

The Meaning of Baptism

**With Special Reference to
The BAPTIST view**

by

Rev. Angus Stewart B.A., Dip. Theol.

(I) INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the verbally inspired revelation of the Triune God of heaven and earth. Thus the meaning of its words must be carefully ascertained. Whole controversies can hinge on this. Consider Luther and the Reformation versus the Roman Church in the sixteenth century. Does the Greek word *metanoein* mean to do penance or to change one's mind (with respect to sin and God in Christ)? Similarly, does *dikaion* mean to *declare* just (a solely *legal* act) or does it also include a *making* just (an *organic* work)?

Here our concern is with the word *baptizein*, the Greek word usually translated in the New Testament "to baptise." With the rise of the Anabaptists, this word also became a subject of debate. Its meaning is especially important since it concerns one of the two sacraments in the Christian Church. One section of the church world boldly proclaims that they know the meaning of *baptizein*. Baptists are adamant that this word means dip or immerse . . . always and only. Consider the following baptist testimonies:

"Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of the ordinance" (*The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1688*, XXIX:iv [The Philadelphia Confession]).

"Christian Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer" (*The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, XIV [1833]).¹

¹Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. III, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), pp. 741, 747.

“[Baptizein] in the whole history of the Greek language has but one [meaning]. It not only signifies to dip or immerse, but it never has any other meaning.” “[Baptizein] . . . always signifies to dip; never expressing anything but mode” (Alexander Carson).²

“To baptise is to immerse” (J. L. Dagg).³

Baptism is “immersion and immersion only” (A. H. Strong).⁴

Furthermore, baptists delight to quote John Calvin: “it is evident that the term baptise means to immerse.”⁵ In short, the baptist argument is that God commands baptism. Baptism is immersion. Therefore, God commands immersion.

If the baptists are right then the whole Reformed and Presbyterian church world is sinning by baptising by sprinkling or pouring; and has been guilty of this sin for almost five hundred years. This is a very serious charge. If the baptists are right we must alter our confessions, change our *Form for the Administration of Baptism* and begin to practice immersion in our churches, in obedience to the command of the Lord God.⁶

Thus, according to baptists, Reformed and Presbyterian churches not only abuse the sacrament of baptism by administering it to infants of believers, but even their adult baptisms are conducted improperly, since their mode of baptism is contrary to God’s command. Reformed and Presbyterian congregations are doubly condemned; having extremely few members who are properly baptised.

Therefore, although our main controversy with baptists concerns the inclusion of infants in God’s everlasting covenant of grace and their right to baptism, we must also consider the baptist contention regarding the mode of baptism. The argument of this paper is not, however, merely negative. Rather it seeks to present a positive understanding of the meaning of baptism drawn out of the Scriptures and in keeping with the Reformed Confessions. If a baptist asks a Reformed believer what he thinks baptism means, what answer ought he give? In other words, this paper asks, What is the heart or *essence* of baptism?⁷ And does this have any implications for our understanding of paedobaptism and the gracious character of God’s sovereignly bestowed salvation?

² Alexander Carson, *Baptism: Its Mode and Subjects*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, repr. 1981), pp. 19, 55.

³ J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, repr. 1990), p. 21.

⁴ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Three Volumes in One, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, repr. 1979), p. 933.

⁵ Calvin, however, believed that sprinkling was also a lawful mode of baptism Cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. II, [Great Britain: James Clarke & Co., repr. 1949], p. 524 [IV:xv:19]).

⁶ The **Form for the Administration of Baptism** is found in *The Psalter*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1988], pp. 85-89.

⁷ Logically, the issue of the *subjects* of baptism is preceded by that of the *meaning* of baptism. “What is baptism?” is a more fundamental question than “Who are to be baptised?”

(II) BAPTIZEIN DOES NOT MEAN TO IMMERSE

Baptists use two English words as synonyms of *baptizein*: dip and immerse. However these two words differ in four respects. **First**, dipping involves the movement of one object into *and out of* a fluid. In immersion, an object is submerged, but nothing is said of its removal from the fluid. Thus in Greek literature a person baptised in water is often one who has drowned.

Second, whereas the action of dipping is specific (entrance into and removal from a fluid), immersion can be achieved in many different ways. A man sitting in an empty bath could be immersed by the water which flows from the faucet. Similarly immersion can be effected by pouring or even by sprinkling. A stone sitting in a bucket could be immersed by water from a watering can.

Third, immersion and dipping also differ regarding the time for which the object is submerged. Dipping conveys a very brief period of envelopment in the fluid, whereas an immersion is a protracted submersion, possibly of hours, days, weeks or even hundreds of years.⁸

Fourth, dipping does not convey to what extent the object was submerged. A man on a beach may speak of going into the sea for a dip, though he only went in to his waist. Immersion suggests a more complete submersion, though even here baptists often feel that the word does not convey the thought strongly enough, so they speak of *total* immersion.⁹

Thus dipping and immersion differ regarding **(1) the action** (immersing and emerging or only immersing); **(2) the means** of the action (immersion can be effected in various ways); **(3) their duration**; and **(4) the extent** to which the object is submerged. To accurately express the meaning of *baptizein* in the baptist sacrament, we may speak of it as a *total immersion by dipping*. This ought to be understood as allowing the non-dipping of the legs, since in their baptism the initiate wades into the water before he is dipped.

Though the baptist understanding of *baptizein* concerning their sacrament is very specific, they understand the word with a great latitude of meaning elsewhere. The baptist use of both dipping and immersion as synonyms of *baptizein* is very helpful for baptist apologetics. Thus *baptizein*, according to baptists, can refer to an act (dipping) or a state (immersion).¹⁰ Though dipping is a weak verb (since the object is only submerged very briefly), immersion is a strong word, since whatever is submerged in a fluid for some time will partake of its peculiar characteristics. Furthermore, *by figure*, *baptizein* can be used with great latitude by baptists when it comes to answering Biblical objections to their position, as we shall see.

⁸ Such as a ship lying at the bottom of the sea, like the *Titanic*.

⁹ The baptist insistence on the completeness of the covering by water is similar to the Jewish error expressed by Peter (John 13:9-10).

¹⁰ This is problematic for the baptists since many protest that a verb can only be active (such as dipping) or transitive (describing a state such as immersion) but not both active and transitive.

Nevertheless, at the very least, the baptist has to show that the baptised object is enveloped in the fluid or that the state resulting from the baptism was through dipping or immersion. This is his one great problem and it is compounded by his definition of *baptizein* as *always and only* to immerse or dip. This claim is exclusive. No other ways of baptism can be permitted by a baptist. Thus his theory is easily falsified. One instance of a baptism not by immersion or dipping is enough to falsify the whole theory, whether it be found in classic, Judaic, patristic or Biblical usage.

Though the immersionists claim to be the only ones who faithfully obey the Biblical mandate for Baptism by dipping, one is surprised that they often seek to make their case for immersion primarily from sources other than the Bible. Thus J. L. Dagg, in seeking to determine the meaning of *baptizein*, gives many examples from the classics - from Aristotle to Aristophanes and Homer to Hippocrates - with a few Biblical references thrown in.¹¹ These claims are very difficult for most Christians to verify. Moreover they are apt to be blinded by such a display of learning.

The aim here is much more modest and much more easily tested: From the usage of *baptizein* in the New Testament, does it appear that it always and only means to immerse? That *baptizein* means to dip or immerse may be refuted in various ways:

(1) If the object to be baptised is *too large to be immersed*. Mark 7:4 speaks of the baptism (*baptismos*) of couches or beds. However, the Talmudic tractate, *Kelim*, and Maimonides, in the twelfth century, speak of the immersion of beds. Carson points out that “the couches might have been so constructed, that they might be conveniently taken to pieces, for the purpose of purification.”¹² Thus we cannot certainly prove that the beds of Mark 7:4 were not immersed.

(2) If there was *not sufficient water*. In Acts 8, we read of the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch, by Philip in the wilderness between Jerusalem and Gaza (v. 26). The eunuch - apparently surprised - saw some water as he and Philip talked, so they left the chariot and Philip baptised him. Are we to suppose that there was enough water to submerge a grown man?

Some have sought to strengthen the case for non-immersion by pointing out that the passage which the eunuch was reading (Isa. 53:7-8; cf. Acts 8:32-33) is only a few verses after a reference to the Messiah *sprinkling* many nations.¹³ It ought to be pointed out, though, that the Septuagint version, which the eunuch was probably using, does not so translate the Hebrew.¹⁴ Although it cannot be proved that Philip did not explain to the eunuch the proper rendering of this verse, the non-immersionist case is not necessarily strengthened by this appeal to Isaiah.

¹¹ Dagg, Op. cit., pp. 23-31.

¹² Carson, Op. cit., p. 76.

¹³ “So shall he sprinkle many nations” (Isa. 52:15).

¹⁴ Cf. W. A. Jarrell, *Baptizo-Dip-Only*, (Dallas: All Color Press, repr. 1973), p. 58.

