

Q & A

Week 2: June 10, 2020

Q Why do we use sprinkling for baptism instead of immersion?

- **Some arguments for immersion**

- People claim that *baptizo* always means “immerse.” This isn’t accurate.
 - Mark 7:3-4—“(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash (*baptizo*). And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing (*baptizmos*) of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.)”
 - Luke 11:38—“The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash (*baptizo*) before dinner.”
 - Hebrews 9:9b-10—“According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.”
- People think that immersion best symbolizes being buried with Christ. But burial isn’t the central symbolism of baptism in the New Testament.
 - Romans 6:3-4—“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.” (cf. Colossians 2:12)
 - Paul’s point is that Baptism represents our union with Christ (which is multifaceted). In the context, he is not making a point about the mode of baptism.
 - The central symbolism of baptism is not burial, but cleansing/washing.
 - Acts 22:16—“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”
 - 1 Peter 3:21—“Baptism, which corresponds to this [the flood of Noah], 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.”
 - Immersion may arguably be contrary to the flood symbolism in 1 Peter (above) and the Red Sea symbolism in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 (below). The point in these passages is that the people were *not* immersed in the water—the ungodly, unsaved world was immersed!
 - 1 Corinthians 10:1-2—“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”
 - Paul connects other imagery for baptism that is not distinctly tied to immersion (e.g., clothing)
 - Galatians 3:27—“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
 - Ephesians 5:26—“That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

- Sprinkling best represents the “cleansing” imagery of the whole Bible.
 - In the Levitical law, sprinkling (especially with sacrificial blood, sometimes mixed with water) frequently symbolized ceremonial cleansing.
 - Consecrating the people, Exodus 24:6-8—“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw 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.’”
 - Consecrating the priests’ garments, Exodus 29:21—“Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons’ garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him.”
 - Cleansing ceremonially unclean people—“Whoever in the open field touches someone who was killed with a sword or who died naturally, or touches a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. For the unclean they shall take some ashes of the burnt sin offering, and fresh water shall be added in a vessel. 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.”
 - The Old Testament looks forward to a time when God will sprinkle His people with clean water, which is connected with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - Ezekiel 36:25-27—“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. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”
 - Hebrews connects our purification from sin through Christ’s blood with the Old Testament (typological) ceremonial sprinkling
 - Hebrews 9:13-14—For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 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.
 - Hebrews 9:19-20—“For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” (cf. Exod 24:6-8 and Num 19, 1 Pet 1:2)
 - 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.”
 - Baptism’s connection with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is more consonant with sprinkling or pouring than with immersion. We are not immersed in the Holy Spirit—He is poured out upon us.
 - 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 fire.”
 - Acts 2:17—“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh....” (cf. Joel 2:28)
 - John 3:5—“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
 - Titus 3:5—“...the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...”
- The mode of baptism is not as important as the element (water) and the words (into the triune name of God), and the meaning. *“Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.” (WCF 28.3)*
- For further study
 - “Is Immersion Necessary for Baptism?” by Bill Shishko, https://opc.org/nh.html?article_id=278
 - “Baptism and Sprinkling,” https://opc.org/qa.html?question_id=310
 - “Is Sprinkling a Proper Mode of Baptism,” https://opc.org/qa.html?question_id=467