

History of Baptism

- As Baptists, we notice in the NT that every case is by immersion.
- This was the common practice & continued into the second century.
 - In fact, as late as AD 180, Tertullian expressed negative concerns about the novel practice that he witnessed in some churches—the baptism of children.
 - His question is why would we baptize children who are innocent? Let them be baptized when they are coming to Christ. He was a key theologian, and he expressed a form of believers baptism.
- Yet, around 250, attitudes were changing. Cyprian (a major church leader in Africa) was concerned about the practice of churches baptizing infants on the 8th day.
 - This was to correspond to Jewish circumcision.
- This was starting to spread rapidly in the 3rd century church. Infant mortality rates were sky high then. Cyprian's complaint was why are we waiting 8 days, because it is too long?
 - He believed baptism would cleanse them from original sin, cause them to be born again, and incorporate them into Christ's church, thus saving them. So he wanted the baptism to be right away.
- By the 5th the century the official position and practice of the church was infant baptism.

Baptism

- The current theological divide between paedobaptism and believer's baptism.
 - We have already talked briefly about the sacramental view.
- There are non-sacramental/sacerdotal Protestants that baptize infants due to their understanding of covenantalism.
- An in-depth treatment of this subject is not normal for a class like this. Instead, we will answer three questions: 1) What is the mode of baptism?; 2) What is the meaning of baptism?; 3) Who are the proper subjects of baptism?
 - When answered in order, these questions reveal that credo-baptism by immersion are the proper and biblical understanding.



Believer's Baptism

- As Baptists we believe that only believers are to be baptized.
 - Following a credible expression of faith, we baptize such people.
- This is different than infant baptism where a non-willing participant is baptized by the choice of the parents.
 - There's different reasons for this in different traditions.
 - RCC believes original sin can only be washed away by baptism. The baptism is *ex opere operato*.
 - The Lutherans and Presbyterians believe it brings children into the covenant community, much like circumcision.
- The New Testament only records believers baptisms.



Mode of Baptism

- The mode of baptism is immersion.
 - The connotation of the New Testament Greek word βαπτίζω (*baptizō*)
 - The connotation is to plunge something into water. It is not to sprinkle or pour, but plunge. The mode is in the word itself.
 - Jesus was baptized by immersion (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10)—He went up from the water.
- Both John the Baptist and Jesus baptized people by immersion (Mark 1:5; John 3:22-23)
 - John 3:22-23—John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, ²⁴ since John had not yet been thrown into prison.
 - They picked their spot because water was plentiful there. That detail strongly favors immersion rather than pouring.
- The Ethiopian Eunuch.
 - Acts 8:38-39—So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing.

Mode of Baptism

- If sprinkling was supposed to be the proper mode of baptism, the New Testament writers had a word they could have used to signify this practice as the correct manner of administering this rite had they wanted to communicate that idea (*rhantizo*; Heb 9:13, 19, 21; 10:22); in no account of baptism, however, is this word employed.
 - Only the word “immerse” is used.
- So where does sprinkling come from?
 - It developed over time historically. It is not an original Christian practice. The original practice is immersion, and the Greeks, Syrians, Coptic, etc., still practice it. They even immerse infants!
 - We should recognize from the 3rd century on, the churches permitted sprinkling instead of immersion in cases of emergency. For example, the Didache (late 2nd century) permits the use of pouring and sprinkling when there is insufficient water.
 - From the middle of the 3rd century, the churches widely believed that without baptism, no one can be saved since they saw it as the agency by which our sins are forgiven.

Mode of Baptism

- So when a person was about to die it was common mode of baptism (sprinkling) in the emergency cases where someone could not make it to the water before death (children, infants, and dying).
 - But they recognized the command was immersion, but thought God graciously in some cases would count sprinkling as if it were immersion.
- Peter Lombard, the great theologian of the Middle Ages whose Systematic Theology was the standard text until the Renaissance, declared without qualification that immersion is the mode of baptism.
- Thomas Aquinas, whose work became the standard of the theology of the RCC, said that immersion was the general practice of his day (13th century) and said it was preferable and safer than any other practice. It was in the 15th century that sprinkling came to be seen as equivalent to immersion rather than as an emergency substitute.
 - The first place Dr. Greg Wills was able to find official documentation of the RCC placing sprinkling on equal terms with immersion is in the Catechism of the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

Mode of Baptism

- Thus, all persons who are baptized by sprinkling and pouring are by definition unbaptized.
- This has major implications.
- Baptists to hold that Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Congregationalists, etc. are not baptized, and it requires us to refuse to admit such unbaptized persons to the Lord's Supper.
 - In the Baptist context, this practice of requiring baptism before coming to the Lord's Supper is known as close communion. Immersion is prerequisite for partaking in the Lord's Supper.
 - Since Paedobaptists are not baptized, they have not met this qualification.
 - In principle all Christians have held this view. Baptism is the door of initiation into the church and into the Lord's Supper. The Didache says let no one eat or drink or eat of the Eucharist who has not been baptized. Augustine said the same.

