

SERMON III
THE ADMINISTRATION AND PRACTICE OF
BAPTISM DURING THE APOSTOLIC AGE AND
THE PRACTICE OF BAPTISM DOWN THROUGH
THE CENTURIES AFTER THE APOSTOLIC AGE
VERIFY IMMERSION AS THE CORRECT MODE
OF THE CHURCHES

ALSO

EVIDENCE FROM IMMERSERS AND SPRINKLERS THAT
IMMERSION IS THE N. T. METHOD, ALONG WITH SOME
SHOCKING CONCLUSIONS FOR PEDOBAPTISTS AND
IMPERATIVE ACTIONS THEY NEED TO TAKE IN VIEW OF THE
OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE

MATTHEW 28:19-20

[Sermon Three is a Continuation of Sermon Two, with a Powerful Addendum Concerning what Honest PedoBaptists Should Do in Light of the Overwhelming Evidence]

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen".

Men, brethren, and fathers, we are still upon a very important subject—a subject which highly concerns us—a subject in which our feelings, our reputation, and our peace too, may not be a little concern. Many things, not to say every thing, call upon us not to go to fast; and, at the same time, obedience to our Lord forbids all backwardness, in pursuing where his truth and Spirit lead us.

TRUTH MUST DICTATE THE ANSWER CONCERNING THE MODE OF
BAPTISM

All which I request of you is, with candor hear, with readiness obey, what truth shall dictate. Should we, after long and serious deliberation, be obliged to believe and practice differently from what we have heretofore done, we shall be much exposed to two things: one is, to be reviled; the other, to revile again. What we shall need is, patience to bear the one, and grace that we may avoid the other.

THE HUMAN TENDENCY TO MAKE OURSELVES, NOT THE SCRIPTURES, THE DETERMINATION OF PRACTICE

Perhaps human nature is more inclined to nothing than to an overbearing spirit. It is perfectly consonant with human nature to make ourselves, and not the scriptures, the standard of both faith and practice. The natural consequence of this is, censure against all who dare to think, or act, as we do not.

To guard you against unreasonable and common prejudice, I will, for your consideration, suggest a thought, which we may do well to remember; and it is this: many, who shall believe and practice as we have long done, may be as honest and faithful as we then were.

This being true, the following consequence is plain, that the line of conduct which the Baptists ought to have practiced, in months and years past, towards us, the same, if we be Baptists, will it become us to pursue with relation to others. It requires not much foresight to discover, that we shall need much of that wisdom which is profitable to direct.

Whilst it may be indispensable with us to use every prudent mean to diffuse that light which God may graciously afford us, it will be our wisdom to do every thing in such a manner as not to heighten, but, if possible, to lower the prejudices of good people.

THE DESIRE THAT TRUTH MIGHT ALWAYS PREVAIL

Whilst you, my dear friends and people, know that light chaseth away the darkness, and that truth will ultimately prevail against every error; I solicit your candour and prayerful attention, that error may not be retained, or prevail against any of us, to our wounding.

Our attention hath already been called to the definition of a number of words which relate to the ordinance of baptism, to the scripture account of baptism, together with some other texts, which were supposed to throw light upon the subject, and also to some evidence in support of the given definitions.

A.

THE ADMINISTRATION AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM DURING THE APOSTOLIC AGE WAS SOLELY BY IMMERSION

[BAPTISM DURING THE APOSTOLIC AGE]

As the great question turns upon what is commanded, and as that cannot be otherwise known than by making sure the import of the words used, we shall therefore search for additional light and certainty, by inquiring how the apostles and primitive Christians understood this matter, and how they practiced.

If this can be made plain, then, perhaps, your minds will be satisfied, and your judgments made up. I proceed to lay the evidence before you.

There appears no necessity of spending time to produce evidence that the apostles understood the matter to be as I have proved to you that it was: for they, no doubt, understood the words which Christ spake, and the commands which he gave: besides, if the apostles and primitive church practiced thus, it is evident that they thus understood it; for doubtless they, especially the apostles, were honest men, and practiced as they understood Jesus Christ to have directed them.

