

BAPTISM: MEANING, MODE & SUBJECTS  
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"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

#### INTRODUCTION

This Booklet sets out the Reformed position on Baptism. It is an edited version of material which originally appeared in the British Reformed Journal: Nos. 6-10, 14 & 15. It is essentially a Bible Study - though I have drawn on a number of Commentators and Theologians. Instead of basing a position on a few proof texts, an attempt has been made to consider every instance in the New Testament where the five words related to Baptism occur.

It would be absurd for any Protestant to claim infallibility! We are fallen creatures - and that affects our minds as well as everything else. If you see something I have overlooked please let me know. Additions, comments or corrections are always to be welcomed; and if criticism is never very welcome it may nonetheless be very necessary. We should always be willing to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see whether what Paul preached was true.

Plas Gwyn  
Trelawnyd

August 1997

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## BAPTISM

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel....."

### Introduction

SYSTEMATIC Theology is that subject which, taking the information provided by Biblical, Exegetical and Historical Theology, seeks to weave it into a comprehensive whole to be applied in Practical Theology. We may liken it to a massive tree, growing out of the bedrock of Scripture. The trunk is Theology proper, what we learn about God; and then the main branches are typically Anthropology-the doctrine of Man; Christology - the doctrine of Christ; Soteriology - the doctrine of Salvation; Ecclesiology - the doctrine of the Church; and Eschatology - the doctrine of the last things.

The branch we are currently interested in is that dealing with the Church and this splits into various sub-branches: Idea; Attributes; Government etc. The one we want is The Means of Grace and again we find that this divides into Prayer; Preaching and the Sacraments. Taking the last we find it again divides into Baptism and the Lord's Supper - and we take up the former.

Now the purpose of this slightly complicated introduction is to try and instil a sense of proportion into the subject! In terms of the whole we are actually dealing with a fairly minor matter. Paul's quote, at the beginning of this article, is a sad perplexity to Sacramentalists. Indeed it is of interest to note that of the cluster of words used relating to Baptism there are only twenty references in the Epistles and Revelation, five of which occur in the I Corinthians passage from which we have already quoted and of which at least another five are not dealing with Christian Baptism at all!

In short the subject does not occupy the place in Scripture which it all too often does in our Ecclesiastical debates - one large Denomination seeing it as so important that it warrants division and the proliferation of Baptist churches. So we had recently the absurd spectacle of a President of the Baptist Union, on the one hand denying the fundamental doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, while presumably on the other holding the position that only Immersion constitutes valid Baptism.

However it will often be found that the issue of what constitutes Baptism does expose a whole mass of related theology - and of course there are important practical issues. A young person, for instance, brought up in a Reformed church goes off to University, finds that only the local evangelical Baptist Church preaches a definite gospel, but is then exposed to remarks about "infant sprinkling" and is persuaded on some pretty tendencious exegesis to submit to re- baptism by immersion.

So, at the risk of simply falling into the same trap of exaggerating its place in theology above that which it occupies in Scripture, let us seek to set out

the Reformed-and Biblical-position. It seems to the present writer that this might most conveniently be done in terms of: The Meaning, The Mode and The Subjects of Baptism.

#### THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

"Go ye therefore and make disciples.....baptizing them...." Matt. 28:19.  
"I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mk. 1:8.

A VARIETY of meanings is associated with Baptism in Scripture and in the Reformed Confessions. However, for our purposes I wish simply to concentrate on three.

First, and self evidently, it is associated both in Scripture and in practice with the profession of Christianity. This is asserted in the first of the texts placed above. A Christian is someone who has been baptized in the name of the Trinity - and incidentally those who have never been baptized have no right to the name. Of course much professed Christianity has little basis or is doctrinally very questionable. Nonetheless, what divides the Christian world from the Muslim or the Hindu is this: that the persons concerned have been baptized. I suggest too that this carries the important practical point that, when we approach baptized people we do so on the basis of their profession, while we seek to explain to men "the way of God more accurately."

When we turn to the second text we note that although there is only one Baptism, Eph. 4, yet two aspects are brought before us in John's teaching. We may perhaps call these the "Ritual" and the "Real". The first refers to the actual physical activity the disciple undergoes: the ritual; the second to the "reality" to which the ritual points. It is important to keep both these ideas in mind, as a failure to distinguish them may lead us to attribute to one aspect a Scripture which is actually referring to the other.

