

# Water Baptism – What Saith the Scriptures?

by Thomas Swan

## Chapter 1. Introductory

Baptism is a subject with which the young believer is soon confronted.

Unfortunately many of those who practise infant baptism by sprinkling have so little interest in the subject or so little conviction that what they do is right, that they have little or nothing to say about it. Seldom is an address given from the Paedobaptist point of view. The subject is referred to only when an infant is being baptised; and, too often, what is then said is only a feeble apology, which does not carry conviction to the hearers.

Why is this so? Does the Bible teach that baptism is only by immersion, and only for those who have made a confession of faith? If so, then the sooner we give up the practice of sprinkling infants the better.

Like most young believers, I was soon brought face to face with this question. I was at first indifferent to it, believing, as is commonly said, that there are three modes of baptism – immersion, pouring, and sprinkling; and as I had been baptised by sprinkling as an infant, I thought that quite sufficient.

At that time there was a good deal of controversy about the subject in the church which I attended. There were many young converts. Some had been immersed, others were going to be; and, of course, they wanted all the rest to do the same. One night there was a dispute about the meaning of a text of Scripture bearing on the subject. The minister appearing, someone asked him his opinion about it. The reply he gave was, “Learned men have failed to agree on the subject; so why should we trouble ourselves about it?” This, of course, was taken by the immersionists as an admission that they were right.

At first, as I said, I was indifferent to the subject. Then on account of so much controversy about it, I thought I should get immersed at the first favourable opportunity, and settle the matter as far as I was concerned; then I should be on the safe side, being both sprinkled and immersed.

But before a favourable opportunity had come, and being involved in a discussion one night, I was given a pamphlet on the subject, consisting of two sermons by a baptist pastor. I read that pamphlet, I can honestly say, with an unbiased mind. When I had read it, what struck me most about it was that the writer tried to prove very little from the Bible. Most of his arguments were the admissions of paedobaptist ministers, lexicographers, etc. and he tried to prove that immersion was a mode of baptism in the early church.

I began to be interested in the subject, and read a number of pamphlets written by Brethren. I read a good deal from the baptist point of view before I read anything against it, and I found the arguments of the various authors to be all much the same. The only Scriptures they tried to draw any proof from were, the baptism of Jesus, and of the Ethiopian eunuch; Romans 6:4 – “*Buried with him by baptism*”; and occasionally a reference to John baptising in Aenon because there was “*much water*” there. Their main arguments were, the meaning of the word “*baptise*” as agreed upon by most

lexicographers; what certain bishops, professors and scholars of the different paedobaptist denominations admit; and the practice of some of the early fathers of the church.

Here is a very curious thing, especially about Brethren: whereas on every other subject you cannot shift them from the Bible, they must have proof texts for every statement made; yet on the subject of baptism you cannot keep them to the Scriptures. Speak to any of them on what is called “Second Blessing” teaching, and they will open their Bibles and show you it is not Scriptural teaching. They will tell you that your experience counts for nothing if it is not supported by Scripture. Yet every one of them that I have heard speaking on baptism – and I have heard a few – each one, without exception, closed his address with an appeal to the blessing he had received, and which he said his hearers should receive, by being immersed; or as they call it, by “following the Lord through the waters of baptism”. Their final and most conclusive argument is their experience, the blessing they consider they received by immersion.

### ***Does the Bible teach us the mode and the subjects of baptism?***

After reading the pamphlet mentioned above, I began to search the Scriptures to see what they had to say on the subject. And I was surprised to find how little ground immersionists have for the amount of emphasis they put upon immersion as the only mode of baptism.

Another thing I have noticed in the Christian life is this. Error seldom tries to defend itself. It works by insinuation. Its advocates take a few texts which seem to support it, and hammer away at them. Whereas truth is always on the defensive. That has been the history of the church all down the centuries. Truth has always, as it were, to take up the cudgels and defend itself. And no sooner has one error exhausted itself, than another insinuates itself upon the church. The old errors are continually raising their heads again. Advocates of error always deplore controversy. They just want to be left in peace to leaven the church with their errors.

The controversy on baptism divides itself into two parts, namely, the subjects of baptism, and the mode of baptism; or, Who should be baptised? And How should they be baptised?

The more important of these two questions concerns the subjects of baptism. It might not be worthwhile discussing the mode of baptism if infants should not be baptised. But if infants should be baptised, the mode receives an added importance from this.

