

Bible Baptism: Sprinkling, Pouring, or Immersion?

by John Isaac Edwards

Is Bible baptism a sprinkling or pouring of water upon a person or immersion of the whole person in water?

1) **The Creeds of Men.** “United Methodists may baptize by any of the modes used by Christians. Candidates or their parents have the choice of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion; and pastors and congregations should be prepared to honor requests for baptism in any of these modes. Each mode brings out part of the rich and diverse symbolism given to baptism by the Bible” (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 1992, The United Methodist Publishing House). “What is the meaning of the word ‘baptize’? ‘Baptize’ means to *apply water* by washing, pouring, sprinkling, or immersing” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, p. 170). “Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person” (*The*

Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, p. 161). “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” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 317). “What is Christian baptism? ...Baptists answer the question by saying that baptism is the immersion, dipping, or burying in water, of a professed believer in Christ...Neither sprinkling a person with water, nor pouring water upon him can by any possibility be Christian baptism” (*The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, pp. 80-81).

2) **Religious Leaders.** Interestingly, some leaders of churches that practice sprinkling or pouring admit Bible baptism is immersion. Some examples: Adam Clark (Methodist): “Alluding to the immersion practiced in the case of

adults, wherein the person appeared to be buried under the water, as Christ was buried in the heart of the earth. His rising again the third day, and their emerging from the water, was an emblem of the resurrection of the body” (Commentary on Colossians 2:12). Mosheim (Lutheran): “The sacrament of baptism was administered in this century (the first) without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by an immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font” (*Mosheim’s Church History*, Vol. 1, p. 343). John Calvin (Presbyterianism): “The very word ‘baptize,’ however, signifies immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church” (*Institutes*, Vol. 3, p. 343). Brenner (Roman Catholic): “Thirteen hundred years was baptism generally and regularly an immersion of the person under water, and only in extraordinary cases a sprinkling or pouring

with water; the latter was, moreover, disputed as a mode of baptism, nay, even forbidden" (*A Handbook on Christian Baptism*, Richard Ingham, p. 159).

3) English

Dictionaries. An English dictionary may define "baptism" as follows: "the religious rite of sprinkling water onto a person's forehead or of immersion in water..." (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). Modern dictionaries define words as they are commonly used among people, and this is how the word "baptism" is commonly used today. One must go back to the original language of the New Testament, Koine Greek, to learn the meaning of the words used by the Lord and the apostles.

4) Greek Definitions.

The Greek word for "baptism" is BAPTISMA and for "baptize" is BAPTIZO. These

are not translations, but are transliterations from the Greek language into the English language. How these words are defined:

"BAPTISMA, baptism, consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence (from *bapto*, to dip)..." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp. 96-97).

"BAPTIZO, to baptize, primarily a frequentative form of *bapto*, to dip, was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc." (Ibid.). There are Greek words for "sprinkle" (RANTIZO) and "pour" (CHEO). These words were not used, however. The Lord and His apostles always and only used a word that means immersion and never means sprinkling or pouring!

5) The Scriptures.

Examples of baptism in the Scriptures demonstrate

immersion; not sprinkling or pouring. When Jesus was baptized of John in the Jordan, it is recorded, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water..." (Mt. 3:16). He must have gone down into the water to have come up out of the water! The Ethiopian eunuch "came unto a certain water," he and Philip "went down both into the water," "he baptized him" and "they were come up out of the water" (Acts 8:36-39). Words used in connection with baptism in the Scriptures affirm the action is immersion; not sprinkling or pouring: "much water" (Jn. 3:23), "buried" and "planted" (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:4-5).

Clearly, the action of Bible baptism is immersion; not sprinkling or pouring. Do not accept sprinkling or pouring as a substitute for Bible baptism!

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