

Guided Bible Study: Week 10

May 23-29, 2020

During the time we cannot have Sunday School and Wednesday Bible Study due to the Corona Virus emergency, Rick is posting a guided Bible study on here to help fill the void left by not having those classes. We encourage you to read the passages in the Bible together with your family. We will post the study for each week.

BAPTISM STUDY

Part 3

In this third study on baptism we turn our attention to the topic of the form of baptism as taught and practiced in Scripture. In today's Christian world there are three forms of baptism with water: immersion, sprinkling, and pouring. Some say the form doesn't matter. Others hold that only immersion is proper. What is right? In [II Timothy 3.16-17](#) we learn to go to the Bible as our source for "doctrine". Let's see what the Bible has to say about the form of baptism.

First, is there any clear indication in the Bible as to how baptism was performed? Yes, we see some clear biblical examples both in the ministry of John the Baptist and in examples from the church in the First Century.

While John's baptism was not for the exact same purpose as Christian baptism, pictures of how it was performed give us a glimpse into what people in New Testament times (the First Century A.D.) would have thought when they heard their language's version of our words "baptize" or "baptism". In [Matthew 3.5-6](#) we find John's baptizing took place IN the Jordan River. Thus the form used required being in water. Secondly we learn in [John 3.23](#) John chose a place to baptize where there was "plenty of water" (NIV). The need to be in water and the need for a relatively large amount of water are characteristics only of immersion.

There is also a vivid example of baptism in the early days of the church. Read: [Acts 8.26-40, noting verses 38-39](#). Here Philip and the man being baptized both WENT DOWN INTO the water and CAME BACK UP OUT OF the water. The Ethiopian man would almost certainly have had a small quantity of water with him

in his chariot if just a little could have been sprinkled or poured on him. Furthermore, remembering the long journey he was on, it would have been inconvenient for him to be immersed and then have to change clothes or ride along until his clothes dried. However, despite this, we see him going down into water and coming up out of water. This again, provides strong proof that baptism in the Bible times was immersion.

Not only do we have instances of people being baptized in the New Testament, we also have texts that describe baptism in ways that tend to nail down this discussion even more than these examples. Let's consider these.

[Discuss: What happens when someone or something is buried? What about when something is removed from a burial place?]

Read: **Romans 6.1-5**. Here baptism is described and defined as a burial and a resurrection. When something is buried it is covered up. When it is resurrected, it is uncovered. What would be true with dirt or any other substance is also true of water. [Discuss or think about: Is being covered up and uncovered true of being sprinkled for baptism? How about of having water poured on one's head? Now, what about being immersed? Is there a covering and uncovering?] Being buried and raised is a characteristic of immersion only. Baptism as a burial and resurrection is borne out also in **Colossians 2.12**.

Next, we turn our attention to the original language in which the New Testament was written. That language is Koine Greek, an earlier version of the Greek language that is now a dead language, preserving definitions of words. In every baptism text in the Greek copies of the original New Testament, we find some form of the Greek word "baptizo". In Greek, this word means only to "dip, plunge, immerse". It is an onomatopoeic word, taken from the sound the ancient Greeks perceived when an object hit the water and went under. The Greek language had other words that would have been used had other forms been in use or been taught by Christ and His Apostles. Had sprinkling been intended, a form of "rhantizo" would have been used. Had pouring been intended, they would have used "echeo". Had the use of water, however desired, been the meaning, a form of "hundriano" would have been used. None of those other words appear in any

baptism text. It is clear that, as revealed by the Holy Spirit to the New Testament writers, immersion was meant.

Scholars from all denominations, even those that practice other forms of baptism, admit two things. One is that immersion is valid. The second is that immersion was the original form of baptism used in the New Testament. Some churches that practice other forms, none the less see that their “clergy” are immersed.

So, if all this be true, why are there other forms of baptism? These arose after the death of the last of the apostles. One will occasionally find a scholar who thinks there were traces of other practices in the mid or late Second Century. However, the first well documented case of an alternative to immersion being used was the case of Novatian somewhere between AD 251 and AD 253. Novatian became seriously ill and was thought to be dying. Permission was received from the bishop to pour a significant amount of water on him for baptism because it was not believed he could stand to be immersed. [NOTE: I have managed successfully to immerse very seriously ill persons with no ill consequences.]

Over the course of the next 500 or so years, other forms of baptism gradually came to be accepted for use in serious illness and other situations of perceived necessity. It was nearly 600 more years, in 1311, that the Council of Ravenna declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent. It is clear that the use of forms of baptism other than immersion came from human church leaders in later years, even much later years, and not from Christ or any of His Apostles.

So what of the unimmersed who have believed in Jesus and sought to follow Him? It is not my place to judge. God, alone, can do that and has the wisdom to do so. It is my place to teach what is taught in Scripture and call people to simply obey God’s Word. Read: [James 4.17](#). When we KNOW the right thing to do it and do not do it, we sin.

The story is told of an old miller, the third generation of his family to run the mill. He, his father, and his grandfather had all been respected as highly honest and honorable men. Those who knew the old miller knew that he would never purposely cheat anyone. One day, however, a new man in town who had worked with measures elsewhere, got some grain ground by the old miller, looked at the

grain, and challenged him on his bushel measure. The miller was taken aback. He was using the same measure his father and grandfather had used all through the years. He would never cheat anyone. The new man, however, was insistent so the miller agreed to have the measure checked by the authorities. When it was checked it was found to be just a little short of a bushel. Somehow, that bushel measure had been bought and used by honest men throughout the years, thinking they were being honest with people. However, could the old miller keep using that measure and still be honest? Of course not, so he bought a new, accurate, bushel measure and started using it instead.

Baptism for some who have experienced sprinkling or pouring might be a bit like that story. Your loved ones might have obeyed God to the very best of their understanding. God might well look on their hearts and accept them. However, can you continue to fully live within God's will without submitting to the New Testament standard of immersion?

What we have presented here is done in the utmost of love and respect. We seek to hurt no one. We do seek to help guide everyone into the closest possible walk with Jesus. Once again, some of you find this is new and challenging material, however we simply seek to present the teachings of the Scriptures. We understand that the Bible, not religious tradition, is the ultimate source of truth, coming from Christ and God. (**John 17.17** || **Timothy 3.14-16**) We encourage you to carefully consider these matters and search the Scriptures for guidance. If you have questions, we encourage you to contact me, Rick Mosher, and I will be glad to study with you in more depth.

This wraps up our study of baptism. If you have learned of your need to be immersed into Christ, as a repentant believer, in order to receive the forgiveness of your sins and the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit, please don't delay. Others, who have already obeyed the Gospel in this way, we trust what we have studied in these three lessons has equipped you to reach out to others or to answer questions others might ask you.