It is our purpose to examine these two questions in the light of Scripture, and to see what the Bible actually teaches on the subject; not that we fear to accept outside evidence, for we are convinced that church history and all other evidence, are on our side. But these pages are for those who accept the Bible as their final authority; and who have not the time or the opportunity to examine the subject more thoroughly.

As the more important of the two questions in this controversy is “Who should be baptised?” – i.e. the subjects of baptism – we shall deal with it first.

## Chapter 2. The Subjects of Baptism. Should Infants be Baptised?

This is a question that has agitated the church for centuries, and never more than at the present time. And many are the arguments for and against. We shall take two of the most important arguments against those drawn from Scripture, to see if they will stand the test of the Scriptures.

The first argument is this: Scripture requires faith and repentance of the person who is to be baptised. The Scriptures quoted are, Mark 16:16 "*He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved*"; Acts 2:38 "*Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*"; and Acts 8:37, Philip's reply to the eunuch, "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.*"

These passages state clearly that faith and repentance are necessary to baptism. We admit that right away. We do not deny plain Scripture statements. But of whom is faith and repentance required? Not of infants surely, but adults. We have no quarrel with the baptists<sup>1</sup> here. We believe as much as they do, that when an adult is to be baptised, he is baptised only on a profession of faith.

But what have these texts to do with infant baptism? "Infants cannot repent; infants cannot exercise faith; therefore infants are not to be baptised."

Very good reasoning it seems at the first glance. But unfortunately our baptist friends are not willing to follow out their own reasoning to its logical conclusion. Let us apply this reasoning to some other subjects to see how it works. What is good reasoning for one question, should be good reasoning for another.

Faith and repentance are necessary to baptism. These do not apply to infants. Therefore infants are not to be baptised. That is the argument. Let us apply it to circumcision. That infants were circumcised is a fact beyond dispute. Circumcision of infants eight days old was commanded by God (Genesis 17:12). Is there anything said about circumcision that does not apply to infants? If we turn to Acts 15:4, we shall see that certain Jews maintained that the Gentiles "*must be circumcised and keep the law.*" The apostle testified that every man that is circumcised is a debtor to keep the whole law (Galatians 5:3). And in Romans 2:25, he says, "*Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.*" Can an infant become a debtor? Can an infant keep the law? Certainly not. Then, according to this argument, infants should not have been circumcised. According to the Scripture it was right for infants to be circumcised; but according to this argument it was wrong. Our baptist friends cannot blame us if we prefer the Scriptures, and decide that their argument is wrong.

Let us examine the argument still further. Faith and repentance are necessary to baptism. Now the baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. Only those who repented were to be baptised. That was the condition of John's baptism. When certain Pharisees came to him to be baptised, they thought that because they were Jews they had a right to be baptised by him. John refused to baptise them, and said, "*Bring forth fruits meet for repentance,*" or, in other words, "You must truly repent before you can be baptised." Now we read that Jesus came to John, and was baptised by him in the Jordan (Mark 1:9). Immersionists tell us that He is our example, and that we ought to follow Him through the waters of baptism. Perhaps they can tell us what He had to repent of. Jesus had nothing to repent of. He had no sins to confess. Repentance did not apply to Jesus. Therefore,

according to the argument we are examining, His baptism was wrong. But Jesus could do nothing wrong. Therefore the argument must be wrong.

Again, let us see how this argument works in relation to the temporal subsistence of infants. No one in his right mind will deny that infants ought to be fed. We read in Isaiah 1:19, *"If ye be willing and obedient ye will eat the good of the land."* And in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, we read that Paul commanded *"that if any would not work, neither should he eat."* Infants cannot be willing and obedient; infants cannot will to work; therefore infants have no right to eat. Willingness, obedience and work do not apply to infants; therefore infants are not to eat. Ridiculous, you say; and so it is. But this is the logical outcome of the argument we are examining.

Further, let us apply the argument to the subject of infant salvation. That infants can be saved no one will deny. Let us look again at Mark 16:16, *"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* Baptists say, "Infants cannot believe; therefore infants are not to be baptised. Belief must come before baptism." Very well. Let us carry this reasoning right through this verse. Belief must come before baptism. An infant cannot believe. An infant is not to be baptised. Therefore, because an infant cannot believe and be baptised, it cannot be saved. Belief first, baptism second, and salvation third. *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* An infant cannot believe, therefore an infant must be damned. I have never yet met a baptist who will accept his own argument on the whole of this verse.

