

BAPTISM IV

Review:

(a) New Testament baptism works the same way Old Testament circumcision did.

Acts 2:38-39

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

(b) In the ‘household’ baptisms, we have examples of infant baptism.

The households of **Cornelius** (Acts 10:2, 47-48), **Lydia** (Acts 16:14-15), **the Philippian jailer** (Acts 16:30-34), **Crispus** (Acts 18:8), and **Stephanas** (1 Cor. 1:16).

(c) The fact that infants are baptized does *not* mean they are automatically saved. Baptism by itself does not save you. You are saved by Christ through faith.

Romans 9:13

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.

Acts 8:13

Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip.

(1) Is *immersion* the only proper mode of baptism? (The case for immersion only)

(i) The Greek word *baptizō* (*baptizo*) only means “immersion”.

(ii) Romans 6:3-6

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Colossians 2:11-12

¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

(iii) Acts 8:34-38

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Matthew 3:16-17

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Problems with seeing baptism as immersion only

(2) Baptism is the washing of dirt, which symbolizes cleansing from sin.

(i) Definition of baptizō (*baptizo*): to wash, purify with water [Greek-English Lexicon by Bauer and Danker]

(ii) The symbolism of baptism is washing.

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Acts 22:14-16

¹⁴ And Ananias said to Saul, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵ for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

(iii) Salvation is often spoken of as a washing.

1 Corinthians 6:11

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Hebrews 10:22

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Ephesians 5:25-26

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

Ezekiel 36:25

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

(3) The word, *baptizo*, has a range of meanings beyond immersion.

Mark 7:1-4

¹ Now when the Pharisees gathered to Jesus, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴ and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)

Hebrews 9:9-10

⁹ According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

(4) There is a ‘baptism’ of the Holy Spirit. In anything, the proper mode of Spirit baptism is pouring.

Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Acts 2:14-17

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.’

(5) If you look at actual examples of baptisms in the New Testament, it seems a stretch that in each case, it was done by immersion.

Acts 2:38-41

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 16:32-33

³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

(6) In fact, if any particular mode for cleansing is cited by Scripture, it is not *immersion* but *sprinkling*.

Ezekiel 36:25

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

Hebrews 10:22

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 9:13-14

¹³ For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Exodus 24:8

And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Numbers 19:17-19

¹⁷ For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt sin offering, and fresh water shall be added in a vessel.

¹⁸ Then a clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there and on whoever touched the bone, or the slain or the dead or the grave. ¹⁹ And the clean person shall sprinkle it on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day. Thus on the seventh day he shall cleanse him, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and at evening he shall be clean.

Leviticus 14:1-8

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, ³ and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look. Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person, ⁴ the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop. ⁵ And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. ⁶ He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. ⁷ And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field. ⁸ And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean.”

(7) But what about the “dying” and “rising” language in Romans 6:3-6?

And what about the passages where people seem to be immersed – “going down, coming up”?

Romans 6:3-6

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Notes:

Review:

(a) New Testament baptism works the same way Old Testament circumcision did.

The promise Peter refers to is the Abrahamic Covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God commanded Abraham and all those in his household to be circumcised – for the promise was for him and his children. Peter states the same promise stands true for the people at Pentecost.

(b) In the ‘household’ baptisms, we have examples of infant baptism.

In the household baptism, you have the exact same paradigm as you did in the Old Testament. The faith of the head of the household acts as the representative of his family, so that his faith and his decision counts for his family.

(c) The fact that infants are baptized does *not* mean they are automatically saved.

Baptism by itself does not save you. You are saved by Christ through faith.

Infant baptism does not negate the necessity of faith. It doesn't mean since the child is baptized, it doesn't matter whether he has faith or not. Remember, baptism is a sign of salvation – it's not salvation itself. Christ saves, not baptism.

In Esau, we have an example of someone who was circumcised though he was not saved. Circumcision alone did not save – you have to have faith in the promises of God as Jacob did. In the same way, baptism by itself does not save. Grace in Christ saves and you receive this through faith. Simon the Magician in Acts 8 is a NT example of someone who receives the sign of covenant membership (baptism) but reveals himself to be unregenerate.

(1) Is *immersion* the only proper mode of baptism? (The case for immersion only)

The whole debate about the proper mode of baptism is relatively a small matter. If baptism is a secondary issue, then the mode of baptism is certainly a tertiary issue. But the reason I'm covering this topic is because a lot of people are interested – what's the proper way to do baptism?

Immersion is often used as an argument against infant baptism. You can't immerse infants. Therefore, infant baptism can't be correct. Well, you can immerse infants. Greek Orthodox Church does infant immersion.

The case for immersion only

The case rests on 3 basic arguments.

(1) The Greek word *baptizō* (*baptizo*) only means “immersion”.

(2) Romans 6 and Colossians 2 show us the symbolism of baptism is being buried and rising with Christ. The motions of burial and rising is matched by being immersed in water and then emerging from the water.

(3) Acts 8 seems to indicate the eunuch went down into the water – as in immersion. And Matt. 3 seems to indicate Jesus came up out of the water – as if rising out of immersion.

Problems with seeing baptism as immersion only

(2) Baptism is the washing of dirt, which symbolizes cleansing from sin.

New Testament baptism did not arise out of a vacuum. It comes from the numerous ceremonial washings in the Old Testament. Actually, this is the backdrop of what John the Baptist was doing at the Jordan River. Ceremonial washings was used on lepers, unclean people and Gentiles. Then John the Baptist requires Jews to be cleansed with water – which was incredibly insulting to the Jews! But the point was that the people needed to repent with the coming of the Kingdom in Jesus.

