



# Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church

## No.3 The Mode of Baptism.

### Immersion, Sprinkling or Pouring

Sabbath Day Morning 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011

We come to the final message on baptism, so far we have looked at the meaning of baptism and the subjects of baptism. As we conclude these public messages on the sacrament of baptism I trust that the congregation has been led to see the importance of baptism. Sadly many in the visible Church show no great interest in the subject, this is sad, as the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom we profess to love as our saviour and head has given us this blessed sacrament, as a means of grace and as a sign of his great promise of grace. Let us not therefore dismiss the meaning, the subjects and the mode of baptism as being of unimportant. As with all things biblical, if God has revealed it then it is important. The mode of baptism has divided the church for many centuries, on one side there are those who believe that the proper mode and indeed the only mode is by immersion only. There are only two other views outside of immersion held by Christians, i.e. baptism by pouring and baptism by sprinkling. Regarding the subject the Westminster confession of faith states in W.C.F. Ch28 Para 3, *“Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.”* May I mention that the Free Presbyterian Church allows its members to hold to either of the three modes that I mentioned, however, it is my purpose as a minister of Christ to lead you through the scripture in order that you might be ‘biblically informed’ as to the mode of baptism. One other important matter to keep in mind is the importance of the mode cannot be separated from the meaning of baptism. Jay Adams points out that the sacraments are symbolic so therefore the mode and the meaning of baptism are one and the same. The mode of observing a sacrament requires careful thought, you will appreciate that I am trying to dispel the attitude that is often heard among Christians *‘Sure it doesn’t matter how you get baptized so long as water is used.’* We would never dream of applying that same attitude to the Lord’s Table, does the mode of observing the Lord’s Table matter? Yes it does! Many good men have held differing views on the mode, each saying that this is the biblical mode, literally millions of pages have been written on the mode of baptism, so it may seem that perhaps enough has been already said and written on the subject, we may be tempted to conclude that the debate will continue and the differing sides will continue to hold to their view. That may be so, yet it is my conviction that bible truth restated will always have an impact on how people think. Christians need to leave to the side any preconceived or opinions that have not been formed by scripture, if we are going to stand for something then we need to know from the bible why we believe it. So what better place to start this morning than looking at the bible word used for baptize.

#### 1) The word for baptize.

The New Testament does not explicitly say that here is the manner and mode for Baptism, so we need then to look at the word used for baptism and its cognates [related words]. I have included in the notes a table of the related words and the approximate number of times they appear in scripture.

Greek	Transliterated	Translated	Approx number of uses
β α π τ ι ζ ω	Baptizo	Baptise	80
β α π τ ι σ μ α	Baptisma	Baptism	22
β α π τ ι σ μ ός	Baptismos	Washing	4
β α π τ ι σ τ ις	Baptistes	Baptiser {John the Baptist}	14
β α π τ ω	Bapto	Dip or Dye	3

#### a) Baptismos.

Turn to [Heb Ch9:10](#), the word for washings is the word ‘*baptismos*’, the word refers to many different washings that took place in the Old Testament, the washing of hands, the washing of cups and saucers and other household furniture. [Mark Ch7:4, 8](#) The Pharisees were holding on to traditions, these traditions included the washing of cups, pots and tables [the word table can refer also to couches or beds]. The word ‘wash’ is ‘*baptidzo*’ and the word ‘washing’ is ‘*baptismos*’ the same as Heb Ch9:10. Literally Mark Ch7:4 reads *‘they baptized their tables and beds and pots and pans.’* In this setting it would be possible to immerse a cup or a saucepan, but it would be extremely difficult to immerse your bed, or your couch, the proper understanding here is that these items were cleansed in a ceremonial fashion, by sprinkling or by cleansing.

#### b) Baptizo.

The Baptist position states that the New Testament word ‘baptizo’ is said to always mean ‘immerse’ or ‘dip’, however, this is not a well founded position. Let me turn you to Luke Ch11:38, in the house of an unnamed Pharisee Luke records that he

"Marveled that he had not first washed before dinner." The word for 'washed' is 'baptizo', which referred in this case to the washing of the hands up to the elbow or wrist. It is a very interesting fact that the translators of the Bible did not translate the word baptize as immerse, sprinkle or pour.

i) Immersion.

