

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	48		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Colossians 2:11, 12		
Date:	September 28, 2025 (a.m.)		

### ONE BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS (Part 1)

Phillip Cary, in his very helpful book on the Nicene Creed (which I have favorably cited a number of times) startled me by declaring, “The word *baptism* is derived from a Greek word meaning to dip or dunk, which can be used to describe dipping your finger into a bit of water (Luke 16:24) or a morsel of food into a sauce (John 13:16). To be baptized is to be dipped or immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in accordance with our Lord’s command and institution (Matthew 28:19).”<sup>1</sup> Alan Orme correctly points out that, “The common notion that the form of baptism signifies death, burial and resurrection with Christ would have struck the first century mind as imaginative even if strained. The idea that baptism by immersion backward signifies this death, burial and resurrection is based upon the modern custom of burying people on their backs under the surface of the ground. In fact, the burial of Christ was, like all the burials of his day, in the side of a hill. He did not come *up from the grave* as the popular Easter hymn would have it. He came *out* from the grave (Matt. 27:60). This view is thought to be supported by Romans 6:3-4. A careful examination of the passage will show, however, that the idea is that the believer is united to Christ by the ordinance of baptism. The believer does not, in baptism, *symbolize* Christ’s death, burial and resurrection; he *experiences* them through spiritual union with his Representative and Redeemer Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

The Greek word *baptizō* in secular usage has the root meaning “to dip” and it *often* has this meaning in Scripture. But it also has the meaning “to wash, stain” (as in Revelation 19:13, a vesture stained with blood, cf. Luke 11:38; Mark 7:4; Daniel 4:33). In this regard, it is interesting that the noted Baptist scholar T. J. Conant is forced to acknowledge that the word does not carry with it the idea of “taking out of the water.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, in every example that he cites (in order to prove the Baptist position) the baptizing element or instrumentality is moved and put upon the person or thing baptized, never is the person put into the element! We conclude that the word *baptizō* is not used as a modal term in Scripture. Rather, it denotes a *condition* or *result* (regardless of the mode or act).<sup>4</sup> What is the most significant thing about baptism? What is it telling us? Contrary to popular opinion, baptism does not chiefly symbolize death, burial and resurrection with Christ. Union with Christ is its central point (Romans 6:3-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27, 28; Colossians 2:11, 12). Baptism *signifies* the washing of regeneration and the sprinkling of the blood of Christ (John 3:5, 1 Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 2:11, 12). Baptism into the name of the Triune God means that we are baptized into union with, and discipleship of, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 17, 23; John 17:20-23). “In Baptism there is a seal of God’s ownership.”<sup>5</sup> This is the key feature of baptism, contrary to the claims of those who insist that the word primarily signifies “to immerse.” This has become one of the most controversial subjects. Baptists argue that *only* baptism by full immersion is valid. They like to point to the analogy of burial and resurrection as well as the etymology of the Greek word *baptizō*.<sup>6</sup> The preoccupation with the analogy of burial and resurrection as implying immersion is arbitrary. Romans 6:3-4 is not speaking of how baptism *symbolizes* Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, rather Paul is stating how the believer experiences the reality of death, burial and resurrection in union with Christ. The *mode* of baptism is not the issue here. Immersion is a valid form of baptism, but so is sprinkling and pouring.”<sup>7</sup> “One of the most remarkable things about Baptism, to the attentive reader of Scripture,” comments

R. L. Dabney, “is the absence of all set explanations of its meaning in the New Testament and, at the same time, of all appearance of surprise at its novelty.”<sup>8</sup> Why is this? Because baptism was symbolized by the Hebrew concept of *purification* (cf. Leviticus 8:5, 6; 14:8, 9; and Psalm 51:1-2, 7-10), which included both cleansing and consecration. In the New Testament, this background formed the Christian understanding of baptism, which symbolizes the two-fold application of Christ’s satisfaction (called His blood) and the Holy Spirit, cleansing from guilt and depravity, and thus, as Dabney continues, “consecrating the cleansed person to the service of a holy God.”<sup>9</sup> It is important that we understand the *proper analogy* intended by baptism. What is symbolized by water? Does it point to burial? We have to remember that a Hebrew tomb (like Christ’s) was not underground. The analogy intended by water is cleansing. With this in mind, we look now at the *mode* of baptism.