Second, Scripture associates Baptism with cleansing. Just as we put a dirty garment to the wash, so the use of water here points to a cleansing - and quite clearly the washing away of our sins, not of course in an *ex opere operato* mode (i.e. by the baptising action performed) but in a recognition that this is what happens in conversion. So we find people coming to John the Baptist: and were "baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." And so also we find Ananias telling Paul: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Third, and most importantly, Baptism points to our Union with Christ. This is the point underlying the second part of our text - that which speaks of the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit". This is well set forth in I Cor. 12:13: "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

#### Objections

At this point we must seek to deal with two objections. Charismatics and Pentecostals generally will argue that the text from John the Baptist points to a two stage process: first conversion, symbolized by water baptism, and then a second and subsequent "Baptism of the Spirit"! However it is clear that there is no support for this in the Epistles - and indeed the reverse is stated in the I Cor. 12 passage which has just been quoted. In the case of Cornelius and his relatives and friends we see that the word is preached, the Holy Spirit converts

and they are then baptized with water. We have here both the external ritual and the internal reality.

A more cogent argument appears to be brought by Baptists who state, to quote Augustus Strong: "The central truth set forth by baptism is the death and resurrection of Christ, - and our own death and resurrection as connected with that." It is clear he is linking that with the idea that only Immersion adequately represents this.

To this it may be replied in the first place that the truth of Christ's death is surely set forth by the Lord's Supper-and in the second that His resurrection is celebrated in every Christian Church by the fact that we meet on Sunday - the day of His resurrection having replaced the Saturday Sabbath.

Inevitably reference is made to Rom.6, "buried with Him by baptism into death," but the point is that here Paul was not discussing Baptism as such. He is seeking to refute the antinomian argument against a free justification - and in order to do so he emphasizes that we are buried, raised, planted, crucified with Him. In short that we are united to Christ. What is in view is not water baptism but that action of the Holy Spirit that has brought us into union with our blessed Redeemer. In a parallel passage in Col. 2, we are said to be circumcised with him. It is clear therefore that it is not the physical but the spiritual aspects which are in view. To emphasize one aspect is poor exegesis - however common.

Besides, we are easily misled by our experience of burials with the coffin lowered into the grave and the promise of resurrection; but our Lord was laid in a tomb in a garden-presumably on a shelf. There was nothing that corresponds to the Baptists' immersion.

In concluding this discussion of the Meaning of Baptism, I want to call attention to the way in which the work of the Spirit is pictured. He is spoken of as having "sat upon each," "fallen upon," been "poured out," etc. The significance of these representations will appear subsequently.

#### THE MODE OF BAPTISM

"In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea.... Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." Matt. 3:1,5,6

#### Introduction

IN the previous section it was proposed that the Reformed and Biblical position might be most conveniently considered in terms of The Meaning, The Mode and The Subjects of Baptism. Having introduced the subject generally and dealt with the first point we now take up the controverted issue of the second.

Now it is a curious fact that the New Testament does not tell us how Baptism was administered! - after all everyone then knew by experience. But that very fact should alert us first to its relative unimportance and second to the consideration that the very fact that these matters may concern us deeply suggests that here we do not have the mind of Christ. He has set us free (Hallelujah!) - and we should be very cautious about any tendency to go back under a yoke of bondage.

After all, a rite which is to be administered to young and old, to those in health, sickness or extremis, in deserts, tropics, tundra and the Arctic as well as temperate climes, can hardly be tied to only one mode of administration!

In fact we might simply end our consideration there-and I suspect if we did so we would be close to the mind of the New Testament-were it not for the fact that not only Baptist churches but a growing number of Evangelical ones persist in asserting that only Total Immersion, (dressed and usually backwards!) constitutes baptism. To give an example, taken simply from the latest literature to hand:

"The administration of baptism...will be by total immersion in water. Matt. 3:5,6,13,16 John 3:23 Acts 8:38,39 Rom 6:3,4."

Needless to say, the proof texts do not prove the point, but of that more anon.

