

What about water baptism?

I keep being asked questions about this and the time has come to make some very simple statements. Books on water baptism can run to hundreds of pages and yet provide little light. Whatever one says one will inevitably be criticised by one church party or another; I take the risk of being criticised by them all; so be it.

When the great Charles Spurgeon wrote an appendix to his edition of Watson's '*Body of Divinity*', to 'correct' Watson's perceived error of infant baptism (paedobaptism) he said categorically, '*Baptism is, we doubt not, immersion*' [*Spurgeon on Baptism*, Henry Walter Ltd, p9] printing the letters in capital type. Such certainty was ill placed and it shows the divide between great men. Thomas Watson was an Anglican Puritan and thus a paedobaptist; Spurgeon was a Reformed Baptist and thus was a credobaptist (baptism of disciples) but both were Calvinists. This is illustrative of the great difficulty facing believers; how can anyone correlate these two positions held by very eminent men on both sides?

What is baptism?

The first thing to examine is what baptism actually is and what the relevant words actually mean. Modern research into ancient Greek and church usage of the term has shown some very interesting facts, and these must be taken into consideration.

What is agreed?

Firstly, all believers agree that baptism is a ritual that is incumbent upon all believers. Whether that applies to children of Christians or adults who believe will be discussed later; but all accept that it is a Christian ritual of initiation. Those in the covenant are identified by two outward signs of communion – water baptism and the Lord's Supper, sometimes called sacraments. A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality. Water baptism signifies that a person has believed in Christ and committed himself to following him. The exact symbolism means different things to different groups and will be discussed later.

Secondly, most Christians agree that the ritual involves water, but there are differences about how this water is applied. Baptists believe that the disciple must be immersed in relatively deep water and then brought up again. Presbyterians, who baptise infants, usually pour (effusion) the water on the forehead, however some groups sprinkle (aspersion) the water on the head. After 1526 Luther, as with some groups, merely practised signing with the cross on the forehead and breast. Early church group had a ritual that involved many factors: signing with the cross, breathing out and renouncing evil spirits, confession of faith, the application of water in some form, anointing with oil, laying on of hands, partaking of salt, and so on. So, churches practised many variations in the ritual; some submerged a person in water three times, while some hardly used any water at all.

Things are not so simple as you may have been led to believe.

What does the word 'baptism' mean?

There is much argument about this between denominations, therefore trusting books written from a committed sectarian standpoint is very dubious. Men have a tendency to fight for a camp and thus, perhaps sincerely, skew the evidence or allow certain facts to

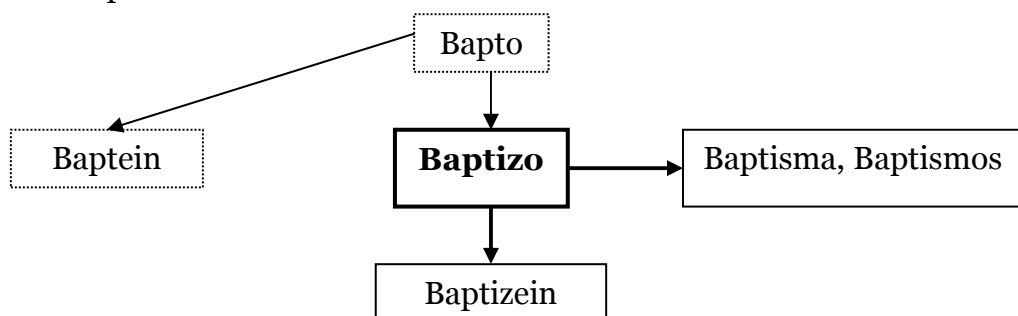
disappear. Baptists ignore certain Biblical statements while Covenant Theologians (Presbyterians) ignore certain theological implications; both sides have shown a tendency to ignore recent archaeological and historical evidence. The truth can only be found on this matter by examining the research of technical experts and reading widely from many standpoints.

What are the Biblical words used?

There are two verbal nouns used which derive from the verb, ‘to baptise’ (*baptizo*). This verb is the intensive form of another verb (*batpto*).

- Baptism – does not appear in the Greek OT. **ba,ptisma** *baptisma* (Strong’s 908); 22 times in NT. This noun is usually translated as immersion, submersion, a purification rite. It is peculiar to the NT. It refers to the result of baptising.
- Baptisms –**baptismo,j** *baptismos* (Strong’s 909); only so translated in Heb 6:2 and as ‘washing’ in Mk. 7:4,8; Heb 9:10. This noun is usually translated as a washing, a purification effected by means of water. [The plural in Heb 6:2 refers to the differences between Hebrew and Christian baptisms.] It refers to the action of baptising. Some teachers believe that this word applies solely to ceremonial washings and *baptisma* to baptism proper, but this is stretched; *baptismos* certainly includes water baptism in Heb 6:2.
- Baptise – does not appear in the Greek OT. **bapti,zw** *baptizo* (Strong’s 907); 76 times in NT. This verb is an intensive form of *batpto* and is usually translated as to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (as vessels sunk), to cleanse by dipping, to make clean with water, to overwhelm. *Baptizein* is a form of *baptizo*.
- Dip - **ba,ptw** *batpto* (Strong’s 911) a primary Greek word meaning to dip, to dye, to gild or glaze or to colour. Lk 16:24 and Mk 14:20 (*embapto*) only. It can even mean to temper a hot iron by plunging or by pouring. This word is not relevant to our studies. It appears four times in the NT but not in connection with baptism (Lk 16:24; Jn 13:26; Rev. 19:13).
- Dip – *batptein*. A form of *batpto*. This verb is usually translated as ‘dip’. This word is not relevant to our studies.

The relationship of these words is as follows:



Baptizein is the present, infinitive active of *baptizo*. Claims that *baptizein* always means ‘to dip’ and therefore, baptism must always be by immersion are false. *Baptein* always means ‘to dip’ not *baptizein*. *Baptizein* has a wider meaning, including ceremonially pouring water over hands (Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38), thus immersion is not the only acceptable method. Demanding one mode alone is sectarian.

‘Baptism’ is rarely used in the Greek translation of the OT (Septuagint or LXX). The word *baptein* is used for ‘to dip’ in Jud 2:14; Jos 3:15; Lev 4:6, 11:32. *Baptizein* (*baptizo*) occurs only in 2 Kg 5:14 and Isa 21:4 (figuratively). Note that in the case of Naaman (2 Kg 5:14)

baptism and washing are synonymous. Also in Dan 4:33 Nebuchadnezzar was wet (baptised LXX) with the dew of heaven, which is not a dipping into but a pouring upon.

Baptism is a continuation of Levitical rites of purification. There is no thought in this rite of death and regeneration but rather washing. The Hebrew term (*tabal*) translated by *baptizein* does not signify sinking or drowning. The nouns *baptisma* and *baptismos* do not occur in the Septuagint.