Dagg tries to turn the case around.¹⁵ He says that few are so stupid as to fail to bring water supplies with them in a journey across a desert. Why then, he argues, was there need for water outside the chariot? If baptism was by sprinkling or pouring, surely the eunuch could have stopped the chariot and Philip could have used some of the eunuch's supplies. Against this we must say that since water is precious to those travelling through a desert a sight of water outside would surely suggest using it instead of one's own reserves.¹⁶

Thus we return to the issue of water in the desert. Again a conclusive case against immersion cannot be made. One cannot rule out the possibility that there may have been a sufficiently large pool in that desert to submerge a man. It is, however, highly unlikely.

(3) If there are *too many people* to be immersed. On the Day of Pentecost, three thousand converts were baptised (Acts 2:41). The five thousand new Christians of Acts 4:4 were also undoubtedly baptised. Three concerns arise for the baptists here. First, the relative scarcity of water in Jerusalem. Second, the amount of time required to baptise the multitude.¹⁷ Third, the hostility of the Jewish authorities. Are we to suppose that they permitted the despised Christians to use Jerusalem's water supplies?

The first issue is easily overcome. The baptists are quite right: there was enough water to do it. Regarding the second, they note that there were not merely one but twelve apostles and point out similar occasions of mass immersions by baptists. The third factor might make it more difficult but probably not impossible. We must admit that immersion cannot absolutely be ruled out. It is much easier, however, to think of the mass baptism on the inauguration of the New Testament church as being by sprinkling or pouring. Thus Moses sprinkled the blood of the (old) covenant on the Israelites in Exodus 24.

(4) If the one baptised is in *a position unsuitable for immersion*. In both Acts 9 and 22 we read of Saul's conversion and baptism. Saul, later named Paul, was praying in a house in the street called Straight, when Ananias came to him and laid his hands on him. Ananias commanded Paul, "Arise and be baptised" (Acts 22:16) and Paul "arose and was baptised" (Acts 9:18). Paul had neither eaten nor drank in the last three days (Acts 9:9) and only after his baptism does he have a meal.

The question is, How can a man standing in a house be immersed? Most baptist scholars do not address this question.¹⁸ John Gill makes an attempt, but it is not very successful. He says that there was probably a bath in the house since, he reckons, it was the house of a Jew. Next, he tries to derive some horizontal and not merely vertical motion from the

¹⁵ Dagg, Op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁶ Apparently, it is an unwritten rule of the desert that all carried water is for drinking only.

¹⁷ The length of time required to immerse the great crowd of converts would have far exceeded that of Peter's sermon. It seems strange that God should choose to begin the New Testament church with such an occupation with the sacramental rather than the kerugmatic (preaching).

¹⁸ E.g. Strong, Op. cit., R.E.O.White: *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation: A Theology of Baptism and Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

word “arise.”¹⁹ This does not, however, come from the word itself, but merely from Gill’s immersionist presuppositions. For Gill, since *baptizein* means immerse, there must be a bath in the house, and “arise” must mean “get up *and go to it.*”²⁰

(5) If one party is described as baptised, while *another party is immersed*. We have occasions of this in the only two Old Testament events referred to as baptisms in the New Testament: I Corinthians 10:1-2 and I Peter 3:20-21.²¹ In the former, Moses and the Israelites pass through the Red Sea on dry land, while Pharaoh and his host are immersed in the water. In the latter, Noah and seven other souls are saved in the ark, while the “world of the ungodly” (II Peter 2:5) is drowned in the waters of the flood. Thus the two great redemptive events in the Old Testament which concern great volumes of water are referred to as baptisms. However, contrary to what would follow from the baptist view of *baptizein*, the Bible teaches that in the Flood and in the Red Sea the ungodly who are not baptised are immersed and the church which is baptised is not immersed!

Baptist attempts to prove an immersion of the godly are not convincing. Carson argues that the Israelites did have a sort of immersion, since the sea was walled on either side of them and the cloud was above them.²² Dagg is just as bold. He reckons that the English translation of I Corinthians 10:2 ought to read, “And were all *immersed* unto Moses.”²³

Regarding I Peter 3:20-21, Carson says that the ark was occasionally *dipped* into the flood waters as they rose and swelled.²⁴ John Gill says that “the ark with those in it, were as it were covered with and immersed in water,” since “the fountains of the great deep were broken up below, and the windows of heaven were opened above.” Not content with merely discovering an immersion, Gill exhibits even greater ingenuity in discovering both a burial and a resurrection in Noah’s baptism. Noah and his family being “shut up” in the ark “represented a burial;” and the resurrection of Jesus Christ “was typified by the coming of Noah and his family out of the ark.”²⁵

Other baptists deny that the analogy or “like figure” (v. 21) is between Christian baptism and a Noahic baptism. They say that I Peter 3:20 speaks of Noah’s salvation *not baptism*

¹⁹ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, (USA: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1995), p. 913.

²⁰ Neither in Acts 9 or anywhere else in the New Testament do we read anything of baptised people having to dry themselves or change their clothes, which references would suggest an immersion.

²¹ Interestingly, both these baptisms are referred to in the Prayer in the **Form for the Administration of Baptism** used by the Reformed churches (*The Psalter*, pp. 86, 88).

²² Carson, Op. cit., pp. 119-120, 328-331, 366-367.

²³ Dagg, Op. cit., p. 29; italics Dagg’s.

²⁴ Carson, Op. cit., p. 388.

²⁵ Gill, Op. cit., p. 911.

and verse 21 of our salvation and baptism.²⁶ Though we reject the sacramentarianism of the Lutheran scholar, W. H. T. Dau, he does point out the appropriate point of comparison between Noahic and Christian baptism:

“Water saved Noah and his family by floating the ark which sheltered them, and by removing from them the disobedient generation which had sorely tried their faith, as it had tried God’s patience. In like manner the water of baptism bears up the ark of the Christian church and saves its believing members, by separating them from their filthy and doomed fellow-men”.²⁷

(6) If a baptism *is effected by pouring*. The risen, but not yet ascended, Christ promised His disciples that they should “be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). He was referring to the Day of Pentecost, as the succeeding narrative makes clear. The baptist attempt at finding an immersion is valiant but futile. Some say that they were immersed by the Spirit which filled the room in which they were sitting. To this we must point out that it is not the Spirit but a *sound from heaven* which filled the house (2:2).

Carson attempts a more sophisticated evasion. He says that the baptism of Acts 2 is “a figurative baptism in which there is no literal immersion, pouring or sprinkling.”²⁸ “The baptism of the Spirit is . . . explicable on the principle of a reference to immersion,” he affirms. “To be immersed in the Spirit (sic!), represents the subjection of soul, body and spirit to his influence.”²⁹

It ought to be clear to all that Pentecost’s baptism of the Spirit was effected by *pouring*.³⁰ This is made clear by the account of Acts 2. The Spirit is “poured out” (Acts 2:17, 18) and “shed forth” by the ascended and enthroned Christ, who “received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:33). That this pouring out of the Spirit is indeed described as a baptism is easily proved from Scripture.³¹

However, Carson attempts to refute this position. He makes three fallacious arguments. First, he begs the question. He states that *baptizein* means to immerse, when this is exact-

²⁶ The Baptist **Beasley-Murray**, however, opposes this view (**Op. cit.**, pp. 259-260).

²⁷ **W. H. T. Dau**, “Baptism,” in James Orr gen. ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. I, (USA: Hendrickson, repr. 1996), p. 396.

²⁸ **Carson**, *Op. cit.*, p. 366.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁰ The Spirit is *poured out* in Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45. In Acts 1:8, He is spoken of as *coming down* on the apostles. He *falls upon* believers in Acts 10:44; 11:15. This is in full agreement with the presentation of the coming of the Spirit in the Old Testament (Prov. 1:23; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Eze. 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10).

³¹ Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4-5; cf. Acts 8:16; 10:44-48; 11:15-16. **Carson** can write that “the pouring out of the Spirit is [totally] different . . . from the baptism of the Spirit,” only because he is thoroughly blinded by the notion that baptism always and only means to immerse (*Op. cit.*, p. 109).

ly the point under debate.³² Second, he resorts to absurd accusations. To those who speak of the Spirit being poured out as the baptism of Pentecost he ascribes “the egregious and blasphemous error which teaches that God is material.”³³ Needless to say, he is unable to prove that this follows from the Reformed position. Third, he fails to make the proper distinctions. He states that our argument *equates* pouring and baptising.³⁴ This is not true. We hold that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was effected by pouring, but we do not say that *baptizein* means to pour.

On the significance of this baptism, Jay Adams writes,

“If any baptism in the Scriptures is important, it is that which occurred at Pentecost. Joel prophesied it [Joel 2:28-29]; John predicted it [Matt. 3:16]; Christ promised it [Acts 1:4-5]; and Luke proclaimed it [Acts 2]. No other baptism is given as much space or prominence.”³⁵

The highly important baptism of Acts 2 was most definitely not by immersion.

