



## Using Metaphors

September 9<sup>th</sup> 2018

In a recent lesson I taught, “In baptism we metaphorically contact the blood of Christ”. A good member questioned my use of the term “Metaphorically”. That got me to thinking about the many ways metaphors are used in the scriptures. I’d like to share them with you but first a little foundation is in order. First the Definition: Webster on metaphor: “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them” Second, one obstacle of thought that gets in the way of understanding is that people have learned to think that, “actual and symbolic”, are opposites. They are not. In truth there can be no real symbolism if there is no matching or confirming reality. When we are baptized, we don’t come out of the water “red” from contact with the saving blood of Christ; it’s a symbolic issue, founded in the reality that His blood saves us. It’s very real -- our sins really are forgiven because of the blood of Christ. We need to teach that figurative and real are not an either/or but are both/and proposition.” Many metaphors are used by Jesus and His Apostles that help explain, emphasize or compliment the plain and direct statements of scripture. Below we will explore just a few.

First is that of **Circumcision**: In Genesis 17, it was the sign of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham’s family and a clear line dividing those in the covenant from those outside. In the New Testament it is used as a metaphor for baptism. Paul speaks metaphorically of spiritual circumcision in which one’s sin is cut away from their heart and cast aside, after which one enters into a covenant relationship with the Father. “*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart...*” (Rom. 2:28-29). In Colossians 2:11-12 Christ not physically, but metaphorically circumcised the penitent believer. Similarly, we are not physically buried with Him, but it is a metaphor for what takes place spiritually. Baptism “like circumcision”, is the definitive action which divides those within the covenant of Christ from those outside of the covenant of Christ. The saved from the unsaved!

A second is the metaphorical use of **Exodus**. Israel is depicted as redeemed, God’s people having crossed the Red Sea. For example, in Psalm 106:9-10 we read, “*He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up; So He led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. 10 He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.*” Again, the metaphor focuses on a final act which separates the unredeemed from the redeemed. The Israelites freed from literal bondage and slavery. But just like the passage through the Red Sea freed and redeemed them, our baptism into Christ marks the point of our redemption from sin. “*...our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*” (1Cor. 10:1-2). Paul used a metaphor / analogy to compare the new covenant with the old. Likewise, Christ Jesus “*gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works*” (Tit. 2:14).

Thirdly, is the use of the term, “**put on**”: Galatians 3:27-28 reads, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” Here baptism is compared to putting on clothes (NIV), which is a metaphor for the character of Christ. In Ephesians 4:22-24, these new clothes equal the new man in Christ and are contrasted with the old self of sin which we must remove — “*that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man...and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*”. Do we actually physically put on a new man? (Note also: Col. 3:9-10). This metaphor clearly demonstrates that

there is an absolute point at which one goes from not being clothed to being clothed with Christ, and the Bible affirms that this point is our baptism into Christ.

The fourth example is **Birth**. The New Testament (NT), often uses the figure of new birth or regeneration for describing the new covenant relationship with God. This rebirth constitutes a dramatic difference, a rebirth, starting all over again completely new. *“he is a new creation”* (2Cor. 5:17), *“He made alive...raised us up together...”* (Eph. 2:1-10), *“renewed in the spirit of your mind...new man which was created according to God”* (Eph. 4:23-24), *“new man who is renewed in knowledge”* (Col. 3:9-10), *“begotten us again to a living hope...born again”* (1Pet.1:3, 23), *“born of God”* (1John 3:9; 4:7). In fact, this new life living in us is to be Christ (Gal. 2:20) not physically, but metaphorically by the renewing and regeneration (Titus 3:5). And for the Bible student there should be no surprise in that new birth is clearly associated with baptism the definitive turning point at which the new birth takes place. In John 3, Jesus paralleled being *“born again”* (3:3) with being *“born of water and Spirit”* (3:5). Not two births, but one singular one involving both water and Spirit without which one cannot enter the kingdom of God. We cannot physically re-enter our mother’s womb (3:4), it is a metaphorical lesson. Note also that for certain Jesus’ *“water”* and Paul’s *“washing”* (Acts 22:16) are unquestionably references to baptism. This same figure of new birth is a figure of our spiritual resurrection and baptism a figure of our burial (Col. 2:12-13; Rom. 6:3-4).

Considering the next metaphor shows baptism as the crucial turning point. Described both as a burial the end of the old life and a new birth the beginning of the new life. Paul uses the metaphor of **burial** as a description of baptism in Romans 6:3-6: *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were **buried with Him through baptism into death...**”* Paul also used this figure in Colossians 2, along with the metaphor of circumcision: *“...**buried with Him in baptism...**13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses”* (2:12-13). In both the meaning of the metaphor is clear. A person must first die, then be buried, and then be resurrected: First death (by repentance), then burial (by baptism), and then our spiritual resurrection or *“newness of life.”* Note carefully here that Paul is unambiguous; [baptism is the point at which we are spiritually made alive or resurrected, thus *“justified by His blood”* (Rom. 5:9), *“redeemed us to God by Your blood”* (Rev. 5:9) and it is the blood and only the blood that can *“wash away your sins”* (Acts 22:16). As stated in the beginning of this article, when one is raised up from baptism, they are never covered with red blood, but metaphorically they are covered, washed, justified, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God: Which is also a metaphor, because Jesus is not a literal four footed lamb.

The sixth and likely the most wonderful example is a **Complete Union** that takes place as we consider the literal action of baptism, that is immersion. The completeness of the spiritual union which started as: We heard the gospel (John 6:45), we believed (John 8:24), we confess (Matt. 10:32), we repent (Mark 13:3) and are immersed or “baptized” into Christ, (Rom. 6 3; Gal. 3:27). Paul explicitly connects baptism with our being united with Christ (Rom. 6:5) clearly this is the point at which we enter into Christ, are united to Him and added to His Body the Church (Acts 2:47; Col. 1:24). Metaphorically we are immersed into the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:13) not physically, spiritually. Follow me now for this is clearly the point at which we enter into the body of Christ where *“salvation is”* (2Tim. 3:15). Now we can say, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (Gal. 2:20). We are crucified with Christ, the time at which we contact the blood that was shed in His death (1John 5:6), not physically, a metaphor for Spiritual reality.

Metaphors are simple, understandable illustrative ways of making plain the teaching of scripture. For example, baptism makes disciples (Matt. 28:19), brings forgiveness (Acts 2:38), and saves (1Pet. 3:21), all metaphors that help us understand truth. We don’t literally *“take up the cross”* (Mark 10:21).

Whatever the metaphor; what is really important is that we understand that we need a Savior, that is Jesus, and that through faith and obedience to God’s commands we can contact His saving blood, become a child of God, remain faithful, and on that great Day be raised up to our Heavenly home.

With a humble heart I pray that whosever believes in Jesus, would not wait on second beyond coming to faith and to be baptized into Christ having your sins washed away. Won't you today?

God Bless you

In Love  
Dave Scarpino