

"Mode of Baptism (Part 1)"

Romans 6:3-7

Baxter Exum (#920)
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Introduction:

When we look at the religious world around us, we find that there are many diverse opinions on the subject of baptism. Certainly there are many denominations that sprinkle water on the heads of little babies. Others baptize adults, but do it for the wrong reason. Others do it for the right reason but in the wrong way. And right there, we have summarized almost 95% of the religious world. And when we think about it, and when we start checking around and asking some questions, we find that the Lord's church is one of only a tiny fraction of the religious world who baptize for the right reason, at the right time, and in the right way.

As I was doing the research for this morning's lesson, I ran across some rather unique practices. ****PPT**** In New Zealand, for example, there is apparently what is known as Athlete Church Extreme (ACE), and they practice what they refer to as "Bungee Baptisms." They gather over a river, they make the appropriate calculations based on a person's weight and the elasticity of the rope, and that person is initiated into the church by jumping off the bridge and being dunked roughly waist deep in the river below. In fact, their website goes on to explain that they celebrate communion while skydiving, and if you look closely, you can see that each skydiver is holding onto a loaf of bread. Well, this is a little bit unusual!

And yet when we start to explain baptism to the world around us, it seems that we are often the ones who are strange. In fact, it almost seems sometimes that we are speaking a different language altogether. I remember getting estimates for some project at the church building down in Janesville, and I was showing the electrician what we needed to have done. As I was standing there in my office, the man asked me what was behind a particular wall. I explained that our baptistery was behind that wall. He said, "No, this wall right here." And I said, "Yes, there's water behind that wall." And the man got a little bit irritated and said, "Well, how do you get into that room?" So I opened the door, he went up the dark stairs, and when he got to the top, he actually yelled and said, "Whoa, there's a lot of water up here!" And when he got over the shock of seeing 800 gallons of water in a church building, he clarified his surprise by saying, "I grew up Lutheran, so I guess that explains it!" And so I think that this is simply another reminder that when it comes to baptism, we are the ones who are actually quite strange. In fact, it is almost impossible to have a basic discussion with someone on the subject of baptism without first backing up and defining the most basic of terms.

With this in mind, I'd like for us to focus this morning on what is commonly referred to as the "mode" of baptism—in other words, the action itself. And our study is especially important, because if we were to ask every religious leader in Madison to describe and define the action of baptism, we would get a number of different responses. Those responses would fall in one of four basic categories. Some would define baptism as sprinkling, others would describe it as pouring water on a person's head, others would define it as immersion, and others would even give you a choice—any of the above, **"Whatever you want, we'll do it for you!"** So as we study, I'd like for us to ask ourselves the question: How do we know whether baptism is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? And as we answer that question from the Scriptures, I'd like to briefly look at four basic areas.

This morning we will look at the evidence from the word "baptism" itself as well as evidence from the definition of the gospel. And then, Lord willing, next Sunday morning we will look at the evidence from the context of the Bible itself, as well as evidence from church history.

I. First of all, though, we need to start by looking at **PPT**** THE WORD BAPTISM ITSELF.**

Unfortunately, the religious world thrives on confusion. In fact, if religious leaders can keep us away from the Bible, then it may be possible for them to convince their people of whatever they want for us to believe. As I was growing up, I went through a time when I really wanted to be sure of my faith. Since I had grown up in the church, I wanted to make sure that my faith was my own and not just what I had been told, and so I went through a time of testing. And during that time of testing, I made every effort to visit every denominational church that I could think of. And when I went to each group, I tried to talk to a leader, and I tried to ask some questions. And this took several months, but I managed to visit nearly every major denomination that was represented down in Crystal Lake, Illinois. I went to the Catholics, I went to the Episcopalians, I talked to the Mormons, I talked to the Jehovah's Witnesses, I went to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, I went to the Baptists, and one Thursday night I went to the Lutheran Church.