TRUTH ALWAYS THE CRITERION FOR DECISION

I will here make two observations to you; and wish you to remember them. The first is, no person should, especially in important matters make up his judgment, that any particular subject is true till he has evidence of its truth.

The other is, the best proof which the nature of any case admits of, may and ought to be considered as evidence, and so received by us, as to those things we are called to believe and practice.

There are different degrees of evidence: the highest kind produces knowledge. When the evidence is small, it produces a weak and dubious belief. But where it is such that, on supposition the thing be true, the evidence could not be greater than it is, there we are obliged to yield our assent, and we do violence to our reason if we do not believe.

The evidence, which we have with respect to the practice of the apostles in the manner of baptizing, differs in degree, and, in some measure, in kind, from the evidence which we have respecting the practice of the church in later ages as to the same matter.

But if we have, with respect to the practice of both, the best evidence which the different cases admit of, we are under obligation to believe the evidence good, and the facts true, which are supported by it.

We have much the same kind of evidence with respect to the practice of the apostles, which we have as to the practice of the church for many ages after them. Mr. Baxter, bishop Hoadly, and others, testify, that the apostolic practice was, immersion. We have, moreover, as to their practice, a much higher kind of evidence. In support of their practice, I shall produce the best kind of evidence, and afterwards, while speaking of the practice of the church in succeeding ages, may occasionally bring forward some of the other kind of evidence, in support of the apostles' practice.

1. THE USE OF THE UNCOMMON WORDS FOR BAPTISM BY THE APOSTLES IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM WAS SOLELY BY IMMERSION.

As to the practice of the apostles, in the administration of baptism, I observe, we have in the scriptures four distinct sources of evidence. The first is this. When baptism is mentioned by the disciples and apostles, and the common word is not used, they uniformly employ one particular word, and this word is of very determinate signification, and expresses the bathing, or washing, of the body in water, as *Heb. 10:22*: Having "our bodies (*leloumenoi*) washed with pure water." *Acts 22:16*: "Arise and be baptized and (*apolousai*) wash away thy sins." *I Cor. 6:11*. "But ye are (*apolousasthe*) washed." By the determinate signification of this word, their practice appears to be immersion.

2. THE COMMAND TO THE APOSTLES TO DIP, IMMERSE AND PLUNGE IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM WAS SOLELY BY IMMERSION.

The apostles were commanded to dip, immerse, or plunge all over in water, the persons whom they admitted to this ordinance. This is evident from the determinate signification of the word to baptize. Says the command, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them, &c.

We have before proved what is the signification of this word," and consequently what Christ commanded his disciples, when we sent them to baptize. I do not now say that the apostles immersed any; but this is what I say, they were commanded to do. I leave it for you to determine, whether they did, or whether they did not.

3. THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE WORD USED IN BAPTISM IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM WAS SOLELY BY IMMERSION

I observe to you, that the New Testament, wherever it speaks of the apostles baptizing any, says they immersed them, or dipped them all over in water. For this is the plain, literal and

common, if not the only signification of the word. I still leave it with you to determine whether the apostles did, or did not, practice thus.

Lest some of you may have forgotten what I have before proved to you, and consequently entertained some doubt whether baptism may not sometime signify the application of water in a different way; we will make two or three observations.

SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM THE USE OF WATER IN REGARDS TO BAPTISM

a. THE COMMON SIGNIFICATION OF THE WORD FOR WASH MEANS TO IMMERSE

The plain, literal and common signification of the word is to immerse, overwhelm, dip, or to plunge all over. There appears to be no evidence that it is ever used so much as once, in any part of the Bible, to signify the application of water in any other sense. Even in those passages where I have in time past supposed that the meaning might be, and probably was, *washing* without immersion, the sense appears to be putting into water or immersion, and not what we commonly understand by the word washing.

