

## Mode of Baptism II

One of the distinctives of the Presbyterian churches is the mode of baptism. It seems this age old argument is never settled. In studying for my own examination on the sacraments I found what I considered to be the best presentation to be that of Rev. J. B. Green, D.D., of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA. I no longer remember which publication of Dr.. Green's I took my notes from, and I am sure I cannot do justice to his presentation based on solid exegesis rather than philosophy and subjective evidence. However I would be amiss not to give him credit for the good parts and accept the blame for the places I misunderstood this scholar of the Bible.

Presbyterians differ from those who believe that immersion is the only biblical mode because our difference is not only of mode, but in the meaning of the sacrament. The immersionist believes that baptism points to the death and resurrection of Christ. The Reformed church objects to that interpretation of the Scriptures.

Few of either camp deny that the Lord's Table points to His death and resurrection. Why then would baptism also refer to these same events in the life of Christ? We believe that baptism doesn't point to the death and resurrection of Christ, but to the work of the Holy Spirit. If this is not true then we have a sacrament pointing to the work of Christ, but not that of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament we find we have signs and symbols of both. In the Old Testament the Passover pointed to the work of Christ and circumcision pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Circumcision was the putting away of sinful flesh or the new birth. This is the particular work of the Holy Spirit. We might also note that if as the immersionist believes baptism signifies the burial of Christ, we have a sacrament that has absolutely no redemptive value. Christ would have completed His work, saved the elect, even if He was not buried. The redemption is in the death and resurrection, the completed work, not the temporary storage of the body.

Why would we think baptism represents the work of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit has three symbols in the Bible. The first is oil. **"Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance? When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son? Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands. After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the**

**Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man."** (1 Samuel 10:1-6 AV) Here we find Saul being anointed by Samuel, to set him apart as the king of Israel. The oil was poured on his head, and the Holy Spirit came upon him.

Likewise, in the 16th chapter of 1 Samuel we find the anointing of David. The oil was poured on his head and the Holy Spirit came upon him. Thus we can see that these anointings with oil being poured on the head were typical of anointing with the Holy Spirit.

The second symbol is water. In the Bible we read "**Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*."** (Ezekiel 36:25-27 AV) Here we find the gift of the Spirit associated with the sprinkling of water.

From the New Testament we read "**In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."** (John 7:37-38 AV) Dare any then deny water as a symbol of the Holy Spirit?

The third symbol is fire. Acts 2:3-4 is the biblical account of the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost represented as tongues of fire. "**And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."** (Acts 2:3-4 AV) Again I think few will dare argue the meaning of the symbol and that it points to the Holy Spirit.

All three of these symbols point to the Holy Spirit and His work, not the redemptive work of Christ. By what mode were these three symbols of the Spirit administered? The oil was poured upon the head. Throughout the Jewish history, water was sprinkled or poured. And at Pentecost the fire descended from above.

We need to consider one other passage before moving deeper into the argument before us. "**And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."** (1 John 5:8 AV) How do these three agree? They all signify the same thing, cleansing. But, they also

agree in mode, The blood was sprinkled, the water was sprinkled, and the Spirit always descend upon from above.

It would seem clear that water baptism symbolizes the work of the Spirit. If this is true, why should it be supposed that the mode of baptism must be immersion?

But the die hard immersionist will reach for the dictionary and try to settle the argument from the Greek word **baptizo**. While it is true this word gives us the name of the sacrament, it does not give us the mode. The word for the Lord's Supper, the second sacrament is **deipnon** which signifies a full meal to fill the hungry man. The church at Corinth fell into this error of the meaning of a word, rather than what it symbolized, Paul dealt with their error.

So it is as in the Lord's supper we do not have a literal feast, in baptism we do not have a physical bath either. Both have a physical sign for a spiritual truth. If a little bread and wine are sufficient, so is a littler water. To those who claim **baptizo** always means immerse or plunge into, in the Bible it doesn't.

If we can point to one instance where **baptizo** does not mean immerse, the whole case of the immersionist must be dismissed once and for all, for it isn't biblical. Let us try Luke 11:37-38 where we find Jesus invited to dine with a Pharisee. Jesus goes in and sits down to eat. The Pharisee marvels that He had not first bathed himself before eating. The word used? **Baptizo!** Does anyone think the Pharisee was surprised Jesus did not immerse himself before He sat down to eat? To do so borders on pure lunacy.

Or, perhaps we might consider a second place in the Bible where it is not immerse. "**The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.**" (Hebrews 9:8-10 AV) The Jews had many washings and purifications, but no immersions, though the word rendered washings in the English Bible, in the Greek is **baptizmois**.

Two not enough? Let us then add another thought to the load of the immersionist. Pick any passage dealing with baptism by the Holy Spirit. Point to one verse where anyone was immersed in the Holy Spirit. Yet they were **baptizo** in the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit was always applied to the person, never the person to the Spirit. Yet John the baptizer did use the magic word, "**I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.**" (Matthew 3:11 AV)

We find this same truth concerning water in the Bible, it is always applied to the person, never the person to the water. There is no exception to this in all of the Bible. When forced to defend the Presbyterian beliefs, stand firm, you need no library but that of God the Bible. Man's reasoning and supposing carry no weight before the Word of God.

There are verses that appear to give some weight to immersion. Matthew 3:16 is such a verse, "**And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.**" (Matthew 3:16 AV) Nonetheless the Greek again is the answer to our critics. The preposition used here is not the Greek *ex* meaning out of, but *apo*, which means then away from the water. This doesn't contradict the Bible in either language, He could have gone up from the water without going up out of the water.

Or in considering Philip and the eunuch, the Scripture says both went down to the water, but if the act of going into and coming out of the water are part of the ritual, then both were baptized and not as the Bible reads that Philip baptized the eunuch. All the orators of the world can never prove the mode from the prepositions used in the Bible. In the eighth chapter of Acts we find the preposition *en* is used several times, but only in the account of the baptism of the eunuch is it translated into. So it is that such passage only appear to favor immersion, they have no proof. If such weak reasoning were the case we Presbyterians would simply point to the baptism of the 3000 at Jerusalem. Water was not plentiful in Jerusalem and they used cisterns. These were under the control of the Pharisees. Does anyone really think they would have allowed the whole water supply to have been corrupted, especially by followers of Jesus? Then there are the passages where baptism appears to have been instantaneous, where no water supply was available to immerse even a child in. And it seems the apostles always baptized immediately. Only sprinkling is so universally applicable as to timing and place.

Key points: We deny baptism is representative of the death and resurrection of Christ, but is the symbolic application of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible the water was always applied to the person and never the reverse. The Spirit is applied to the person and never the reverse. In the Bible believers were baptized immediately on the spot. "**Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.**" (Hebrews 10:22 AV)

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