I sat in the back and observed the entire service, and when it was all over, I talked to the minister. Among other things, I asked him about baptism and why they used sprinkling instead of immersion. This man looked me in the eye and told me that the Greek word for baptism originally meant "sprinkling." What he didn't know was that I already knew that Greek word, and I knew that there was not a single authority in the Greek language to define it in that way. In fact, the scholars (from all denominational backgrounds—including Martin Luther himself) are almost completely unanimous in their conclusion that the word originally referred to an immersion in water. In other words, this minister, standing there in his fancy robes in the back of a beautiful facility, straight out lied to a young man asking an honest question about the Bible! At that point I realized that some people are out to actively deceive by abusing their religious authority. I had always wondered whether those in the denominational world were just honestly mistaken or whether they were evil. But

this man answered that question for me. And so I asked him a follow-up question: Could you please show me a Greek lexicon that defines baptidzo as sprinkling? He stuttered, he stammered, he paused, he shifted his weight around, and he finally admitted that it couldn't be done. There is not a lexicon that defines baptidzo as sprinkling.

When we look at the definition of baptism in a modern dictionary, we get the modern definition—basically, as the term is now used, baptism does refer to any kind of religious initiation that is done by either sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. And yet we need to understand that words change over time. The word "gay," for example, means something much different now than it meant less than a hundred years ago. And so if I'm reading Shakespeare and run across the word "gay," I cannot define that word by looking in the latest edition of Merriam Webster's dictionary. I have to go back further than that. We can think about the word "church." If we were to look it up in a modern dictionary, it would be defined as a religious building, and yet we know from the Scriptures when Jesus purchased the church with His blood (**Acts 20:28**), he was not purchasing a building. And so we don't even need to imagine, then, that the word baptize has changed as well, and in many cases it has been actively redefined.

But when we look to the standard reference works (none of which, by the way, were written by members of the Lord's church), we find that the word we commonly translate as baptize originally (and unanimously) referred to dipping something. According to Thayer (a well-respected Greek scholar), the Greek word baptidzo, means, **"...to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge, to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make oneself clean with water."** The Greek scholars Lidell and Scott define the word in this way, **"to dip in or under water; [used] of ships to sink or disable them.; to dip oneself."** We could go on and on, but I have not been able to find one Greek lexicographer to define baptidzo as "sprinkle" or "pour." Not one! There are Greek words that can be translated as "sprinkle" or "pour" (words that the Bible authors could have used), but baptidzo is not one of them!

In fact, almost all modern translations correctly translate the root of this word in **Luke 16:24**, where the rich man is in the flames and asks Abraham to send Lazarus to **"dip"** (or baptize) the tip of his finger in water to cool off his tongue. There is no dispute that the rich man wanted Lazarus to **"dip"** (or immerse) his finger in the water.

Even outside of the Scriptures, other ancient writings from roughly the same period also show us how the word was commonly used. In the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus, for example, Josephus was describing the murder of a boy who was drowned by his companions (at Herod's command) in a swimming pool. According to Josephus, **"Continually pressing down and immersing (baptizing) him while swimming, as if in sport, they did not desist till they had entirely suffocated him."** The young man's companions did not drown him by sprinkling him with water, but they immersed him in the pool.

We have another account from a historian who lived between 30 and 60 years before Christ, and wrote about the defeat of an army on the bank of a river in Sicily. He said, **"The river, rushing down with the current, increased in violence, submerged (baptized) many, and destroyed them attempting to swim through with their armor."** The soldiers were drowned, not by sprinkling a few drops of water on their heads, but by being immersed in the river. The word that is commonly translated as baptism, then, was used in the ancient world to refer to an immersion in water.

