

Baptism is Not Baptism, If it Isn't Immersion

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For hundreds of years people have debated the signification, qualification, and methods of administration of baptism. The arguments have existed not because it is a difficult subject in Scripture but because of presuppositions defended at all costs, and then the resultant forcing of scripture.

How important is it to understand and then obey the proper mode of baptism? Firstly, if we seek to be faithful and true to God's Word, obeying "*every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4), we would certainly desire and ensure the method of baptism is in line with what Scripture teaches. True believers obey God's Word, demonstrating they know and love Christ, while false believers do not (read 1 Jn. 2:3-5; Jn. 14:15-24; Lk. 16:13). When we ignore God's Word and replace it with our own opinions, do we actually know and love Him? Secondly, since baptism is a picture of salvation and salvation is only through one way (Jn. 14:6; Ac. 4:12; Rom. 1:16-17), then the baptism should align with what that one way of salvation is. Thirdly, the Bible's teaching on the method of baptism is in fact as clear as its teaching on the purpose of baptism (which, as explained, is a picture of salvation and identity with Christ, not salvation itself).

In [this](#) and [this](#) article we clearly argue the case that baptism is not a salvic requirement, but an expression of what occurred at salvation. Having settled that matter soundly, we will examine the mode or method of the administration of baptism.

I don't think anything is as important as the truth. There is something foundational there. I'm not insecure about what I believe, so I am comfortable clashing with people on beliefs. I'm also not afraid of changing if I could be shown the truth.

There is only one mode of baptism taught and practiced in the Bible and that is immersion/dipping. "*Baptizo*" does not mean several things, and even if it did, it only means one thing in the Bible. There is no basis for ambiguity here. I know that majority of Mennonites and other groups take a position that allows for more than one mode, but we don't have a basis in the Bible for more than one mode. We know this for the following Scriptural reasons.

Baptism = Immersion because of the Underlying Greek Word

This is where we must begin, for it's the word "baptism" itself that bears witness to the truth, that it can only be immersion. The word "baptism" is a transliteration. It wasn't really an English word, but became one as they transliterated "*baptizo*" and "*baptizmos*" into baptism.

The verb ***baptizo*** (or derivatives such as *baptidzo* or *baptizmos*) is defined by Webster's dictionary of 1828, "*to dip; to submerge; to immerse.*" Thayer defines the word as "*properly, to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge (of vessels sunk, Polybius 1, 51, 6; 8, 8, 4; of animals, Diodorus 1, 36).*" Liddell-Scott, "*to dip in or under water.*" Friberg, "*strictly dip, immerse in water.*"

Even pedobaptists like Martin Luther and John Calvin and John Wesley have consented to this right definition, that NT baptism was immersion. Though all three these reformed men and founders of Protestant denominations were heretics and false teachers (see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#)), they did get this right. Luther stated, in his sermon on baptism in 1518, that "*baptism is . . . when we dip anything wholly in water, that it is completely covered over. . . . it should be thus, and would be right . . . [for] the child or any one who is to be baptized, [to] be completely sunk down into the water, and dipt again and drawn out*" (Opera Lutheri, I. 319, Folio ed., quoted on p. 108, Christian, J. T., A History of the

Baptists, vol. 1, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1922.). Calvin wrote that *“it is evident that the term baptise means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive Church”* (Calvin, Institutes, 4:15:19, trans. Henry Beveridge). Commenting on Ac 8:38, *“they went down into the water,”* Calvin wrote, *“Here we see the rite used among the men of old time in baptism; for they put all the body into the water.”* John Wesley, commenting on Rom 6:4, states that the *“ancient manner of baptizing [was] by immersion”* (John Wesley’s Notes on the Old and New Testaments, 1767).

As the definition indicates, the verb *baptize* **always** means to dip, to submerge, to immerse, whatever the subject, yea it requires immersion, which is validated by the 79 instances of the verb in the NT: Matt 3:6, 11, 13-14, 16; 20:22-23; 28:19; Mk 1:4-5, 8-9; 6:14; 7:4; 10:38-39; 16:16; Lk 3:7, 12, 16, 21; 7:29-30; 11:38; 12:50; Jn 1:25-26, 28, 31, 33; 3:22-23, 26; 4:1-2; 10:40; Ac 1:5; 2:38, 41; 8:12-13, 16, 36, 38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 11:16; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:3-5; 22:16; Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13-17; 10:2; 12:13; 15:29; Gal 3:27, as well as the lexica.

