalmist in his distress: Ps 42:7: “Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.”
 - The new Israel (i.e., us!) in the new exodus: Isa 43:2: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”
- In other words, there is a flood in the baptismal font! The waters of baptism mark us as *those who have already undergone judgment*.
 - Notice the connection between water and fire in Isa 43:2. This prepares us for John's statement that water baptism will not suffice: Luke 3:16: “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”
 - God will not again deluge the world with water (Gen 9:15), but he will flood the world with fire: 2 Pet 3:7: “the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”
 - Jesus underwent the water baptism with John. But then he had another baptism on the cross: it is this baptism of fire, the end-times judgment of God. Jesus has undergone this fire baptism on the cross.
- Hence Jesus' baptism marks us as those who will survive the flood of fire.

2. Entering the blessedness of the New Creation

- Baptism says: this one is destined for the new heavens and the new earth.
- Indeed, baptism says we have already begun to enjoy everlasting life! We are now on the other side of the Jordan!
 - Titus 3:5–6: “he saved us . . . by *the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” Only other use of “regeneration”: Matt 19:28, referring to the new creation.
 - John 3:5 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- Baptism marks our entry into the new birth, into the “regeneration” of all things by the Spirit.