Why is it, then, that the word is not consistently translated throughout the Scriptures? Part of the history goes back to the work of John Wycliffe (in 1384) when he translated the Bible into English for the very first time. Wycliffe was working from a Latin manuscript, and instead of translating the Latin word "baptisma," he simply turned it into an English word by dropping the "a" off of the end. In other words, he basically left it untranslated. By this time, sprinkling was already quite common and was known as baptism by the leaders of the church at that time. Wycliffe, therefore, instead of translating the Latin word "baptisma" as immersion, avoided the controversy by simply leaving it untranslated. Several years later, in 1525, William Tyndale made the first English translation directly from the Greek language. Tyndale did translate the word "baptidzo." He translated it properly as "immersion," and in response, the leading church of the time actually paid people to burn any copies of Tyndale's translation.

A number of years later, as people were preparing to create the King James Bible, the king ordered his 54 scholars not to translate the word "baptidzo," but to use the word "baptism," and avoid the controversy created by Tyndale's Bible several years earlier. And ever since then, the Greek word "baptidzo" has basically been left untranslated as "baptism." When we use the word baptism, then, we are basically using a Greek word. And the word itself is properly defined as immersion. Most modern translations have continued to avoid the controversy by refusing to translate it. By leaving it as "baptism," they can allow various groups to define it on their own. And so, as I mentioned earlier, there are religious leaders out there who are telling their people that baptism is whatever they want it to be.

Can you imagine a Bible publisher to publish a translation where baptidzo is actually translated? It would be immediately rejected and would never pay for the ink and paper it was printed on. Would the Lutheran minister I referred to earlier ever tell his people to go out and buy a translation that said, **"Change your hearts, and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ"**? That, by the way, is an accurate translation of **Acts 2:38**. Would he ever tell his people to read a proper translation of **Acts 22:16**, **"Now, why do you delay? Arise, be immersed, and wash away your sins, having called on the Lord's name"**? Could a Catholic priest, who sprinkles babies, ever read from **Romans 6:3**, **"Do you not know that as many of us as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into His death"**? Could a priest, who sprinkles babies, ever read an accurate translation of **Mark 16:16**, **"He who believes and is immersed shall be saved..."**? It is a little hard to flick water on a baby and read an accurate translation

of the Greek word baptidzo. It is much easier to keep the word untranslated and then just tell people whatever you want them to believe.

I have a suggestion that is based on experience, and that is, when we study with people, and if this is their hang up, if they insist that baptism can be done by sprinkling, and if they don't trust our Greek lexicons and reference books, then I would suggest just going to the dictionary. I don't know about you guys, but I love looking stuff up in the dictionary. Several years ago, I discovered that my grandfather has a habit of reading one page of the dictionary every night after dinner. That is a beautiful habit that more people should have. But for those who insist on looking at an unbiased source, we can learn a lot from a dictionary.

When we look up the word baptism, all dictionaries will give its modern definition, and this definition will include almost everything. It may refer to sprinkling or pouring. There might be anything there. ****PPT**** But most good dictionaries will also have at least a brief statement about the origin of the word and its original meaning. Right now we are looking at the *American Heritage Dictionary* as it was posted on Dictionary.com, and as you can see from the short line in the brackets at the bottom, the word "baptism" comes from a Greek word that originally meant, **"to dip."** Very interesting! Thank God—we do not have to know Greek to go to heaven! All we need is an English Bible and good dictionary, and we can figure out that baptism refers to immersion.

****PPT**** The next entry is also from Dictionary.com and comes from the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*. As you can see, they list sprinkling and pouring in the definition of how the word was being used when this dictionary was copyrighted, in 2006. But again, at the end of the definition, there is a section on the history of this word. The actual word "baptize" goes back to 1250-1300 AD. Remember what I said about Wycliffe back in the 1300's? He took a Latin word and basically made it look English. And here we find that Random House traces the history of the word to roughly the same period. But even more interesting is what comes next. The "LL" indicates that it came from Latin, and the "Gk" means that Latin got it from the Greek. And there at the very end, not in a "religion book," but in a modern dictionary, we find that (depending on the ending it is given), the original word meant either to **"immerse"** or **"bathe."**