Of this you may be convinced by considering the treatment to which the Jews were accustomed with respect to those vessels which were ceremonially unclean. They were to baptize them, or put them into water, as you may see, *Lev. 11:32*. "And upon whatsoever any of them, when they are dead, doth fall, it shall be unclean; whether it be any vessel of wood, or raiment, or skin, or sack; *whatsoever vessel* it be, wherein any work is done, it must be *put into water*, and it shall be unclean until the even; so it shall be cleansed."

b. CHRIST USED THE COMMON WORDS CONCERNING BAPTISM WHEN HE MANDATED THIS ORDINANCE, TERMS ALL HIS HEARERS CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD.

I will observe to you that it would most visibly be a reflection upon the great Teacher who came from God, to suppose that he should, when appointing a positive institution, use words aside from their plain and commonly received sense;

That too without giving any intimation of his using words in any sense differing from the common, especially when he was setting up a new institution, about which his most faithful followers could, in all succeeding generations, know nothing but from the words used in and about the institution. Does not all this appear plain and reasonable?

Now the Bible in the plain, literal and common sense of the words which it uses, says, the apostles dipped, plunged or immersed all such as they admitted to baptism. You will judge for yourselves whether the apostles practiced thus, or whether they did not.

4. PAUL'S TEACHING TO THE BELIEVERS IN ROME [ROMANS] AND COLOSSEE [COLOSSIANS] CONCERNING BAPTISM IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM WAS SOLELY BY IMMERSION.

The practice of the apostles is farther illustrated and confirmed by what Paul tells the Roman and Colossian Christians, with respect to what took place when they received the ordinance of baptism. He says to the former, "We are buried with him by baptism into death:" To the other he says, "Buried with him *in* baptism."

Paul speaks of this matter as a thing perfectly understood by Christians in his time, and used it as an argument to promote their weanedness [no dependence upon] from the world, and growth in sanctification.

But have you not either passed over these and similar passages, without noticing them, or considered them rather hard to be understood? But how easy is it to understand them, provided

the apostles practiced as the scriptures say they did! I still leave it with you to determine for yourselves how the apostles practiced.

This is the best evidence which the nature of the subject admits. This matter, the apostles' practice, was transacted many ages since. We have the testimony of the scriptures as to what it was: this is evidence enough: however, we shall occasionally add the testimony of men.

We shall now attend to the practice of the church, and discover, of we can, how it was for ages after the apostles. The best evidence which this part of my subject admits, is that of human testimony.*

* Christ's promise to his apostles, to their successors, and to the Church may assure us, that the ordinance of baptism, by which his people should be distinguished from the world, would ever continue. Therefore could we know what the Church hath always practiced, especially that part of it which hath been most separate from the world, then their practice would afford a strong argument in favour of what the institution intended.

I by means rest the merit of the cause on this evidence. At the same time, it may weaken the prejudices of some, and be a mean of confirming others in the belief of the truth. It appears so plain a case that we can hardly refuse assent to it, that as the church hath for a series of ages practiced, so have they believed. When we shall see what their practice hath been, we shall the more easily concede that their belief hath been similar.

B.

THE ADMINISTRATION AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM AFTER THE APOSTOLIC AGE-DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES-IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM IS BY IMMERSION

[BAPTISM AFTER THE APOSTOLIC AGE]

What is now before us is to produce and to receive evidence relative to the practice of the primitive church. It is the following:

This evidence conflicts in the united testimony of both those who practiced the administration of the ordinance by immersion, and those who used sprinkling, and called it baptizing.

1. THE TESTIMONIES OF IMMERSERS AND SPRINKLERS IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM IS SOLELY BY IMMERSION

a. THE TESTIMONY OF MOSHEIM: NOTED CHURCH HISTORIAN

Mosheim, a very noted church historian, and not very friendly to the Baptists, bears direct testimony that John, Christ's forerunner, and the church in the first ages of Christianity, practiced immersion as the mode of baptizing.

The following you may take as a sample of his evidence. "The exhortations of this respectable messenger (John) were not without effect; and those who, moved by his solemn admonition, had formed the resolution of correcting their evil dispositions, and amending their lives, were initiated into the kingdom of the Redeemer by the ceremony of immersion, or baptism."

