

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

I. *Its Importance.*—2. *Its Acts.*—3. *Its Designs.*—4. *Its Effects.*—5. *Its Administrator.*—
Miscellaneous Matters.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM.

CHRISTIAN baptism is a positive duty enjoined upon each child of God by all the authority with which any law of God is enforced. Christ, when he commanded it, declared that he was clothed with all power in heaven and earth. In addition to his most emphatic **command**, he affectionately urges obedience to it upon his regenerated disciples by all the motives drawn from his love and death for their salvation—in fact, he makes it a **test** of the sincerity of their profession of friendship for him: “If a man love me he **will** keep my commandments.” “Ye are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.” “Why cal ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command you?” Of the “all things whatsoever” Christ singles out, he mentions but one act as representative of all, and that act is **baptism**. It was the first act of Christ’s public ministry. He has made it **the** initial act of our Christian life and service. He has constituted it **the** act in which we confess to the world, in forceful symbolism, what Christ has done for us—**saved us**; and the act in which we profess before angels and men, our supreme allegiance to him with the Father and Holy Spirit, and obligate ourselves to cordially obey **all** things whatsoever he commands us.

Christ has also appointed baptism to be **the one** and **only rite** of initiation into his visible churches, and thereby into his kingdom, a duty he requires and enjoins upon every one who has received the grace of his salvation. Indeed, he implies that the professed disciple who refuses to unite with his people—with whom, and in the midst of whom, he declares he will always be—occupies the attitude of open hostility to him and his cause. “He that is not for me is **against me**, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” As certainly as we love Christ, or God, we will **love**, and love to **be with** the children of God. “If we love him that begot, we shall love them also who are begotten of him.”

Christ positively requires his children to observe his Supper, in remembrance of him. “This do” is a command as inviolable as any specific law of the Decalogue, and its violation involves us in equal guilt. If we are the recipients of his grace, we can not, with impunity, refuse or delay to obey the command to observe his Supper. To refuse to observe it is to **aggravate** the guilt of its violation.

Now the Lord’s Supper is a church ordinance, and within the sacred enclosure of his churches, and we can not partake of it without being introduced into one of them. To attempt to eat the Supper outside, or in an organization not his church, is to eat and drink unworthily.

But no one ever was, is to-day, or ever can be, a member of an evangelical or Christian church, or of the kingdom of Christ, unless baptized **as** Christ was, and as he commands us to be, which will be fully shown in the closing section of this chapter.

All Christians, how widely so ever they differ about other things, agree that no one can become a member of Christ's church without baptism. But let it be ever remembered that the act we submit to for baptism must be **baptism**, *i.e.*, must be the act which Christ commands, and it must be administered to us by the body he authorizes alone to administer it—one of his local churches; and organization not a church, though all its members were Christians, has no authority to administer the ordinances of Christ's house. Then as we would obey Christ, by observing his Supper, by uniting with his church, by confessing him as our Savior, by professing our hearty allegiance, it devolves upon us to be baptized as he was and as he commands us to be. It must be true that every true child of God has the mind and spirit of Christ, which was the spirit of **exact obedience**, and desires to know what that act is: and it is for such I write.

Why there is today the least doubt in the minds of the people about the appointed and primitive act, is—I. Because both the primitive **act** and **design** have been changed by the Romish church and the change adopted by Protestants to suit the tastes, feelings, and convenience of the people; 2. Because the word Christ used to designate the act is not translated in our commonly received version; 3. Because other words used to describe the act are untranslated; and 4. Because there are large and influential denominations that teach that the word Christ selected is a word of generic signification, and denotes several different and even opposite acts; as to **pour** upon, to **sprinkle** upon a part of the body, and to **immerse** the whole body in water, and that we are at liberty to use any one of these. The flesh of course selects the one most convenient and popular, and for these reasons the primitive act is practically rejected.

It has been less than three hundred years past that there has been any serious doubt raised as to the act Christ commanded; and, indeed, among the best scholars of all denominations, there is no doubt entertained now, because, for thirteen hundred years, the primitive act was generally observed by all professed Christians. The real question among scholars and theologians since the days of Calvin has been, if a **modified** form of baptism, one more convenient and better suited to the refined feelings of the people will not answer just as well, and if the church has not the authority to change rites and ceremonies, so that the substance is retained? The thoughtful and reverent Christian can not believe that Christ empowered his churches to contravene his positive laws, or modify in the least his appointments. Moreover, the **form** is the substance of a ceremony, and the design of a rite determines its form, and one can not be changed without affecting the other, and the change vitiates the ordinance.