(7) If a baptism *is effected by sprinkling*. Our last example proved a baptism effected by pouring. Hebrews 9 speaks of baptisms effected by sprinkling. Verse 10 of that chapter tells us that the Old Testament economy consisted of “meats and drinks, and divers washings [literally, baptisms, *baptismos*], and carnal ordinances.” That there were a few immersions amongst the purifications of the Mosaic dispensation, we might grant. That immersion was the only, or even the most frequent, method of ceremonial cleansing no one would be foolish enough to assert. But we are not left to search the Old Testament to see to which baptisms (*baptismos*) the Holy Spirit is referring.

The inspired text goes on to enumerate some of the Mosaic baptisms. In verse 13 we read of the “sprinkling” of “the blood of bulls and of goats” and of “the ashes of an heifer” (cf. Num. 19:17-18). Verses 19-20 speak of Moses’ purifying both “the book and all the people” in Exodus 24. With “scarlet wool and hyssop,” he “sprinkled” “the blood of calves and of goats [which was mixed] with water.” Verse 21 adds that later “he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and the vessels of the ministry.”³⁶ Not once does the Holy Spirit refer

³² Ibid., pp. 104-105.

³³ Ibid., p. 105.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

³⁵ Jay E. Adams, *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), p. 22. This is the most helpful little book on the subject of this article.

³⁶ James Oliver Buswell may well be correct in seeing in the *sprinkled* hearts of Hebrews 10:22 “an allusion to the significance of baptism,” in accordance with the usage of sprinkle in Hebrews 9 (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Two Volumes in One, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, repr. 1975], II, pp. 249-250

to a baptism by immersion, but three times He speaks of *sprinkling*.³⁷ Thus when Dagg translates Hebrews 9:10 as “divers *immersions*,” we can only wonder at how zealously men will seek to cling to a pet theory.³⁸

One evasion would be to admit that the baptisms (*baptismos*) of Hebrews 9:10 were indeed effected by sprinkling, but to argue that this is not determinative for the meaning of the verb *baptizein*. This argument, however, will not do. Greek nouns with the suffix *mo-* (*-mos*) indicate the abstract name for the action. If *baptizein* means to immerse or dip, then Dagg is correct: Hebrews 9:10 must be translated “divers *immersions*.” Since the context forbids this, *baptizein* does not mean to immerse or dip.³⁹

From our consideration of *baptizein* in Scripture, it is clear that it does not always and only mean “to immerse.” Moreover, even if it could be proved that baptism was effected by immersion in a few places, the baptist view still would not hold water. Just one example of a baptism not by dipping is enough to falsify the baptist position; and we have found several such examples. Therefore, the Word of God does not forbid but permits baptism by sprinkling or pouring. Reformed and Presbyterian churches are not disobeying the Scriptures in their mode of baptism.

(III) BAPTIST ARGUMENTS FOR IMMERSION

One is forced now to consider why baptists argue that *baptizein* always and only means to immerse. The Biblical arguments they adduce for their position can be considered under three heads: places, prepositions and symbolism.

(1) Concerning *places*, baptists point to John’s baptising “in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there” (John 3:23). The baptists emphasise the last clause - “*because there was much water [Grk.: hudata polla] there*” - but they should also consider the place, Aenon. Thayer says that Aenon is derived from a Hebrew word for spring.⁴⁰ This helps us to understand the *hudata polla*, translated “much water” by the *Authorised Version* (KJV). Aenon was probably named after the *many waters or fountains or springs* which arose there. This is the way *hudata polla* ought to be translated. Wilbur Christy writes,

“Unfortunately for those who are accustomed to find here proof of immersion, these springs trickling through marshy meadow land on their way to the

³⁷ It is no wonder that the **Westminster Confession of Faith** refers to Hebrews 9 first, when dealing with the mode of baptism (XXVIII:iii).

³⁸ **Dagg**, Op. cit., p. 28; italics Dagg’s. Similarly, **Carson** also states, “The translation ought to be ‘different immersions,’ not ‘different washings’” (Op. cit., p. 76). **Gill** likewise understands the baptisms of Hebrews 9:10 as immersions (Op. cit., p. 897).

³⁹ Thus the “doctrine of baptisms” of Hebrews 6:2 is not “the doctrine of dippings or immersions.”

⁴⁰ **Joseph Henry Thayer**, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company, rev. 1889), p. 16.

Jordan, as they do to this day, offer little or no facilities for immersion”.⁴¹

Second, baptists point out that John also baptised at the River Jordan. Why go to a river to baptise, they argue, unless you need a large quantity of water, such as is required for immersion? It ought to be noted that John’s location in the wilderness is more important than his choice of baptismal site. His wilderness setting is primary, for in this he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 40:3; Mark 1:2-4).

The connection between the Messiah’s forerunner and the prophecy regarding the wilderness is not arbitrary. John’s mission was to prepare the way for the Christ by calling Israel to repentance. “The Biblical concept of repentance, however, is deeply rooted in the wilderness tradition,” writes William Lane.

“Essential to the prophetic concern with repentance in Hosea, Amos and Isaiah is the concept of Israel’s time in the wilderness as the period of true sonship to God, a status into which the Lord is going to lead his people once again in a future time.”⁴²

Thus John’s location in the wilderness was essential to his mission. Water is scarce in the wilderness and many people came to John (Mark 1:5). People need water for refreshment and for any animals they may bring with them. Water supplies also vary according to the season. Furthermore, as James Dale notes, “It is notorious that both Gentile and Jew [cf. Lev. 14:51-52] attached a specially purifying value to *running* water.”⁴³ What better place to baptise then than at the (lower) River Jordan (which was included in the wilderness region)? Dale argues that in working here, John, who came “in the spirit and power of Elias” (Luke 1:17) was acting in accordance with “his great prototype, Elijah.” Elijah went “into the same wilderness” and made “his home by the banks of the same river.” Dale adds,

“The Scriptures teach us, that Elias for a long period together made his home by the brook Cherith, which empties into the Jordan (precisely the same spot occupied by John); but the only use which he made of its waters, so far as we are informed, was for drinking.”⁴⁴

(2) Baptists argue that *baptizein* means to immerse or dip from *prepositions*.

⁴¹ Christy believes that John left the Jordan for the “many springs” of Aenon to avoid “the foul, muddy flood of the Jordan overflowing all its banks, as it usually did at this season of the year (Joshua 3:15).” After all, “clean water” was “the insistent requirement of the law” (quoted in Adams, Op. cit., p. 13).

⁴² William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 49-50.

⁴³ James W. Dale, *Johannic Baptism*, (USA: Bolchazy-Carducci, P & R and Loewe Belfort, repr. 1993), p. 332; italics Dale’s. Dale gives many examples to support his position (pp. 332-336).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 329. Elijah certainly did not use the water for dipping!

First, they appeal to the Greek preposition *en* (in, on, at, with, by, among).⁴⁵ A. T. Robertson writes, “The simple narrative in Mt. 3:6 is that ‘they were baptised of him in [*en*] the river Jordan.’⁴⁶ Robertson here understands *en* to indicate the receptive element into which the baptised person is dipped or plunged; but he cannot prove it.⁴⁷ *En* may refer merely to the place where John baptised them, as it does elsewhere.⁴⁸ For example, we read in John 1:28 that “John was baptising in [*en*] Bethabara beyond Jordan.” Later we find John “baptising in [*en*] Aenon” (John 3:23). Mark 1:4 even tells us that “John did baptise in [*en*] the wilderness.”

Furthermore, Matthew 3:6 says that the multitudes who confessed their sins were baptised in the Jordan. It does not say that they were baptised *in the water* of Jordan. Robertson would have to appeal to other texts which speak of a baptism *en udati* (in water), such as Matthew 3:11 and John 1:33. The phrase, “I indeed have baptised you with water: but he [the coming Messiah] shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost,” is found - essentially not verbatim - in parallel passages in Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16, as well as in Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:16. In three of these four passages the *en* is omitted; only *udati* is used. All scholars recognise that this is a dative of instrument: “I will baptise you *with* water.”⁴⁹

There is, therefore, no necessity to translate the *en* in Matthew 3:11 and John 1:33 as “in” and then understand this as indicating the receptive element for an immersion.⁵⁰ It is more reasonable to interpret these two verses in the light of their parallel passages, as indicating the substance (water) that John used in his Baptism. Just as Jesus baptised *with* the Holy Ghost, according to the Biblical parallel, John baptised *with* water.⁵¹

Secondly, Robertson appeals to the preposition *eis* (into, to, towards, for, among), espe-

⁴⁵ Thayer, Op. cit., p. 209.

⁴⁶ A. T. Robertson, “Baptism,” in James Orr gen. ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. I, (USA: Hendrickson, repr. 1996), p. 386.

⁴⁷ Robert C. Harbach is correct. It is only “a superficial reading of Matthew’s account” of Jesus’ baptism which would “lead one to presuppose immersion” (*The Biblical Mode of Baptism*, [A Pamphlet Issued and Distributed by the Sunday School of the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids], p. 13).