We see that this argument leads to untrue conclusions. It was right that infants should be circumcised, but this argument proves that it was wrong. Jesus was rightly baptised, but this argument proves that He wasn't. It is right that infants should be fed, but this argument says "No." That infants may be saved is a truth, but this argument proves that they cannot. Thus the argument proves what is right to be wrong. So we can only conclude that it is the argument itself that is wrong. Infants are not excluded by the statement about baptism any more than by the statements above quoted about circumcision, eating and salvation. When the Lord said, *"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved,"* He did not intend infants to be excluded from baptism, any more than He intended them to be excluded from salvation.

The other objection to the baptism of infants is this, "There is neither command nor example for infant baptism in the New Testament." We admit the truth of this statement right away. But here again baptists will not follow out their argument to its conclusion. Let us ask them one question. Do you allow women to partake of the communion? Their answer will be, "Certainly, we do." Even Brethren allow women to break bread. We ask them again, "Where is there a command or example in the New Testament for admitting women to the Lord's table?" "Women were baptised, Acts 8:12, and women can appreciate the ordinance," they reply. "But," we insist, "that does not constitute a command. Your argument is that before anyone can have right to an ordinance, there must be an express command, or a clear example, in the New Testament." There is no such command or example for women partaking of the communion; therefore this argument disallows it. We are not trying to prove that women have no right to partake of the Lord's Supper. That women have an equal right with men to come to the Lord's table, everyone admits. But if we are to exclude infants from baptism because there is neither command nor example for it in the New Testament, then it follows that women must be excluded from communion on the same principle. For what applies to the one ordinance must necessarily apply to the other.

We see that these arguments of our baptist friends prove too much. An argument that proves too much proves nothing, and only destroys itself. Let us now consider the arguments in favour of infant baptism. That infants and children of believers should be baptised, we shall endeavour to show, firstly, from the church membership of such infants. By the church we mean the outward and visible organization of God's people, the Kingdom of God in all ages. No man can determine who are regenerated, born again, members of the invisible church. That God has kept in His own power. Our business is with the outward and visible church; and it is our duty to increase the membership by all right means. Adults are to be admitted to church membership only on a profession of faith in Christ; but the children of members have a right to the privileges of church membership.

That the church existed in Old Testament times, and has now passed from the Jews to the Gentiles, is clear from the Scriptures. Stephen, in his defence, spoke of the "*church in the wilderness*", Acts 7:38. Our Lord said to the priests and rulers of the Jews, "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matthew 21:43). And Paul, in the eleventh chapter of Romans, speaks of the Jews as the natural branches of the olive tree (the church) being cut off, and the Gentiles being grafted in; not made something new, but being grafted into something that already existed – the church.

The continuity of the church is a truth that none denies, except modern Premillenarians and Dispensationalists. Even the old Orthodox Baptists believed it as much as Presbyterians and others. It was the extremities to which they were driven in denying infant baptism that gave room for Premillenarians and Dispensationalists to come in denying the existence of the church before Pentecost. That is why these errors have made so much progress among baptist organisations.

### ***Were infants ever members of the church?***

We find in the Old Testament that children were always included in covenant blessings with their parents; as, for instance, in God's promise to Abraham, Genesis 17:7-14. There God promised to be a God unto Abraham and his seed; and infants were to be admitted to church membership when only eight days old by the ordinance of circumcision. Their circumcision gave them a right to all the external privileges of God's people. If they were not circumcised, they were cut off from all these privileges.

After the resurrection of Christ the covenant of grace was widened: and now "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female,*" etc. (Galatians 3:28). The middle wall of partition has been broken down (Ephesians 2:14). Circumcision has given place to baptism, as it is a simpler and more universal ordinance.

I know that immersionists deny that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. But a careful reading of Colossians 2:10-13, will show that the apostle Paul identifies the two ordinances with each other. When Peter on the day of Pentecost said, "*Repent and be baptized.... for the promise is unto you and to your children,*" etc., he would not be thinking of children in any other sense than that understood in the Old Testament. He would be thinking especially of the promise to Abraham, "*I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*" Neither would any Jew understand the words in any other sense than that their children would be in covenant blessings with them.