I again emphasize the fact that since Christ has not authorize his churches to modify in the least any one of his appointments, that unless we are baptized as Christ our great exemplar was, and commands us to be, we are not baptized at all, and we can not partake of his Supper without profaning the feast, and bring upon ourselves his condemnation.

Let it not, then, be said or thought that Christian baptism is a matter of little or no importance—that it is “a mere form” and “a non-essential.” While not essential to our salvation, since we must be conscious of this before we are baptized, still it is essential to our obedience to Christ; it is essential to our acceptable worship of him; for he tells us this, “In vain do they worship me who teach for doctrines the commandments of men,” *i.e.*, the modified form, design, and subjects of baptism; it is essential to the maintenance and perpetuation of his truth; essential as an act of honor to him our Head; and it is quite essential as a test of the real state of our deceitful hearts and spiritual relation to him.

The importance of scriptural baptism is thus set forth by one of our most forcible writers in his Tract on the “Position of Baptism in the Christian System.”

“1. It is a **fact**, that baptism was the initial of the ministry of Jesus Christ. 2. It is a **fact**, that he closed his ministry as he began it,—with baptism. 3. It is a **fact**, that the record of his last conversation on earth shows specific mention of this duty and of no other. 4. It is a **fact**, that this is the only duty which we are required to perform in the name of the Trinity. 5. It is a **fact**, that once only was Godhead displayed to earth in triune character, and that this was done on the occasion of baptism. 6. It is a **fact**, that baptism is classed in the Scriptures with things of most tremendous import and of infinite dignity. 7. It is a **fact**, that the baptism of Christ was essential to the fulfillment of all righteousness. 8. It is a **fact**, that baptism is the only duty of which one single moment in the life of an immortal being has a monopoly.”—*Dr. H. H. Tucker.*

II. THE ACT OF BAPTISM.

1. It is admitted by all that Christ commanded John the Baptist, his Seventy disciples, and his apostles, to baptize all who professed to repent and believed on him as their Savior—Messiah.

2. That he requires his churches, through their officers, now to baptize all who believe on him.

3. That this command will be in force until he comes again.

4. That it is our personal duty, who believe on him, to obey this command of Christ; therefore,

5. It must be evident to every intelligent mind, and is admitted by all jurists, that unless he used a word, when he commanded us to be baptized, the exact meaning of which we can undoubtedly understand, we are free from all obligation to obey the command, since we would not know what to do.

“A law that is hopelessly obscure, has no binding force, and no person can be held responsible for obedience.”¹

If Christ used a term of generic signification to indicate the rite of baptism, he did what he has nowhere else done, in either the Old or New Testament, when instituting a rite of baptism, he did what he has nowhere else done, in either the Old or New Testament, when instituting a rite, civil or divine.

It is the form which constitutes, and is the essence of a rite, human or divine. We must conclude, therefore, that Christ did select a word of specific signification when he instituted the rite of baptism. It is agreed by scholars that the English word “baptize” in our version, is not a definition of the Greek term “**baptizo**,” which Christ selected to indicate the act he wished performed.

Our present English Bible was translated—the Old Testament out of the **Hebrew** and the New Testament out of the **Greek**—by order of King James, over three hundred years ago, by a company of Episcopalian scholars. They did not translate “baptizo,” but transferred it with a change of the last vowel. This is what Dr. Edward Beecher, and acknowledged Pedobaptist scholar, says:

“A the time of the translation of the Bible, a controversy had arisen as regards the import of the word, so that although **it was conceded to have an import in the original**, yet it was impossible

¹Pothier, “Smith’s Law of Contracts.”—p. 421.

to assign it in English **any meaning** without seeming to take sides in the controversy then pending. Accordingly, in order to take neither side, they did not attempt to give the sense of the term in a significant English word, but merely transferred the word ‘**baptizo**,’ with a slight alteration of termination to our language. The consequence was **that it does not exhibit its original significancy to the mind of the English reader, or, indeed, any significancy**, except what was derived from its application to designate an external, visible rite.”—*Import of Baptism*, p. 5.