⁴⁸ That the Jordan is used as a locality is proven by Matthew 3:13, which speaks of Jesus coming to John “upon/at [*epi*] Jordan.”

⁴⁹ However, a baptist grammarian, Daniel B. Wallace, tries to use *hudati* in both senses. He states that *udati* in Luke 3:16 “seems to function in a double-duty capacity - specifying both the *place* of baptism and the *means* of baptism” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], p. 155; italics Wallace’s).

⁵⁰ Dale gives extensive instances of the instrumental use of *en* in Classic and Hellenistic Greek and in the Septuagint, Apocrypha and New Testament (*Johannic Baptism*, pp. 155-178). Buswell quotes A. T. Robertson’s Greek Grammar as saying, “The instrumental use of *en* is common” (Op. cit., II, pp. 253).

⁵¹ Cf. Albrecht Oepke, article :“Bapto, Baptizo, Baptismos, Baptisma, Baptistés” in Gerhard Kittel ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley trans. and ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 539.

cially where used in combination with *ek* (from out of, out from, forth from, from).⁵² He quotes Acts 8:38-39:

[38] They went down both into [*eis*] the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptised him. [39] And when they were come up out of [*ek*] the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.

Robertson reckons that this and his previous argument present a formidable case, for he wonders “if [any]one could still be in doubt about the matter.”⁵³ However, his optimism is ill-founded.

First, the text makes it clear that *both* Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, but that only the eunuch was baptised. Therefore, the eunuch’s baptism did not consist of going down into (*eis*) the water and coming out of (*ek*) the water. **Second**, since water collects in the lowest places, what else would one do but go down to it and come up from it? **Third**, this presents no evidence for immersion as opposed to sprinkling or pouring. The latter methods of applying water could just as well have taken place after Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. **Fourth**, Robertson makes no reference to the difficulty of finding sufficient water in the wilderness for two men to wade into and one to be dipped.

Probably, the most plausible argument for immersion from prepositions is based upon Mark 1:9:

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptised of John in [*eis*] Jordan.

The baptists argue that *eis*, which is stronger than *en*, indicates the enveloping element of the baptism. Thus Jesus, they say, was *dipped into the Jordan*.⁵⁴ If the text had read *eis hudor* (into water) and not *eis ton Jordanen* (into the Jordan) their case would have been stronger, but still it requires a solid response.

First, we have seen that water is used as the *instrument* of baptism. Second, the preposition *eis* with *baptizein* in the baptism by John indicates the *resultant state*. Thus John baptised “into [*eis*] repentance” (Matt. 3:11) and “into [*eis*] the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). This was the “baptism of John” (Luke 7:29; Acts 19:3). Similarly, *eis* used with Christian baptism, as we shall see later, always indicates “the receiving element (in the

⁵² Thayer, Op. cit., pp. 183, 189.

⁵³ Robertson, Op. cit., pp. 386-387.

⁵⁴ Thus Strong, with reference to Mark 1:9, affirms that the Jordan “is the element into which the person passes in the act of being baptised” (Op. cit., p. 935; cf. Gill, Op. cit., p. 910). However, Wallace, a contemporary baptist grammarian, is more cautious. He notes the overlap in the usage of *eis* and *en* and states that *ebaptisthe eis ton Jordanen* (“He was baptised *eis* the Jordan”) in Mark 1:9 is “less than an iron-clad argument for baptismal immersion.” He also states that *eis* approaches the domain of *en* more than vice versa (Op. cit., p. 363, n. 18; emphasis Wallace’s).

New Testament always ideal) into which the baptised element (verbally) passes.” It expresses the full subjection of those baptised to the controlling influence of that element.⁵⁵ Thus a baptist reading of Mark 1:9 does not fit with the established New Testament pattern.

The baptist error lies in reading motion into the verb *ebaptisthe* (He was baptised) and thereby insisting that *eis* here can only mean “into.” Thus they understand the text to indicate that Jesus was dipped (a verb of motion) into - and then taken out of - the Jordan. This conceives of the Jordan not as a locality, as in the parallel passage (Matt. 3:13)⁵⁶ and in the preceding context (Mark 1:5), but as a receptive element. However, as Lenski points out, *eis* the Jordan (v. 9) is equivalent to *en* the River Jordan (v. 5). Both are locative “stating where the baptism took place . . . and nothing more.”⁵⁷

The question now arises, Why does Mark 1:9 use *eis* and not *en* as Mark 1:4 or *epi* (on, upon, at) as Matthew 3:13? The answer is not far away. Mark 1:9 uses two verbs with respect to Jesus: *elthen* (He came) and *ebaptisthe* (He was baptised). It uses one preposition *apo* (from) to indicate that He came *from* Nazareth. However, it uses only one preposition to indicate both the place *to which* Jesus came and where He was baptised.

In his book on the baptism of John, James Dale gives Biblical examples where a prepositional phrase with *eis* (such as *eis ton Jordanen*) immediately follows a verb of rest (such as *ebaptisthe*, He was baptised) which is preceded by and connected with a verb of motion (such as *elthen*, He came). He concludes that in such cases the prepositional phrase modifies both the verb of rest and the verb of motion, in a manner consistent with each verb.⁵⁸ Thus Mark 1:9 tells us that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan and was baptised at the Jordan.⁵⁹

There is a great deal to be said for Robert L. Reymond’s position that “*there is not a single recorded instance of a baptism in the entire New Testament where immersion followed by emersion is the mode of baptism.*”⁶⁰ However, it must be stressed that even if the reader still thinks that the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch or Christ’s baptism or the baptisms

⁵⁵ Dale, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, p. 310.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels For Students of the Life of Christ*, (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, repr. 1952), p. 19.

⁵⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s and St. Luke’s Gospels*, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 22; cf. pp. 29-30.

⁵⁸ See John 20:19. Also compare Luke 21:37 with Matthew 21:7 and John 9:7 with John 9:11 in the Greek.

⁵⁹ For further discussion of Mark 1:9, see Dale, *Johannic Baptism*, pp. 377-406, esp. pp. 388-396.

⁶⁰ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 935; cf. Harbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 23. Harbach also writes that baptist baptisms are “valid, although not Scriptural” (p. 3).

of John at Aenon were by dipping, the baptist position still falls to the ground. *All* the baptisms of the Scriptures must be immersions for their view to hold and the pourings or sprinklings of Reformed and Presbyterian churches to be unlawful.

(3) Another reason that baptists adduce for immersion is derived from the *symbolism* of Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:3-5. The latter passage reads,

[3] Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised 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. [5] For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

From this text, baptists argue that going down under the water (immersion) portrays our union with Christ in His burial, and that our emersion signifies His resurrection and our share in it.⁶¹ It is not surprising that baptists should so use this text. After all, they say that one of the Christian sacraments essentially consists of a dipping into and removal from water. In itself there is nothing at all in immersion in and emersion from water that has any particular value. Therefore they need to find some symbolism for their act. What is surprising is that so many non-immersionists think that this text supports the theory that *baptizein* means to dip.⁶²

First, we should note that Paul is not speaking of *ritual* baptism but of *real* baptism. **Second**, Christ was not buried in the same manner in which people are today, that is by being placed in a hole in the earth. He was *laid* in a tomb hewn out of a rock (Matt. 27:60). This is enough to explode the baptist theory. A baptist submerged in water cannot symbolise Jesus' burial if Christ's body did not physically descend in His burial. Furthermore, what is the sense of using pure water? How can this symbolise the element into which a dead body is buried? Surely a sand solution or dirty water would be more appropriate.

Third, Romans 6:4-5 does not parallel Christ's physical resurrection with our physical emersion from water, but with our new spiritual life (v. 4) and our future physical resur-

⁶¹ **Robertson** refers to this as the "obvious and inevitable interpretation" (Op. cit., p. 387). Significantly, neither the **Three Forms of Unity** nor the **Westminster Standards** nor any of the historic Reformed, Anglican or Lutheran creeds know of such symbolism in the sacrament of baptism (cf. **Peter Hall** trans. and ed., *The Harmony of the Reformed Confessions*, [USA: Still Waters Revival Books, repr. 1992], pp. 301-315).