I. **THE SIGN SIGNIFIED.** There is a close analogy between baptism (cleansing, purification) and the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38). How is this pictured in Scripture? Typical Baptist terminology is *never* used in the New Testament (e.g., I will immerse, or dip, or plunge you in the Spirit!).

A. **The Old Testament Description.**

1. **The Concept of Pouring.** “I will *pour* water upon him that is thirsty; I will *pour* my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isaiah 44:3). “I will *pour out* my Spirit upon all flesh. In those days will I pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28, 29).
2. **The Concept of Sprinkling.** “Then will I *sprinkle clean water* upon you, and ye shall be clean – and I will put my Spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:25-27). “He (Christ) will be *like rain falling* on a mown field, *like showers watering* the earth.”

B. **The New Testament Description.** In the following texts we find the Spirit of God always represented as descending upon persons (not people being dipped or immersed into the Spirit).

- |                              |                                  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Descending, John 1:32     | 6. Anointing, Acts 10:38         |
| 2. Pouring, Acts 2:17        | 7. Giving to, Acts 15:8          |
| 3. Shedding forth, Acts 2:33 | 8. Sealing, Ephesians 1:13       |
| 4. Falling, Acts 11:15       | 9. Sent from on high, Luke 24:49 |
| 5. Coming upon, Acts 1:8     | 10. Received, John 7:39          |

**Note:** In Matthew 3:11, we are told that John the Baptist baptized with water unto repentance, but Christ “shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (cf. also Acts 1:4, 5). When we come to the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), *how* is the baptism of the Spirit pictured? We find terms like “sat upon” (Acts 2:3), “poured out” (Acts 2:17, and “shed forth” (Acts 2:33).

II. **PROBLEMS WITH THE CONCEPT OF IMMERSION.**

A. **Acts 2:41.** Three thousand are baptized in one day. Note that: (1) This took place in Jerusalem. *Where* could these people be baptized by immersion? (2) *Who* baptized (by immersion) all these people? If only the twelve apostles, then each apostle would have to baptize 50 persons an hour for 12 straight hours! (3) *What did* the people wear who were baptized? (They did not have baptismal robes.) Were they baptized in their clothes? Without their clothes? I submit that baptism by immersion was not only improper but impossible! If, however, the mode was *sprinkling* or *pouring*, then all these difficulties disappear.

III. **FIGURATIVE EXPRESSIONS.** Two passages, Romans 6:3, 4 and Colossians 2:12, use the expression *buried with Him in baptism*. Baptists say this proves immersion. But this interpretation is very problematic.