The words 'baptism', 'baptise' etc. are transliterations of the Greek words into English since no adequate simple translation is possible. There is no English equivalent as to what 'baptism' means in Greek, so the Greek words were anglicised by Bible translators.

The range of meanings for baptise are:

- a) To dip a thing into an element or liquid.
- b) To put an element or liquid over a thing.
- c) To wash, especially in the sense of purification.
- d) In fact, the most up-to-date researches into the meaning of the word tell us that baptism primarily means, sic. 'to change the essential nature of a thing'. JW Dale categorically proves that the word has a wide variety of meanings. *Baptizo* developed to mean 'to affect by any controlling influence'. '*Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state or condition of any object, is capable of baptizing that object and by such change of character, state, or condition does, in fact, baptize it.*' [JW Dale, *Classic Baptism* Perkenpine & Higgins, (1867) p352-354. Cf. *Baptism in the Early Church*, Stander & Louw] Another way of putting it is, '*to indicate an effect to be produced without expressing the kind of action by which that effect is to be brought about.*' [Hodge, *Syst. Theol.* Vol 3, 528.]

The mode of baptism is not designated by the word itself. No one can say that baptism automatically implies immersion or pouring. [*The words bapto, baptizo, and their cognates, are used with such latitude of meaning, as to prove the assertion that the command to baptise is a command to immerse, to be utterly unauthorised and unreasonable.*' Charles Hodge, *Syst. Theol.* 3:526-7] In Biblical terms it refers to the Christian initiation and the mode of this must be determined by Scriptural analysis.

So, the development of the Greek word *baptizo* does not always mean immersion, as claimed by Baptists writers, but has a wide expression of meanings and it basically implies a change in the nature of something by its action.

The word 'baptism' is usually used in a literal sense, referring to ceremonial washing through the application of water: ritual washing of the Jews, baptism of Jewish proselytes, the baptism of John and the disciples. However, sometimes 'baptism' is used figuratively such as regarding sufferings and martyrdom (Matt 20:22; Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50) or the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It also means 'identification with' in 1 Cor 10:2. Some believe that it refers to doctrine in (Matt 21:25; Mk 11:30; Acts 18:25), taking the word in the synecdochical sense (the figure of speech where the part represents the whole).

So far we can say that the Christian initiation is by baptism, which is a ceremonial application of water to symbolise washing from sin and which is applied by immersion, pouring or sprinkling within the context of God's word (Eph 5:26) and according to Christ's command. [*Without the Word of God the water is simple water, and no baptism.*' Luther. '*Remove the word and what is water but water? The word is added to the element and it becomes a sacrament.*' Augustine.] Baptism is always accompanied by teaching (Matt 28:20) and water baptism results from obedience to doctrine.

Secular baptism

Baptism in water to effect ritual purification was common amongst the disciples of Zoroaster, Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans as well as the Jews.

The use in Greek society

'Baptism' had a wide range of applications from the sinking of ship to the bottom of the sea, to lustration, or the sea-shore washed by the tide and its meaning varied such as: plunging, drenching, to pour upon, staining, dipping and sprinkling. It did not always require water when meaning overwhelmed in any way, such as a man being baptised with wine or opium, debts or puzzling questions. Wine was said to be baptised by having water poured into it.

There were many forms of religious washings in the Greek religious cults ('mysteries') which all had to do with purification and which were called by the name of 'baptism' [Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* xi]; most of these have the sense of to cleanse by washing with water. They were usually found as forms of initiation, though sometimes they were for ceremonial purification from committed sin [Eurip. *Iph. in Tauri*, 167].

There were many figurative uses involving the sense of being overwhelmed. These include difficulty in crossing a river and being overwhelmed by calamity.

How are these words used in the Bible?

This is where there is much disagreement and quite often some misusing of Scripture. The first thing to say is that the words do not always mean to immerse; there are very clear instances when to baptise something means something other than immersion in water. For example:

Mark 7:4 *When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.*

'Wash' here is *baptizo* and 'washing' is *baptismos*, while 'couches' [*kline*] can be translated as 'beds'; it is not a table as translated by the AV; these couches seated several persons. Now it is clear that beds are not washed by submerging them completely in water, which would ruin them; thus *baptismos* can simply mean 'washing by applying water'. [An example of skewed argument is given by the writer of the article 'Baptism, immersionist view' in the ISBE. He says that the couches referred to in Mk 7:4 are pallets or stretchers, which could easily be submerged in water. Firstly, this is facile reasoning as no one would take a pallet all the way to a river to cleanse it when it could be washed ordinarily at home. Secondly, *kline* is not a pallet; the references to 'pallet' in the NT are a different word (*krabbatos*). This shows how untrustworthy some academic arguments are on this subject. Hodge says that 'to maintain that beds or couches were immersed, is a mere act of desperation'. [*Syst. Theol.* 3:533.]

To baptise the hands, as required by the Pharisees, was to wash the hands and the usual method of doing this was by pouring water over them.

An important concept is the baptism in/with the Spirit. Here the word *baptizo* is used.

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Matt 3:11

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. Mk 1:8

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Lk 3:16

The baptism (*baptizo*) of the Spirit is explained by Paul as the initiation into union with Christ in the Spirit and the making of one body in Christ (1 Cor 12:13). The thought of submerging into and the emerging out of cannot possibly apply here.

In Acts 1:5 Jesus promised, 'you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'. But three verses later he calls this, 'you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you'. In Acts 2:16-17, Peter calls the fulfilment of this, quoting Joel, an outpouring upon. Thus the baptism that Christ promised was experienced as a pouring.

But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with.' Matt 20:22-23

Again there is no thought here of being submerged into something and emerging out of it. The baptism Jesus refers to is being overwhelmed with persecution unto death.

From these passages alone we can say with certainty that baptism cannot fundamentally mean immersion into something and emerging out of it. Other passages affirming this include:

When the Pharisee saw *it*, he marvelled that He had not first washed (*baptizo*) before dinner. Lk 11:38 (Which was by pouring water over the hands.)

Concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings (baptismos), and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. Heb 9:10 (These washings were by sprinkling.)

Even the baptism of the thousands of converts resulting from Peter's first sermons by immersion was almost certainly impossible.

- There were no private baths for families; even if there were they would be insufficient.
- During Pentecost (June) especially there was a scarcity of water; there is no running stream in Jerusalem, except the small rill of Siloam and the city was supplied with water by cisterns and reservoirs.
- The Jews would not have tolerated the various pools for domestic use being spoiled by the plunging of thousands of dusty feet, (even if they were deep enough) especially by a recently despised and persecuted sect.
- Finally, the Pool of Solomon, the only one that could be credibly used, had water supplied by an aqueduct from very far away and was guarded as a key source of water for the drinking and supply of inhabitants. Further a contingent of Roman soldiers were stationed in the Tower of Antonia overlooking it whose job was to suppress disturbances by crowds.
- Without doubt, there was insufficient water for the immersion of 3,000 souls then 5,000 men (how many women?).

