

## The Mode of Baptism

*The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, in which the individual is to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary for this ordinance to be administered properly.* (Modernized 1689 Confession)

1. Why mode is important
  - a. God is an exacting God.
    - i. Adam and the tree
    - ii. Moses failing to circumcise his son (Ex. 4:24-26)
    - iii. Moses and the rock
    - iv. Pharisees told to tithe their spices (Matt. 23:23)
    - v. God tests hearts. 1Th 2:4
    - vi. God's exactness magnifies his grace because he is patient with us.
  - b. The meaning is tied to the mode
    - i. Union with Christ
    - ii. Death, burial, and resurrection
    - iii. The complete washing of the Gospel (Jn. 13:8-11)

8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."
  - c. The experience is tied to the mode.
    - i. A crisis – compare to Christ's baptism of suffering. This was no light experience. (Lu. 12:50)
    - ii. Memorable
    - iii. Sensible ("pertaining to the senses") – the sacraments are the Gospel preached to the senses. A few drops of water on the top of your head are hardly going to register with your sense of touch.
  - d. The proper mode allows us to identify with Christ in his experience.
  - e. The mode is not as important to us as the subjects are.
  - f. This issue is not so important that we cannot enjoy fellowship with those who have come to different conclusions.
2. Three basic positions concerning the proper mode:
  - a. Baptizo means "to wash", and any mode of washing with water fulfills the command.
  - b. Baptizo means "to wash", and the particular mode is suggested by the symbolism in the context. ("Dipping of the person into the water is not

necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person." -WCF)

- i. Sprinkling – based on Old Testament cleansings
- ii. Pouring – based on the Holy Spirit being poured out
- c. Baptizo means "to immerse". This view is based on:
  - i. The literal meaning of the word
  - ii. The word used in context
  - iii. The symbolism attached to it
3. The literal meaning of the word
  - a. All standard Greek lexicons give "immerse" as the basic meaning.
    - i. Some lexicon to also give the meaning "wash" as one possible meaning of the word. But this is because washing is the natural result of immersion in some situations. It is not the inherent meaning of the word. Likewise, some lexicons will indicate "sink to the bottom" as a meaning, but this is just the natural consequence when a ship is immersed. It is not the inherent meaning either. (Example: We define "take a dip" to mean "swim", but this is because swimming requires literal dipping in water.)
    - ii. Some say it is unspiritual to use a definition derived from usage outside of the Scriptures. Sometimes, the Bible uses terms in special ways that aren't the same as their secular definition.
      - (1) but the Bible is written in Koine Greek – common Greek
      - (2) how could we determine the meaning of words that are used only once in the New Testament?
      - (3) it is true that there are some technical words in the New Testament, but they don't depart completely from their ordinary meaning; for instance – elder (older man), church (assembly)
  - b. Josephus – a contemporary of the New Testament authors and a Jew
    - i. "And baptizing part of these ashes in spring water, they rantized them" (Greek *rantizo*, meaning "sprinkle")
    - ii. Concerning Jonah's ship: "the ship was in danger of being baptized"
    - iii. When Herod had some young men drown his son-in-law: "while such of Herod's acquaintance as he had appointed to do it, baptized him as he was swimming, and plunged him under water, in the dark of the evening, as if it had been done in sport"
  - c. Septuagint – Greek translation of the Old Testament
    - i. Two uses– both are used to translate the Hebrew word that means to dip
    - ii. Isaiah 21:4 – "Horror baptizes me" (This is a figurative use that would be perfectly understandable with the translation "immerse" – "I am immersed in horror".)
    - iii. 2 Kings 5:14 – "So [Naaman] went down and baptized himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

This is a literal baptism of a person in water, so it provides a good backdrop for understanding what this word would have meant to a first-century reader of the New Testament.

- d. New Testament
  - i. There are words for wash (nipto), sprinkle (rantizo), and pour (katacheo, cheo, ballo) in the Greek language
  - ii. Why would the writers of the New Testament be so deliberately ambiguous when there were other words that could have made a different mode crystal clear?
- e. Church fathers
  - i. Early church immersed.
  - ii. Luther: “First baptism is called in Greek baptisimos, in Latin mersio, that is, when we dip anything wholly in water, that it is completely covered over. And although in many provinces it is no longer the custom (in other provinces it was the custom) to thrust the children into the font and to dip them; but they only pour water with the hands out of the font; nevertheless, it should be thus, and would be right, that after speaking aloud the word (baptize) the child or any one who is to be baptized, be completely sank down into the water, and dipt again and drawn out” (*Works*, v. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1960), 29.
  - iii. Calvin: “The word signifies to immerse, and it is certain that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church.” (*Institutes*, Bk. IV. C. 15)
  - iv. Modern Greeks immerse.

#### 4. The context in the New Testament

- a. Mark 1:9-10 – “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.” *eis* (into) the Jordan
- b. John 3:23 – John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.
- c. Acts 8:36
  - i. Plain sense
  - ii. Objection of desert not having enough water (8:26)
    - (1) if so, would’ve had water with him! Why wait to see water?
    - (2) “desert” means “isolated”, not arid – there is plenty of water there

#### 5. The symbolism of baptism

- a. Romans 6:3-4
  - i. Union with Christ
  - ii. Burial and resurrection – why mention burial? Because it was an allusion to the concrete nature of baptism, not just death in the abstract sense
  - iii. The figure does not include crucifixion

We have been identified with Christ in his death. But just as his burial confirmed the reality of his death so our burial has borne witness to our union with him in his dying and to our own death. Baptism is the instrument here... It is by means of baptism that this has been effected. Again the sign and the thing signified converge. But it is the very vivid character of the sign which enables sign and thing signified thus to converge. It is the symbolic immersion, a ceremonial drowning if you like, which sets forth the identification of the believer with Christ at the final point of his burial in the sepulchre. It is hard to see how a few drops of water could convey such a lesson. (Herbert Carson in *Local Church Practice*, ch. 4)

- b. Colossians 2:11-12
  - c. 1 Peter 3:18-22 – Why would Peter have clarified that baptism is not a removal of dirt from the body if it were not outwardly so?
  - d. Galatians 3:27
  - e. 1 Corinthians 10:2
6. What about baptism in the Holy Spirit? Doesn’t this indicate pouring?
- a. Matthew 3:10-12 – in the immediate context, people are gathered either into a barn (the Holy Spirit) or thrown in the fire
  - b. There are many figures in Scripture to describe the giving of the Holy Spirit
    - i. Pouring out
    - ii. Filling
    - iii. Drinking
    - iv. Wind blowing
  - c. It would be odd for a sacrament to point primarily to the work of the Spirit, when the work of the Spirit is to magnify Christ and his work!
7. What about those who were sprinkled as a profession of faith?
- a. This experience contains many of the elements of baptism:
    - i. profession of faith
    - ii. receiving of God’s assurance
    - iii. an important spiritual marker
    - iv. the use of water
    - v. public identification with the Trinity and the church
  - b. Scripture presents baptism as a one-time marker of a one-time experience.
  - c. A subsequent immersion should not be viewed as a second baptism or a rejection of the first experience. Instead, it is a completion of what was begun in an incompletely administered expression.
  - d. Immersion should be received as an embracing of greater light and the full meaning and experience of baptism.
  - e. The breakdown is that these are culturally determined practices. But we believe that Jesus said to immerse people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of indifference.