New Testament baptism is essentially a ceremonial washing. In the symbolic removal of dirt, we have a picture of salvation – we are cleansed of our uncleanness (sin). What’s remarkable about Christian baptism is that it is only applied once! Why should that be? In all other religions, you have numerous washings again and again. That’s because Christian washing is with the blood of Christ – meaning he died for us once and for all time.

The fact that NT baptism is ceremonial washing also shows us why the amount of water is immaterial. It’s a ceremonial washing! It’s not an actual bath, in which you need soap and you need to scrub thoroughly. The removal of dirt is symbolic. Thus even a small amount of water is sufficient.

Concerning the definition of baptizō (*baptizo*). If you look at Greek-English lexicons, it doesn’t say *baptizo* only means “immersion”. In fact, “immersion” is only a secondary meaning. The primary meaning is “to wash, to purify with water.”

And the passages where it clearly talks about the symbolic meaning of baptism, it clearly states that baptism is a ceremonial washing. It is the removal of dirt – which symbolizes cleansing from sin.

1 Peter 3:21 – Peter says baptism is not ultimately merely about removing dirt, but it’s an appeal to God. Meaning baptism as a sign is the removal of dirt. The symbolism of baptism is washing.

Acts 22:16 – Baptism and washing away sins are in parallel.

Not only that, but salvation is often spoken of as a washing – which makes sense that baptism is a ceremonial washing.

(3) The word, *baptizo*, has a range of meanings beyond immersion.

Mark 7 – The word translated wash/washing is the Greek word *baptizo*. The word naturally means “wash” here not immerse. One could argue all the objects were immersed in water, but when you get to dining couches, it seems a bit of a stretch.

Hebrews 9 – what is the writer talking about with “various washings”? He’s talking about the OT ceremonial washings the priests and others would have to go through.

In other words, *baptizo* doesn’t exclusively mean immersion. There is a range of meanings – including immersion, but primarily washing. To insist that *baptizo* only means immersion is lexically too narrow and doesn’t make any sense if used to translate the above two verses.

(4) There is a baptism of the Holy Spirit. If anything, the proper mode of Spirit baptism is pouring.

To speak of a certain mode of Spirit baptism is silly of course. The baptism here is figurative. The Spirit comes upon the believers and John the Baptist uses baptism as a metaphor for this.

But if the idea that *baptizo* always and only means immersion, then according to Acts 2, at Pentecost, the Spirit technically was “poured” out on the disciples, not “immersed”. In other words, it’s a strange thing to insist on immersion as the only proper understanding of baptism.

(5) If you look at actual examples of baptisms in the New Testament, it seems a stretch that in each case, it was done by immersion.

At Pentecost, 3000 people converted to Christianity and were baptized. It seems a stretch that they found a body of water to accommodate 3,000 immersion baptisms, especially in an inland city (Jerusalem) with no river or natural body of water nearby.

The Philippian jailer and his family were baptized *at once*. They were baptized immediately after his conversion. It seems a stretch that Paul, Silas and the jailer’s family went around the city in the dead of night looking for a body of water, especially after a major earthquake (with the city probably in chaos).

These are not conclusive, but they do suggest that immersion baptism would have presented a significant practical problem. It seems more conducive that in these baptisms, just a small amount of water was sufficient, especially since the baptismal washing was symbolic. (You didn’t need to get into a tub and actually lather up and wash off dirt.)

(6) In fact, if any particular mode for cleansing is cited by Scripture, it is not *immersion* but *sprinkling*.

Again, the concept of the cleansing of baptism does not come out of the blue, but the background is the rich imagery from the Old Testament. Cleansing from sin is one of the repeated themes of the Old Testament.

And when you look at the actual OT cleansings, you never see “immersion” as the prescribed mode, but “sprinkling”. Again, this does not mean that baptism can only be done by sprinkling. I’m only making the case that the mode is unimportant. Sprinkling, pouring, immersion – all are valid. The mode is not important, the medium is what’s important (water).

Leviticus 14:1-8 is worthy of note. This is the passage describing how a leper is made ceremonially clean. We’ve looked at the imagery of leprosy in a sermon before. Leprosy was the Bible’s image of sin. How is the leper cleansed and re-admitted into his community? He was sprinkled with blood mixed in water and then pronounced clean.

(7) But what about the “dying” and “rising” language in Romans 6:3-6?

And what about the passages where people seem to be immersed – “going down, coming up”?

Two responses here. First, Romans 6 is talking about baptism as union with Christ – “baptized into Christ.” Because we are united to him, everything that happened to him happens to us. So Christ died (putting to death sin) and he rises (to the new life) – those things happen to us as well. I don’t believe Paul is talking about the mode of baptism here, but the meaning behind baptism. In other words, he’s not explaining how we should do baptism – be sure to immerse! I find that to be a stretch.

Second, let’s suppose this is what Paul is doing – giving us directions to immerse people in baptism because it shows us our death and resurrection. Why should that be the only exclusive mode when we’ve see all throughout the Bible that sprinkling also qualifies as a valid mode of cleansing.

In other words, let’s not get hung up on mode. What’s important is the presence of water, not the quantity of water.

Finally, what about those two passages that show the eunuch going down into the water and Jesus coming up out of the water?

Why does that have to mean they were immersed? Could it not be that the river is lower in elevation than the bank? So that in order to get into the river, Jesus and the eunuch have to walk down and then walk up. At the river site, they could then be sprinkled or poured as their baptism.

One more thought. If immersion evokes burial and resurrection, is that the meaning behind John the Baptist doing baptisms? But how could John the Baptist be thinking this when Jesus had not yet resurrected – an event which stunned everyone, including the disciples? And if that was the imagery, how could that have made sense to those being baptized by John the Baptist? Doesn’t it make so much more sense that they understood the baptisms to be a ceremonial cleansing from sin? Yes.