[Note: the earliest Latin versions of the NT never translate *baptizo* with 'immersion' and baptismal fonts found in ancient Greek churches in Palestine are too small to immerse anyone, being intended for pouring.]

Finally the baptism of the Philippian jailer and his household absolutely obviates immersion.

- It occurred after midnight. Could a large group of people really go searching for a large body of water at this time? The context implies that it was done indoors.
- Would Paul and Silas be up to a long walk and then immersing several people after being whipped?

- How much more likely that water was brought for pouring or sprinkling (as had been brought to wash their wounds)?
- There is no mention of going out to find water. 'He brought them out' does not mean outside the jail but being taken from the dark 'inner prison' whence they had been thrust (note the jailer 'ran in').
- It was as Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to all in his house that their wounds were washed and the baptism took place (perhaps using the same jar of water). 'Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptised' (Acts 16:32-33).

There is no sound proof that baptism in the NT was by immersion but much proof that it was by sprinkling or pouring.

Old Testament precursors of baptism

Ceremonial cleansing

The word 'baptise' is sometimes used in the LXX to cover many forms of ritual purification. These include immersion, washing, sprinkling, and pouring. The various 'washings' (literally 'baptisms') are mentioned in Heb 6:2, 9:10. These included:

- The priest's hands and feet in the laver outside before entering the tabernacle (Ex 30:17-21).
- The high priest's body in the holy place on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:23).
- Ceremonially unclean people (Lev 14; 15, 16:26-28, 17:15, 22:4-6).
- The person who released the scapegoat (Lev 16:26) and the one who buried the ashes of the red heifer (Num 19:10).
- People before attending a religious festival (Ex 19:10; Jn 11:55).

At the time of the Lord's ministry, ceremonial washings had been multiplied unnecessarily by the Pharisees, chiefly the pouring of water over hands before eating (Mk 7:3-4; Lk 11:38). Thus the understanding of baptism was common as it arose from the Mosaic Law; however, this law never mentioned immersion but always pouring or sprinkling. Note that Heb 9:10 ('various baptisms') is then amplified by Heb 9:13 (cf. Num 19:17-18), Heb 9:19 (cf. Ex 24:6, 8) and Heb 9:21 (cf. Lev 8:19, 16:14). In other words, the writer directly links the word 'baptism' with 'sprinkling'. The variety of these baptisms stems from the use of sprinkling with water, water mixed with ashes, oil, and blood.

It is important to note that the NT never expresses that a change occurred in the mode of baptism. NT baptism is linked with OT baptism (especially in Hebrews) and this mode was sprinkling. This is undeniable. The 'immersion only' party have no way of countering this,

Proselyte baptism

As well as circumcising males, the Jews baptised male and female proselytes according to the 2nd century Targum of Jonathan on Ex 12:44, Epictetus in the late 1st century and The Mishnah (*Yeb 46a*), which are the earliest authorities. Ishmaelite or Egyptian converts were already circumcised so some additional rite was necessary. However, there is debate as to the time when this began; it was certainly the case after the destruction of the temple when sacrifices ceased but washings continued. Some form of ritual washing was found even in Gentile religions and the ready acceptance of John's baptism shows that this was not unusual for Jews. Most commentators accept that proselyte baptism was in existence before the time of John the Baptist [e.g. Schürer, *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Div ii, II, 319ff; Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus*, appendix, xii, Baptism of Proselytes]. It would be indeed odd that baptism was not required of proselytes when so many ritual washings were

required of Jews. Furthermore, some form of initiation ritual was required for women converts who could not be circumcised.

What is the meaning of the symbolism of baptism in the Bible?

It is primarily the representation of a coming upon, not a descending into and rising out of.

- When the apostles were baptised in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit came upon them. The fire with which they were baptised with also came upon them (Acts 1:8).
- The explanation of the baptism in the Spirit was that it was a pouring out upon them (Acts 2:17).
- Further experiences of the baptism of the Spirit are a 'pouring out' (Acts 11:15).
- The sanctification of holy things in the worship of Israel was effected by the sprinkling of blood (Heb 9:19, 21), not by immersion. 'Sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh' (Heb 9:13).
- The symbolism of the application of redemption is the sprinkling of blood (1 Pt 1:2).
- The incursion of the Gospel into the world is called a 'sprinkling of nations' (Isa 52:15).
- The ritual cleansing by blood or sanctification by oil in OT worship was effected by pouring (Lev 8:12, 15, 21:10; Deut 12:27).
- The blessings of the Spirit is always an outpouring (Isa 32:15).
- Forgiveness of sins is represented by the divine sprinkling of clean water (Ezek 36:25). This passage is quoted in the NT as applicable to those under the New Covenant (2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10).
- The reception of God's love, concomitant with receiving salvation, is a pouring upon (Rm 5:5).
- The washing of regeneration (represented by baptism) is a pouring out (Titus 3:5-6).
- Ritual baptisms recorded in the Gospels are a pouring of water to effect ceremonial purification (Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38; Jn 2:6).

Not immersion

In general, baptism is a reference to the fact that salvation has occurred, that the Spirit of God has been poured out. This salvation is universally symbolised in the Bible as a sprinkling or pouring, not by an immersion.

Against this Baptists state that Baptism is only by immersion [*The mode of Baptism ... is immersion, and immersion only*]; AH Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Armstrong (1899), p522], and that this merely represents one aspect of salvation, '*Baptism is the visible symbol of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.*' [EH Bancroft, *Elemental Theology*, p311]. '*Baptism, more particularly, is a symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ.*' [Strong, p527.] However, this ignores the most important aspects of the symbolism – the work of the Holy Spirit poured out as a purifying by cleansing. Being sprinkled or poured out is the overwhelming Biblical symbolism which the Baptist position ignores. The whole emphasis of Scripture is that salvation is effected by a coming upon not by a plunging into. Nowhere in the OT are there any types of salvation effected by an immersion, but many of a sprinkling, washing or pouring. Furthermore, 'immersion' cannot be the correct translation of *baptizo* in Lk 11:37, 38, 12:50; 1 Cor 10:2, 12:13.

A minor but interesting point is that immersion is not conducive to the analogy of Christ's death and burial anyway. Modern western Baptists have in mind the burial of people in a pit as a grave. Jesus' experience was not like this. Firstly, his death was on a cross, i.e. he was lifted up; immersion cannot illustrate this death. Secondly, his body was placed in a rock tomb. This was usually done by putting the body on a shelf hewn in the rock, again lifted up from the ground; immersion cannot represent this either.

What about Romans 6 and Colossians 2?

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with [*katargeo*], that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Rm 6:3-6

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Col 2:11-13

These passages are universally upheld by Baptists as proof that water baptism is by immersion. But the first thing to say is that water baptism is not even in view in these texts. They are not talking about Christian initiation rites but what has happened already in the Spirit. This is shaky ground on which to base an argument for the mode of water baptism. It should also be remembered that pagan baptism rites often included the concept of dying to one life and beginning a new one. This is certainly true of Greek Mystery religions [Apuleius *Meta.* Xi].