The reader can see the ignorance manifested by those who refer to Webster for a correct definition of **baptizo** by looking under this word “**baptize**,” which is not the English synonym of the Greek word. Webster gives every act which the people call baptism. How, then, are we to ascertain, without a doubt, the literal, real, or true meaning of the word Christ used? Authorities on interpretation tell us that we have five sources of information. The first and highest is the—I. usage of standard writers in the age the author lived. The definitions we find in the lexicons are derived from this source; 2. The definitions given in standard lexicons; 3. The testimony of historians as to how the term was understood, and the rite performed at the time it was instituted; and, 4. The testimony of acknowledged scholars; 5. Internal evidence—*i.e.*, the manifest sense in which the term is used by the author.

Now let us briefly appeal to these sources of information, and inquire:

I. How did the ancient Greeks use it in the time of Christ and his apostles?

Dr. T.J. Conant, of New York, acknowledged to be one of the best Greek scholars in this continent, spent many years, with the assistance of eminent scholars on both continents in collating and translating every instance of the use of **baptizo in every Greek author whose work is extant**. That every one can see the correctness of his translations he gives in his book the text of the authors. His work has been for years before the scholars of the world, and no one has objected to his translations. What is the result?

Every Greek author uses the term in every instance in the sense of to dip, to immerse, plunge, submerge; and in no instance in the sense of to sprinkle.

What must we conclude from this fact? That if Christ used **baptizo** in the sense the Greeks of his day used and understood it; he used it to signify to dip or immerse in water—this, and no other, meaning.

II. How do the lexicons define baptizo?

All the lexicons examined or quoted in the Carrollton debate² (some fifty in all) gave **to dip, to immerse** or **merse** as the **primary** or **literal** signification. We have nothing to do with the **figurative** which is based upon the real or primary, and can mean nothing different from it.

In the last few years, three Greek and English lexicons have appeared; one in England, of the “Greek Language in General,” by Liddell & Scott; and two Lexicons of New Testament Greek, in Germany, and all by Pedobaptist scholars, and the three works are acknowledged by all scholars as eminently authoritative. The testimony of these three recent lexicons, embodying as they do the results of the ablest scholarship and latest criticism, should settle the meaning of **baptizo** in the mind of every candid reader. I give them here.

I. Liddell & Scott, 6th Edition:

“To dip in or under water.”

²See Graves-Ditzler Debate.

Giving but this one literal or real definition of **baptizo**, the few figurative meanings are built upon the idea of an immersion. Thus do they support the declaration of Dr. Chas. Anthon:

“Baptizo, means to dip, to immerse; pouring and sprinkling are out of the question.”

2. Grimm’s Willke’s Lexicon of New Testament Greek:

“(1) To immerse, submerge; (2) to wash or bathe by immersing or submerging,” which he says is the meaning of Mark vii: 4, and in the cases of Naaman and Judith; **figuratively** to overwhelm as with debts, misfortunes, etc. In the New Testament rite, he says it denotes an immersion in water, intended as a sign of sins washed away, and received by those who wished to be admitted to the benefits of the Messiah’s reign. No hint of its meaning anything else.”

Cremer’s Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek:

He gives us the general meaning—“immerse, submerge”—and says in the peculiar New Testament and Christian use the word “**denotes immersion**, submersion, for a religious purpose.” No the shadow of the idea of sprinkling water upon an object is justified. According to the united testimony of all Greek lexicographers, Jesus commanded his apostles to **immerse** their disciples in water, and today commands his churches to immerse, thus forbidding them to sprinkle water upon them by his authority.

All scholars, all critics and lexicographers are agreed that in **classic Greek** baptizo means nothing else save to dip, to immerse, in or under water. But some few polemics claim that in New Testament Greek, its sacred use took on a different meaning, as to purify by the application of water, to wash or bathe by applying water to a part of the body.

To show how groundless this theory is, I quote a canon of interpretation from Morus, indorsed by Ernesti and Stuart:

“The principles of interpretation are common to sacred and ordinary writings, and the Scriptures are to be investigated by the same rules as other books.”

Moses Stuart (Pedobaptist) for thirty years professor in Andover Theological Seminary, upon this subject says,—and with his statement Bible readers and students can not be too familiar:

“If the sacred Scriptures be a **revelation** to men, then they are to be read and understood by men. If the same laws of language are not to be observed in this revelation, as are common to men, then they have no guide to the right understanding of the Scriptures, and our interpreter needs inspiration as much as the original writer. It follows, of course, that the sacred Scriptures would be no revelation in themselves, nor of any use except to those who are inspired. But such a book the sacred Scriptures are not, and nothing is more evident than that when God has spoken to men, he has spoken in the language of men, for he has spoken by men and for men.”

