

- o We have focussed on the subject of baptism. We must consider briefly the mode as well.
 - Many paedobaptists allow for all three ways of baptism, viz. immersion, affusion (pouring), and sprinkling. They claim that the mode is unimportant. But what is taught in the Bible?
 - Other paedobaptists, e.g. John Calvin and Louis Berkhof, agree that the baptism taught in the NT is immersion, but allow for sprinkling.
 - Some, including John Murray and Duane Spencer, argue for pouring and sprinkling only, denying immersion.

I. The Baptist position.

1. The clear command is for believers to be baptised (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3-4).
 - It is agreed in many lexicons that “baptizo” is “to dip; to immerse.” It is derived from the root word “bapto” which itself means “to dip” or “to dye.” The nouns “baptismos” (translated “baptism”), and “baptisma” (translated “washing”) describe the event of the verb “baptizo.”
 - The biblical words for “to sprinkle” and “sprinkling” are “rhantizo” (Heb 9:13) and “rhantismos” (Heb 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2), which are never used to refer to baptism, but rather are allusions to the blood sprinkling of the OT (Ex 24:3-8).
2. All the instances of actual baptism in the Bible support immersion, not sprinkling, of believers (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:9; Jn 3:23; Acts 8:38, 39).
 - Even the figurative baptisms carry the idea of being completely overwhelmed, thus supporting immersion (Mk 10:38-39; 1 Cor 10:1-2; etc.).
 - If we believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, we would have to accept the significance of going “down into the water” and coming “up out of the water” in such passages as Acts 8:38-39.
3. Immersion alone correctly pictures our union with Christ in His burial and resurrection, and the washing away of our sins (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12; Acts 22:16; etc.).

II. The position of John Murray & Duane Spencer.

1. Etymology (the study of words):

- Paedobaptists adopt various strategies to try to prove that “bapto” does not always mean to immerse completely under a substance.
 - : Murray and Spencer claim that, in Joshua 3:15, the priests’ feet may not have been dipped (“bapto”). They overlook the fact that God promised to stop the flow of the river when the soles of their feet rested *in* the water (3:13).
 - : In the case of Jonathan dipping (“bapto”) the tip of his staff into the honeycomb (1 Sam 14:27), Murray ridicules the idea that the whole staff was immersed, even though no Baptist claims such an act. It was the tip of the staff that was immersed in the honeycomb.
- Both Murray and Spencer claim that the mode of “baptizo” cannot be determined from secular Greek usage or verb forms. Rather, they say, only its usage in Scripture can determine its real import or mode. Both warn against the use of Greek lexicons and examples from secular literature to define a scriptural word.
 - : We agree that the Bible usage of a word has final authority, but we also believe that it is impossible to translate and understand the Bible while ignoring the literary and historical background of those words. To treat the Bible as if it were dropped out of heaven with detached meanings from the surrounding culture and languages reveals ignorance of the verbal plenary (covering all parts) method of inspiration and the literal-grammatical-historical exegesis (interpretation).
 - : Josephus was a Jewish historian contemporary with Jesus Christ. He is neither an insignificant, optional or a minor secular resource. His Judaism, his familiarity with Koine Greek (used in writing the NT) and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), his awareness of the Christian movement, and his discussion of biblical passages in Greek all give major corroboration to the accuracy of most Greek lexicons in their definition of “baptizo”: to dip, or to immerse.

2. **Verb forms:** Paedobaptists ignore the verb forms of “baptizo” which does not permit the replacement of the subject (the person baptised) with the medium (the water) of baptism. In Mark 1:9, “Jesus was baptised by John into the Jordan River” cannot be made to mean “Water

was baptised (poured, sprinkled) upon Jesus by John in the Jordan.”

- Some active forms of “baptizo” conceivably could support either dipping or sprinkling because of the ambiguous Greek grammar, e.g. “I baptize (dip or sprinkle) you in/with water” (Mt 3:11). However, the clearer passive forms cannot support either sprinkling or pouring as an alternative translation and must, therefore, determine the translation of the less clear active forms. So, Matthew 3:11 should read, “I baptize (dip or immerse) you in water.”

3. **The use of obscure texts:** Murray and Spencer appeal to the use of “baptismois” in Hebrews 9:10 as “various washings (baptisms)” to claim that the OT pourings and sprinklings are also biblical forms of Christian baptism.
 - The context of Heb 9:10 shows that ceremonial washings are in mind, similar to the ones in Mark 7:4-5. Murray and Spencer argue against dipping in Mk 7:4-5, but their arguments are unconvincing, for they fail to take into consideration the subjects of the “baptisma.” We can have the immersions of cups, not the pouring/sprinkling of cups.
 4. **Figurative words:** Murray and Spencer deny that Rom 6:3-4 has any reference to immersion as the symbol for being baptized into Christ or raised up with Him. They claim that Christ was not buried in the ground, but placed in tombs.
 - Murray and Spencer mistakenly think that all burials in the Bible were by placing the bodies in tombs. Actually, only the rich did that, while the majority of the people were buried (Gen 35:8; K 23:6; Jer 26:23; Lk 11:44; Mt 27:7).
 - Although the Lord was buried in a tomb, He was figuratively buried in the earth (enclosed by earth). That is the main idea conveyed by the figurative usage of burial and baptism in Rom 6:3-4. The primary emphasis is union with Christ, which is better illustrated by immersion than by pouring and sprinkling.
 - 1 Cor 10:2 also figuratively shows the union of the people with Moses as their mediator and leader (cf Heb 3:2-4, 16). The Israelites were as good as baptised, i.e. submerged under the cloud and the sea.
 - The appeal to Col 2:11-12; 1 Pet 3:18-22; and Mt 3:11 similarly does not do justice to the figurative use of baptism. The main idea of the baptism (being covered completely, being overwhelmed) should be kept, not the details of how the events (burial & resurrection, the flood baptism by fire) took place.
 - The meaning of a word should be determined by its literal usage, not by its figurative usage. The figurative usage carries one main idea, and the details are not to be pressed to yield other meanings different from the literal ones.
- = Murray’s and Spencer’s position that pouring or sprinkling are the primary or exclusive modes of Christian baptism is untenable and biblically unsupported. Their misunderstanding and misstatement of the Baptist position, as well as their misinterpretation of biblical texts, make the position impossible to accept by all honest Bible scholars. Immersion is the biblical mode of Christian baptism.