****PPT**** The next entry is from the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, a dictionary that specializes in the history of words. They claim that the English word baptize goes back to 1297, from an Old French word, which came from Latin, which came from Greek, and they give the definition of the Greek word as, **"to immerse."** And then they say, **"in ecclesiastical (or, church) language,"** it goes back to the Greek word meaning, **"to dip, steep, dye, color."** And then, **"Christian baptism originally consisted in full immersion."** And so we have it from a secular source—the Greek word that we translate as baptize, originally referred to immersion, and was even used to refer to the coloring of fabric. If you wanted to change a garment from one color to another, you would not sprinkle it with dye, but you would dip it or soak it or steep it in the dye.

Several years ago, a man came into my office to study this issue, and I pulled out all of the big books. But this man did not trust my books, so I took him to the latest dictionary at that time, which was the *Merriam Webster's 9th Collegiate Dictionary*. We went to the entry on "baptize," which listed the original meaning of the root word as, "to dip." He read the entry for himself and decided to be baptized immediately. There was a man who was converted by the Bible and Merriam Webster!

So first of all, then, we can learn something about the "mode" of baptism by simply looking at the Greek word itself.

II. Secondly, even if we did not have any clue about the Greek language, we could also determine the mode of baptism simply by studying THE DEFINITION OF THE GOSPEL. **PPT******

In **1 Corinthians 15**, the apostle Paul gives us a definition of the gospel, and in **verses 3-4**, Paul says, "***For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.***" The gospel (or the good news) is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We understand the importance of the death, and we understand the importance of the resurrection, but what is the big deal about the burial? Why is the burial of Christ considered such an important part of the good news?

As we think about the importance of the burial, consider for just a moment what would have happened without it. Imagine Jesus being crucified, dying, and then immediately waking up. Do we see a problem with that scenario? What if Jesus died on the cross and then ten minutes later decided to jump off the cross and proclaim Himself alive?

I think we start to see that the burial confirms His death! Not only that, but the open tomb three days later confirms His resurrection! The burial confirms both the death and the resurrection! And so the death, the burial, and the resurrection are all three vital parts of the good news. Take one of these away, and the good news is no longer good news.

And just like the death and the resurrection, the burial is also prophesied in the Old Testament. The burial was important to God. In fact, in **Psalm 16**, David makes a prophecy that is quoted and applied by the apostle Peter on the first day of the church in **Acts 2**. In **Acts 2:31**, Peter referred to David and said that, "***...he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.***" That last phrase is a reference to the time that Jesus' body spent in the tomb.

The most direct Old Testament prophecy concerning the burial of Christ is found in **Isaiah 53**, the famous passage about the "Suffering Servant." In **Isaiah 53:9**, the prophet Isaiah said that, "***His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was***

there any deceit in His mouth." The fulfillment is found in **Matthew 27:57-60**, as we find that, ***"When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away."*** And so even though Jesus died between two thieves, he was placed in the tomb of a rich man, just as the prophet Isaiah had predicted.

When we start looking into the importance of the burial, we realize how important it is. We realize why the burial of Jesus was predicted by David and Isaiah. And in a practical sense, as we look at the importance of the burial, we realize that the miracle of the resurrection took place in the tomb!

Several years earlier, a good friend of Jesus had passed away—a man named Lazarus in **John 11**. We learn from **John 11** that Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. In fact, his body had already started to decay, and when Jesus told them to move the stone away from the entrance to the tomb, they gave Jesus a warning. According to **John 11:39**, ***"Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.'"*** But the Bible goes on to say that, ***"He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.'"*** And then, ***"The man who had died came forth."*** That miracle happened in the tomb. And in a similar way, the good news about Jesus Christ is that Jesus died, He was buried, and then He was raised up from the dead.