Speaking of the church in the second century, he says, "The persons that were to be baptized, after they had repeated the creed, confessed and renounced their sins, and particularly the devil in his pompous allurements, were immersed under water, and received into Christ's kingdom by a solemn invocation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, according to the *express command* of our blessed Lord. *(Century II, part 2, chap. 5, sect. 12)

The Doctor speaking of some inferior sects of the seventeenth century, and particularly of a sect called Collegiants, says, "Those adult persons that desire to be baptized, receive the sacrament of baptism according to the ancient and primitive manner of celebrating that institution, even by *immersion*." ** (Vol. 5, p. 488)

b. THE TESTIMONY OF BAILEY: ENGLISH DICTIONARY AUTHOR

Mr. Bailey, in his Etymological English dictionary, says, "In ancient times, this [baptism] being performed by immersion, the persons so initiated went into a river, &c. and were plunged."

c. THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN CALVIN: PROTESTANT REFORMER

John Calvin, in his *Institutions*, Book IV. chap. 15. sect. 19, says, "It is certain that the manner of dipping was used of the old church." Here are three substantial witnesses. These might be sufficient, seeing there is not one to be found who will, or dares, give direct and positive testimony against the truth of what these affirm.

But since there are an host who stand ready to give in their testimony, even against their own practice, we will hear what two more of them will testify relative to the important cause now on trial. These two shall be Dr. Cave and the famous Mr. Baxter.

d. THE TESTIMONY OF DR. CAVE: ANTIQUITY RESEARCHER

Dr. Cave, a great searcher into antiquity, says, "That the party baptized was wholly immersed, or put under water, which was the *common, constant* and *universal* custom of those times; whereby they did significantly express the great end and effects of baptism, representing Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and, in conformity thereto, our dying unto sin, the destruction of its power, and our resurrection to a new course of life," &c. ***[*Ten Letters*]

e. THE TESTIMONY OF DR. BAXTER: [PURITAN THEOLOGIAN]

Most remarkable is the testimony which Mr. Baxter gives to this truth, in the following words: "It is commonly confessed by us to the Baptists, (as our commentators declare) that in the apostles' time, the baptized were dipped over head in water, and this signified their profession both of believing the burial and resurrection of Christ, and of their own dying unto sin, and living, or rising again to newness of life, or being buried and risen again with Christ, as the apostle expoundeth baptism, Col. 2:12, and Rom. 6:4.

And though (saith he) we have thought it lawful to diffuse the manner of dipping and to use less water, yet we presume not to change the use and signification of it; so then he that signally professes to die and rise again in baptism with Christ, doth *signally* profess *saving faith* and *repentance*; but *this* do all they that are baptized according to the apostolic practice." *(*Ten Letters*)

As these witnesses testify, so do all learned and pious men who have critically attended to this subject, and afterwards given in any direct and positive evidence upon the matter.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES PRACTICE OF BAPTISM IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM IS SOLELY BY IMMERSION

a. DR. LATHROP'S ASSERTION OF THE CHURCHES HISTORICAL PRACTICE OF IMMERSION

The evidence as to the practice of the primitive church, consists in the testimony of men to this truth, that the church did for thirteen hundred years practice immersion, some extreme cases excepted.

The only evidence which I purpose to give in support of this for the present, is the testimony of the author of *Ten Letters* to Bishop Hoadly upon the mode and subjects of baptism, and the confession of Dr. Lathrop that it was even so.

The author of the *Letters* asserts that this was the practice of the church for thirteen hundred years after the commencement of the Christian era. Dr. Lathrop assents that this was the fact; as you may see, by reading his four sermons on baptism, where he gives these letters a particular attention, and is supposed to assent, where he makes no objection.

b. THE NON-ROMAN CATHOLIC DENOMINATIONS IN OTHER CONTINENTS STILL PRACTICE IMMERSION

All the churches in Europe, Asia and Africa, ever have done, and do now, practice immersion, save those who are now, or have been, under the jurisdiction of the Pontiffs of Rome.

