

## CHRISTIAN BAPTISM: IMMERSION, SPRINKLING OR POURING?

Reformation Bible Church

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Our brethren who believe that Scripture commands baptism by immersion are compelled by that belief to preach on the necessity of being immersed. But those who believe that Scripture is silent on the mode of baptism are not so compelled. Consequently, the impression is given that all the biblical arguments for mode of baptism are with immersionists, and that there are not biblical reasons to practice affusion.

It is not our purpose in this message to prove that affusion is the only acceptable mode, or that immersion is unacceptable. Rather, what we observe is that Scripture does not command any single mode of baptism. The only way to “prove” any mode of baptism in Scripture is by way of inference. Lacking any biblical command regarding mode of baptism, one should be at liberty to select how he/she desires the water to be applied to his/her body. Preliminarily, two observations may be made from Scripture. First, it is the fact of water, not the quantity of water, that is relevant in New Testament baptism. Second, the water is represented as being applied to the person, not the person to the water.

We divide our consideration into four elements:

**First**, because immersion-only is often preached, it is helpful to apply Scripture to some of the primary arguments.

*Argument #1:* The Greek word for baptize means to immerse, therefore baptism is immersion.

*Answer:* **Matthew 20:22** “But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, we are able.”

**I Corinthians 10:1, 2** “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

**Mark 7:4** “And when they come from the market, except they wash (baptizo) they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (baptismos) of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.”

*Argument #2:* Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and only immersion can be true to this symbol.

*Answer:* **Romans 6:3-5** “Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized into Jesus Christ** were **baptized into his death**? Therefore we are buried with him by **baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” **I Corinthians 12:13** “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

*Argument #3:* The Bible says that at Jesus’ baptism He went up out of the water.

*Answer:* **Matthew 3:16** “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway **out of** the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.” (note the inconclusiveness of prepositions: “after, ago, at, because of, before, by (the space of), for (-th), from, in, (out) of, off, (up-) on (-ce), since, with” – *Strong*)

**Second, by what mode did John the Baptist baptize?** Immersion is assumed, but how is that determined? We must recognize that John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet. His entire ministry was according to Old Testament practice. What was the Old Testament practice with regard to the use of water when consecrating a priest or a Levite?

*Consecration of the Levites: Numbers 8:5-7* “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: **Sprinkle water of purifying upon them**, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and *so* make themselves clean.”

*Consecration of the Priests: Leviticus 8:1-6* “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; And gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the LORD commanded to be done. **And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.**”

**Third: When Scripture speaks of other baptisms, it does not use the imagery of immersion, but affusion.**

**Luke 3:16, 22** “John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: . . . And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” (Note water symbolizing the Holy Spirit – John 7:37-39)

**Acts 1:5** “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” **Acts 2:3, 4** “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

**Fourth, baptisms in the New Testament seem to make immersion unlikely.**

**Pentecost: Acts 2:41** “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

**Ethiopian: Act 8:26, 36, 37** “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert . . . And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”

**Paul: Acts 9:18, 19** “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.”

**Cornelius: Act 10:47, 45** “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”

**Philippian Jailer: Acts 16:31-38** “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.”