This is the word used in the NT when the rich man entreats Abraham that Lazarus may be sent to *“dip the tip of his finger in water.”* It is also the word used twice in Jn. 12:36 by Christ, *“He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop,”* and in Revelation, Christ is represented, as *“clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.”* (Rev. 19:13). The inspired penmen have used no other word, beside *baptizo* and its derivatives, to convey the idea of immersion; nor have they ever used this word in any other sense.

For those who understand German, the germanic word for baptism is sufficient evidence: *“deepen”* or *“enducken”* or *“dunken”* or *“nenducken”* or *“taufen,”* all of which literally mean *“dipping into the water”* and *“dipping in the water.”* (Plautdietsch Lexicon — Low German Dictionary). They’re ain’t no *“dunken”* happening with sprinkling or pouring, thus those professing Christian groups speaking German or Low German and continue to adhere to pouring or sprinkling “baptism,” such as many Mennonites and Amish, are without excuse. They are plainly rejecting the truth of Scripture for something man-contrived, and then force and bend Scripture to fit their new definition. But they do the same to the gospel and many other doctrines, so this doesn’t come as any surprise.

The meaning and definition does not change for *baptizo* outside of human water baptism, including the immersion or baptizing of pots and pans, tables, and dining couches. Rejectors of *baptism = immersion* attempt to argue that Mk 7:4, the *“washing [baptidzo] . . . of tables.”* proves baptism isn’t always immersion. Mk 7:5-5 reads:

"And when they come from the market, except they wash [baptidzo], 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. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?"

'The Jews certainly did not immerse *tables*' some sarcastically claim. They argue, 'clearly they must have simply sprinkled or poured water on the tables.' Though this argument may sound legit at face value, it is in fact simply not the case. The "tables," or "dining couches" (*kline*, see BDAG—the word is used elsewhere in the NT for "beds"), were indeed immersed by the Jews. Important to understand that the first century custom was to recline to eat, not sit at a table of the modern sort. In the words of the scholarly but very theologically liberal—and so hardly biased towards Bible-believing Baptists — *Hermeneia* commentary:

"Verse 4b also mentions the custom of immersing dining couches.⁷⁵ In the biblical period, most beds consisted of a mat, a quilt to lie upon, and a covering. The wealthy had ornamental bed frames that were raised above the floor. The beds of the poor probably included only a wicker mat and the owner's day clothes.⁷⁶ The situation was probably similar in the first century ce. Leviticus mentions that beds may become unclean and implies that they are to be dismantled and immersed, then being unclean until evening (Lev 15:4, 21, 23, 26). *M. Kelim* 19.1 presupposes the practice of immersing beds" (Collins, A. Y., & Attridge, H. W. (2007). *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*. Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (349).

Evidently *baptidzo* retains its normal meaning in Mk 7:4-5, and that "tables" or dining couches of the passage were indeed immersed by the Jews. Mark 7 is the best attempt by the opponents of the Baptist doctrine of believer's immersion to get out of the necessity of the plain meaning of *baptidzo* as dipping or immersion. Since this attempt fails, the advocate of sprinkling or pouring is left without even a decent appearance of Biblical support for his position, but is immersed in trouble and drowning in difficulties.

The following citation from the Jewish Mishna provides representative proof from an original source that the Jews immersed their tables/dining couches/beds:

Miqwaot 7:7

A. [If] one **immersed** the bed [Heb. mittah] therein

B. even though its legs sink down into thick mud—

- C. it is clean,
- D. because the water touched them before [the mud did].
- E. An immersion pool, the water of which is [too shallow [to cover the body]—
- F. one presses down,
- G. even with bundles of wood,
- H. even with bundles of reeds,
- I. so that the [level of the] water may rise—
- J. and he goes down and immerses.
- K. An [unclean] needle which is located on the steps of the cavern—
- L. [if] one stirred the water to and fro—
- M. after a wave has broken over it,
- N. it is clean.

Baptism by immersion is like saying immersion by immersion.

The Picture and Purpose of Baptism is Immersion.

It is called a “*figure*” [symbol] in 1 Pet. 3:21. It is a picture and public testimony of spiritual realities, a public identification with Christ. One who is baptized is “*planted together in the likeness of [Christ’s] death*” and “*shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection*” (Rom. 6:5), so baptism pictures the gospel of Christ — the death, burial, and resurrection of the Saviour, and its application to the repentant sinner, the death of the believer’s old life (which is crucified at salvation — Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 5:24, and is dead — Rom. 6:5-11) and his resurrection to new life in the Lord Jesus (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:12-13).

