

The Optional Mode Scam

Some years ago a man swerved into the Church that I pastored. There was a real sense of restlessness about him. After the service he asked me a question. What do you think about baptism? I was somewhat dumbfounded in that my sermon had nothing to do with baptism. I discovered a sad story as he poured out his heart. A true story of how his happy home was trashed by the insistence that only a certain mode of baptism gets one to heaven and he had refused to be baptized by that mode. He considered the walk of faith more important than a dip in a tank. You see, he had married a lady who was a former member of the Church of Christ, but after marriage she felt it obligatory to return to her church. He knew Christ, and was baptized by another faith community. But that baptism did not count for that denomination. He had to be immersed by them. For some denominations, salvation comes by a dip and only a dip in the tank.

Recently, I had a discussion with a brother who held an important position in one of the South's fine small Methodist denominations. He coauthored several books designed to help new members and new Christians in their faith. So I requested one of his books. But instead, knowing that I wanted to examine the chapter on baptism, he just copied that chapter and sent it on. What I read was something far less Methodist and even less Biblical. It almost sounded like he was missionary for his former Baptist creed of "Believer Baptism". The whole way through his presentation of modes, the focus was all about the superiority of "Believers Baptism." This phrase has become code in Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and the contemporary Christian Church movement to mean baptism by immersion only. This then is the proof of scriptural Salvation, if you were immersed - "Believers Baptism", you showed obedience by following Christ in immersion which means you truly a Christian.

So I examined the scriptures to find the term "Believers Baptism." I checked for it in the KJV, the NKJV, and a few other versions. Guess what? That term does not appear. But it does appear in the literature of the Free Will Baptist Church, Independent Baptist Churches, the Southern Baptist Church and the vast majority of the Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and the contemporary Christian Churches. As much as they use this term one would think that it was written in gold everywhere in the Scriptures. But it does not appear!

If "Believers Baptism" is the correct mode in the scripture, if it is what God commended through the inspired writers, then it would have been exonerated in the scriptures. For example, God clearly states that he created the world and all that is in it in seven days. God clearly stated that Mary was a Virgin, that she knew no man, and that Jesus was that holy thing that was conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit. God clearly taught that Jesus was risen from the dead the third day. Of course this list could go on but you catch the drift. The point is, no where do we find God saying to Peter or Paul to immerse anyone. At best immersion, their water burial, is assumed just like the term "Believers Baptism."

What we are talking about is a large amount of water to be used in the holy act of baptizing someone. We are talking about a tank or tub of water where a person must be stuck under to the very top of their head and to have every square inch of their body buried in water. Not a dry spot on the body should remain or it is not "Believers Baptism." So we could conclude that God likes to use large amounts of water in dedicating, cleansing, or ceremonial cleansing and anointing which baptism can represent. So let's look at this relationship between believers and large amounts of water. Again before we begin, I could not find any clear example of immersion being commanded or anyone using

this mode in the Bible as the concept of “Believers Baptism” necessitates. Even the laws of cleansing given by Moses does not require immersions. But where the laws are to wash in water we realize that the water is applied to the body in order to cleanse the body. But the impression of washing by immersion in Moses’ Law is not to be found. So where do we find a lot of water used?

The first thing to noticed in this connection is Noah’s flood. This was a large amount of water and boy was it massive. The whole earth was immersed. Notice however, it was an immersion of judgment, and not an immersion of death, burial and resurrection. There was only death and burial. Now Noah was saved in the ark. Not a drop of water touched him in that judgement of immersion. The ark represents the grace and mercy of God as we find in Christ. This immersion of the world is very negative to say the least.

Then the next time we see contact with large amounts of water is when Moses leads the children of Israel across the red sea. However, the waters divide, and Moses and his people walk through on dry ground. There is something interesting here because Paul alludes to this as a baptism into Moses. I Cor. 10:1-2 says, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;” Well paint me red and call me a fire truck! Paul called it a baptism! They were baptized and not a drop of water touched them, but they were surrounded by water. Not a bit of mud attached itself to their feet. They were baptized into Moses and there was no water to make them wet. Nevertheless there was an immersion here too. Pharaoh and his army were kill by drowning or immersion. An immersion of judgement. An immersion of death and burial with no hopes of a resurrection except at the great judgement. The same thing happened with Joshua as he crossed the river Jordan. Even there the waters divided. They too walked through on dry ground just as their father who walked through the Red Sea. It can be well said that they too were baptized into Joshua, as their fathers were baptized into Moses.