How then is the matter to be resolved? Clearly the answer is by reference to those same inspired Scriptures, which are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

The approach taken has been the scientific one: obtain all the information available and then construct a theology which does justice to all the data. To that end every text referring to baptism in the New Testament has been examined and classified. This seems to point to quite clear conclusions-and I can only urge anyone bothered about this issue to pursue the same course. What follows is simply a summary.

#### Baptism and its cognates

There are five words used in the New Testament and it may be helpful at this point simply to list them:

baptizw	Baptizo.....	Baptize	80
baptisma	Baptisma	Baptism	22
baptismoV	Baptismos	Washing	4
baptisthV	Baptistes.....	Baptizer*	.....14
baptw	Bapto	Dip or Dye	3

\*i.e. John the Baptist

In the first column is the Greek word which is transliterated in the second; the third column gives the translation and the final column the approximate number of uses of each word in the New Testament. It is not necessary to know Greek to be able to see that in most cases the words are simply taken over into our language. In the Providence of God the translators of the Latin version simply used the original words which have in turn been Anglicized in our versions.

#### The Baptisms of John

As we think about the work of John the Baptizer, perhaps almost unbidden an idea comes into our mind compounded from our imagination-and photographs of missionary activity-of this dour figure standing in the Jordan, with perhaps a line of four or six figures in front of him waiting to be immersed. I suggest however that we need to ask ourselves two questions:

How many people did John baptize?

How long did his ministry last?

We may feel we do not know - but in fact we can at least make feasible estimates.

As we read the Gospel narratives what we find is that a great religious revival is going on under John's ministry. Pharisees, Sadducees, Tax Collectors and Soldiers as well as the common people are all moved by the preaching-and come to be baptized. At the time the population of Jerusalem is estimated at between 200,000 and 250,000 people. In agricultural societies perhaps only some 10% of the population is not engaged in husbandry-so when we read of "Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region round the Jordan" that may suggest a population around 2,000,000. Allowing that the word "all" does not mean every single person, yet we may estimate the answer to our first question that around 1,000,000 people were baptized.

Now we know that John was six months older than our Lord and from Luke 3:23 that Jesus was about thirty when his ministry began; John then was about the same age, which was apparently the normal age for the start of a priest's ministry. After a period Christ comes to be baptized and then enters on His ministry. John's then decreases, he is imprisoned and finally executed. At the outside his work probably did not last beyond a year.

Now back to Jordan-and that line of figures. Let us suppose that instead of four or six a continual stream is presented. How long will it take to immerse each one? Perhaps a minute? After 50 minutes John wades to the bank, rests for a few minutes and resumes his labours. After four hours he has immersed 200 - and is utterly exhausted. He resumes the next day - and after five days he has done a thousand. There are still 999 000 to go! How long does one suppose flesh and blood could sustain such an activity?!

May we not at this point hear some other Scriptures? "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean." What need for this ado about immersion? How appropriate that one coming from a priestly line should use those sprinklings and washings of Old Testament usage which all point forward to the "taking away of the sins of the world."

Mathematics is a marvellous science; the one exact science we have. We apply it to the data across two millennia - and it demonstrates incontrovertibly that whatever the gospel writers meant when they spoke of John's Baptism it cannot mean immersion. Nor is there any reason why it should. If a small piece of bread and a sip of wine may represent the Lord's Supper why may not a sprinkling of water represent our cleansing from sin in Baptism?

#### Objections

Although this seems quite clear it may be that certain objections are felt to this interpretation. The writer can think of four and it may be helpful simply to consider them.

1. John is said to baptize "in the Jordan." Does this not then imply immersion? Not necessarily. It could be by immersion but an old picture of baptism shows a person standing in the water and the administrator pouring water on his head

from a container. This would be equally consistent with the phrase "in the river."

2. In the phrase: "I indeed have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" the Greek word "en" should be translated "in" instead of "with." This is in fact offered as an alternative in the margin of the RV and in the text of the ASV where "with" appears in the margin. This is interesting because it comes to the heart of the discussion. What really is at issue in the argument is not the amount of water - but how it is applied. Is the water poured or sprinkled on the person-which is consistent with the translation "with," or is the person immersed in the water-which is consistent with the translation "in?" Greek prepositions are tricky, even for the expert. A glance at the Englishman's Greek Concordance shows that the normal translation is "in" but "with" occurs as do "among, at, by, on, unto" etc. A good example of the use of "with" is in I Cor. 4:21, where Paul uses the phrase "en rabdw" which is translated "with a rod" and where "in" would be quite inappropriate. To translate then 'en udati" as "with water" seems quite in keeping. The correctness of this translation is strengthened by the fact that in the parallel phrase in Luke's gospel the Greek "en" is omitted. This then requires the dative "with". A further consideration is that the translation, "in the Holy Spirit," seems quite out of keeping with what actually happens. We are not immersed in Him! He is poured out on us. For these three reasons it seems appropriate to reject the translation "in" and use "with" as in our common translation.