But what does Paul mean?

The baptism Paul speaks of is the essence of salvation; it is the cutting off of the old life by death, by dying with Christ, and the gift of resurrection life in Christ. It is not an immersion into death and a raising of that which was immersed back to life. That ruins the symbolism completely. That which dies is not reborn, the Adamic life is killed off by God and is ultimately destroyed. True this has not yet been finalised, but the word *katargeo*, translated as 'destroyed' in the AV (Rm 6:6), means 'made unemployed, made useless'. When our salvation is consummated this death is completed. The raising of our lives is in Christ; we are not raised as we were but as new creatures (2 Cor 5:17). None of this helps to make the Baptist case at all, but ruins it. Only by twisting words and theological meanings is the Baptist case made.

The spiritual baptism under consideration here is not a water baptism but the baptism in the Spirit which actually unites a person to Christ having dealt with his old nature and having made him a new resurrected creature. The result of this baptism is an identification with Christ, one of the range of meanings of the word *baptizo*. Dying and being raised with Christ is identification with Christ; we are co-crucified and co-raised. The same use of baptism is also seen in 1 Cor 10:2 [*all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*] where the Jews became identified with Moses as a result of God's miraculous deliverance. Being baptised into Moses was being identified with him and made to stand firm in his convictions. Interestingly, the Syriac version translates *baptizo* as 'to stand firm'. What is sure is that there is no sense whatsoever of immersion in 1 Cor 10:2 since only the Egyptians were immersed not the Israelites.

Baptizo also has a primary meaning of merge or merge. Therefore, in Spirit baptism one is merged or merged (united) into Christ and in 1 Cor 10:2 the Jews were merged into Moses, became identified with his faith. In water baptism Christians are baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19) – they are merged with God's authority, not dipped into his name and then removed from it. In Rm 6 and Col 2 we are taught that the believer is merged or merged (identification) into Christ, not dipped in and then removed. The same thought applies to Noah's ark (1 Pt 3:20-21). Those baptised were

identified with Noah; it was the wicked outside the ark who were immersed. The salvation of those in the ark was being united with Noah and typologically appropriating resurrection. The water brought a new beginning to the Earth and wiped out sin. This understanding also applies to 1 Cor 12:21; being baptised into the body of Christ is not being dipped into it and then taken out of it, but being merged with it.

So these passages are not about water baptism and do not establish parameters to illustrate the Baptist interpretation of what baptism means.

Baptism and circumcision

Another point is that Paul directly links OT circumcision with the spiritual baptism in Colossians 2; this counters the Presbyterian view that circumcision equates to water baptism. It does not; it is a type of the cutting off of the heart of flesh, dying with Christ at the cross. In Acts the sign associated with regeneration was not baptism but being filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:38, 9:17, 10:44-47, 11:15-16, 15:8 etc.). Also Baptism is not the seal of regeneration; the sealing of the believer is the indwelling of the Spirit – the primary spiritual sign of new life. Furthermore, circumcision was only given to boys in the OT. [See later on ‘infant baptism’.]

Baptismal regeneration

Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Moravians and some others teach that baptism results in regeneration, or that baptism is necessary for salvation, taking their lead from a misunderstanding of Jn 3:3, 5. Further they explain that water baptism brings remission of sins or justification based upon Mk 16:16, Acts 2:38, 22:16; Rm 6:4-6, 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26, 1 Pt 3:21, and Heb 10:22. [*‘Baptism ... worketh forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe, as the word and promise of God declare.’* Luther’s *Smaller Catechism*] Anglicans also teach a sort of baptismal regeneration, especially seen in the Prayer Book, though the 39 Articles are interpreted differently by the Low and the High church.

Reformed theologians explain that this idea is a mistake, usually resulting from taking figurative expressions literally. Standard systematic theologies give many good arguments for this and should be consulted. Indeed, the idea of baptismal regeneration is of ancient pagan origin first seen in Babylonian occultism.

For example:

- Jn 3:5 – ‘water and Spirit’ is a figure of speech (hendiadys) meaning ‘spiritual water’; i.e. water and Spirit are the same thing. Jesus was showing Nicodemus that the cleansing spiritual water mentioned in the OT (Ezek 36:25-27) was not ritual washing but the regeneration of the Spirit.
- Mk 16:16 – here the clear emphasis is upon faith. It is faith that saves and the faithful one must be subsequently baptised to demonstrate his faith.
- Rm 6:4-6 has no reference to water baptism at all. It is a spiritual baptism in view. The same applies to Titus 3:5.
- Acts 2:38 – repentance results in remission of sins. The command is to repent for forgiveness and then be baptised to demonstrate it. The Greek preposition *eis* has the force of ‘in connection with’ here meaning, ‘baptism is in connection with the remission of sins received through repentance’ (which implies faith also).
- 1 Pt 3:21 – The Greek text here is very complex and is mistranslated; suggestions as to how it should be translated vary, but none imply baptismal regeneration. One suggestion is that there are two sentences here: ‘Who (the Spirit) now saves us, the antitype (of Noah), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism is not a putting away of

the filth of the flesh but the seeking of a good conscience to God.’ [See Cairns, *Dict. of Theol. Terms*, i. Loc. and good commentaries.]

The penitent thief on the cross and all the OT saints prove that a person can be saved without baptism.

The historical record

Many claims are made by all parties to gain the support of history, but much of this is baseless.

The first theologians to link circumcision with baptism were not the apostles but Asterius the Sophist [d. 340, an Arian] and Cyprian [c.200/210-258]; not the most trustworthy of the church fathers. Indeed, infant baptism was not common until the late 3rd century, mostly in North Africa, developing into a widespread custom in the 4th century [Stander & Louw, p184]. The most usual early form of baptism was of adult believers by immersion. This conclusion comes from the pen of two esteemed paedobaptist professors of the classics in their unbiased aforementioned study.

The earliest paedobaptist reference is in 200 AD by Tertullian who refers to the baptism of children but not infants and not within a Covenant Theology framework; indeed in ‘*On Baptism*’ he criticises the baptism of small children. In this early period the ritual of baptism was much abused being considered necessary to reach heaven. Some left it till as late as possible in life to cover all previous sins, while others baptised very early to remove inherited sin, even using sponsors to substitute for the young child. Tertullian condemns both views.

The NT practice of Baptism

The baptism of John

This was a continuation of the Hebrew baptism of proselytes and becomes an initiatory rite for the messianic community. The symbolism is clearly that of washing and repentance.

John was not the originator of water baptism but was accepted as a prophet by the Jewish people because he was baptising. The Pharisees did not question the rite of baptism, which must have been long accepted, but asked John why he was baptising if he wasn’t the Messiah nor Elijah (Jn 1:25). Interestingly, this means that the prophets foretold that the Messiah’s forerunner would come baptising; but there are no references to the Messiah or the forerunner immersing, but there are prophecies regarding sprinkling and pouring being associated with the Messianic hope (Isa 52:15; Ezek 36:25; Joel 2:28).

