

Does it Really Make a Difference How We Baptize?

INTRODUCTION

- A. A young minister, fresh out of college, was conducting his first baptismal service.
 - 1. In his nervousness, he got his Scriptures confused concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - 2. He said "I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." As he lowered the convert into the water, he added, "And now drink ye all of it."
- B. There are many groups who could instruct individuals to drink all the water in which they were being baptized and that wouldn't be a problem at all, for they don't immerse.
 - 1. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "The essential rite of the sacrament follows: Baptism properly speaking. It signifies and actually brings about death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ. Baptism is performed in the most expressive way by triple immersion in the baptismal water. However, from ancient times it has also been able to be conferred by pouring the water three times over the candidate's head (p. 317, paragraph 1239).
 - 2. From the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches: "In administering the sacrament the pouring or sprinkling of water on the person by the minister fittingly symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit; however the validity of the sacrament is not dependent upon its mode administration" (5.21).
 - 3. There are a multitude of groups which sprinkle or pour for baptism.
 - a. Notice what the Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Churches says: "The validity of the sacrament is not dependent upon its mode of administration."
 - b. While baptism is not a sacrament, does the validity of baptism depend upon its mode of administration?
 - 1) We in the churches of Christ baptize by immersion, but do we need to baptize by immersion or would we do just as well to baptize in some other way?
 - 2) Tonight, we want to explore that question.

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY AND BAPTISM

- A. First, I want us to explore the writings of early Christians concerning baptism.
 - 1. The writings of these early Christians are historical, but they are not authoritative for what we do religiously. Only the Bible can fill that role.
 - 2. However, looking at how the early Christians - those who were closest in time to the apostles - understood Scripture can often shed light on the meaning of Scripture. These Christians did not have two millennia of error and tradition piled on top of Scripture; therefore, they often (not always) get close to the original meaning of Scripture.
- B. How did those early Christians understand the mode of baptism?
 - 1. Tertullian who wrote about AD 200, said "Baptism itself is a bodily act, because we are immersed in water but it has a spiritual effect, because we are set free from sins" (On Baptism 7 - notice also what "spiritual effect" Tertullian gave to baptism).
 - 2. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived about AD 350: "For as he who plunges into the waters and is baptized is surrounded on all sides by the waters so were they also baptized completely by the Spirit. The waters however flows around the outside, but the Spirit baptizes also the soul within completely" (Catechetical Lectures 17.14).
 - 3. Basil of Caesarea, who lived about AD 350: "How then do we become in the likeness of his death? We were buried with him through baptism.... How then do we accomplish the descent into Hades? We imitate the burial of Christ through baptism. For the bodies of those being baptized are as it were buried in water" (On the Holy Spirit 15.35).
 - 4. John Chrysostom, who preached about AD 375, said: "Exactly as in some tomb, when we sink our heads in water, the old man is buried, and as he is submerged below, he is absolutely and entirely hidden. Then when we lift our heads up, the new man again comes up" (Homilies on John 25.2, on John 3:5).
- C. Let's explore why Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom believed as they did.

THE GREEK WORD "BAPTIDZO" MEANS TO "IMMERSE"

- A. In ancient Greek, the word "baptidzo," like most other Greek terms, had a wide variety of meanings.
 - 1. According to Liddell and Scott, the most authoritative lexicon of ancient Greek, "baptidzo" was in the

following ways:

- a. The term meant to drown.
 - b. The word referred to the sinking of a ship.
 - c. "Baptidzo" meant to flood a city.
 - d. "Baptidzo" metaphorically meant to be over head and ears in debt.
2. The usage in ancient Greek does not lend itself to any interpretation save total immersion.
- B. Interestingly, there is a very ancient Christian document referring to pouring water over the head.
1. The Didache, written about AD 90 and supposedly containing the teaching of the apostles, refers pouring water over the head if one is too sick to be baptized or if enough water is not available for immersion.
 2. However, the term "baptidzo" is used for immersion and a different word altogether is used for the pouring - even this demonstrates that the term "baptidzo," the term used in the New Testament, refers to immersion and nothing else.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE OF IMMERSION