Infants were always members of the church, and there is no intimation that their membership has ceased. So, instead of paedobaptists being required to produce a command for the baptising of infants, it is the baptists who should produce a command for their practice of excluding infants from baptism. It is unreasonable to suppose that, after the covenant of grace has been widened so as to bring in all nations, infants, who were once included in the covenant, should now be excluded from it.

In 1 Corinthians 7:14 we read, *“The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.”* It is evident from this passage that God makes a distinction between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers, even when only one parent is a believer. Whom God pronounces to be clean, who can forbid water that they should not be baptised and that they should not receive the sign of the washing of regeneration? Nothing more, or nothing less, is meant by the baptism of infants than is meant by their circumcision in the Old Testament. Circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:11). *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness”* (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6). Abraham received the righteousness of faith first; then he received circumcision, the sign of it. His seed received the sign, although many of them never received the reality. So there is no reason for refraining from baptising children because many who have been baptised have never been saved.

God has given to believers in Christ a glorious promise, and a great privilege. He has promised them household salvation, and baptism is a sign of that promise (Acts 16:31-33). When Christian parents have simple faith in God and His promises; and bring their children to be baptised, regarding the baptism not as a mere ceremony of naming the child, but as a dedication of the child unto the Lord in the way that He has appointed (Matthew 28:19,20), and claiming His promise, then God will do wonders. He will keep His promise, and honour their faith.

<sup>1</sup>By Baptists we do not mean the Baptist denomination merely, but all Immersionists who are opposed to infant baptism, and so throughout.

### **Chapter 3. The Mode of Baptism**

It is said that there are three modes of baptism – immersion, sprinkling and pouring. The last two are included in a single term, “affusion.”

The baptists assert that baptism always means immersion, never affusion. Paedobaptists have never denied that immersion is a proper mode of baptism, while insisting that it is not the *only* Scriptural mode. Let us search the Scriptures to see if they say enough on the subject to determine the matter without going to outside authorities. If enough is said in the Scriptures to decide the matter, then we have no need to revert to outside authority.

We find in the New Testament at least twelve instances of water baptism. These twelve can be divided into three groups of four each.

One of these groups gives us no clue whatsoever as to the mode used. These are:

- (1.) The baptism of the Samaritans and of Simon, the sorcerer, Acts 8:5,12-16.
- (2.) The baptism of Lydia and her household, Acts 16:13-15.
- (3.) The baptism of Crispus and the Corinthians, Acts 18:4,8; 1 Corinthians 1: 13-16.
- (4.) The baptism of the disciples at Ephesus, Acts 19:1-6.

In none of these instances is anything said whereby we can determine the mode of baptism.

The second group of four seems at first sight to suggest that immersion was the mode employed. These are:

- (1.) John baptising the multitude in the Jordan, Matthew 3:5,6.
- (2.) John baptising Jesus in the Jordan, Luke 3:21,22; Mark 1:9,10.
- (3.) John baptising in Aenon because there was much water there, John 3:23.
- (4.) Philip baptising the eunuch, Acts 8:38,39.

We shall come back to these four instances again, and examine them more minutely. But in the meantime let us look at the other four. These are altogether against immersion as being the mode used:

- (1.) The first instance in this group is that of the three thousand who were baptised on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

None of these three thousand expected when they were coming up to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost that they were going to be baptised into a new sect; so they would have no baptismal robes with them. The New Testament church had not had time to organise itself and to have baptistries and robes for them. Neither is it possible for the twelve apostles to have preached the gospel and then gone down to the Jordan – a considerable distance – and baptised so many by immersion in one day.

I pointed this out to an immersionist who had more zeal than reason. He told me I was limiting the power of God: that with God all things are possible. But the Lord did not work miracles in New Testament times to baptise anyone: at least we have no record of such. And if all those who were baptised on the day of Pentecost were immersed, it would have taken a miracle to accomplish it. In Jerusalem to this day the water supply is of the scantiest. The only occasion recorded in the Bible on which God worked a miracle to baptise people was at the crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, we read, that “*They were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*” The Israelites were on that occasion baptised without being immersed; the Egyptians were immersed, but not baptised.

- (2.) The second instance in this group is that of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17-19).