⁶² **W. A. Jarrell** quotes Philip Schaff (1819-1893) on Romans 6:4-5: "All commentators of any note [except {Moses} Stuart and {Charles} Hodge] expressly admit or take it for granted that in this verse the ancient prevailing mode of baptism by immersion is implied as giving force to the idea" (Op. cit., p. 103).

rection on the last day (v. 5).⁶³ **Fourth**, the passage can have *no reference to the mode of baptism whatsoever* since, as John Murray observes:

“We have no more warrant to find a reference to the mode of baptism in sunetafmen [*sunetaphen*, we were buried with Him] here in vs. 4 than in sumfutoi [*sumphutoi*, planted together with Him] in vs. 5, sunestaurwqh [*sunestaurathe*, crucified with Him] in vs. 6 [or in] evnedusasqe [*enedusasthe*, clothed with Him] in Gal. 3:27.”⁶⁴

What then is the apostle saying? He has just shown that justification is by faith alone and not by the works of man in any sense (Rom. 1-5). Someone might respond: “Let us sin that grace may abound!” (cf. 6:1). The apostle first states (v. 2) and then proves (vv. 3ff.) that we are dead to sin. He reminds them of their union with Christ. In Romans 5:12-21, he spoke of their union with Him with regard to *blessings*: justification, righteousness, life and grace. Now he speaks of their union with Christ with respect to *His great redemptive acts*. To which event does Paul point to show believers are dead to sin? Not to His ascension into heaven or session at God’s right hand (as Eph. 2:6), but to His death and burial, of course (Rom. 6:2ff.).

Since the Christian’s position is not merely negative (dead to sin) but positive (alive to God), the apostle goes on to speak of our resurrection with Christ (vv. 4ff.). Thus the apostle refers to our baptism “into Christ” (v. 3). We are engrafted and united to Christ by the Spirit. Paul puts this first. Since we are united to Christ, *therefore*, we share in His death, burial and resurrection. In other words, partaking of Christ’s death and resurrection is through baptism into Him; it has nothing to do with our physical descent into and ascent from water, nor is it signified thereby.

Robert Harbach’s analysis bears repeating:

“The object of Paul’s words is not to show that Christians ought to walk in newness of life because [they were] figuratively raised from a watery grave

⁶³ One baptist, **Oscar Stevenson Brooks**, admits,
 “[Paul] does not follow the expected analogy [only expected by baptists!] of Christ’s resurrection and the believer’s resurrection from the waters of baptism. If this were the symbolism in baptism, Paul failed to capitalise on it” (*The Drama of Decision: Baptism in the New Testament*, [USA: Hendrikson, 1987], p. 119).

⁶⁴ Brooks also admits that Colossians 2:12 does not prove that the believer’s immersion signifies Christ’s burial nor that his emersion signifies His resurrection (p. 125). Yet he still clings to the standard baptist representation throughout his book!

John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, NICNT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1964), p. 215, n. 3. **Herman Ridderbos** also firmly rejects the baptist eisegesis of this text: “Baptism is not a grave and a resurrection” (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1992], p. 404).

in a symbolic ritual, but because [they were] spiritually, objectively, historically, unitedly, corporately and representatively raised . . . through the death [of Christ].”⁶⁵

The true interpretation of Colossians 2:12 runs along similar lines. In Colossians 2 the apostle teaches believers about the sole sufficiency of Christ. Through baptism into Him not only are we dead to sin, but we are also dead to the world and to the law (as a means of establishing our own righteousness).⁶⁶ Again, mode has nothing to do with it.⁶⁷

I have sought to be thorough and fair in my treatment of baptist arguments for immersion from the Bible. One argument - and it is their main one - I have not touched upon: the use of *baptizein* in sources other than the Scriptures. This lies outside the scope of this brief article.⁶⁸ I can only point the interested reader to the works of James Wilkinson Dale, a nineteenth century American Presbyterian.⁶⁹

Suffice to say that I am in full accord with the position advocated in Dale’s works: neither in the Bible, nor in the classics, nor in Jewish nor patristic usage does *baptizein* always and only mean to immerse or dip.

Why then do the baptists so vehemently insist that it does? Jay Adams gives as his “studied conclusion,” that “immersion is propagated as a biblical mode more by repetition and assertion than from conviction stemming from careful Bible study.”⁷⁰ Buswell points out the perennial attraction of the immersionist view:

“There has always been a tendency, since the New Testament times, to regard immersion as more vivid and spectacular, and thus, somehow more holy than baptism by sprinkling or by pouring.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ Harbach, Op. cit., p. 22.

⁶⁶ Baptists tend to refer to Romans 6:3-5 first, rather than Colossians 2:12, probably because they want to avoid awkward questions arising from the verse preceding the latter (i.e., Col. 2:11), regarding the parallel between circumcision and baptism, and its implications for paedobaptism.

⁶⁷ For a fine exposition of Colossians 2:12, in opposition to the baptist view, see **John Eadie**, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, (London and Glasgow: Richard Griffin and Co., 1856), pp. 152-157. Eadie, who is not a man prone to make rash statements, writes, “The Colossians did not personate death and burial in baptism any more than they imitated the circumcision of Moses” (p. 154).

⁶⁸ Nevertheless, as **Jay Adams** says, “The outcome of the debate hangs entirely upon the teaching of the Scriptures, and nothing more” (Op. cit., p. 5, n. 6).

⁶⁹ **James W. Dale**, *Classic Baptism*, (USA: Bolchazy-Carducci and P & R, repr. 1989); *Judaic Baptism*, (USA: Bolchazy-Carducci, P & R and Loewe Belfort, repr. 1991); and *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, pp. 473-630.

⁷⁰ **Adams**, Op. cit., p. 5, n. 6. Similarly, Lenski speaks of the baptists’ “uncritical exegetical traditionalism” (Op. cit., p. 23).

⁷¹ **Buswell**, Op. cit., II, pp. 243.

(IV) THE TRUE MEANING OF *BAPTIZEIN*

Now the question comes to us again, What does *baptizein* mean? Does it mean to pour? No, this would not agree with the baptisms of Hebrews 9. Does it then mean to sprinkle?⁷² No, this would not fit with the baptism of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost and its “extension” in Cornelius’ house (Acts 10-11). Furthermore, neither of these modes describe the baptism of the Israelites into Moses in I Corinthians 10 or Noah’s baptism in I Peter 3, never mind many other instances which we could refer to in the classics.⁷³ Does *baptizein*, then, mean to purify? There appears to be some support for this in Hebrews 9. The “divers baptisms” (v. 10) effect ceremonial purification or sanctification (vv. 13, 22, 23). The baptisms of “cups and pots, brazen vessels and couches” (Mark 7:4) were purifications. So were the ceremonial cleansings of the Pharisees (Luke 11:38-39). Furthermore, John 3:22-26 seems to support this contention. John is baptising in Aenon (vv. 23-24), when the Holy Spirit records a question between John’s disciples and the Jews “about *purifying*” (v. 25). Then they came to John and asked him about Jesus’ *baptism* (v. 26). “Without a doubt,” writes Jay Adams, “the two words ‘purification’ and ‘baptism’ are equated as naturally as ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ in Paul’s letter to Titus.”⁷⁴

However, to purify does not agree with *all* the Biblical references to baptism. Were the children of Israel *purified* into Moses (I Cor. 10:2)? Was Christ purified with a purification, by His penal sufferings on the cross (Mark 10:38; Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50)? Nor is this definition wide enough to include many usages in the classics. For example, a man is baptised by an alcoholic drink, when he consumes too much. Origen, a third century Christian theologian, even speaks of certain persons who were baptised “by wickedness.”⁷⁵ These baptisms are clearly not purifications.

We need a definition of *baptizein* that includes purification but is broad enough to do

⁷² W. A. Jarrell in his *Baptizo-Dip-Only* spends most of his time fighting against the straw-man he has erected. The Reformed *do not* understand *baptizein* to mean either *sprinkling* or *pouring*, or that it indicates mode at all!

⁷³ We must agree with the baptists that if *baptizein* does indicate a mode in the Greek classics, immersion is the only mode which would have any appearance of fitting the facts. After all how can a ship which has sunk to the bottom of the sea be said to have been sprinkled or poured? Immersion, however, also fails miserably. For example Dale, in his *Classic Baptism*, refers to *baptizein* being used by classical authors in instances where the intellect was baptised by blood boiling up the veins (p. 259) and the soul was baptised by the body (p. 264). Baptisms are also affected by anger, grief, misfortunes, calamity, multitude of evils, diseases, acts of a wizard, taxes, debts (pp. 284-285), drugs, wine and sleep (p. 317). Also the ancients spoke of a garment being baptised by solar rays (i.e. dyed by the sun).

⁷⁴ Adams, Op. cit., p. 14.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Dale, *Johannic Baptism*, p. 401.

justice to all the various baptisms. **Dale's general definition** of *baptizein* is sufficient:

“Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state or condition of any object is capable of baptising that object; and by such change of character, state or condition does, in fact, baptise it.” **76**

John Murray's analysis is similar:

“[*Baptizein*], we must conclude, is one of those words which indicate *a certain effect* without itself expressing or prescribing the particular mode by which this effect is secured.” **77**

Thus *baptizein* means *to thoroughly change the character, state or condition of an object*.**78** Now we must show that this understanding of *baptizein* fits the New Testament data.

