

Is Baptism by Sprinkling, Pouring or Immersion?

Bible Answers About Salvation

Baptism is commanded by Jesus Christ. In the Great Commission Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 NAS) Mark gives this same commission as, "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16 NAS)

The word "baptism" is an anglicized word that was coined in 1611 in the translation of the King James' Version. Sprinkling was introduced as a substitute for and on a par with baptism at the Council of Ravenna in 1311 and subsequently has been adopted by protestant denominationalism. In the 1600's when the Anglican translators were confronted with translating the Greek baptizo (and other forms) into English, they found themselves in a dilemma. To translate baptizo as "to immerse" would be to deny authority for their practice of sprinkling. On the other hand to render baptizo as "to sprinkle" would be a travesty and a reproach against their scholarship. And so, as a compromise, the translators simply transliterated the Greek word into English and introduced into the English language a new word "baptism." Those who believed in sprinkling capitalized upon the resulting confusion (as people inquired as to the meaning of this new word) by telling the uninformed that "baptism" embraces several actions or modes. But this is not so, according to the scholarship of the world.

Had the Greek word baptizo been translated into English, instead of being transliterated, we would have "dip, immerse, submerge, plunge" rather than a new word "baptism." Baptism never meant to sprinkle or pour. The Greek word for "sprinkle" is rantizo, and the word for "pour" is cheo. All three words, in both Greek and English, suggest different actions. To say that a person can be baptized by sprinkling or pouring is a contradiction of terms. It is like saying that one can run by walking or riding.

The Bible is crystal clear in helping us to understand the action of "baptism." Writing to the church in Rome Paul said, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4 NAS) Paul clearly said that "we have been buried with Him through baptism." In writing to the church in Colossae Paul said the same thing, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12 NAS) We are buried in baptism and then raised up

with Christ. One cannot find a single person who was sprinkled or poured for baptism in becoming a Christian in the New Testament.

The first record of sprinkling was that of Novation in 251 A.D. In 1311, the Council of Ravenna allowed sprinkling in the Roman Catholic Church. Greek speaking countries still practice only immersion. As you study the conversion of the man from Ethiopia please notice that the passage mentions "much water." (Acts 8:26-39) Baptism requires much water, a going down into the water, being buried in the water and being raised from it, and a coming up out of the water as one can see in the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Surely one is able to see the action of baptism in this passage.

Even religious leaders have admitted that baptism is a burial in water:

- Martin Luther (founder of the Lutheran Church): "The term 'baptism' is a Greek word; it may be rendered into Latin by *mersio* — when we immerse anything in water, that it may be entirely covered with water."
- John Calvin (founder of the Presbyterian Church): "The word 'baptize' signifies to immerse and the rite of immersion was practiced by the ancient church."
- John Wesley (founder of the Methodist Church): "Buried with Him — alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion."
- Catholic Dictionary: "In Apostolic times the body of the baptized person was immersed, for St. Paul looks on the immersion as typifying the burial with Christ, and speaks of baptism as a bath."

The quotations above show (1) they are unanimous in their definition of baptism as immersion; (2) they all come from members of churches that have substituted sprinkling and/ or pouring for immersion. Their scholarship and honor require them to refute their own practice, however. To adopt any other view requires a denial of New Testament authority.

In baptism one imitates the death of Christ, and as He died, one becomes dead to sin by repentance, puts off the old man by being buried in baptism, and is raised to walk in newness of life even as Jesus was raised by the glory of the Father. (Romans 6:3-7) In baptism one is baptized (buried) into His death (wherein He shed His blood for the remission of sins for many. (Matthew 26:28; John 19:33, 34; Acts 2:38) The purpose of baptism, then, is to be "saved," to "wash away sins," to "put on Christ," to enter "into Christ," and to have "the answer of a good conscience toward God." (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:4; 1 Peter 3:21).

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