In the New Testament, we find that Christ had conflicts with all the ceremonial cleansing’s that the Jews thought to be so important. They scolded Jesus for not washing his hands. In one case the word baptizo appears in a certain form for washing tables. In another case Jesus condemns the Pharisees as he makes a passing reference to the use of water. In Matthew 23:15 he says “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte*, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” You see, by this time in Jewish history, in order to become a Jewish proselyte, they practiced the unbiblical use of immersion, which was never required in the Law of Moses. The unbiblical dip in the mikveh was required to make a person a Jewish proselyte. Over the ages, the emphases became less by faith, and more by water to the Pharisees. This mimics “Believers Baptism” perfectly. However, according to Jesus, great mounts of water hinders faith more then it helps. In that same chapter he again references water directly. In verse 25 he says “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.” Christ understood the danger of dependence on water. For Christ it was all about the inside. The sprinkling of the Blood of the Lamb makes clean on the inside. It seems from our Lords perspective that large or small amounts of water was not important. Water has nothing to do with true faith as far as Christ is concerned. If it is about the inside of a mans heart, and it is, then baptism by sprinkling is a far more perfect mode then “Believers Baptism.”

There is still another event that is important to this survey of water usage in the in the Bible. It is the case of Jesus washing his disciples feet. As he comes to where Peter is resting, he begins to wash

his feet. Peter quickly says that he does not want Jesus to wash his feet. However our Lord reasons with him by saying, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." You see Peter had already been dipped in the mikveh for the feast. He was clean. And while the feet is a passing focus, the meaning is clear. It is Christ's washing that counts. Not a dip or immersion in the Mikveh. Like foot washing and more then foot washing, the lesson is that the washing that Christ gives can wash away the everyday sins of man. How much water was used for this important lesson?" Only what was in a small basin. When Christ blesses the water of baptism, as he did the bread and the fish, little is much in the purpose of the Lord.

We therefore see that in the New Testament, the emphases on "much water" as meaning the need for immersion baptism is not there. But wait, as I continued to check for this mode, I now understand why Christ had an issue with the water. Listen to what Isaiah says he will do when Christ comes. 52:15, "So shall he *sprinkle* many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider." The "he" here is Christ. Sprinkling is what Isaiah said Christ would do. Not immersion. But add insult to injury listen to what the prophet Ezekiel says, "Then will I *sprinkle* clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Remember he fulfilled all that was written about him. Indeed the feet washing of the disciples are a real symbolical illustration of this cleansing. It was not accomplished by immersing the feet in the water.

But look, let's cut to the quick here. Some claim that where it says Christ "went up straightway out" and in the case of the eunuch where it says "down both into the water" unequivocally proves that "Believers Baptism" took place. First it should insult our intelligence to think that we must base this immersion belief on prepositional phrases. Such a phrase does not prove that an immersion took place, but only that one is in the water. It is only circumstantial evidence at best, to say that because he came up out of the water meant immersion. For example, I got paddle when I was a child for standing in the water with my Sunday shoes. My shoes were not covered over in any sense of the word. I got paddle for standing "in" the water. Trust me, when mom got the stick out, I "went up straightway out" of that muddle fast. So this "into" and "out of" at best proves little about the mode of immersion. All we know is Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. We know nothing of the mode. Second, there are many first century drawings that indicate that people stood in the water as it was either being poured or sprinkled over them. There has yet to be any pictures or engravings found showing an immersion in the primitive church.

But wait, this water god dogmatic of "Believers Baptism" is not easily defeated with simple truth. We all know that Romans 6 proves "Believers Baptism" beyond the shadow of doubt. So let's look at this bulwark of "Believers Baptism."

Paul says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were *baptized* into Jesus Christ were *baptized* into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by *baptism* into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." I will grant a point here. Indeed one of the meanings of baptizo is immerse or dip. No one argues that. Many "Believer Baptizers" contend for that every time baptizo is used, we ought to replace it with its literal meaning, that is, immerse or immersion. What many reference Bible's conveniently leave out is the fact that *wash*, *sprinkle*, and *moistening* is part of the meaning of baptizo too. Now I wonder why they are not truthful about this fact? So let's make a concession to their argument that baptizo should be translated immerse or some similar meaning whenever baptize is used. It is said that baptizo here means buried or burial which is of course equal to immersion. So if burial is equal

to immerse or baptize or baptized let's literally try on their fine suggestion. These two verses will now be revised correctly. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were *buried* into Jesus Christ were *buried* into his death? 4 Therefore we are *buried* with him by burial into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." That idea really makes no sense at all in this verse! None!

Let's try to make sense of what Paul is teaching here. The question here is this, is he teaching "Believers Baptism" is illustrated by immersion only? Or is he speaking of a more superior baptism than any large amount of water could ever afford? So let's consider the follow three important points to provide some insight to what Paul really meant.