Baptism is a public testimony of conversion and picture of the believers new birth (Jn. 3:3-8) that occurred through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ac. 20:21; 8:34-38; 16:30-34; 2:37-38). Baptism identifies the believer with his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and depicts salvation—dying to self, dead to sin—buried with Christ, and raised to

newness of life with Him (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:12). Paul included in his definition for baptism the likeness of a burial (Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12) and of a planting (Rom. 6:5), and Peter likened it to the flood (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

Baptism is called "*buried*" in Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12. We have a picture of death in burial. You don't bury living people. A person must die first. That is the importance of the burial part of the death, burial, and resurrection. The death is implied in the burial. It is plain evidence of death. No swooning. We are buried with Him in baptism and raised out of the water in the likeness of His resurrection. Paul never states that baptism is the act that makes one dead to sin; on the contrary, he states baptism is a picture or "likeness" (Rom 6:5) of Christ's atoning work, which really justifies.

There is ONLY one mode of the church ordinance of baptism that accurately and truly portrays the picture or "figure" (1 Pet. 3:21) of the gospel, and that is immersion. And that is what the word means after all, so what else could we expect. Both pouring and sprinkling modes corrupt the proper symbolism of the ordinance.

Rom 6:3-6 reads as follows:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? [4] 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. [5] For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: [6] Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

In v. 1-2 of this 6th chapter of Romans, Paul deals with the slander that the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the eternal security of the believer, provides a license to sin; the enemies of the gospel had affirmed as much (Rom 3:8). He counters that one who dies to sin at the time he is justified by faith (as expounded in Rom 1-5, cf. Gal 2:19-21) and so is now "*dead to sin*" cannot "*live any longer therein*" (v. 2). A dead man is not influenced or affected by the affairs of this life; its sounds, tastes, pleasures, ambitions, and all else mean nothing to him (cf. Col 2:20-22). God gives a man a new heart and nature at the moment of regeneration (2 Cor 5:17, Heb 8:10-12), so that, his "old man" now "crucified" with Christ, he henceforth will "not serve sin" (Rom 6:6). Paul argues that, since God breaks the dominion of sin over men when they believe, justification by faith leads to a holy life, not lawlessness. In the midst of this, Paul reminds his readers that their baptism was a symbol or "likeness" (v. 5) of their death to the old life of sin and

resurrection to a new holy life in Christ at the moment when they trusted in Him. They were “baptized into [Greek *eis*, “with reference to”] Jesus Christ,” and so were “baptized into [Greek *eis*, “with reference to”][v] his death” (v. 3). They were “*buried with him by baptism into [Greek *eis*, “with reference to”] 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.*” The only proper picture of what Paul is describing here in Rom 6 can be and is immersion.

Both pouring and sprinkling corrupt the picture of baptism.

The Examples of Baptism in Scripture is Immersion

Immersion/dipping is the examples of all baptisms in the NT. They required “*much water*” (Jn. 3:23) and required the participant to go “*into the water*” (Ac. 8:38) and “*come up out of the water*” (Ac. 8:38-39; Matt. 3:16).

John baptized near Aenon because there was much water there. Jesus and the Eunuch (Ac 8) went down into the water, a portrayal of the death, burial, and resurrection, and no example of someone actually being sprinkled as a mode of baptism.

In Ac 8:38-39 the preacher (Philip) (and the candidate (the Eunuch) “*went down both into the water*” and “*came up out of the water.*” The only reason for this would be to practice immersion. Otherwise, the preacher would merely have dipped up some water and applied it without getting wet. Since the Eunuch was riding through deserts in his return to Ethiopia, he surely would have contained large volumes of water on his chariot to avoid death by thirst, certainly more than enough to eliminate the need for a body of water to practice either pouring or sprinkling. But that didn't occur, because that is not what baptism is. Someone that would have heard the word in that day, knew immediately that it meant to be immersed in a body of water. There was no confusion, and no personal opinions subjugating the authority of Scripture. Including the Ethiopian Eunuch

Neither pouring or sprinkling requires “*much water*” (Jn. 3:23a), nor requires going “*into the water*” or “*out of the water.*”

There were the examples of the early Christians.

The phrases “*into the water*” and “*out of the water*” in Matt. 3:13-18 and Ac. 8:36-38 do not technically denote the actual act of immersing the individual being baptized under water, but the fact that one who wished to receive baptism had to actually enter into a body of water to be immersed in it. Had sprinkling or pouring qualified as baptism in Ac. 8:36-38, there would have been no need for Philip and the eunuch to have left the chariot they were riding in and descended into a body of water. A cup of water from a jug in the chariot would have sufficed, and since they were riding through the desert, there is certainly no doubt they had a cup of water! Only if the eunuch was immersed is the narrative explicable and reasonable.