As we start to compare this to the process of baptism *****PPT*****, we start to understand that baptism is also a burial. Paul explains it so clearly in **Colossians 2:12-13**, where he referred to, ***"...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions."*** We notice here that we were ***"buried with Him in baptism."*** And we also notice that God ***"made us alive."*** When were we made alive? When were our sins forgiven? According to **verse 13**, our sins were forgiven, ***"when we were dead."*** The miracle of forgiveness takes place in the tomb of baptism! We were made alive in the tomb!

Paul paints a similar picture in **Romans 6**. He makes the comparison between baptism and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and in **Romans 6:3-7**, Paul said...

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall

also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.

We are freed from sin in the tomb of baptism, when we are immersed into the death of Jesus Christ!

And yet there are millions of people in the world around us who practice what they call baptism by sprinkling water on a person's head. Sprinkling, though, completely ignores the significance of the Lord's burial in the tomb.

What I'm about to say is not the main point of this morning's lesson, but the most absurd denial of this whole process takes place when people say that you can be saved before baptism. There are many churches that teach that you accept Christ into your heart, your sins are forgiven, and then you are baptized a few days, weeks, or even months later...as a sign that you have already been saved. And so, unlike the diagram up here on the screen, they don't have a dead man being buried in baptism, but instead, the man has already been resurrected, his sins have already been forgiven (supposedly), and he is now being buried alive! And so at this point, going down into the water, being buried, and being raised up is actually a mockery of the gospel itself! And so the beautiful picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, mirrored in baptism, is literally stripped of its literal and symbolic meaning.

But back to the main point of this morning's lesson and the question of whether baptism is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion—there is no similarity; there is no comparison between sprinkling or pouring and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Immersion is the only "mode" of baptism that perfectly (or even remotely) fits the analogy given in **Romans 6**. Our sins are forgiven in the "tomb" of baptism. Over the past several years, I have made a point of telling people who are about to be baptized to pause and think for a moment while they are under the water before I lift them up—right now you are in the tomb with Jesus! Right now you are covered by His blood! Right now your sins are being forgiven!

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

This morning, then, we have asked ourselves how we can know whether baptism is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. We have looked at two basic lines of evidence.

- First of all, we can know that baptism refers to immersion by looking at the word itself. We can look it up in any standard Greek lexicon, we can look to how the word was used in ancient writing other than the Bible, we can look at this word in the history of the English Bible, and we can look up the origin of the word in any modern dictionary, and we will find that the word itself originally referred to immersion.
- Secondly, not only did we look at the word itself, but we considered the mode of baptism based on the definition of the gospel that was given by Paul in **1**

Corinthians 15:3-4. According to Paul, the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection Jesus Christ. We obey the gospel through baptism, and according to **Romans 6**, we die to sin, we are buried with Christ in baptism, and we come up out of the water as new creatures ready to start a brand new life. Anything other than immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins actually makes a mockery of the process.

I am so thankful for your good attention this morning. Lord willing, we can continue looking at the "mode" of baptism by looking at two more evidences next Sunday morning. We will look at the context and structure of those passages where baptism is mentioned, and then we will consider church history for some clues on when the switch was made from immersion to sprinkling.

For this morning, all we really need to remember is that our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ when we are immersed in water. Several years ago, I ran across a very touching poem that was written by a young woman who was about to be baptized at the Austin Avenue congregation in Brownwood, Texas. She wrote this poem, and then it was read as the preparations were being made for her immersion into Christ. The title is, "**An Awakening**," and the author is Tana Simpson...

***I shiver nervously. I am timid and afraid.
Yet, I have no fears and I cannot wait.***

***I hold my breath as I fall down deep,
past life, past death, past time, past sleep.***

***I feel the cold blue water rippling upon my skin.
Yet, the waves are pure red, not outside, but within.***

***Straight from the heart, so special, so true.
This blood was shed for me and for you.***

This morning, if you have any questions about baptism, we would love to talk with you as soon as possible. But if you know what you need to do, and if you are ready to be buried with Christ right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org