(1) First, we shall consider the baptism on the Day of Pentecost. Before it, the disciples were weak and fearful, but after they were baptised by the Holy Spirit they were fully equipped to serve as the apostles of the risen Christ. Now they could speak in various foreign languages - symbolised by the cloven tongue which sat on each of them (Acts 2:3) - and be used in gathering the catholic church. The disciples were baptised into the apostolate. *Their condition had been thoroughly changed.*

(2) The Scriptures speak of a baptism into Moses (I Cor. 10:1-2). Here, we must note the prepositions. The Israelites were baptised *by* (*en* with an instrumental dative) the cloud and the sea *into* (*eis*) Moses. When the Hebrews saw Pharaoh's mighty host pursuing them they were “sore afraid” (Ex. 14:10; cf. v. 13) and doubted Moses, accusing him of bringing them out of Egypt to have them killed in the wilderness (vv. 11-12). Moses cried out to the people,

[13] Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day . . . [14] The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

76 Dale, *Classic Baptism*, p. 354. **W. A. Jarrell** was clearly aware of Dale's thesis regarding the meaning of *baptizein*, but he does not engage in any significant interaction with it (Op. cit., pp. 17-18, 44, 55). He refers rather disparagingly to Dale's works as being “against baptism” (pp. 17, 55), as if to attack the notion that *baptizein* means “to immerse” or “to dip” were to attack the ordinance of God.

77 **John Murray**, *Christian Baptism*, (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1952), p. 33; italics mine.

78 We should add that *ritual* baptisms (both Johannic and Christian) *symbolise* the great change wrought by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the elect. This understanding of baptism agrees with the baptists in that it sees *baptizein* as a powerful word. It differs from their definition in seeing the power of *baptizein* not as an immersion but a radical transformation.

Then God made bare His mighty arm and moved the cloud from in front of the Israelites to between them and the Egyptians. This separated the two people. It brought darkness upon the Egyptians but it was a light to the Hebrews by day (vv. 19-20).

Next, Moses stretched out his rod over the sea which divided before him. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, with the sea as two great walls on either side of them (vv. 21-22, 29). When God's people had all safely crossed, Moses stretched out his hand again and the waters returned and immersed the Egyptians (vv. 26-28, 30). Significantly the narrative ends:

And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did on the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and *believed* the LORD, and *his servant Moses* (v. 31).

Thus having seen God's mighty power and love toward them in His use of the cloud and the sea, they now believed or leaned upon or trusted in Moses (v. 31). As Dale says,

“The Israelites having been wavering, unstable and unreliable in their relations to Moses, were made (as a result of the miracles which they had witnessed) to trust, to confide in, to believe upon him, with a confidence second only to that cherished toward Jehovah himself, whose minister and representative they now fully believe him to be.” **79**

Thus Paul says *they were baptised into Moses*. John Murray expresses it well: “To be ‘baptised into Moses’ (I Cor. 10:2) is to be bound to Moses in the fellowship of that covenant of which Moses was the mediator.”⁸⁰ The Israelites were now under Moses’ “controlling influence.”⁸¹ *Their condition had been thoroughly changed.*

(3) For our final example, we may consider Christ's baptism by John at the Jordan. Though John did indeed baptise Jesus, Jesus did not receive “the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29). After all, John's baptism was only open to guilty penitents and Jesus was sinless. John's ritual baptism signified an inner transformation and was “into the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). Of this baptism, Jesus could not partake. Though he *suffered* for us, He did not undergo *vicarious repentance* for us. The incongruity was not missed by John, “I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?” (Matt. 3:14).

What was Jesus' baptism then? John 1 puts us on the right track. In the Gospel according

79 Dale, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, p. 308.

80 Murray, *Christian Baptism*, p. 32.

81 Dale, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, p. 309.

to John, John the Baptist is presented primarily as a witness.⁸² Not only his preaching but his baptism served to identify and witness to the Messiah. Thus the Baptist tells us that he came baptising with water to manifest to Israel the Messiah (v. 31).⁸³ John witnesses to Jesus as the supremely worthy One (v. 27), the One who was before him (v. 30), the One who baptises with the Holy Ghost (v. 33) and the Son of God (v. 34).

Most significantly, the Baptist witnesses to Him as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (v. 29). “The Lamb of God” is the only title he uses twice (vv. 29, 36) and it is the only one introduced by the exclamation, “Behold!” (in both vv. 29 and 36). Furthermore, it is on hearing Jesus spoken of as “the Lamb of God” that Andrew and another disciple begin to follow Jesus (vv. 35-40). This title presents Jesus, not as prophet or king, but in His *priestly role*; the One who would bear the sins of all the elect throughout the world.

Thus Christ’s role as priest is uppermost in John’s baptism in John 1.⁸⁴ It was to this aspect of Christ’s work that John’s baptism pointed. Other details need to be supplied to complete the picture, including the *circumstances* of Jesus’ baptism. John, who baptised Jesus was a priest, being a son of Zechariah, a priest (Luke 1). Furthermore, Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was about thirty years old - the time when priests were ordained (cf. Num. 4:3, 35, 47) - when he began his ministry. Significantly, Luke tells us Jesus’ age *in the context of His baptism* (Luke 3:21-22). Does it now sound unreasonable to say that Jesus’ baptism by John was his initiation into His priesthood?

There remains more to be said for this position. We must also consider something of the *significance* of Jesus’ baptism. First, unless we hold it, we must maintain that Jesus resorted to evasive answers when asked a difficult question. In Matthew 21:23-27 (cf. Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8), Jesus is challenged by the chief priests, scribes and elders regarding his purging the temple (Matt. 21:12-14) and teaching in its sacred precincts (v. 23). At the heart of their accusations was the issue of *authority* (vv. 23 [twice], 24, 27). What *right* did Jesus have to do these things (v. 23)?

Jesus answered their questions with a question of His own: “The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or from man?” (v. 25). The rulers were in a quandary: the people would be enraged if they denied John’s divine call; and if they affirmed it, they would condemn themselves, since they did not heed John’s admonitions (vv. 25-27). They opted out: “We cannot tell” (v. 27).

If Jesus received from John the “baptism for the remission of sins,” this would not give

⁸² John 1:7, 8, 15, 23, 26-27, 29-37; 3:26, 29-36; 5:32-36.

⁸³ Cf. **Brooks**: “John the Baptist’s vital message was: ‘I have been sent from God to baptise with water; my baptism will reveal the unknown Messiah’” (Op. cit., p. 78).

⁸⁴ As the Servant of Jehovah, Jesus is, of course, also our prophet and our king. It is through His priestly work in atoning for our sins that we can be reconciled to God; and know Him as our prophet to teach us and our king to rule us.

Him authority to cleanse the temple. Then Jesus merely answered a hard question with a hard question. His response, therefore, would have been equally appropriate on any other occasion when the Jewish religious leaders sought to corner him, since it did not deal with the specific issue which the chief priests raised. For their part, they did not respond by accusing Him of an irrelevant answer. They realised they were beaten by a response which *perfectly explained Jesus' authority to teach in and cleanse the temple*. John had ordained Jesus as a priest; and priests had authority to do these things.⁸⁵

Second, Jesus' words to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:15 are very important: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all *righteousness*." Righteousness, as both John and Jesus well knew, is *that which is according to the law of God*. Jay Adams asks a highly pertinent question:

Christ underwent the law of circumcision (Lev. 12:3 and Luke 2:21); he was presented in the temple (Luke 2:22-23); he went to the passover (Ex. 34:23 and Luke 2:42); he observed the Jewish feasts commanded by the law (Mark 14:12, Luke 22:7-13; Matt. 26:17-19; John 7:10); *but what law was he obeying at his baptism?*⁸⁶

That law was that of the ordination of priests.

Furthermore, since Jesus speaks of "*us*" in Matthew 3:15, we must ask, What happened at Jesus' baptism that *both* John and Jesus fulfilled all righteousness? Or, to put it differently, if Jesus' water baptism was a purification for us, how did *John* fulfil all righteousness? The only satisfactory answer to these questions is that John fulfilled all righteousness *in ordaining Jesus to the priesthood*.

In this way, Jesus was possessed of the ceremonial qualifications necessary for obtaining our righteousness with God. He did this through His substitutionary life of obedience and death on the cross. Thus Jesus was not baptised into the forgiveness of His own sins - a blasphemous position - nor was He baptised vicariously, so that the water of His baptism washed away our sins symbolically. Instead, He was ordained our High Priest, that He might obtain the righteousness of God for us by faith in His blood.

As an ordination to the priesthood, Jesus' baptism was by sprinkling. This is the manner in which the Old Testament priests were ceremonially authorised for their functions (cf.

⁸⁵ **Robertson** refers to Jesus' counter-question to the chief priests as "pertinent" and says that, "He did not dodge in His answer." He also states, "Jesus bases His human authority on John the Baptist, His forerunner who baptised Him." He does not, however, explain *how* Jesus' authority depended on John's baptism and, with his baptist principles, it is hard to see how he could (Op. cit., p. 160).

⁸⁶ **Adams**, Op. cit., p. 17; italics mine.