We can summarise its features as follows:

- John was divinely commissioned to baptise (Lk 3:2; Jn 1:33; Matt 21:25).
- He baptised with water (Jn 3:23). He alone administered it.
- It was for the remission of sin (Mk 1:4).
- He called for public repentance and confession of sin (Matt 3:6).
- It was a preparation for the Messiah (Matt 3:3, 11:10).
- Jesus accepted baptism at John's hand (Matt 3:13; Jn 1:29), not to renounce sin but to fulfil all righteousness and to identify with the elect.
- Most Pharisees revealed their rejection by God in refusing John's baptism (Lk 7:30).

John’s baptism, in calling people to repentance, served to bring about conviction of sin and a desire to follow God in righteousness. This was not salvation but the preparation for the Jews to hear the way of salvation from the Messiah. Subsequent submission to Christ and

baptism by the disciples was necessary. This was why Apollos and the Ephesian disciples needed to be baptised and filled with the Spirit (Acts 18:24-26, 19:1-6).

John's baptism stood between Jewish baptism of proselytes and Christian baptism. It was more than a formal ceremonial purification, since it included deep repentance and confession of sin. Jews who were ceremonially pure still needed John's baptism. However, it was not a Christian conversion since it symbolised the preparation for entering the kingdom, not actually being a member of it. This was only relevant for the time before Jesus' ministry (Acts 19:3-6).

But didn't John require 'much water' at Aenon to baptise (Jn 3:22-34) and does this not, at least, imply immersion? No. Jn 3:23 is usually wrongly translated; 'much water' should be 'many waters' (*Young's Literal*), 'many waters were there' (*Robertson's Word Pictures*) or 'many streams' (Helen Montgomery's translation printed by a Baptist press). John baptised at Aenon because there were many streams of water available, which may not have been very deep. In fact, 'Aenon' itself means springs or fountains. The water available for baptism was springs not large rivers. There was no place for immersion in these springs trickling through marshy meadows. It is supposed that John left the Jordan river, which was dirty and muddy overflowing its banks at this time of year (Jos 3:15) for the cool springs to obtain the necessary clean water for baptism found at Aenon. This passage also links 'baptism' with 'purification' and the law regarding purification was by sprinkling (Lev 14:6-7; Num 8:7; Ps 51:7 etc.).

A final point regards numbers. It has been suggested that John may have baptised up to one million people out of a population round Judaea of about 2 million. Even some Pharisees and Roman soldiers were baptised. It is virtually impossible that one man could have sustained baptising that number by immersion in a relatively short time, since he began aged about 30, the lawful age for the beginning of priestly ministry, and his ministry did not last very long since it diminished when Christ's ministry began, probably only months later. Immersing a mere few hundred alone would have caused complete exhaustion. However, if John sprinkled whole crowds at once, following the usual Old Covenant precedent (Heb 9:19, Ex 24:8), then there is no problem. There is no evidence that John immersed.

The baptism of Christ

Jesus' baptism was most unusual since he was not a sinner and needed no repentance. John's baptism was a preparation for receiving the Christ, and Jesus did not need this either. The Lord was baptised to identify himself with the message and ministry of John and to fulfil all righteousness. This means a submission to Mosaic Law (Deut 6:25). Christ had always fulfilled the law from being circumcised as a child to attending the temple feasts. In beginning his ministry at thirty-years-old (Lk 3:23) Jesus was becoming a priest for his people. The law required that priests were sprinkled (Ex 29:4; Lev 8:5-6; Num 8:6-7); the laver near the Tabernacle was not for immersion. Jesus, in submitting to John's baptism, as the last OT prophet and the most genuine representative of the Mosaic Law (John was also the son of a priest), was being initiated as a priest and it was performed by sprinkling. Jesus' induction into the priesthood was into a new order, that of Melchizedek, prophesied in the OT (Ps 110:4) and explained in the NT (Heb 7:17-21). Jesus' priesthood was not to be limited by the Aaronic line, but was a universal priesthood for men from all nations. Jesus united the Old Covenant law for Jews alone with the New Covenant application to the world. But the New Covenant emerged after Christ's death and resurrection; during his earthly life the Lord had to fulfil all the aspects of the Mosaic Law that he was under as a Jew, and thus he was sprinkled for induction into the priestly office.

Jesus' baptism formally signifies his anointing to divine office as the Christ, the 'anointed one'. Indeed, at his baptism the Lord was signally anointed by the Holy Spirit who came upon him and imbued him with power to minister. The baptism and the anointing are linked not just by time but by the outward symbolising the inward. Thus, this gives further proof that Jesus was sprinkled, an effective symbol of the Spirit coming upon him. Immersion would utterly fail the rules of symbolism.

Baptism with the Spirit

Matt 3:11 (and parallels), Acts 1:4-5, 2:3-4, 17, 33, 11:15-16 all speak of a spiritual baptism. This is the corollary of water baptism and not a separate experience since there is only one baptism (Eph 4:4-5). The baptism in water is an external sign and seal of the inward baptism of the Spirit which is a heavenly sealing. This baptism is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel that all God's people would know the inward ministry of the Spirit and the outpouring at Pentecost shows its fulfilment. This spiritual baptism is then continued in application to Gentile believers (Acts 10:44-48, 11:15-16) and all new people groups.

The point is that the external sign must harmonise with the internal reality, and immersion cannot do this. The action of the Spirit is always called a pouring, outpouring, a falling upon, a receiving or a coming down upon. This complies with the prophecy of Joel 2:28 which calls this event a 'pouring out'. We can say with certainty that the Pentecostal baptism was not an immersion, but a pouring. To demonstrate their conversion and receiving of the Spirit, believers are immediately told to be baptised; clearly this would be by pouring not immersion (which as we have stated was impossible in Jerusalem anyway and would be at odds with the examples of the law).

Finally, we see the phrase 'baptism with the Spirit' in Matt 3:11, Mk 1:8, Lk 3:16 and Jn 1:33 but Baptists affirm that the preposition *en* (translated as 'with') can equally be translated as 'in', and thus refers to immersion. In many cases 'with' is to be preferred (e.g. in 1 Cor 4:21 where 'in' would be preposterous). John's promise that Christ would baptise us with the Spirit is more conducive to the facts of the baptism theologically explained in 1 Cor 12:13 ('For by [*en*] one Spirit we were all baptised into one body') and described in Acts 10:44 etc. 'the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word'. Pouring or sprinkling is more in line with the word 'with' but immersion cannot comply with the word 'with'.