Three days previously Saul had been struck down on the road to Damascus, and was led into the city, blind. He had fasted for the three days. And now Ananias comes and lays his hands upon him, and he receives his sight. Then we read, “*he arose, and was baptised. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.*” Note that while he was yet weak after his experience, and three days’ fasting, he was baptised before he took food. It is unlikely that he was taken out in his weak condition and immersed in a river. The circumstances indicate rather that he was baptised in the house, and by affusion.

- (3.) The third instance in this group is that of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48).

Here also the circumstances point to affusion as being the mode. The words of the apostle would suggest that the people were baptised where they were assembled in Cornelius’ house. While Peter was speaking to them they were baptised with the Holy Spirit. Peter exclaims: “*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptised?*” His

words undoubtedly mean that water should be brought. *“And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord.”* We shall have more to say on this passage later.

(4.) The fourth instance in this group is the baptism of the jailor and his household at Philippi (Acts 16:33).

Here again the facts are against immersion. The jailor and his household were baptised in the prison in the middle of the night. Paul would not have left the prison during the night, and gone back again, and then in the morning refused to leave the prison until the magistrates would come themselves and fetch him and Silas out. They went from the cell to the jailor's house, another part of the building, and it is not likely that they would find in a Roman prison the conveniences for immersion. Nor, weak and bleeding as they were, would they be in a fit condition for the same.

It is evident that in some cases of baptism in the New Testament immersion was, to say the least, extremely unlikely. It is also evident that in all cases affusion was possible.

If we examine a little more closely the four instances in which at first sight immersion seemed to be the mode, we shall find that in them also the evidence is against immersion. Take John the Baptist and the multitudes that were baptised by him. We read in Matthew 3:5,6, *“Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”* We know that the ministry of John lasted but a little more than six months. If a quarter of the population of these districts were immersed by him, it would have required to stand in water up to the waist continually, and even then, he could not have immersed them all in the time. One who was brought up a baptist writes thus, “From having frequently witnessed the process, I knew that baptism by this mode (immersion) could not be administered to an individual, with suitable deliberation and gravity, in less time than two minutes, and with the utmost despatch consistent with decorum, that more than thirty could not be immersed in an hour. Assuming this to be the average rate at which John performed the service, and supposing that he thus spent ten hours of every day, I was conducted to the conclusion that he might baptise 2,000 weekly, or about 100,000 in a year; from which it is evident that, had he spent no part of this time in travelling, preaching, or other employments, but continued without intermission in the water, he must have devoted 5 years of labour to this single work.”

Furthermore, neither here, nor in any other of the cases of baptism, do we read of the people removing their garments. We read of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:50) that, *“He, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus”*; of Jesus that, *“He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel and girded Himself”* (John 13:4); and in Acts 7:58, that *“The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, who's name was Saul.”* Is it not significant that in such an important thing as baptism, we have no mention of garments? We should expect that if immersion were the mode, we should read, in at least one instance, that they laid aside their garments and were baptised. We cannot believe that they were immersed with all their clothes on.

The baptism of Jesus would be in the same manner as John's other baptisms.

Let us pass, therefore, to the third instance of this group, John 3:23, *“John also was baptising in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there.”* We are told by immersionists that John baptised at Aenon because of the *“much water”* that was required for immersing.



As will be seen from the Revised Version margin, the words "*much water*" should rather be "*many waters*." The name Aenon appears to be derived from a Hebrew word meaning "*springs of water*." The inference is that the "*many waters*" means "*many springs of water*." There is nothing to indicate how much water, or what depth of water, there was in the streams issuing from any of them.

We read that multitudes followed John, and that he had disciples that must have stayed a considerable time with him. Water is required for more purposes than baptising. When soldiers, or others are about to pitch a camp, and especially in a country like Palestine, the first thing they investigate is the water supply. John in choosing a place for his ministry away from cities and towns, would take care to choose a place where there would be plenty of water for the ordinary uses of the people that would come to him. There is therefore no ground for the assumption that Aenon was chosen because of there being water sufficiently deep for immersion of candidates for baptism.

The other instance of a baptism that seems to favour immersion is that of the eunuch by Philip (Acts 8:38). "Here," the immersionists say, "it is evident that the mode was immersion, for we are told distinctly that both of them went down into the water." They say further that Luke gives us here a full account of the baptism of the eunuch to show us the way they baptised in apostolic times.

