

## THE HISTORY OF SPRINKLING

(From the Christian Courier, September 1965)

The only infallible history of the church founded by Jesus Christ is that of the Bible, specifically "The Acts of the Apostles" written by Luke and the "General Epistles" to churches and individuals by the various inspired writers. If then, one would know the history of the early church on any given subject, he must give the New Testament a close examination for all of the sacred historical data available. It is not the purpose of this article to present a lengthy treatise on the subject of baptism, however. A few observations are in order.

The term "baptize" is an anglicized form of the original Greek word "baptizo" from the root "baptol" meaning "to dip, or immerse". Grammatically speaking, the term is a verb of definite action and can properly therefore, have only one correct idea of expression. In its literal usage it always conveys the meaning of an "immersion" or a "submersion" and thus never denotes a "sprinkling" or "pouring". The term originally seems to be a form of onomatopoeia (the word being formed from a sound), hence "bapto" represents the sound of some object being "plunged" under water. To baptize (immerse) means one thing, to sprinkle another, and to pour still another; these words are not interchangeable. This is easily demonstrated by observing one verse from the LXX (Greek Translation of the Old Testament). *"And the priest shall take of the log of oil, and pour (cheo) it into the palm of his own left hand; and the priest shall dip (baptizo) his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle (rantizo) of the oil with his finger seven times before Jehovah"* (Lev. 14:15,16). The difference between the verbs is easily discernable.

In the New Testament baptism is pictured as a burial in water. *"We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death..."* (Rom. 6:4). Again, *"having been buried with him in baptism"* (Col. 2:12). Christ is said to be *"the first born from the dead"* (Col. 1:18); a clear reference to his resurrection from the dead. Similarly the believer who would enter the Kingdom *"must be born of water"* (Jno. 3:5), an equally clear reference to a resurrection from the water. The baptism authorized by the Son of God involves *"going to the water"* (Acts 8: 36). *"much water"* (Jno. 3:23), *"going down into the water"* (Acts 8: 38), and *"coming up out of the water"* (Acts 8: 3-9). By way of contrast, sprinkling and pouring do not require going to water, much water, going down into water, or coming up out of water. Clearly, sprinkling and pouring are not baptism.

It is universally admitted by the scholars that baptism in the apostolic age and for years thereafter was administered only by immersion. The writings of the church historians in the post-apostolic age make this abundantly clear. For instance, Barnabas (A.D. 30 ) writes, *"Blessed are they who, placing their trust in the cross, have gone down into the water... we indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up bearing fruit ... "* Similar quotations of this period are numerous.

The celebrated Lutheran historian, Mosheim, comments, *"The sacrament of baptism was administered in this century (1st. C.) without (outside of) the public assemblies, in places appointed, and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font."* Even the Catholic priest, Bertrand Conway, admits, *"that for twelve centuries it (immersion) was the common practice."*

The first distinct reference to sprinkling as a substitute for baptism is found in the "Didache" (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), a document dated between 120-160 A. D. It reads in chapter 7, *"Now as regards baptism, thus baptize ye: having first rehearsed on these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if thou hast not running water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water upon the head thrice... "*

From this statement in the middle of the second century (a half century too late to have the approval of inspiration) the references to aspersion begin to multiply. Cyprian (A. D.200-258) makes the first defense of sprinkling but even then, he says only *"when necessity compels and in cases of "sickness and weakness."*

The first actual recorded case of baptism by aspersion occurred about 251 A. D. Eusebius, the "father of Church History", writes concerning one Novatian of Rome who was *"attacked with an obstinate disease, and being supposed at the point of death, was baptized by aspersion in the bed on which he lay."* But because of his clinic baptism, Novatian could not be elevated to the "clergy" for, says Eusebius *"It was not lawful that one baptized in his sick bed by aspersion, after he is well, to be promoted to any order of the clergy ..."* Thus, baptism by sprinkling or pouring was not even fully accepted by the middle of the third century.

For many centuries after the great apostasy was under way, sprinkling as a substitute for baptism was limited to cases of "necessity." In fact, the council of Nemours 1284 A. D. definitely limited it to such. Finally, however, "necessity" gave way to "convenience" and for the most part, the Divine way of administering the command was disregarded. In the year 1311 A. D. the Roman Catholic legislature in a council conducted in Ravenna, declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent. Thus was sprinkling introduced. It has, from that time till this been nurtured and adopted by many sectarian churches and inculcated into their creed books.

When interested people, by an intelligent study of the Bible, develop a respect for God's word, they will cease to exchange Divine Revelation for human opinion.

---

**WHAT IS BIBLE BAPTISM?** It is a command of God (Acts 10:48), an act of obedience to the one desiring salvation (Heb. 5:9). a going down into water, a burial in water, a coming up out of water (Acts 8:38, 39; Rom. 6:4), Never does one read in the Bible of pouring or sprinkling for baptism:

**WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?** He that believes in Jesus (Mk. 16:16) and he that repents of his sins (Acts 2:38),

**WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO FOR ONE?** It remits sins (Acts 2:38), puts one into Christ's church (I Cor. 12:13). puts one into Christ (Gal 3:27), makes one a child of God (Jo. 3:51, it saves (I Pet. 3:21), it qualifies one to walk in newness of life (the Christian life) - Rom. 6:4.

These being the facts of the case--(remember, the Bible is God speaking to man) a number of points about baptism come to light. Since God allows no one to change His commands, to be truly baptized, is for the responsible person, to understand that Jesus is the Messiah, and in faith accept Him. Repenting of the sins he has personally committed, he is then prepared to confess his faith and be baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of his sins. This puts him into Christ and His church (Acts 2:47).

**SHOULD YOU BE "REBAPTIZED"?** There is a Bible example of rebaptism, (Acts 19:1-7). If you were baptized as an infant, **Yes:** If you had water sprinkled or poured on you as baptism, **Yes:** If you were taught that baptism

was not necessary to salvation, but simply to join you to a particular denomination, **Yes!** If your baptism differed in any way from the baptism revealed in your New Testament,

**YES, YOU SHOULD BE PROPERLY BAPTIZED!**

