

SHOULD CHRISTIANS TOTALLY IMMERSE WHEN BAPTISING TO BAPTISE VALIDLY?

(Quotations from Baptism, Meaning, Mode & Subjects. Atheists who have any contact with those who believe that baptism is to be performed by total immersion alone must study this booklet for it is more than excellent.)

If people who have been baptised but not by immersion have received an invalid baptism then this has important consequences among Catholics and Orthodox. They say valid baptism is needed to go to Heaven forever when you die.

Christianity practises water baptism. Some sects, principally the Baptists, claim that baptism can only be validly administered by totally immersing the candidate in water. Others contend that sprinkling, pouring or partly immersing the person will suffice.

Most Christians, Catholics in particular, today give baptism by sprinkling or pouring instead of total immersion. They reason that God wouldn't expect them to totally immerse sick people or people in lands where water was scarce and where there is no water at all the only way a baptism can be performed is with spittle. He wouldn't but that would not mean that the other modes were valid. He might accept sprinkling when there is no other way or he might not accept it at all. Christianity claims to be the best religion so if God won't convert the whole world to it by sending incarnate angels to teach mankind he proves that he is capable of rejecting a baptism of sprinkling or pouring as invalid.

The argument that water baptism need not be by immersion because not all can get immersed is foolish because it assumes God cares that much for baptism. It is not essential. It is something you do when you have enough water and if you believe. Otherwise it doesn't matter.

This argument for the validity of sprinkling or pouring is unacceptable for when two people are in a position in which they can't use liquid and one of them craves baptism the Church says it is no use if one tries to transmit grace without water by the laying on of hands. If God won't accept this then why should he accept their little splashes?

Members of the Baptist faith hold that baptism by total immersion is the only real and valid form of baptism. This is because many of the verses about spirit baptism imply immersion in the Spirit and are taken as referring to water baptism immersion.

Many say that this is wholly unbiblical. I would say for a start, the Bible doesn't even mention baptism by partial or total immersion!

Does the word baptism mean immersion?

It does but it means washing too. We know from Luke 11:37-38 that this is so. The Pharisee is astonished that Jesus did not baptise himself before dinner in accordance with manmade Jewish tradition to wash away imaginary impurity, religious uncleanness. "Now is it likely that our Lord and the other guests had all immersed themselves – in separate containers, for the water would immediately on use be considered contaminated – before partaking of their meal?...here we have the consent of many Greek scholars that the word baptize simply means wash!" (page 19).

But why doesn't the Bible use other words for baptism if it means washing? There is no reason to believe that the early Church washed converts. Dipping somebody in water is hardly washing them for they could still have the dirt on them so the cleansing symbol wouldn't be there. When the Bible uses the word baptism which can mean total immersion it probably means total immersion.

Let us refute the New Testament "proofs" against immersion.

Christians tell us that when the three thousand were baptised on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) baptism by immersion could not have been practiced. This was in "the dry season of the year, when most households would rely on cisterns filled in the rainy season and where there was no extensive body of water available" (page 23). It is hard to believe that tanks were used to totally immerse all these people though they may well have been. Perhaps there was a deep pond? Perhaps the only immersion they got was a quick dip of the top of the head in a bucket. We must realise that it is not said that the apostles did all the baptising. There might have been enough to do all the immersing that day. The newly baptised could baptise others. We must remember the early Church claimed that God can multiply food so is Acts just saying that God miraculously provided enough water for all these people to be baptised? How do you know that there wasn't a reservoir or something nearby so that many could be baptised at the one time?

Incidentally, if this baptism was really a sacrament of initiation into Church membership like in Catholicism why is there no evidence that records were taken of the baptised or that the baptism was witnessed properly? The fanaticism of three thousand people putting their lives at risk to have a public baptism into an illegal religion is unbelievable. I don't believe it. But if true it makes it probable that no record was taken. That indicates that baptism was not regarded as a magical sacrament. To suggest they were initiated into Christianity by this baptism only minutes after they converted is ridiculous. This baptism was not an initiation rite. If it forgave sins it was so it didn't forgive sins nor was it intended to do this in any magical way. It was a rite that you undergo to signify repentance and the desire for mercy from God not a magical washing away of sin like you have in Catholicism.

Let us refute the New Testament "proofs" for immersion.

John the Baptist may have been said to have baptised in the Jordan but he could have done this without actually immersing anybody partly or fully. Jesus could have come out of the water after just being sprinkled with it. He might have been standing in the water up to the ankles. John may have had to take people into the water for reasons of space. That may be why Jesus had to get his feet wet. Perhaps John deliberately refused to baptise people with them and himself standing on the dry water's edge for some symbolic reason. Walking into water could signify walking into penitence. John's baptism is not the same as that of Jesus' – if Jesus had one at all which is doubtful. Both were baptisms for repentance. But John's was for making a person committed to Judaism while Jesus' or the Church's was about making a person dedicated to Jesus. If John immersed what has that got to do with the form of Christian baptism? Nobody said they had to be done the same way. Since another meaning of baptise was dye (page 35, Jesus and the Four Gospels) and clothes had to be completely immersed to be dyed it is thought that baptism has to be by total immersion. This cannot be accepted for there is no evidence that the word as used by Christians took in the idea of dye.

Romans 6 states that we were buried with Christ in death when we were baptised and that we raise in baptism like him to a new life. In other words you are drowned and killed in baptism and rise again all new. Baptism is attempted murder of human nature. Whatever form it takes it involves an intention to kill. Baptists say that we have to be buried in the water completely because of this verse. But look. We don't know if this is water baptism or the baptism of the Holy Spirit in which there is no water. The spiritual baptism buries us too, to our old lives. There is no sense in supposing that a person being buried with Christ at baptism means that she goes down into the water to get buried in it. We can be buried with Christ at repentance, without being literally and physically buried. Baptists seem to think that the text says that we have to go down into the grave with Jesus and that this is symbolically saying that we have to be buried in water. But Jesus did not go into a grave but into a tomb and Paul says we are not buried into Jesus' tomb but his death so buried is symbolic. The expression, buried with Christ, proves that for us the burial is a symbolic burial and not necessarily a physical burial in water or a grave for we can't literally be buried with Christ. But we can literally be buried with Christ to sin in the sense that we are forgiven and rise with him to be given a new life. Forgiveness buries sins.

Not once does the Bible explicitly mention total immersion. How then can it teach that this is the only right way to do it? But let us think about Romans 6 where we are told that we are buried with Christ in baptism and rise again alive in baptism too. If baptism pictures salvation through the baptism of the Holy Spirit which all early sources agree with then baptism should be by total immersion for your old self is supposed to be buried and your new self rises. That is what it pictures. It pictures that Jesus was buried totally in the ground and rose up as well. If the baptism of the spirit saves the whole body and soul through the death and burial and return of Jesus Christ then total immersion is necessary. It might not be necessary for a sick person when a partial immersion would do but it would invalidate washing and sprinkling. Baptism is to be a picture so it is invalid if no immersion is involved.

Christians who have been baptised but not by immersion are not really baptised at all.

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The WWW

Doctrinal Summary by Br Thomas Mary MICM. This page informs us that Catholic teaching is that if you hear of the Catholic Church and don't join it or study it your damnation is guaranteed. It affirms that babies that die without baptism will be banned from Heaven forever.