This is the view held by Baptists, that the mode of baptism is properly and only that of immersion every time. As we have seen there is no definite proof from scripture that can be cited for such a position, this kind of dogmatism is to be rejected.

ii) Sprinkling.

Those who use sprinkling as a mode cite Ezekiel Ch36:25-28, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Again there is no certain proof, but as you look at examples of scripture you can see that sprinkling is a valid mode. Look at Exodus Ch24:6&8, Moses sprinkled the people [see also Heb Ch9:19, 21]. Sprinkling represents the cleansing of sin by the blood of Christ which is promised in the covenant of Grace, it points to this reality [Heb Ch12:24, "The blood of sprinkling,"

iii) Pouring.

Turn to Acts Ch10:44-48. Peter is called by Cornelius to preach to those gathered in his house, as he preaches the Holy Ghost falls upon those who are assembled, may I remind you that those gathered are gentiles. The Jews [circumcised] who were with Peter are amazed when the Holy Ghost falls upon the Gentiles in the house, the uncircumcised. This is further proof that the new administration of the covenant of Grace is made with the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Notice the manner in which the Holy Ghost falls upon the gentiles [v45] "poured out the gift of the holy ghost." Peter immediately recognises that these believers should be baptized, "can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" The natural understanding of this passage is that water was then brought into the house and these were baptized either by sprinkling or by pouring. The pouring symbolizing the promise of the covenant of Grace, i.e. the Holy Ghost which would be poured out on all flesh. Thus again pouring is to be considered as a valid mode of baptism.

**2) Baptism in the book of Acts.**

We have not time to look at all the references to those being baptized, but let us look at a few prominent passages.

i) Day of Pentecost Acts Ch2:38-41

On the day of Pentecost 3000 people were converted. If baptism was by immersion here, how long that would have taken, remembering that the Christians were viewed by the authorities as a sect, there was much opposition to the apostles. It is not likely that the apostles would have been allowed to take over some public bath for the immersion of these 3000 people. Without travelling many miles to perform an act that could possibly have taken many days, they sprinkled or poured them in baptism.

ii) The Ethiopian Eunuch. Acts Ch8:36-39

Perhaps this is the most oft quoted text by immersionists [Baptists], note that it simply says "see, water" It does not say how much water, but simply water, what we do know is that the place was a desert place [v26]. V38 says, "And they went both down into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch and he baptized him." Those who say 'immersion only' point to the fact that this means the Eunuch went under the water and then came up from the water. But the verse says that both went into the water, so to consistently say that this passage implies immersion, must mean that we must say Philip went under the water also. Turn to Matt Ch3:16 and Mark Ch1:10. Notice how the same word is used of Christ's baptism Matt Ch3:16, "And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water." The phrase 'out of' is the Greek preposition 'apo' which means 'away from', what Matthew and Mark mean is that Jesus went away from the waters of Jordan, not out of. The movement mentioned here regarding both Christ and the Eunuch indicates away from water, not out of water. It is therefore difficult to prove that this passage teaches immersion only.

iii) Lydia and the Phillipian Jailor and their households. Acts Ch16

There are two examples here. That of Lydia and the Jailor, both after their conversion were baptized, again the scripture lies silent on the matter, but the circumstances would lead us to accept that the mode was conducive to the circumstances. Would Paul have immersed a lady of standing who was unprepared in the river? This would have gone against Eastern Custom whereby the decency of woman was of high order. Go now to v33-34, the jailor and his family was baptized during the early hours of the morning, is it probable that Paul and Silas proceeded to some place where there was sufficient water for immersion. I am only pointing out that the mode most likely to be used was that of sprinkling or pouring.

**3) One baptism.**

Baptism is to be administered once. Throughout Church history there have been those who supported re-baptism for those who were baptized as infants, their baptism was regarded as null and void and they were re-baptized, this was the view of the 'Anabaptists', the Protestant reformers rejected this position, in fact the Anabaptist position was condemned as not merely an error but a heresy. There is one baptism Eph Ch4:5. The baptism is done by the application of water. Christians are not to be re-baptised

for sentimental reasons, I have heard of some who on visits to Jordan have been re-baptised; this is wrong and ought not to be done!

i) In the name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Oneness Pentecostal baptism does not have a basis in scripture, is not in the name of the Trinity, in the name of Father Son and Holy Ghost [Matt Ch28:19].

May the Holy Ghost teach us more on the subject of baptism and its importance to the church.