Before quoting the definitions given in all the lexicons of the New Testament, I submit the statement of Dr. Geo. Campbell, president of Marischal College, Scotland, a Presbyterian:

“The word baptizein, both in sacred and in classical, signifies to dip, to plunge, to immerse; and was rendered by Tertullian, and the old Latin fathers, **tingere**, the term used for dyeing cloth, which was by immersion. It is always construed suitably to this meaning (Note on Matt. iii: 11). ‘I should think the word **immersion** (which, thought of Latin origin, is an English noun) a better English name than baptism, were we now at liberty to make choice.’ ‘On the Gospels,’ vol. 2, p. 23, ‘I have heard a disputant in defiance of etymology and use, maintain that the word rendered in the New Testament **baptize**, means more properly to sprinkle than to plunge, and in defiance of all

antiquity, that the former method was the earliest, and for many centuries the most general practice in baptizing. One who argues in this manner never fails with persons of knowledge to betray the cause he would defend; and, though with respect to the vulgar, bold assertions generally succeed as well as arguments – sometimes better – yet a candid mind will disdain to take the help of a falsehood, even in support of truth.”—*Lec. on Pul. Elo.*, p. 480.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE LEXICONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Schleusner’s Lexicon of New Testament:

“**Baptizo**—Properly to immerse and dip in, to immerse into water, and it answer to the Hebrew, Taval.”—2 k. v. 14.

“**Baptisma**—Properly immersion, dipping into water, washing. Hence it is transferred to the sacred rite, which is called baptism, in which those formerly baptized were immersed in water,” etc.

Leigh:

“If we are willing to observe the import of the word, the term of baptism signifies immersion into water, or the act itself of immersing and washing off. Therefore, from the very name and etymology of the word, it appears what would, in the beginning, be the custom of administering baptism, whilst we **now** have for baptism rather rhantism—that is, sprinkling.”

Stokius, an authority of great weight:

“Baptizo.—I. Generally, and by force of the original, it denotes immersion or dipping; 2. Specially, properly, it denotes the immersion or dipping of a thing in water, that it may be cleansed or washed. Hence, it is transferred to designate the first sacrament of the New Testament, which they call of initiation, namely, baptism, in which those to be baptized **were formerly immersed into water**, though, at this time, the water is only sprinkled upon them,” etc.

Wahl’s Clavis of New Testament (1829, Leipsic):

“Baptizo (from **bapto**, to immerse; often to immerse in New Testament)—I. To immerse (always in Joseph. Antiquities, 9, 10, 2 and 16, 3, 3, Polyb., 1, 51, 6), properly and truly concerning sacred immersion.”

Dr. E. Robinson, American Presbyterian, in his Lexicon of New Testament:

“Baptizo—a frequentative in form, but not in fact; to immerse, to sink.”

Prof. Sophocles (Professor in Yale College), himself a native Greek. His Lexicon covers a period of 110 years before Christ to the year 1100 after:

“Baptizo—to dip, to immerse; sink, to be drowned (as the effect of sinking). **Trop** [figurative meaning], to afflict; soak in liquor; to be drunk, intoxicated. There is no evidence that Luke and Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament, put upon the verb meanings not recognized by the Greeks.”

The latest editions of two of the great standard Lexicons of New Testament Greek, viz.: **Grimm’s Wilkes’** and **Cremers’** “Biblico-Theological Lexicon,” give **only** to dip, to immerse,

as its literal and real sense everywhere in the New Testament (see their definition on page 6 of MS.).

So far as the authority of lexicographers and critics can determine the meaning of a word, they have settled the meaning of baptizo and its cognates—the only word Christ or the apostles used in commanding or speaking of Christian baptism; and the verdict I will give in the forceful language of Prof. Stuart, of Andover (Pedobaptist):

“Bapto and Baptizo mean to dip, plunge, or immerse into any liquid. All lexicographers and critics of any note are agreed on this. It is, says Augusti, ‘**a thing made out,**’ viz.: The ancient practice of immersion. So, indeed, all the writers, who have thoroughly investigated the subject, conclude. I know of no usage of ancient times which seems to be more clearly made out. **I can not see how it is possible for any candid man, who has examined the subject, to deny this.**”—pp. 55, 149, 150.

