

MODES OF BAPTISM

For those considering baptism, one may question whether it matters the way in which we get baptized. The answer depends on the reason we are getting baptized: if we don't have any intention on changing our lifestyle, then it probably doesn't matter since we don't understand the meaning of the ordinance and what it symbolizes. The Christian ordinance of baptism should only be undertaken by those persons who sincerely want to change their life from one wherein worldliness controls us to one of walking in the love and compassion that Jesus the Christ walked in. If a person wants to follow after Jesus, then they will want to be baptized in the same manner as he was baptized.

Today, the main modes of baptism being practiced by various churches are immersing, pouring and sprinkling. The scriptures only instruct us in using one of these modes.

The mode of baptism that involves pouring cannot be the proper mode to use since "baptize" does not mean pouring. The Greek word for "pouring upon" is 'epicheo' (Strong's Concordance # 2022). Luke 10:34a uses this word: ***"And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in [epicheo] oil and wine..."*** There is a slight difference in phrasing in the King James Version for pouring in as compared to the Greek which reads "pouring upon" of which the Greek word is epicheo. Baptism comes from the Greek word 'baptizo' and is not used for 'pouring upon'.

There is a separate Greek word for "pouring" or "poured out" which is 'ekcheo' and it is used in John 2:15: ***"And when he had a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out [ekcheo] the changers' money ..."***

How and when did the practice of 'epicheo' enter into Christendom? It is difficult to say with certainty when this occurred for the first time, however, we read about pouring replacing immersing in baptism from a manuscript that is believed to have been written between 140 and 170 A.D. which was given the name of *"The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"*. From chapter 7 of this manuscript, it reads: ***"And concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if thou have not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold, in warm. But if thou have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast and the baptized and whatever others can; but thou shalt order the baptized to fast one or two days before."*** The "living waters" refer to moving waters such as in creeks and rivers. It is evident that this document demonstrates that baptism was moving away from immersion to a pouring of water soon after the Apostles died.

Pouring rather than immersing was soon to become more popular as it was more convenient for the church which was already moving away from the teachings of Jesus. The custom of pouring originated outside of the original church and was brought in by those early church figures who brought in many of their own ideas which were not based on scripture. Tertullian wrote concerning the three immersions during his time (circa 160 to 240 A.D.): ***"When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel..."*** Tertullian makes it quite clear that he does not oppose triple immersion but acknowledges that Jesus had not appointed the practice in the Gospel. This was yet another custom of man brought into the church that did not have scriptural backing. It is worthy commenting at this point that those who follow the Christ by faith will not succumb to their own desires nor to the desires or ideas of others. We should live in obedience to those principles and teachings as taught by the Christ of God.

Another practice that made its way into the Church of God at a much later date was sprinkling. It

began in the Western church with Rome and is now used by most branches of the Western church and some Eastern churches, although most Eastern churches still often use immersing. To be sprinkled is not the same as someone having been immersed. There is no scriptural backing to use sprinkling as a form of baptism. If one had been sprinkled upon during a christening as a baby, one has not been baptized. It is believed that the practice of sprinkling came into the church after the death of Constantine. Eusebius said it was the wish of Constantine to go to Palestine and to be baptized in the river Jordan as Jesus had been. However, due to chronic illness, Constantine could not make the journey. It is believed that Constantine was sprinkled by Eusebius of Nicomedia in 337 A.D.

The last mode we will discuss is immersion which is what the Greek word 'baptizo' means. Using *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, we find the Greek word 'baptizo' is always used for immersing. "907 – baptizo – from a derivation of 911: to make whelmed (ie. fully wet), used only (in the N.T.) of ceremonial ablution ... 908 – baptisma – from 907: baptism ... 910 – Baptistes; - from 907, a baptizer, as an ephthet of Christ's forerunner. Baptist ... 911 – bapto – a prim. Verb; to whelm, ie. Cover wholly with a fluid." The word "baptizo" is defined as being whelmed which is being covered completely with water or other fluid, in other words, being totally immersed. Jesus was baptized using immersion which is the mode that John the Baptist used. ***"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him ... And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water ..."*** Matthew 3:13, 16a. John baptized in the Jordan River and that was where Jesus went to be baptized. Note that Jesus came up out of the water. Mark 1:9b, 10a describes this better: ***"... and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water ..."*** Another passage describing baptism by immersion includes Acts 8:36, 38b, and 39a: ***"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? ... And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water ..."*** It is abundantly clear from Philip's baptism of the eunuch that baptism by total immersion occurred in that both men went down into the water and subsequently came up out of the water.

We should point out that the Jews had a practice of requiring proselytes to be "cleansed" upon admission into the Jewish congregation. Every proselyte would be regarded as unclean and before entering into the congregation went through a ceremonial cleansing. Note that this was an outward washing whereas the Christian baptism is by immersion. John the Baptist did not baptize proselytes but baptized those Jews who were already members by birth and descent so what they were obtaining from John was a spiritual purification from their sins.

If we are earnestly seeking truth as a Christian, we will come to realize how important a matter that baptism is and that it should not be taken lightly. In essence, what baptism symbolizes is the old person who was absorbed in worldliness, dies and is buried, arising a new person in Christ. ***"...but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."*** I Corinthians 6:11b; ***"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*** Romans 6:3, 4; ***"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."*** Colossians 2:12. Baptism symbolizes the death of the old worldly version of ourselves. The rite of baptism with being fully immersed in water signifies that burial. Using any other mode shows that we do not comprehend what baptism signifies. It is worth noting that when Jesus went to John to be baptized, John almost resisted baptizing Jesus because of Jesus' righteousness but Jesus made it clear that the step of baptism was an important one for all believers: ***"But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."*** Matthew 3:14, 15. Jesus approved of John's baptism which was by immersion and so should we. ***"One Lord, one faith, one baptism."***

Ephesians 4:5.