3. But surely, says someone, all this is beside the point: whatever your arguments, we have an actual example in the case of our Lord. His baptism was by immersion. Well, taken on its own, it may have been. There is nothing in the narrative to rule it out-but neither is there anything there to imply it must have been. Although our Lord's Baptism is mentioned in all four gospels, only two have a direct account. In Matthew we read: "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up immediately from the water;" and in Mark: "coming up out of the water." Once again we are faced with the difficulties of Greek prepositions. In Matthew the word used is "apo" This means "from" or "away from" - not "out of" as the AV translates. In Mark the word is "ek" which means "out of" or "from." Putting both accounts together all we apparently are being told is that our Lord "came from" the water. If He and John the Baptist had stepped into the Jordan and John had scooped up water and poured it on our Lord's head and then they had both come away from the water all the facts in the Biblical narrative would be covered. In the light of our previous discussion immersion seems unlikely.

4. One further objection needs to be considered. Does not the fact that John baptized in Jordan - and later "in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there," point to immersion as the mode? Well, no, it does not! Judea was a relatively barren area compared with Galilee. Doubtless the towns and villages had adequate but limited water supplies-enough for themselves and passing travellers except in times of drought, I Kings 17; but quite inadequate for the massive number of travellers who came as a result of John's preaching. Food could be carried-but apart from the baptismal needs, water in bulk was required for travellers and animals. In fact the reference to "much water" in the Greek is "udata polla" - which Thayer translates as "many springs or fountains." Again the derivation of the name Aenon is given by Strong as "place of springs." Now it is perfectly feasible to water both man and beast in a place of springs; and to baptize a multitude by pouring or sprinkling. It would be singularly difficult to immerse even one person in those springs with which the writer is acquainted!

Interestingly the account in John 3 adds an additional datum of information-for we read in verse 25: "Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying." Clearly this is linked with the references to Baptism-four in five verses. But how were Jewish purifications carried out? By "sprinkling:" Lev. 14:6,7; Num. 8:7 and 19:11-13. So far then from supporting the immersionist's position, a careful examination of John 3 points in precisely the opposite direction.

#### Conclusion

We have examined the circumstances surrounding John's baptizing and have ascertained that it is precisely what might have been expected from a priest carrying out purifications under the Old Dispensation. This fits in with the very large numbers who came-and nothing in the possible objections is inconsistent with the interpretation that these baptisms were carried out by pouring and/or sprinkling. Everything cries out that they could not have been carried out by immersion.

#### Baptism in the rest of the Gospels

##### Introduction

When we turn to the remainder of the Gospels to see what we may learn about the mode of baptism we are immediately faced with the two great texts at the end of Matthew and Mark.

Matt. 28:19 reads: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Then in Mk. 16:16: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved...."

From these we learn that a Christian may be defined as one who believes, is a disciple and has been baptized. However, nothing is said about the mode-and indeed we would have to turn to other Scriptures to discover that water is involved because it is not even mentioned in either text.

##### Figurative

There are a number of other minor references to Baptism and John the Baptizer which do not add anything of significance to our quest, but at Mark 10:38 (cf. parallels) our Lord asks: "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Clearly the reference is figurative-and has in view His forthcoming sufferings. Now we could say that our Lord was immersed in trouble but it would be equally possible to substitute the words overwhelmed with. It would be a bold person who attempted to derive a mode from this passage. Indeed the fact that the word here is being used figuratively is surely a warning that its meaning is much wider than some brethren suppose.

##### Mark 7

However there are two further passages in the Gospels which do shed light on the matter, but which may readily be overlooked by the English reader, as the Greek words are not translated baptize. Both arise out of Pharisaic ritualism and the first relevant section is in Mark 7:4:

"And when they come from the marketplace, except they wash themselves, they eat not. And many other things there are, which they

have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pots, copper vessels, and tables."