- A. It makes me extremely uncomfortable to be in a Bible study and bring Greek into the discussion.
1. I don't like to discuss Greek (or church history) across from the kitchen table with someone because I fear that person will think I'm saying, "Hey, I'm educated and smarter than you. I'm better than you."
 2. We, of course, don't want to portray arrogance; however, we need that history and Greek in case the individual will not look at solely the biblical evidence.
- B. We now turn to examine the biblical evidence.
1. John the Baptist baptized by immersion.
 - a. "Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized" (Jn. 8:23). If John wasn't baptizing by immersion, why did he need to baptize at a place where "there was plenty of water"?
 - b. John baptized Jesus by immersion (Mk. 1:9-10).
 - 1) Why would John have baptized Jesus "in the Jordan" had that baptism not been by immersion?
 - 2) Why would we read that Jesus came "up out of the water" unless he was baptized by immersion?
 2. The symbolic significance of baptism cannot be appreciated appropriately without immersion.
 - a. "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:3-4).
 - b. "In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of Gods who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:11-12).
 - c. Baptism is a burial - unless there is immersion in water, that symbolic significance is completely obscured.
 - 1) We hear from our Baptists friends that baptism is a symbol of a deeper reality.
 - 2) They use that to mean that baptism has no connection with salvation.
 - a) They are wrong in that connection, for we are told that baptism removes our sins.
 - b) However they are correct in saying that baptism is a symbol of a deeper reality.
 - i. That deeper reality is that I am crucifying (putting to death) the old man, burying him forever and being raised to walk in a new way of life.
 - ii. Without immersion that symbolism is gone.

DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

- A. So, "baptidzo" means "to immerse" and the symbolism is obscured if we don't immerse but does a person's salvation depend upon immersion?
1. The answer to that question largely depends on how we view Scripture.
 - a. If I view Scripture as an evolving document that changes from generation to generation, sprinkling and pouring aren't problems at all.
 - 1) Bea Blair, an ordained female Episcopal priest said, "The Bible is a history of our growing understanding of God. It needs to be read, listened to, and studied in its context. People have to interpret the Scripture or traditions for themselves."
 - 2) In such an understanding of Scripture, I don't care how a person is baptized or if a person is baptized, because I interpret the Scriptures for myself.
 - b. However, if I view Scripture as God's final revelation to man, the way I baptize could be extremely important.
 - 1) Why should a person who accepts the Bible accept it as God's final revelation? Scripture claims to be God's final revelation.

- a) “Your word O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens” (Ps. 119:89).
 - b) “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Is. 40:8).
 - c) “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mt. 24:35).
 - 2) I can’t claim any type of allegiance to Scripture and not understand that Scripture is finalized and not changing.
- 2. Scripture commands immersion for salvation.
 - a. We need to understand that baptism is an English word, with English connotations.
 - 1) If I pour water over a baby’s head and call that baptism, that’s the English use of the word, not the biblical Greek usage of the word.
 - 2) If I sprinkle water on an adult convert’s head and call that baptism, that’s the English use of the word, not the biblical Greek usage of the word.
 - b. Acts 2:38 actually reads “Repent and be immersed, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”
 - 1) Hugo McCord, one of the greatest Greek scholars ever among churches of Christ and who taught at Oklahoma Christian University for many years translated the New Testament into English. He translates Acts 2:38 like this: “Change your hearts and be immersed each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ into the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - 2) The word “baptize” was invented in the English language thanks to the translators of the KJV.
 - a) King James had ordered the Bible to be translated into English by these scholars.
 - b) King James was christened as a child and his children were christened as infants; therefore, the translators didn’t want to put “immerse” here so they took the Greek word “baptidzo” and made the English word “baptize.”
- B. People will often say, “Wait a minute! What if someone is in the desert and there’s no water? What about a person who is too ill to be immersed?”
 - 1. As far as a person not being able to find water, it’s not a problem here - they’re just attempting to throw up some objection so they don’t need to be baptized.
 - 2. What about a person too ill to be immersed? Whatever objections I raise doesn’t change one word of Scripture.
 - 3. Are you obeying the words of Scripture?