Similarly, the Lord Jesus would not have needed to descend into the waters of the Jordan river with John the Baptist for baptism (Matt. 3:13-16) unless the Saviour of the world was immersed. Indeed, immersion/dipping is the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized, made very, very clear in Mk. 1:9-11; Matt. 3:13-17, and “*It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.*” (Matt. 10:25a). Philip (Ac. 8:35-36), and John the Baptist only baptized by immersion (Jn. 3:23).

Historically speaking, immersion/dipping was the only mode of baptism in the churches for many centuries. Many ancient baptistries testify to this. The most ancient baptistry in Rome, for example, is a large pool that was obviously used for immersions. I have stood in this baptistry and it comes up to my waist. The same is true for an ancient baptistry at a church in Ephesus. Immersion is historically the first and recognized manner or mode of baptism. This fact is reported virtually by every historian and/or historical writing which bears upon the topic. Edward Hiscox in his book “*Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*,” reports a brief history on the deviant mode of pouring. He notes that the first incident of “aspersion” (or pouring) is that of Novatian in A.D. 250 upon his sick bed, hence it is called “clinic baptism.” Sprinkling however is rather sketchy but one historian (Vedder) places it on A.D. 259 and adapted as a mode by the Roman Catholic Council of Revenna in 1311. Infant baptism, being motivated by the false doctrine of baptismal regeneration was recognized as early as A.D. 350. One can observe that convenience would be a motive of changing from immersion to any other mode. This change, however convenient it may be, is unjustifiable.

Baptism is NOT Pouring or Sprinkling

Immersion is baptism. That is what the word means. It doesn't mean something else, like sprinkling or pouring. Pouring or sprinkling is not baptism. These words have no meaning in relation to baptism.

So "*baptizo*" is the Greek word for immerse or dip whereas "*rantizo*" is the Greek word for sprinkle and "*cheo*" is the Greek word for pour. The last two words are never used in regards to the church ordinance. "*Rantizo*" is defined by Louw-Nida as, "*to cleanse and purify by means of sprinkling*," and by BDAG, "*To sprinkle liquid on something*." If sprinkling were the mode, the transliteration *rantize* would have been used in fitting with the verb for "sprinkle," *rantizo*.

Some attempt to make the argument that pouring out of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Ac 2:17 and 10:45 and 11:16 validates or connects to baptism but this worse than a stretch. I can see this as maybe the best that someone could do, that is, to make that kind of ambiguous connection to define *baptizo* as "pour," but the Greek words for "pour" and "baptize" are two entirely different Greek words, and God's Word (in the NT) was inspired in the Greek and preserved for us for all generations in that of the Greek Textus Receptus, and all translations from this text by formal equivalence are considered to be God's Word (in the English language that is only one: the KJV). I make mention of this because of the insidious attack on the Greek Text by certain camps. Furthermore, concerning Acts 2:17 and 10:45 and 11:16, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, salvation is not by works. There is no connection between this salvation event and that of baptism. The Holy Spirit is given to repentant sinners at the moment of their conversion, not when they are baptized. Additionally, the events found in Acts 2 and 10 were a fulfillment of the prophecy in the gospels and Acts 1, that is referenced again in Acts 11, but the baptism that took place occurred because of the pouring. There would be not baptism without pouring, but the pouring itself was not baptism. They are two parts to the same event.

There is a Greek word that also hurts the arguments in Acts 11:16 and that is the preposition "en." The baptism was "in" the Holy Ghost. The preposition associated with the verb in Acts 2:17 and 10:45 is "ek" and the other is "apo." Those are not talking about identically the same thing. They are the same event, but not the same action. They are as different as, well, pouring and immersing.

The baptism of water that saved Noah and his family in 1 Pet 3:21, occurred to the world. The world was destroyed by the water. Noah and his family were saved from the world by the world being immersed in the water. The water of baptism for a believer also saves him

from the world, like that baptism saved Noah and his family. This helps our understanding. Those people in the world were hardly sprinkled. Noah and his family would not have been saved through sprinkling or just pouring. It required immersion.