Regarding the Charismatic claim that the promise of Christ baptising with the Spirit and the Spirit baptising us into Christ are two different actions, well the Spirit only does what Christ directs (Jn 16:13-15). He brings the things of Christ to us; he applies all that Christ has worked for. The promise that the disciples would be baptised with the Spirit is the counterpart of the theological statement that the Spirit has baptised us into one body. Pentecost is the fulfilment of the promised baptism. The work of the Spirit and Christ are a united whole and both follow the eternal decree of the Father. What Jesus and John promised was that a work would occur in converts conducted by the Spirit and Christ which would bring spiritual renewal and life. What Paul gives us is more information about how this brought us into union with God in Christ, something the early Jewish disciples could not possibly have taken in at that time. Remember that baptism has the meaning of a radical change being effected by a certain action; hence we can summarise this as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| He (Christ) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit | Meaning: a significant life change would occur as a result of the work of the Spirit, which will be initiated by Christ. |
| By the Spirit we were baptised into one body | Meaning: the change that occurred was that we were regenerated by the Spirit, given new life, and united with Christ as one body. This was initiated by Christ's work on the cross and applied by the Spirit. |

Both statements refer to the same thing from different perspectives.

Water baptism must emulate Spirit baptism; this is best done by pouring or sprinkling.

Christian baptism

It must first be stated that there is no single definite instance of water baptism being by immersion; in fact, there are several cases where it is most unlikely. No one can prove, from Scripture, that baptism must be by immersion. Furthermore, since baptism has a worldwide significance there are places where immersion would be either dangerous or impossible. Even in England unless a church has a baptistery in a building it is actually quite difficult to immerse people – unless you live near a river or the sea; but even then most of the year this is impracticable. Furthermore, there are many cases where a disciple would not be able to be immersed, such as the frail, elderly or sick. While immersion may be the most popular method, there is actually quite a lot of evidence stacked against this,

Since no mode is specified we can safely deduce that immersion, pouring or sprinkling is perfectly adequate when done with reverence. This is why Scripture gives no clear explanation of the mode; any form is acceptable and no one is precluded from being baptised by the mode.

The formula

Baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Matt 28:19

Baptism is in the name of the Trinity, under the equal authority of Father, Son and Holy Spirit since salvation comes from the work of all three. References in Acts to baptism being in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:36, 8:16) are merely the author using a précis or abbreviation, a normal practice; they do not represent an apostolic baptismal formula. Oneness Pentecostals are wrong in teaching that baptism is only in the name of Jesus and forcing disciples to be re-baptised. The above reference is crystal clear and is a command of the Lord.

When is it applied?

Upon conversion; as soon as practicably possible. The practice of waiting for many months, or even years, is utterly unbiblical. When a person has confessed Christ and shown signs of genuine repentance, then they should be baptised. It was normal in the early church to baptise on the same day as conversion (Acts 2:41, 8:36-38); note the word 'immediately' (Acts 16:33). Neither is there any need for a public meeting to administer baptism. Baptism can be conducted even in a jail (Acts 16:33).

Mode

According to general Christian traditions there are three ways of administering the water: immersion, effusion and aspersion; the latter two forms are the same means of washing as evidenced under the Mosaic economy.

- Immersion: the disciple enters into the water whereby the head and body is plunged under it, sometimes once or sometimes three times (to symbolise the Trinity). According to Baptist logic this represents dying and raising with Christ.
- Effusion (pouring): the water is poured upon the whole head or upon the face. Sometimes the person is in water, sometimes on dry ground. This most effectively pictures the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.
- Aspersion (sprinkling): water is sprinkled on the head or face. The common modes in the early church were pouring and immersion but sprinkling became almost universally employed by the 13th century. In the early centuries sprinkling was reserved only for the

sick and infirm to weak to submit to pouring in a river. In this time some questioned the validity of this method but Cyprian defends it [LXXV epistle or LXIX Hartel's ed.]. Texts used by Cyprian to support it include: Ezek 36:25-26; Num 8:5-7; 19:8, 9, 12, 13.

The baptiser

The person who baptises does not have to be a leader (elder) or apostle. Scripture shows that ordinary believers baptised people (Acts 9:18). What is alone required is that the baptiser must be a genuine believer and must instruct the person being baptised. It is recognised that women baptised women in certain conditions in the early church. [Clement of Alexandria explains how women alone had access to the *gynaecium* to carry the message of the Gospel there, who then baptised converts (*Strom.* III, 6). Paul's friend and disciple Thekla (she did exist but her story is not an inspired text) baptised her converts.] Tertullian shows that in his time (2nd century) baptism was performed by any Christian male [*On Baptism*, 17.]. However, institutional churches usually insist that only office-bearers can perform baptisms.

The baptised

Only those who make a sincere and genuine confession of Christ as Lord and Saviour. This is usually evidenced by oral confession and observable repentance in life. Presbyterians add that the children of believing parents must also be included. No prolonged course of instruction is necessary.

The theology of baptism

Scripture affirms that 'there is only one baptism' (*baptisma*, Eph 4:5). However, there are two aspects of this baptism, actual and symbolic, or ritual and real. The symbolic is the act of water baptism, which is an illustration of what has actually occurred in Spirit baptism. The act of uniting a person with Christ into one body is the essence of salvation and this is done by the baptism of the Spirit, promised by Jesus and John (Mk 1:8; Acts 1:5) and effected at Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff.). Every convert is baptised in the Spirit, baptised by the Spirit into one body (1 Cor 12:13), when they believe the Gospel and are born again. In this action they are overwhelmed, sealed, indwelled and filled by the outpoured Spirit (baptised), are united in Christ's death and resurrection, are made into new creatures, are washed clean from sin and are justified and adopted into God's family. The outpouring of the Spirit, begun at Pentecost, is made effectual in every believer on the day they are saved.

The chief implication of the baptism of the Spirit is a cleansing from sin, the application of the benefits of salvation through the merits of Christ, and a uniting with Christ through new life, 'Arise and be baptised, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord' (Acts 22:16). Thus washing is the chief emblem of water baptism, not immersion.

Ephesians 4:5 also asserts that, since there is only one baptism, we can say that being re-baptised is wrong. If a genuine baptism has occurred upon faith then no one can make you be baptised again in another way. Oneness Pentecostals and others err in this. Also we can affirm that all the notions of a Charismatic baptism in the Spirit, as a secondary experience to conversion, is a lie. There is only one baptism. Trying to make Heb 6:2 teach that there are two baptisms is false exegesis and makes Scripture contradict itself. The verse in Hebrews refers to the different forms of Jewish ritual baptism and the difference between these and Christian baptism (which the rest of the letter makes clear).

Baptism – a means of grace

Like the Lord's Supper, baptism is a sacrament and, as such, is not a mere symbolic ritual with no meaning or spiritual effect. As the Supper conveys genuine grace and stimulates faith week-by-week, so baptism also is a means of grace and provides a foundation for

assurance. Several Scriptures speak of baptism in such powerful terms that some have taken them sacerdotally, i.e. they have used them to affirm baptismal regeneration. While this is a mistake, the opposite error is to aver that baptism has no spiritual significance for the believer. Yes baptism is a symbol, but it is a symbol with power.