First, perhaps we can learn what Paul means by looking at his personal experience of baptism. In Acts 9:18 it says that he "arose, and was baptized." He was baptized standing up! What we know from this passage is that there was not a Mikveh in that home, nor did he leave to go to a near by river even if there was one, and there is no suggestion of leaving that room to find a tub or court yard fountain deep enough to be immersed. Ananias baptized Paul as he stood up. Now look, if we are to believe in the great experience that baptism gives by immersion, could Paul have had the same with the water being sprinkled on him? Of course. It is baptism. After fasting, and praying for several days certainly he would have the same thrill! Therefore, from Paul's experience of baptism, there is no scriptural support to enforce the idea that immersion is meant in Romans 6.

Second, Paul also used a similar concept of "*baptized* into Jesus Christ" in I Cor 10:2 where he says "...were all baptized unto Moses...." Immersed into Moses, right? Yes there was a lot of water in that old Red sea. But the only ones immersed was the wicked Pharaoh and his mighty army. The Children of God walked through on dry land. The children of Israel were baptized into Moses without any dip in the water. It was a spiritual baptism that Paul spoke of in I Cor. 10:2. The same here in Romans too. Paul meant that we were baptized not in water, but by the Spirit of Christ. It is by the Spirit's baptism that we have this death, burial and resurrection. It is the Holy Spirit that makes us new, and raises us from death and sin. Could this be what Paul is teaching? Immersion is so far away from what Paul had in mind here. Water baptism is not the king in Paul's writings. But today it has become the Sovereign King of Christian baptism.

And finally, there is this phrase in that same verse "...in the sea." Here is another point concerning a prepositional phrase. It says that they were in the sea, and yet they were not immersed as always assumed from such prepositions. Immersion is always demand when such prepositions are used, and this proof that such an action does not have to be the case. There is never an immersion found in any prepositional phrase in the Scriptures.

Now let's briefly survey the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the course of redemptive history. In the old times the Spirit rarely dwelt within the believer. Yet it was said to be upon the person who God sent to do his purpose. But in the New Testament this all changes. Not only does he come upon us, but also dwells in us. And by the way, it is never said that we are immersed in Him.

Paul in Romans 6 is speaking of this undeniable work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. Acts 2:4 says "And they were filled with the Holy Ghost." Eph 5: says "Be filled with the Spirit." And what about the "Spirit of adoption?" "Walk in the Spirit" in Gal 5:16. And this is just a short list of how the Spirit works in the life of the believer. And what of Jesus our Lord? Was he not conceived by the Holy Spirit? Was he not lead by the Holy Spirit? Was he not Anointed by the Spirit for service at baptism? The writer of Hebrews says in 9:14 "How much more shall the blood

of Christ, *who through the eternal Spirit offered himself* without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” He was crucified through the Holy Spirit. We are “...*baptized* into his death” by the Holy Spirit, not water! Paul writes in Romans 8:11 “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” “... like as Christ was raised up from the dead...” by the *Holy Spirit*, not by water! And water baptism always and best illustrates the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. No where in the scriptures do we find one believer being dipped into the Holy Spirit. Where in the name of common sense, or scholarship is there immersion to be found to illustrate what Paul is teaching in Romans? All that Paul is telling us is the fact that the Holy Spirit did all those things when we were saved. And when the water is poured over you at baptism it is the symbol of the power that is in you. It has nothing to do with a dip or two in water! Nothing! No amount of water can illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. It is that new birth in Christ that the Apostle is talking about, and how you were baptized by the Holy Spirit which did the same thing for you since you were dead in your sins. It is the illustration of the Holy Spirit, not out of water, that raises the new believer in the newness of life. Immersion, “Believer Baptism”, places far far too much importance on the water.

In closing we find that immersion is not in the scriptures. Baptism is. Now the dear brother, that I mentioned above, argued for his position based on the concept of optional modes. For him immersion was truly the real and only mode taught in the scriptures. He spoke of the other two modes in his article, but it was with a view of doubt about their Biblical standing. When you speak to such brothers, he will immediately demand that you accept their view based on the fact that Methodists allow optional modes. Optional modes within Methodism is not so much for the propose of accommodation of all modes, but rather to direct the emphases on a Spirit filled dependance and not on water. Baptism is not a cheap thrill of a quick dip, but to be thrilled with the inward working and power of the Spirit. Not to glorify any physical actions of Christ, but what he accomplished by the Spirit through those actions. Christ’s actions would mean nothing without the tending power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is all about the Spirit! It only takes a little water in baptism to illustrate the immense work of the Holy Spirit. All the water in all the oceans could not do that. And besides, no where in the New Testament are we commanded to follow the Lord in baptism no matter the mode used by John the Baptizer. After all, all the attention should be focused on living for Christ, not a personal experience in a tank. It is never about a large amount of water. It is never about how you or I feel. It is all about the Spirit empowered life because of Christ. As the old Brylcreem commercial use to say, “a little dab will do you.”