Conclusion

Baptism is obviously an extremely important doctrine, but also one that has been foundational for practically all cults and false religions. For thousands of years the subject largely differentiated between true and false churches, and has led cults like Roman Catholicism to pursue after, persecute and murder those who re-baptized new believers (such as the Baptists/Anabaptists, the Mennonites). It wasn't really "re-baptism" because they had never been baptized genuinely to begin with. There is only one true mode of baptism and only one condition in the reception of baptism. If you received baptism before salvation, it amounts to nothing and has no value, because baptism proceeds from conversion. If you received the wrong mode of baptism, even as a truly regenerated believer, it also amounts to nothing, for baptism has a very specific picture it portrays, and if the mode didn't portray the ordinance, it wasn't baptism regardless of the label it is given.

God commands all who have been born again (Jn. 3:3-8), justified by faith (Rom. 5:1), to submit to the ordinance of baptism as "*the answer of a good conscience toward God*" (1 Pet. 3:21). In Scripture, only believers are baptized (Ac. 2:41; 8:13, 35-38; 18:8, etc) because faith unto salvation is a prerequisite to Biblical baptism (Mk. 16:16; Ac. 2:38, 41). And in Scripture all believers were baptized immediately (the longest time span we know of is three days, that of the apostle Paul — Ac. 9) (see Matt. 28:19-20). Since infants cannot understand, much less believe the gospel (Rom. 10:14), or testify to their conversion (Matt. 3:6-8), they cannot be Biblically baptized. Every true born again believer will want to be baptized, for he is not ashamed of the Lord Jesus anymore (see Rom. 10:9-11; 9:33; 1:16; Isa. 54:4) and he has been dramatically regenerated (meaning: given new life, born again, revived from the dead, made alive forever more) (Jn. 3:3-8; Tit. 3:3-7). Baptism also adds the new born again believer to the membership of the local church which authorizes the ordinance (Ac. 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27; 1:2).

Since the ordinance of Jesus Christ is unchangeable and the only one that is acceptable to the Father; and since he has commanded that we shall first preach the gospel and then immerse those who believe; it follows that all those who baptize and are baptized, without the teaching of the gospel and without the new birth, and without the proper mode, baptize and are baptized on their own opinion, without the doctrine and the ordinance of Jesus Christ, and therefore it is idolatry, useless and vain.

The Bible surely has spoken and is clear; to be scripturally baptized one has to be immersed, dipped into water. Baptism means immersion. It is immersion. It is the actual English word for it, or dipping — “baptism” is a transliteration (Greek *baptizo*). God commands baptism and obedience to His commands (obeying God’s commandments is a critical evidence of salvation: Jn. 14:21-25; 1 Jn. 2:3-5) and Biblical baptism can only be by immersion. There is simply no Biblical support for the practice of either “pouring” or “sprinkling” water on someones head and all that have undergone such a mode and are professing true born again believers, need to be immersed immediately. Such practices are foreign to God’s Word and those people have never been baptized at all. These modes are false and generate a bad “conscience toward God” (I Pet. 3:21). They contradict the very definition and word for baptism, which is immersion. It’s an oxymoron, like saying “pouring immersion” or “sprinkling immersion.” Such is the error and ridicule when God’s Word is corrupted and not actually believed and practiced. Everywhere in the Bible, the word “baptism” (or derivatives) should be read as immersion or dipping (or derivatives). Among those professing to be saved, how many have been scripturally baptized in Evangelical and/or Mennonite churches today? Likely very few? Next to none are “re-baptized” according to the truth of Scripture out of fear of man when they ought to be fearing God. *“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”* (Pr. 29:25). Nevertheless, if you were now truly baptized by immersion, you are not being “re-baptized” for you have never been baptized to begin with! It is imperative for those professing themselves to be born again to obey this very important and obvious command, the most important command post-salvation in fact — the very ordinance that specifically identifies the professed believer with their Lord and Saviour and portrays what they profess to have happened with their new birth. True baptism is an evidence that a person has truly been converted and born again. Those who claim to have been saved by Jesus will be convicted through Gods Word to be properly baptized. Jesus said that those who love Him will obey Him (Jn. 14:23) and those who obey not God’s Word are liars; they don’t know Him and don’t have the truth dwelling in them (Jn. 14:23-24; 2:3-5).

A true Biblical church that fears God and is true and faithful to God’s Word, a true church *“which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim. 3:15), one that *“worship[s] the Father in spirit and in truth”* (Jn. 4:23-24), will not only immerse all new believers in water, but also “re-baptize” those who have never been immersed but were poured or sprinkled post-conversion. They will also plainly expose these other false modes of “baptism,” and not leave the congregation in confusion over this subject. They won’t just add this mode to the other modes, portraying further confusion, disobedience, and rebellion against God’s Word. A true born again believer will be convicted over this serious issue and will not act partially or with double-mindedness, for *“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”* (Jam. 1:8).