Num. 8:6-7). They were most definitely not immersed.⁸⁷ However, most important for our current inquiry is that Jesus' baptism by John fits with our proposed definition of baptism. Jesus' baptism was a *change of state*, in which He was ceremonially initiated into the priesthood.⁸⁸

At the time of His physical baptism, God also baptised Jesus spiritually and inwardly by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17). Jesus' baptism by water and His baptism by the Spirit were two aspects of the one great act of God appointing and equipping Him as the Servant of Jehovah. The former speaks of Jesus' authorisation as Messiah from a formal and outward point of view, while the latter speaks of His inner and spiritual qualification for this office.

Jesus received the Spirit in full measure (John 3:34) to enable Him to fulfil His Messianic mandate (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isa. 61:1-2). That the Spirit descended on Christ "like a dove" (Matt. 3:16) indicates that He was anointing Him as our gracious High Priest (Heb. 4:15; 2:17).

Only by the Spirit's strength was Jesus able to withstand the temptations of Satan, to cast out demons (Matt. 12:28), to proclaim the gospel of grace and, finally, to go to the cross to die as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; Heb. 9:14). The Spirit's controlling influence upon Jesus is indicated in many ways in the Gospels, and especially by Luke. After returning from His baptism, Jesus "was led by [*en*] the Spirit into the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). After His temptation in the wilderness, He "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" and His fame spread "through all the region round about" (v. 14). Thus in Christ's spiritual baptism, we have another illustration of our definition of *baptizein*.

(V) THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Having ascertained the meaning of *baptizein*, it only remains to explain *the meaning or significance of Christian baptism*. So far we have referred to various examples of baptism in the Bible:

- [1] the baptism of Noah and his family (I Peter 3:20-21).
- [2] the baptism of the Israelites into Moses (I Cor. 10:1-2).
- [3] the various Old Testament purifications (Heb. 9:10).
- [4] the Pharisaic purifications (Mark 7:2ff.).⁸⁹

⁸⁷ The water of Jesus' baptism, like the water of Mosaic baptism (I Cor. 10:1-2), but unlike the water of Christian baptism, does not signify the forgiveness of sins. Water was the element with which He was consecrated to His high office.

⁸⁸ For more on Jesus' water baptism by John as His initiation into the priesthood, see **Dale**, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, pp. 27-31; **Adams**, *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-20.

⁸⁹ These were not divinely prescribed.

- [5] John's baptism into the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4)
- [6] John's water baptism of Jesus, ordaining Him as a priest (Matt. 3:13-15).
- [7] Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit, equipping Him for His Messianic mission (Matt. 3:16-17).⁹⁰
- [8] Jesus' baptism by penal sufferings on the cross (Mark 10:38).
- [9] the apostles' baptism by the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2).
- [10] Christian baptism into the name of the Holy Trinity (Matt. 28:19).⁹¹

Numbers [1] to [4] (amongst other things) illustrate the meaning of *baptizein*. Numbers [5] to [9], while also serving this purpose, are essential (though in different ways) to the establishment of *Christian baptism* [10].

In the New Testament Christian baptism is intimately connected with many blessings. From the lists of T. M. Lindsay and G. R. Beasley-Murray, we may produce the following compilation:⁹²

- [1] forgiveness of and cleansing from sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16).
- [2] bestowal of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13).
- [3] union with Christ (Gal. 3:27), including union with Him in His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 2:12).
- [4] regeneration (Titus 3:5).
- [5] adoption (Gal. 3:26-27).⁹³
- [6] membership in the spiritual body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13).
- [7] membership in the church institute (Acts 2:41).

While neither intended to be exhaustive, two glaring omissions are found in both men's presentations.⁹⁴ First, neither mentioned the essence of these blessings as *covenant* blessings. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is much to be preferred at this point. At the very beginning of its treatment of the spiritual blessings of (real) baptism, the *Confession*

⁹⁰ As we have seen, [6] and [7] are intimately related since Jesus' real baptism by the Spirit was signified by His ritual water baptism.

⁹¹ The Scriptures also speak (hypothetically) of a baptism into the name of Paul (I Cor. 1:13, 15).

⁹² T. M. Lindsay, "Baptism," in James Orr gen. ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. I, (USA: Hendrickson, repr. 1996), 393; Beasley-Murray, *Op. cit.*, pp. 263-264. I have reordered and omitted some of their material.

⁹³ Calvin stresses the relationship between baptism and adoption. He writes at the very beginning of his treatment of baptism: "Baptism is the initiatory sign by which we are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, that being engrafted into Christ we may be accounted *children of God*" (*Op. cit.*, p. 513; italics mine [IV:xv:1]). See also the **Second Helvetic Confession**, XX (Schaff, *Op. cit.*, pp. 889-890)

⁹⁴ Beasley-Murray issues a disclaimer: he is not attempting "to give exhaustive references" (*Op. cit.*, p. 263).

speaks of baptism as “a sign and seal of the covenant of grace” (XXVIII:i).⁹⁵ Jesus Christ is the covenant Christ and initiation into Him is partaking of all the blessings of God’s covenant with man.

Beasley-Murray, coming from a baptist standpoint, links the blessings of baptism not with the covenant but with (conscious) faith: “In the New Testament precisely the same gifts of grace are associated with faith as with baptism.”⁹⁶ He errs by omission in not seeing the proper covenantal significance of baptism, but his statement is profound. *All the blessings of salvation are related to baptism.* This necessarily follows from the nature of baptism as a sign and seal of salvation.

Second, and even more serious, the lists of both Lindsay and Beasley-Murray fail to mention union with the Triune God - the very heart of baptism! This is expressly stated by Christ, as He inaugurates the sacrament of baptism in Matthew 28:19:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptising them in [into; eis] the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.*⁹⁷

Hoeksema’s concise explanation of the phrase “into the name” bears repeating:

This does not mean “upon the authority of the name of the Triune God,” but rather “into the fellowship of God Triune as He has revealed Himself in the name of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁸

The Reformed have always emphasised the Trinitarian character of baptism. Leonard Riisen expresses it admirably:

“Therefore when the pastor says, I baptise thee, it is the same as if he were saying, I declare in God’s name that this water in which I wash you is a symbol of your admission into God’s covenant and His Church; that the Father accepts you as a son, the Son as a member of His body and a brother, and the Holy Spirit as a host with whom He is willing to dwell for ever; and that you worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in virtue of the terms of your duty to the triune God, with worship and obedience, and consecrate yourself wholly to the

⁹⁵ The standard Baptist confessions make no reference to the covenant in their treatment of baptism.

⁹⁶ **Beasley-Murray**, *Op. cit.*, p. 272. **Herman Ridderbos** makes a similar association between the Spirit and baptism: “given the connection between the Spirit and baptism, what applies to the Spirit can be easily transferred to baptism” (*Op. cit.*, p. 400).

⁹⁷ The **Belgic Confession** even uses this text, as one of its proofs for the doctrine of the Trinity. It also appeals to the Father’s speaking and the Spirit’s descending at the Lord’s baptism at the Jordan (IX).

⁹⁸ **Hoeksema**, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: RFPA, 1966), p. 674. For a defence of this understanding of the phrase “into the name,” see **Dale**, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, pp. 403-469.

worship of the Trinity for ever” .⁹⁹

As a Trinitarian sacrament, baptism is intrinsically intertwined with the covenant.¹⁰⁰ It concerns union and communion with the covenant God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The implications of this Trinitarian understanding are manifold. Here we shall consider just one: its relation to sovereign grace.

In the final chapter of his book, *The Drama of Decision: Baptism in the New Testament*, Oscar Stephenson Brooks engages in a study of the baptismal teaching of I Peter.¹⁰¹ His thesis is that I Peter is a “baptismal tract,” written to a congregation with many new members in need of instruction.¹⁰² Even though baptism is mentioned only once in I Peter (i.e., 3:20-21), Brooks does produce some interesting arguments for his position. Though he is wrong in holding that I Peter is “given completely to a concern for baptism” and that baptism is “the key to understanding the entire book,” there is something to be said for his position.¹⁰³

Certainly the book says a lot about initiation into salvation. Those addressed in I Peter were regenerated (1:3, 23; 2:2) and (effectually) called (1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10), through the preaching of the gospel (1:12, 25). Their “saving response” to the gospel, R. E. O. White notes,

“is . . . described both in terms of belief (i 5, 8, 9, ii 6, 7, v 9, once “confidence” i 21) and in terms of obedience (i 1, 22, ii 8, iii 1, iv 17, once love for Christ i 8f)” .¹⁰⁴

Brooks proceeds to outline the book.¹⁰⁵ (1) 1:3-12 is the opening section which tells us how God saved us. (2) 1:13-2:10 describes the calling of the Christian. (3) 2:11-3:12 contains instructions how the new Christian should live in the world. (4) 3:13-22 insists that “a convert must maintain faithfulness and integrity at all costs.”¹⁰⁶ Peter refers to the example of Christ and the importance of baptism to enforce His point.