The same witnesses who bore their testimony to the last particular, give in their evidence in support of this, and in the same way; the one asserting the fact, the other assenting that it is even so.

3. THE INDEFENSIBLE REASONS GIVEN BY PEDOBAPTISTS [SPRINKLERS] IS EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM IS BY IMMERSION

The very reasons which have been given and which are still given to justify the contrary practice, are a plain confession that immersion, or burying the subjects under water, was the practice of the apostles and primitive church in the ordinance of baptism, and what Christ commanded to be done.

The reasons which are alleged why sprinkling may be substituted for immersion, are, **the want of health**, in some instances where they suppose baptism to be necessary; **the weakness of constitution** with respect to some, and **the coldness of climate** with respect to many, and as to all in northern climes in the wintry season. Here is a silent acknowledgement that it is not the institution, that it is not the permission of Christ, but mere accidental and local circumstances, which make it lawful to lay by the command of Christ, and to receive in its stead the precepts and commandments of men.

WHAT PEDOBAPTISTS STATE WAS THE ORIGINAL MODE OF BAPTISM AND THE REASONS FOR THE CHANGE

a. BAILEY'S DICTIONARY

Mr. Bailey says, in his Dictionary, that baptism was performed in the eastern and warmer countries by dipping the persons all over; but in process of time, in the western and colder countries, sprinkling was substituted in the place of dipping.

b. DR. LATHROP'S SERMONS

Dr. Lathrop in his sermons implicitly confesses the following extracts to be both true and genuine.

c. MR. BAXTER'S THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS

Mr. Baxter, in his *Paraphrase on the New Testament*, observes on Matt: 3.6. "We grant that baptism then was by washing the whole body; and did not the difference of our cold country, as to that hot one, teach us to remember, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' it should be so here."

d. LETTERS TO BISHOP HOADLY

The author of the *Letters to Bishop Hoadly*, in the twenty-third page, writes thus: "Mr. Baxter, we have already seen, excuses the matter by the coldness of our climate.

e. CALVIN'S EXPOSITIONS

Calvin, the celebrated reformer of Geneva, observes in his Exposition of Acts 8:38, 'We see here what was the baptismal rite among the ancients, for they plunged the whole body in the water.'

Now it is the custom for the minister to sprinkle only the body or head, and he too excuses this sprinkling, but how, I cannot well recollect, not having his book at hand."

f. BISHOP BURNET

Bishop Burnet, though he thus describes the primitive baptism, "With no other garments but that serve to cover nature, they at first laid them down, as a man is laid in the grave, and then they said these words, I baptize, or wash, thee in the name, &c. Then they raised them up again, and clean garments were put upon them; from whence came the phrases of being baptized into Christ's death, of being buried with him by baptism into death, of our being risen with Christ, and of our putting on the Lord Jesus Christ; of putting off the old man, and putting on the new."

And though he justly observes that sacraments are positive precepts which are to be measured only by the institution in which there is no room left for us to carry them any farther; yet forgetting his own measure of the institution, viz. the party baptized was laid down in the water, as a man is laid in the grave, he says, "The danger in cold climates may be a very good reason for changing the form of baptism to sprinkling." *

*Burnet's Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles

g. DR. WALL'S: *THE LETTERS*

I propose for the present to note but one quotation more, and that shall be in the words of Dr. Wall, as quoted in the *Letters*. The Doctor, in giving the reasons why, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, the custom of dipping was laid aside, observes, "It being allowed to weak children to be baptized by effusion, many found ladies and gentlemen first, and then, by degrees, the common people, would obtain the favor of the priest to have their children pass for weak children to tender to endure dipping in the water."**

**Vol. II, p. 30, I Ed.

Now, it may be easy for you to gather what is the outward and visible part of the ordinance of baptism.

It is to immerse proper subjects in water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. This is the outward and visible part of baptism, the scriptures being judge; this literal and plain meaning of the command being judge; the practice of the apostles being judge; the practice of the church for more than a thousand years being judge.