[The sacraments] are made effectual to the elect for their salvation. ... [The sacraments] become effectual means of salvation. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q154 and Q161. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q91.

While forgiveness of sin is appropriated by the divine gift of faith, which justifies, baptism gives confirmation to the believer that this is applicable to him. Baptism thus confirms what has happened in justification to the conscience of the baptised; note: Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11. Baptism also confirms our regeneration (implied in Titus 3:5) and our union with Christ (Gal 3:26-27). Thus baptism assures the conscience of the elect of their hope. If assaulted by temptation to doubt your salvation, a key element of combat is to declare that one is baptised in the name of the Trinity in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism also helps to identify those who are truly committed to the faith; few professing superficial converts ever bother to be baptised.

Rebaptism

As I have said elsewhere rebaptism is wrong. There is only one baptism. However, many Reformed Presbyterians will accept the 'christening' of infants in an apostate Anglican Church as acceptable baptism when they later convert [e.g. Kimmitt, p46]. I believe that this is also wrong.

When a person is born into an unregenerate family, and is taken to an apostate church teaching wrong doctrine and where the minister is not a Christian, and is then 'christened; by sprinkling as a baby, there is no sound basis for true baptism. When that child grows up and later is truly converted to Christ there is no real baptism to fall back upon and he needs to be baptised for the first time. Reformed statements that he has simply come into the reality of what the earlier ritual stood for are irrelevant; there was no faith, there was no truth thus there was no Biblical baptism. Thus the baptism as an adult believer is not a rebaptism but a real baptism; the earlier 'christening' was a meaningless ritual performed by unbelievers in an apostate church.

However, if a person showed repentance and was baptised but later backslides and leaves the church for many years, when they return they do not require a rebaptism; their original baptism still stands. Though they abandoned their baptism for a time, their baptism did not abandon them; what they originally stood for persevered.

The baptism of infants?

Scripture does not forbid or command this directly, so we must carefully examine the Biblical texts and analyse the analogy of the faith (Biblical theology) to determine whether it is acceptable.

The Baptist case is that repentance and faith must be in evidence before baptism can occur, and this is impossible to determine in infants. This is not to say that young children cannot be believers, but it is very hard to prove. The Presbyterian case is chiefly that it is, at least, implied in the NT that infants were baptised. Baptism of entire households would almost

certainly include infants (Acts 16:15, 32, 1 Cor 1:16); however this is not proof and but mere conjecture. Scripture does not say that there were infants involved.

Another Presbyterian (Covenant Theology) argument is that baptism equates to circumcision and infants were circumcised under the Old Covenant and were included in the covenant community from 8 days old. But, as I have earlier explained, water baptism does not equate to circumcision, which is a type of the cutting away of the flesh, dying to the old man.

They say that there is no NT repeal of the command to place the sign of the covenant upon children, but then are there any repeals of other commands, such as to build an altar of stones to worship? However, while circumcision is called a sign (Rm 4:11), baptism is never formally called a sign in the NT. The better outward sign of being in the covenant in the NT is attending the *ekklesia* and partaking of the Lord's Supper. This requires a 'discerning of the body' which is not possible for infants (1 Cor 11:29). The Old Covenant community did not have Sunday meetings as we do but saints were part of the covenant community by birth and circumcision, though faith was required to obtain salvation. There are many other differences, not least the priesthood of all believers in the NT and the need for mutual edification. The apostolic message is that the forms of Old Covenant life did not carry over into the New Covenant (e.g. vestments, mediatorial priests, music, temples, sacrifices, anointing, libations, feast days etc.).

All of the forms of Old Covenant worship have been abrogated unless taken up by the New Covenant. The vast majority were shadows; mere signs to what would be fulfilled in Christ. We do not continue with the shadows unless commanded to by Christ or the apostles. There is no specific teaching that circumcision was replaced by baptism, indeed the fulfilment of circumcision is the dying to the old man. If Presbyterians want to affirm that baptism equates to circumcision, then they must also admit that baptism is by immersion since it then represents dying and being raised with Christ alone.

Another argument is that the OT promise of salvation was not just to parents but to the whole family. At Pentecost Peter repeats that this promise of the Spirit is 'to you and your children' (Acts 2:38-39). However, this does not mean that the children are automatically baptised but that the promise is for them as they are instructed in it and grow up to be converted. We do not have to practice paedobaptism in order to believe this promise. The same applies to the Lord's point that infants were types of those who enter the kingdom (Mk 10:14-16). The fact that the early (sub-apostolic) church did practice paedobaptism is insufficient warrant for us; the early church also got a number of other things wrong; it, for instance, often taught salvation by works and meritorious martyrdom. [Irenaeus endorses it for instance, *Adv. Haer.* II, 22, cf. 39. Tertullian (late 2nd c.), though personally against infant baptism, accepts that it was common.] However, though it may have been common, it was not universal. The great theologian Basil and his equally fine brother Gregory of Nyssa are examples of those who were brought up as believers in a godly family but who refrained from being baptised until they experienced a personal conversion upon reaching maturity.

Finally, Presbyterian paedobaptists are universally troubled by what to do with baptised infants as they grow up. Some treated them as regenerate (Beza); some were more cautious (Calvin, Vermigli, Warfield, Murray) but still accepted that there was spiritual grace in their position. Others were yet more cautious and affirmed that baptised infants were to be treated as unregenerate until personal faith was evident (Thornwell, Dabney). All Presbyterians accept that many baptised babies later become apostate. This practical uncertainty reflects an unsound theological proposition.

To summarise: If one includes Anglicans and Episcopalians with Presbyterians, then the majority of historic Protestant churches practised infant baptism. These would say that the promise includes children since they are covenant people through their believing parents and should receive the sign of the covenant; that a child may be full of the Spirit from the womb (Lk 1:15); that infants are in the kingdom (Matt 19:14); and that children of believing parents are holy (1 Cor 7:14). Baptists would counter that only believing disciples can be baptised and that there is a danger of baptising people who are not saved. Covenant Theologians would then answer that even Baptists baptise people who later prove to be unsaved. And so the arguments go on. The current situation, with the explosion of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, is that immersion is probably now more common.

Regarding the historical record, most of the early baptisms included various expressions of repentance and commitment, such as: giving an undertaking to live righteously, undergoing a period of devotion and fasting, and seeking forgiveness for past sins. Clearly infants could not satisfy these conditions for baptism. Also baptism was clearly linked to the remission of sins and not associated with the covenant. Stander and Louw prove that the first instances of known infant baptism occurred in the latter part of the 3rd century, mostly in North Africa [p184]. However, the historical record is not our first plank of authority.

The position of the writer, who does not identify with any denomination, is that Covenant Theology fails to fully understand the change in the introduction of the New Covenant and that the old has passed away; a new form of religion in Christ is introduced where 'all things are new'. The new is not a mere continuation of the old in essentially the same form but with some superficial additions, but the old was only ever a shadow of the new. The Law of Christ is not the same as the Law of Moses, even though the moral law undergirds both. The unity of the two testaments is in Christ as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant, not in theological propositions espoused by Covenant Theology. Circumcision is not replaced by baptism. The entrance into this New Covenant is by faith alone, demonstrated by repentance and thus precludes the baptism of infants below the age of reason.