Now if this had been the purpose of Luke in giving us this account, we should have expected him to add a few words indicating this. When he tells us of Jesus going into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, he adds, "*as his custom was*" (Luke 4:16), and in Luke 22:39, speaking of Jesus going to the Mount of Olives, he adds, "*as he was wont*"; again in Acts 17:2, speaking of Paul going first to the Jews, he says, "*as his manner was*." It looks rather as though the circumstances attending the baptism of the eunuch were unusual. The meeting of Philip and the eunuch took place in a desert place; and when the eunuch was convinced of the truth of the gospel preached by Philip, he was anxious to be baptised into the Christian faith as soon as possible. Passing along in the chariot, and seeing some water, the eunuch exclaims, "*see, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?*" We are not told what depth the water was, nor that the eunuch went any farther into the water than Philip did. "*They went down both into the water.*"

If Philip had been a modern immersionist, he would have told the eunuch that there was a revival at Samaria; and that, at the close of the special meetings, an opportunity would be given to all those who wished to confess the Lord in public by following him through the waters of baptism. But instead he replies, "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*," and he baptised him there in a desert place. Where is the public testimony in being baptised in a desert place?

Luke shows us the eunuch's eagerness to be baptised – and, no doubt, his recognition that God is no respecter of persons – when he mentions that the eunuch, instead of waiting in his chariot to be attended by others, got out, and went down with Philip into the water to be baptised.

There is no definite statement in any of these instances as to the mode employed, whether immersion or affusion. We can only judge by inference, and, though the weight of evidence appears to be against immersion, we shall pursue our investigation of the subject further.

## ***The Meaning of the Word “Baptise”.***

The way to find out the meaning, or meanings, of any word about which there is any controversy, is to examine the use of it every time it is mentioned. So, to find out the meaning of the word “*baptise*” as it is used in the Bible, we ought to examine its use every time it occurs there.

If to baptise with water means to immerse in water, then to baptise with spirit means to immerse in the Spirit; and to baptise with fire means to immerse in fire, etc. Next to water baptism the word is most used of baptism with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist prophesied that “*He (Christ) shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire*” (Luke 3:16). And in Acts 1:5 we read, “*For John truly baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*” This prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Just as the Spirit came in the form of a dove and sat upon Jesus at His baptism, He came in tongues as of fire and sat upon each member of the assembled church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3). Further down, verses 16-18, we have Peter’s explanation of the occurrence. “*This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh....; and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in these days of my spirit.*” Twice in these three verses Peter says that what occurred was a pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the people. He says the same in verse 33, where the Authorised Version reads, “*He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.*” The baptism in this case was by affusion.

Let us turn again to the account of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48). Verse 44 reads, “*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word.*” In verse 45 we read that the Jews who were with Peter were astonished “*because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” Peter, in his explanation to the Jews at Jerusalem in the next chapter, calls it a baptism (Acts 11:15-17).

Here the baptism of the Spirit was by falling upon, pouring out; and it would be appropriate that their water baptism should be of the same manner. The use of the word baptise, when the baptism of the Spirit is spoken of, has reference to affusion, and never to immersion.

Again, Mark 7:4 reads, “*And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (Greek, baptism) of cups, and pots, brazen vessels and tables (or beds):*” and Luke 11:38, “*And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that He had not washed (Greek, baptised) before dinner.*” Is it likely that the Jews immersed tables or beds, and immersed themselves before every meal?

“But,” someone will say, “What about Romans 6:4, “*Buried with him by baptism*”; and Colossians 2:12, “*Buried with him in baptism*”?”

As these two passages are the stronghold of immersionists, I have left the consideration of them to the last. Immersionists tell us that Paul is here speaking of the mode of baptism; that by being buried in the waters of baptism we are identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. “And what,” they ask, “is a more appropriate figure of burial and resurrection than immersion?”

Similarly, in denying infant baptism, they say that baptism signifies our burial with Christ, and is only for those who have died with Him. "Have you died with Christ?" they say, "Then why are you not buried with Him in the waters of baptism? Dead people ought to be buried; and baptism by immersion is a figure of our going down into the grave with Him, and our coming up out of the water a figure of our resurrection with Him."

Now, is that what Romans 6:3-11 and Colossians 2:12,13 teach?

We shall not discuss whether water baptism is meant here or not. Water baptism symbolises the truths taught in these passages. But we shall see if the apostle is speaking of the mode of baptism, or of the burial of Christ in the tomb.