And even if we appeal to those who refuse to practice thus, they add their testimony, that it is what was commanded. They pretend not to say that any new command hath been given, or that the old one hath ever been changed. What shall we say to these things!!!

SOME STARTLING CONCLUSIONS

WHAT PEDOBAPTISTS SHOULD DO IN VIEW OF THE OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE THAT BAPTISM IS BY IMMERSION

I conclude by submitting a question, and a few inferences, for your consideration. The question is, If immersion be from heaven, and sprinkling from men, by what authority do we continue the practice? The inferences are—

1. THE BAPTISTS HAVE THE PLAIN TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE ON THEIR SIDE.

We, who call ourselves Pedobaptists, are as a house divided against it self. To say the least, we appear thus. Our champions will look us in the face, and assure us, that the Baptists have plain Scripture for their mode, and yet we have a right to choose on the score of convenience, &c. what mode is pleasing to us.

Thus say Calvin, Hoadly, Owen, and others: whilst in their practice they have been, in his instance, like the servant who knew, but did not his lord's will. These good men have confessed rather too much for the credit of their practice, and our comfort while copying it.

Many, however, have risen up, in defense of our fathers' practice and ours. They invent many ingenious hypotheses to prove it from heaven, but not one affords a solid conclusion which shows it to be so.

2. PEDOBAPTISTS SHOULD BE HONEST, ACCEPT THE TRUTH AND PRACTICE BAPTISM AS THE SCRIPTURE COMMANDS, BY IMMERSION.

According to the light which for the present appears, we cannot but conclude that our definitions of baptism and to baptize are scriptural, accurate and just. If we will do the will of God, we must practice what he commands.

3. SPRINKLING IS NOT PROPER BAPTISM; IT NEVER HAS BEEN, AND IT NEVER WILL BE.

It appears that it is not left with us what mode we will practice in administering or in receiving the ordinance of baptism; for we find but one mode to it: and we must practice this, or none.

We may sprinkle a person in the name of the Father, &c. and we may wash the face, or any part of a person, in the same sacred name; but it is not possible to baptize a person in this way; for sprinkling, or any small partial washing never was, is not now, nor ever will be, what the scriptures mean by Christian baptism.

4. THE SCRIPTURE SPEAKS OF NO OTHER MODE OF BAPTISM BUT IMMERSION.

That a person must be greatly unacquainted with the plain, literal scripture account of baptism, or extremely prejudices, not to say perverse, to affirm that the Bible says nothing about immersion, or burying in water for baptizing. For it speaks of this mode, and of no other, in the application of water as a gospel ordinance.

The Baptists have for their mode the broad *basis* of *scripture*, antiquity, and the uninterrupted and somewhat universal practice of the church.

5. SINCE BAPTISTS HAVE THE SCRIPTURE ON THEIR SIDE, OPPOSING IMMERSION IS AN EVIL ACTIVITY

It appears that for well-informed Pedobaptists to oppose the Baptists, as to their mode of baptizing is very great wickedness. For the Baptists have the advantage of plain and express scripture on their side, and the learned, critical and candid Pedobaptists know it.

A DISCERNING OBSERVATION

IGNORANCE THE ONLY LEGITIMATE EXCUSE FOR SPRINKLING

Ignorance is the best and only excuse which we can make for ourselves for any opposition which we have made against the ancient and primitive mode which the Baptists have practiced in the administration of the ordinance. Our contention in this matter hath not been against the Baptists merely, but it hath been against their Lord and ours.

Dr. Lathrop appears generously to grant the truth, that immersion is scripture baptism, and only contends that sprinkling be also allowed; which every candid mind would readily do, were there one text of scripture to support it.

6. NO GENUINE BELIEVER WHO IS KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE TRUTH OF BAPTISM WILL MINIMIZE IMMERSION AND THE BAPTISTS INSISTENCE UPON IT AS THE SOLE METHOD OF BAPTISM

No true Christian, if he knew what he did, would ever make light of immersion, which the Lord commands, and the Baptists practice, as the mode of baptizing, or, more strictly, as baptism itself.