⁹⁹ **Heinrich Hepp**: *Reformed Dogmatics*, G.T. Thompson transl., (Grand Rapids: Baker 1978), p. 615. See also the **Form for the Administration of Baptism** (*The PRC Psalter*, P. 85.).

¹⁰⁰ The Trinitarian and covenantal nature of baptism undergirds the **Form for the Administration of Baptism** (*The Psalter*, pp. 85-89).

¹⁰¹ **Brooks**, Op. cit., pp. 135-159.

¹⁰² Cf. Ibid., pp. x, 149. **Brooks** is not alone in holding that baptism plays a very significant role in I Peter (cf. **White**, Op. cit., pp. 228-231; **Beasley-Murray**, Op. cit., pp. 251-258).

¹⁰³ **Brooks**, Op. cit., pp. 157, 143.

¹⁰⁴ **White**, Op. cit., pp. 228-229.

¹⁰⁵ **Brooks**, Op. cit., pp. 144-157.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 153. **Brooks**' analysis of I Peter as a “baptismal tract” breaks down somewhat in his rather brief treatment of 4:1-5:14 (p. 157).

The opening section (1:3-12) is key to our understanding of I Peter. Brooks rightly points out that it is Trinitarian, dealing with the Father (vv. 3-5), the Son (vv. 6-9) and the Spirit (vv. 10-12). Baptism points to our salvation. The most important thing about that salvation, Peter tells us, is that it is Trinitarian.¹⁰⁷ Flowing from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, salvation can be nothing other than by sovereign grace. Thus 1:3-12 tells us not what we have done but *what God has done for us*. It is amazing that Brooks after all his insightful remarks fails to note this. So enthralled is he with Arminianism that he misses what stares him in the face.

Furthermore, Brooks fails to take I Peter 1:2 into consideration. First, here we have another testimony to the Holy Trinity:

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you and peace be multiplied.

Second, Peter addresses these new converts as “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” He wishes to tell them at the beginning of his epistle that their salvation is all of God’s eternal electing grace. This is “the true grace of God” (5:12) that is signified and sealed in baptism.¹⁰⁸ Third, this Scripture portrays the application of Christ’s blood to our hearts by the Holy Spirit as a *sprinkling*. Since the reality is described as sprinkling, how can the baptists forbid this mode in the administration of the sign? It is no wonder that Brooks as an Arminian baptist left this verse well alone!

This treatment of I Peter shows us the proper methodology in understanding the significance of baptism. We must study what the Scriptures teach about salvation, and especially about its initial application, and then understand that our ritual baptism is a sign and seal of that grace of God.¹⁰⁹ Thus, for example, the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5 is that spiritual baptism revealed as a work of sovereign grace by the Triune God in chapter 1:3-14 and the rest of the book.¹¹⁰

It only remains to relate the various blessings signified by baptism and then to show how

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Christ’s institution of baptism in Matthew 28:19.

¹⁰⁸ Peter goes on to treat election alongside reprobation in I Peter 2:8-9. The elect church is formed into the covenant people of God (vv. 5, 9-10) and founded on the elect Christ (vv. 4, 6), the chief cornerstone (vv. 4-8).

¹⁰⁹ Baptism presents our *initiation*, whereas the Holy Supper is a sign and seal of our *continuation* in God’s salvation (cf. **Westminster Larger Catechism**, Q & A 177; **Heppe**, Op. cit., p. 627). In the words of **Turretin**, our “*nativity* is adumbrated by baptism,” but our “*nutrition* by the Supper” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. III, [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1997], p. 378; italics mine).

¹¹⁰ **Brooks** (an Arminian) unwittingly quotes Romans 1:16 in connection with the baptism of Romans 6:3-5 (Op. cit., p. 111). Baptism is thus a sign and seal of “the gospel of Christ” as “*the power of God unto salvation* to every one that believeth.

Christian baptism is brought about by the various baptisms taught in the Scriptures. Our real and spiritual baptism is effected by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). He engrafts us into Christ (Gal. 3:27) and thus we are united with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19). Our union with Christ consists of fellowship with Him in His great redemptive events, including His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5), and in the graces He obtained for us. Thus we partake of regeneration (Titus 3:5), justification (Acts 2:38), adoption (Gal. 3:26-27) and sanctification (I Cor. 6:11), in short, all the blessings of the covenant of grace.

Moreover, being united to Christ the Head, we are also joined to His invisible, spiritual body (I Cor. 12:13). Thus the believer joins himself to a true church institute (Acts 2:41). In all this, the believer lives a life of holy fellowship with the Triune God. He is baptised into Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). He has put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). He will live a sanctified life, putting sin to death and growing in grace. His ritual baptism, as a constant reminder of the truth of God's covenant of grace, serves to encourage him to obey the Lord his God out of thankfulness.

This everlasting bond will never be broken. On the Last Day, God will raise up all the bodies of His elect children that they may dwell with Him forever in the New Heavens and the New Earth. God's covenant with man will be consummated (Rev. 21:3). These are the ramifications of the salvation signified and sealed in our baptism.

All this serves to confirm our understanding of *baptizein*. Real baptism is a radical spiritual transformation from death to life, from darkness to light, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from the power of Satan to the kingdom of God, from children of wrath to children of the Father in heaven. This fits perfectly with our definition of *baptizein* as *to thoroughly change the character, state or condition of an object*.¹¹¹ Contrariwise, we must ask, How does *dipping* indicate this glorious translation? How do immersion and emersion signify the transforming work of God in saving us?

Now the question comes, Why does the Bible speak of "one baptism" (Eph. 4:5), when there are many baptisms spoken of in its sacred pages? First, contrary to many baptists, we must affirm that the baptism of Ephesians 4 is a spiritual baptism not a ritual baptism, never mind a dipping!¹¹² This baptism is effected by the "one Spirit" into "one body" and "one Lord" and, hence, into the "one [Triune] God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (vv. 4-6). This baptism was purchased by Christ on the cross and effected in His elect by the Holy Spirit (vv. 7ff.). Thus, in the context of Ephesians 4,

¹¹¹ The translators of our *Authorised Version* (KJV), did well to render *baptizein* as "to baptise."

¹¹² E.g., V. C. Mayes believes in "one immersion" (see the Foreword to W. A. Jarrell, Op. cit., pp. vi-vii). For a defence of the position that the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5 is spiritual baptism, see Dale, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, pp. 344-351.

all believers must be longsuffering and endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit (vv. 1-3), since we all have “one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*” (v. 5).

It is clear, therefore, that not merely is this a *spiritual* baptism, but it is also, second, an explicitly *Christian* baptism. Thus the ceremonial cleansings ordered in the books of Moses (cf. Heb. 9:10) and those foisted on the people by the legalist Pharisees (Mark 7:2ff.) are not included in this one baptism. The baptism of Noah and his family (I Peter 3:20-21), the baptism of the Israelites into Moses (I Cor. 10:1-2) and Johannic baptism (Acts 19:1-5)¹¹³ also are not *Christian* baptism. However, like the baptisms taught in the law they have significance in teaching us something about the meaning of our *one* baptism.

The baptisms which Christ received - His baptism by the Spirit signified by His water baptism at the Jordan (Matt. 3:13-17) and His baptism by penal sufferings on the cross (Mark 10:38) - and the baptism into the apostolate in Acts 2 are not Christian baptism either. Rather, they “constituted a basis on which Christian baptism was to rest, and without which it could not exist.”¹¹⁴ On that historic day at the Jordan, Jesus undertook to fulfil the duties of our great High Priest and was equipped to do so by the Holy Spirit. On the cross, He drank to the dregs the cup of God’s wrath against us for our transgressions of His law. There our covenant Head was baptised by penal sufferings into death that we might be baptised into His death and into His resurrection life.¹¹⁵ His baptism enabled us to receive the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5.¹¹⁶

What then of the Pentecostal baptism? That too was necessary for our baptism, because God was pleased by the labours of the apostles to erect the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church on Christ, the chief cornerstone. Through this church, God has been pleased to preserve His truth through the ages that we might be brought into fellowship with the Triune God in Christ, through our *one Christian baptism*.

We must next go on to consider the many weaknesses inherent in the baptist presentation of Christian baptism. SEE PART TWO OF THIS ARTICLE (*Seperate Document*).

This first published in the British Reformed Journal No. 29 Jan - Mar. 2000.

¹¹³ John’s baptism was *preparatory* for the coming of the Messiah and ended with his (John’s) death.

¹¹⁴ Dale, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, p. 94.

¹¹⁵ Thus in our spiritual baptism we do partake to some degree of the baptism of Christ on the cross, for we share in His sufferings (cf. **Westminster Confession of Faith**, XXVI:i). Similarly, James and John drank of the cup of Christ’s sufferings, though not of course as a propitiation for their own sins or for the sins of others (Mark 10:39).

¹¹⁶ As **John Henry Heidegger** observes, “The [early Church] Fathers rather aptly declared that our baptism derived its power and efficacy from contact with the Christ baptised by John” (quoted in **Heppe**, Op. cit., p. 617).