HOW DO STANDARD HISTORIANS SAY THE CHURCHES IN THE APOSTLES’ TIME, AND FOR AGES AFTERWARD, BAPTIZED?

I will introduce a few of the representative historians, with a statement of Prof. L. L. Paine, D. D., who occupies the chair of Ecclesiastical History in the Bangor Theological Seminary (Congregational), which is his defense against the charge of teaching the young ministers under his tuition Baptist sentiments, because he teaches them that immersion was the universal practice of the apostolic churches for thirteen centuries after Christ, and the prevailing practice of Christendom—sprinkling being the exception:

“It may be honestly asked by some, Was immersion the primitive form of baptism? and, if so, what then? As to the question of **fact**, the testimony is ample and decisive. No matter of church history is clearer. The evidence is all one way, and all church historians or any repute agree in accepting it. We can not claim even originality in teaching it in a Congregational Seminary; and we really feel guilty of a kind of anachronism in writing an article to insist upon it. It is a point on which ancient, medieval, and modern historians alike, Catholics and Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists, have no controversy; and the simple reason for this unanimity is, that the statements of the early fathers are so clear, and the light shed upon these statements from the early customs of the Church is so conclusive, that no historian, who cares for his reputation, would dare to deny it, and no historian who is worthy of the name would wish to. There are some historical questions concerning the early church on which the most learned writers disagree; but on this one—of the early practice of immersion—the most distinguished antiquarians – such as Bingham, Augusti, Colman, Smith, and historians such as Mosheim, Gieseler, Hase, Neander, Millman, Schaff, and Alzog (Catholic)—hold a common language. The following extract from ‘Coleman’s Antiquities’ very accurately expresses what all agree to:

““In the primitive Church, **immersion was undeniably the common mode of baptism.** The utmost that can be said of **sprinkling** in that early period was, in case of necessity, permitted as **an exception** to a general rule. This fact is so well established that it is needless to adduce authorities in proof of it.””

As further testimony that sprinkling is an innovation upon the primitive act, I quote a sentence from Dr. Schaff’s “Apostolic Church.” He is the highest **Presbyterian** authority in America:

“As to the outward mode of administering this ordinance, **immersion** and **not sprinkling** was unquestionably the original normal form. But while immersion was the universal custom, and

abridgment of the rite was freely allowed and defended in cases of urgent necessity, such as sickness and approaching death [for which Christ made no provision]; and the peculiar form of sprinkling thus came to be known as ‘clinical’ baptism, or the baptism of the sick. And hence it is difficult to determine, with complete accuracy, just when **immersion gave way** to sprinkling as the common church practice. The two forms were employed—one as the rule, the other as the exception—until, as Christianity traveled northward into colder climates, the exception silently grew to be the rule.”

I will now present two or three only of the representative historians and scholars of the leading Pedobaptist sects, commencing with—

ROMAN CATHOLIC HISTORIANS AND SCHOLARS.

It is well known to all scholars that the Catholics claim that their church has the **right** to change rites and ceremonies and determine doctrines, and that this Mother Church **did** substitute sprinkling for immersion, and infants for believers. History confirms this alleged fact.

Robinson, in his “History of Baptism,” upon unquestioned authority, states this:

“In the spring of the next year (754) in answer to some Monks of Cressy, in Brittany, who privately consulted him—Pope Stephen III—he gave his opinion on nineteen questions, one of which is allowed to be the first authentic law for administering baptism by pouring, which, in time, was interpreted to signify sprinkling. The question proposed was:

“Whether, in case of necessity, occasioned by illness of an infant, it were lawful to baptize by pouring water, out of the hand or cup, on the head of the infant.’

“Stephen answered: ‘If such a baptism were performed, in such a case of **necessity**, in the name of the Holy Trinity, it should be held valid.’”

Robinson says:

“The answer of Stephen is **the true origin of private baptism and of sprinkling.**”

NOTE.—For the remainder of the argument on this subject, see Tract by Author, “The Act of Baptism,” price, 10 cts. Baptist Book House, Memphis, Tenn.

A Baptist Historical Resource
Published by the Center for Theological Research
at www.BaptistTheology.org

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