The key foundation for me is the divine imperative in Matt 29:19, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' and the statement in Mk 16:16, 'He who believes and is baptised will be saved'. The position of Presbyterians that all parties can only deduce information from Scripture on this subject and that Baptists have no solid ground for credobaptism any more than paedobaptists, is clearly untrue. These verses alone declare that those who are baptised are those who have shown themselves to be disciples. A disciple is someone who has manifested faith and repentance, and thus is a fitting candidate for baptism. This excludes infants. The prayer of the Westminster Assembly's *Directory for Public Worship* that God would add the baptism of the Spirit to the outward water baptism is surely putting the cart before the horse.

Questions

1. *What about phrases such as 'coming up out of the water,' 'went down into the water' (Mk 1:10; Acts 8:38); surely these imply immersion?* No they do not. They are equally applicable to effusion and aspersion. In history many folk were baptised by pouring or sprinkling in a river, either at the bank or in the water itself. The earliest historical account of baptism (*The Didache*, c.7) approves of pouring, preferably in running water. Though it does not specifically mention immersion, it may possibly be implied in the text. If so, it approves of pouring and immersion, which was the common practice in the early church as was sprinkling. It is extremely unlikely that the baptism of the

households of the Philippian jailer and Cornelius were by immersion, having taken place indoors. There is no NT case where immersion can be absolutely proved.

2. *What about the Greek text of Mk 1:9-10 and parallels ('coming up from the water') and Acts 8:38-39 ('went down into the water')?* The Greek prepositions used (*ek*, *apo*, *eis*, *en*) never mean 'down into' or 'up out of'. The better Baptist expositors admit this. To give this meaning the words *ano* and *kato* would be also required. *Eis* and *ek* have a range of meanings including 'to, toward, into, out of, unto from away from' etc. It can't be proved that they went into the water. In Mark's account *ek* is used, but in Matthew's *apo* is used, which cannot mean 'out of' but 'away from'; therefore, Mark used *ek* in the sense of *apo*. In Acts 8 *eis* may mean 'unto, to toward'. However, it occurs eleven times in Acts and only once is translated (wrongly) as 'into' in the AV. In any case this took place in 'a desert road' in the Negeb. There is no water supply there sufficient for immersion, especially in the dry season; there is only the occasional small spring. In fact, the Eunuch says, in Greek, 'a little water' (*tina hudor*), expressing surprise.
3. *What about Paul's baptism?* The Greek literally reads 'standing up, he was baptised' (Acts 9:17-18, 22:12-16). He was not immersed.
4. *What is the common early historical form?* Written records commonly testify to immersion (often nakedly), but the early pictorial representations of baptism show effusion. Consequently, both Presbyterians and Baptists claim that early history supports their case. However, we do not make our case based on history, but Scripture.
5. *What was the practice of the 16th century Anabaptists?* The rebaptism of adults by Anabaptists used the method of pouring.
6. *What was the practice of the Mennonites (forerunners of Baptists)?* This was effected by pouring.

Conclusion

So what is the final conclusion of all this?

My conviction, after much study, is that baptism is only allowed for those who have exercised faith in Christ as Saviour and submitted to his Lordship, demonstrating this by true repentance. There is not one single method of performing this baptism but immersion in water, sprinkling and pouring of water are equally viable, the latter two being particularly suited for extreme cases of infirmity. In this I endorse the credobaptism of the Baptists but including the use of effusion and aspersion of the Presbyterians. However, my conviction is that a stronger Biblical case can be made for pouring or sprinkling than for immersion.

When John came baptising there was no shock about his method, but universal acceptance, even by Pharisees. This meant that the method used was familiar to Jews. The reason why it was familiar is because baptisms were common under Old Covenant law (Heb 6:2) and the law prescribed sprinkling and pouring. The prophets also foretold a messianic sprinkling to come. Not only did John, as a priest, follow the precedent set by the law, but it was impossible for him to administer immersion to the huge numbers that he baptised. Clearly, baptism in the beginning of the New Testament, and the baptism of Jesus, were by sprinkling or pouring.

Practicalities also preclude immersion: I have mentioned that the frail, disabled, elderly and ill are unable to be immersed yet Baptists would delay or halt their necessary baptism. This cannot be right. Neither does immersion make sense in times of persecution (and the church has been frequently persecuted in history). Finding somewhere to baptise by immersion is frightfully difficult even today and always has been; in many parts of the world it is impossible. Indeed, it would be very strange for God to prescribe an action that aged and infirm leaders could not perform; yet many immersionists, such as Charles

Spurgeon, had to delegate baptising when they became ill and old. Furthermore, there are records of immersionists becoming very sick after immersing people in polluted rivers in Africa.

Baptism should be performed as soon as practicably possible after conversion and performed by a true believer, but not necessarily an office-bearer. It should follow instruction and teaching so that the baptised person knows what is being done and why. Finally, it should be administered in the name of the Trinity, but it does not require three dunks, one act of pouring or immersing is enough, though a triple action is not forbidden.

While baptism is important and is an act of obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation is not inextricably attached to it. Not all those who are baptised are saved (either amongst Baptist converts or Presbyterian infants) and those who die in faith but are not baptised for some reason are not condemned (e.g. the penitent thief on the cross).

What is worthy of condemnation is when institutional churches refuse to allow believers into membership because they have not followed their baptismal method. It is common for genuine Christians to be shut out from fellowship if they were not baptised in this or that manner. This is a great sin. There is no clear Biblical method of baptism, hence the historic controversy that rages on, but there are very clear Biblical commands to receive one another (Matt 10:40; Rm 14:1, 15:7). To refuse fellowship on these grounds is to be guilty of adding to Scripture and offending the Lord of the rejected believer, in effect a rejecting of the Lord himself.

While baptism is important, demonstrating obedience to the faith, it is not to be used as a weapon to divide Christians. Paul stated that 'Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel' (1 Cor 1:17), revealing what is most important. Christians of different denominations must tolerate each other's sincerely held views and not reject one another. Thus to use a mode of baptism as the central truth to define your denomination is clearly wrong.

Quotes

Baptism is a washing with water. By washing is meant any such application of water to the body as effects its purification. This may be done by immersion, affusion, or sprinkling. The command, therefore, to baptise is simply a command to wash with water, It is not specifically a command to immerse, to affuse, or to sprinkle. The mode of applying water as the purifying medium is unessential. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 3, p526, James Clarke (1960).

Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person. Robert L Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Nelson (1998), p923.

Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 28:3.

Reformed paedobaptists must admit that nowhere in the New Testament can a direct command be found: 'Baptise the infants and small children of believing parents'. Robert L Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Nelson (1998), p923.

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