- A. ***The Custom of Burial.*** The Romans did *not* bury, but burned, their dead (as did the Greeks). More importantly, the Jews did *not* bury their dead the way that we do. How could the Apostle Paul have “burial” in the modern concept in mind? A careful analysis, notes John Murray, “will show that there is no necessary allusion to the mode of baptism.”<sup>10</sup> Baptism signifies union with Christ in His redemptive work, renewal by the Holy Spirit, and entry into the Kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> Paul’s point is that union has to do with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It is very easy to point to the expression “buried with Him” (Romans 6:4) and insist that only Baptism by immersion is what is meant, but note *also* the expressions “planted together” (united, NIV, Romans 6:5) and “crucified with Him” (Romans 6:6). These expressions likewise indicate the union with Christ which is symbolized and sealed by baptism -- and they do *not* bear any analogy to immersion. “The fact is,” concludes John Murray, “there are many aspects to our union with Christ. It is arbitrary to select one aspect and find in the language used to set it forth the essences of the mode of baptism.”<sup>12</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The mode of baptism is not a concern of Scripture. The effects of and responsibility arising from union with Christ and renewal by the Holy Spirit – these *are* the major points of baptism. Those who make baptism by immersion the only mode of baptism have missed the point. Immersion is an entirely proper mode of baptism – but so is sprinkling and pouring – and given the language used in texts like Hebrews 9:13, 14, 22, 10:22, 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2. Presbyterian W. A. MacKay is somewhat more forceful. He writes: “The Scriptural mode of baptism is such as can be practiced in all seasons, in all climates, in all countries, on all persons, at all times, in all places, in all conditions, and under all circumstances. But this cannot be said of immersion. Which is often impracticable, indecent, dangerous, and impossible. It cannot therefore be the Scriptural mode of baptism.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, Murray once again: “The argument of Baptists that immersion is the only valid mode is based on the allegations that the Greek terms mean immersion, and that certain passages (Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:11, 12) indicate that the burial of Christ in the earth, and his emergence, provide the pattern. The fallacy of the second resides in an arbitrary selection of certain aspects of Paul’s teaching on our union with Christ. It is true that believers are united with Christ in his burial and resurrection, and it is also true that immersion in, and emergence from the water appear to represent and symbolize this phase of union with Christ. But the union signified by baptism includes more than union with him in his burial and resurrection. It signifies union with him in his *death* and *crucifixion*. The burial must not be equated with either. Paul in Romans 6 speaks of being baptized into Jesus’ *death* (v. 3), of being *planted together* with him in the likeness of his death (v. 5), and of being *crucified* with him (v. 6; cf. Gal. 2:20). It is apparent that immersion and emergence do not resemble these. But they are as germane to union with Christ as burial and resurrection. In the Baptism argument, therefore, the burial and resurrection are accorded the exclusive relevance in the plea for symbolism. Other passages likewise prove the arbitrariness of preoccupation with the analogy of burial and resurrection. Paul also writes: *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). It would be as legitimate to argue for the mode of baptism from this passage as from Romans 6:4. But the figure here is that of putting on a garment, to which immersion bears no resemblance.”<sup>14</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> P. Carey, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 199. Actually, this is not surprising, since Carey teaches at a Baptist University.

<sup>2</sup> A. D. Orme, *God's Appointments With Men: A Christian's Primer On The Sacraments* (University Church Press, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> T. J. Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizien* (Kregel, rpt., 1977), pp. 88ff.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest Latin translation of the New Testament, dating back to the second century, simply translate the word by its Latin form *baptizō* and it is never translated by *immerō* or the like (the Latin word for "immersion"). Given the fact that these men were fluent in both languages, this is significant.

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray II* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 371.

<sup>6</sup> James W. Dale is his masterful study, *Classic Baptism Baptizō: An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Word as Determined by the Usage of Classical Greek Writers* (rpt. P&R, 1989) convincingly demonstrates that the word primarily does not simply signify "to dip," rather, the term means: "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" (p. 354).

<sup>7</sup> Luther and Calvin, the two most principal figures in the Protestant Reformation, did not practice baptism by immersion but did allow for it as a perfectly legitimate mode of baptism. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* BK, IV, Ch. XX, Sec. 19 and *What Luther Says I* (Concordia, 1959), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> R. L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, rpt., 1975), p. 759.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), pp. 29ff.

<sup>11</sup> This three-point emphasis is noted by the Baptist scholar G. R. Beasley-Murray in his article, "Baptism" in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. S. B. Ferguson, D. F. Wright and J. I. Packer (InterVarsity, 1988), p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> Murray, op. cit., p. 375.

<sup>13</sup> W. A. Mackay, *Immersion and Immersionsists: A Refutation* (American Presbyterian Press, 1917), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Murray, 372.