It is a well known fact that, in the east, in the times of our Lord and His apostles, burial was not always the same as ours. A grave was not always a hole in the ground into which the corpse was lowered. Sometimes it was a hole, or cave, hewn in the rock, into which the corpse would have to be lifted, instead of being lowered. The Lord Jesus was buried in a tomb hewn out of the solid rock, above ground (Matthew 27:60). Therefore going down into the waters would not be a proper figure of his burial.

Why do immersionists put so much emphasis on the burial of Christ? The apostle does not do so. He emphasises His death and resurrection, but not His burial.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3,4, where he is recording historical facts, he mentions His death, and burial, and resurrection. But in Galatians 2:19,20; Ephesians 2:4-6; and Colossians 3:1-3, our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection are referred to, without His burial being mentioned. And in Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 2:12,13, the passage now under consideration, the thought does not dwell on the burial of Christ, but on His death and resurrection. In Romans 6:3, he says, "*So many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death,*" not into His burial: and in verse 4, "*We are buried with Him by baptism,*" not into His grave, but "*into His death,*" and in verse 5, "*We have been planted together in the likeness of,*" not His burial, but "*His death*": and in verse 6, "*Our old man is crucified with Him,*" not drowned with Him.

The whole emphasis is on our death with Him on His cross, not of our burial with Him in His tomb. He was baptised into death on the cross, and we are baptised with Him into His death on the cross. As the apostle says, "*We are crucified with Him.*"

The Lord Himself spoke of His death as a baptism. He said, "*I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*" (Luke 12:50). And, speaking to James and John, He said, "*Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?*" (Mark 10:38).

In these passages He was speaking of His sufferings which culminated in His death on Calvary.

Out of all the Scriptures bearing upon the death of Christ, immersionists take an obscure passage, Psalm 42:7, "*All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me,*" and say, "There you are, Christ's sufferings were an immersion," ignoring plain statements such as Isaiah 53, "*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,*" and all the typical teaching of the transference of our sins to Him.

Christ's baptism into death was by our sins being *laid upon* Him. Our baptism into Christ by the Holy Spirit is by the Holy Spirit being *poured out upon* us. These truths, which baptism signifies, are best symbolised by affusion.

There are two interesting prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ. One was spoken by the evangelical prophet Isaiah, and is recorded in the last verse of the fifty-second chapter of his book, "*So shall he sprinkle many nations.*" The other was uttered by Ezekiel, who was both a priest and a prophet, and is recorded in the thirty-sixth chapter of his prophecy, in the twenty-fifth verse, "*Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean,*" etc.

The Jews believed that when Christ would come He would baptise. When priests and Levites came to John the Baptist from the Jews to enquire who he was, he denied that he was Christ, or Elias, or that prophet. Then they said unto Him, "*Why baptisest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*" (John 1:19-25). The belief that Christ would baptise was based upon these two prophecies.

Isaiah's prophecy had reference to the kingdom. When Jesus began His ministry, He began baptising (John 3:22); doing it, however, through His disciples (John 4:2). And before He ascended, He commanded His disciples to go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19).

Ezekiel was both priest and prophet; and, as he ministered daily in the temple, his mind would be full of the ceremonial law, the purifications and cleansings commanded in the law of Moses. So his prophecy had reference to cleansing from sin. In the Messiah he saw the fulfilment of all the cleansings under the ceremonial law. The cleansings by blood and water that were enjoined by the law were by sprinkling: Leviticus 14:7,51; Numbers 8:7; 19:13; Hebrews. 9:19-22. And the blood of Christ is spoken of as the blood of sprinkling: Hebrews 12: 24; 1 Peter 1:2.

These prophecies began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). There we see devout Jews out of every nation under heaven being baptised. "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord shall call.... Then they that gladly received his word were baptised*" (Acts 2:38-41). There we have the earnest of the promise given to Israel through Ezekiel, and the foreshadowing of the sprinkling of many nations, spoken of by Isaiah.

"*So shall he sprinkle many nations*" (Isaiah 52:15).

"*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*" (Ezekiel 36:25).

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## **Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter XXVIII. Of Baptism.**

**I.** Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible church, but also to be unto

him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, or his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His church until the end of the world.

**II.** The outward element to be used in the sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

**III.** Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.

**IV.** Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptised.

**V.** Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated.

**VI.** The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

**VII.** The sacrament of baptism is but once to be administered to any person.

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