There is some textual variation but I have emphasized wash and washings, as the underlying word in the Greek is baptize. (Both baptizw and baptismoV are used.)

Now what is going on here? Is it likely that, on returning from the market place the purchasers immediately immersed themselves in water? They did not have our facilities of baths and running water-and normally water would have been laboriously carried into the home in water pots. And though there would be no great difficulty about cups, pitchers and copper vessels, would it have been practicable to immerse the couches or tables? Now twice in the passage reference is made to: "the tradition of the Elders." In the Book of Leviticus there are arrangements for ceremonial cleansing in connection with various matters. Pharisaism had built on that-a common fallacy, to which we are all even now prone-and extended it. Presumably what Mark is explaining to his readers is that certain ceremonial washings are being performed- probably by sprinkling; and this is called baptizing!

Luke 11

The second passage occurs in Luke 11:37-38, where a Pharisee had invited our Lord to dine:

"And he went in and sat down to eat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that He had not first washed before diner..."

In the Greek the word washed is actually baptized. 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? Well certainly the translators do not think so! Young's Literal Translation gives correctly "baptize;" but the dozen or so other translations consulted all have variations on "wash." So here we have the consent of many Greek scholars that the word baptize simply means wash!

Objection

It is interesting to note how Carson in his work on Baptism deals with this objection. If we read him aright his argument amounts to this: "Baptism means Immersion; therefore our Lord must have immersed." It is salutary to see how such an intelligent and well informed mind can get hold of the wrong end of the stick. Because he believed baptism meant immersion, and nothing but immersion, then that is what it must mean here-whatever the improbability. But this is to miss the whole point. What we are seeking to do in this series is not to take our definition from a dictionary but to go through the whole New Testament and work out from the actual circumstances what the writers meant when they used the word. Dictionaries, whatever their undoubted value when seeking for the meaning of a word, are purely secondary authorities, and may need to be altered in the light of further investigation into the actual usage of a particular word.

John 2

Further light on the previous incident is probably shed by the account we have of the marriage at Cana of Galilee in John 2. Here we read of "six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece" - probably 17 to 25 gallons. The normal procedure would be for water to be drawn in a container from the pot, so that the contents were not contaminated, and then poured over the hands, and possibly the feet, of the guest. There were elaborate rituals in connection with purification, which are hinted at in all three accounts. So doubtless all that the Pharisee had expected of our Lord in the account in Luke 11 is that He would have washed, or allowed His hands to be washed, before eating.

Perhaps, however, we should ask whether it would be possible to immerse in such a container? Well certainly not in one of this size. Here mathematics can again be invoked. If we take the outside amount, and recognising the pots are not quite full, we have a maximum amount of perhaps thirty gallons. Since there are 6.25 gallons to the cubic foot we have a capacity of some 5 cu. ft., which may be contained in a cylindrical pot fifteen inches in diameter and four feet high. Presumably the actual pots would have been wider in the middle and narrowed towards the top-but clearly such would be inadequate for immersion - a much larger vessel being needed.

Conclusion We may therefore summarize this part of our study by saying that in the two or three cases where baptism is mentioned, it can be deduced that it is being used in terms of pouring, sprinkling or washing and cannot reasonably be applied to immersion. This of course is entirely in line with the results of our earlier studies.

## Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles

### Introduction

At the outset of this book we are immediately faced with a repetition of the promise found in varying form in all four Gospels:

"John truly baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This continued repetition surely serves to remind us that what is important about Baptism is not the external sign-but the inward reality to which the sign points. We may be baptized by Aspersion, Affusion, single or Trine Immersion or varying combinations, but unless it is true of us that: "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...", it were well for us that we had never been born. What matters is not the Ritual-but the Reality to which the Ritual points. Unhappily one aspect of the Fall is that we readily tend to ritual!

We see this amongst some Christian Jews in their emphasis on circumcision; we see it amongst Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholics in their emphasis on including various rituals in worship; we see it amongst those who place religion in keeping Christmas and Easter and Good Friday, etc., and who insist on certain clothes and cloths-indeed we call them Ritualists: and it is to be feared that we see it amongst those who insist on a particular mode of Baptism; for the Galatian heresy is ever with us!

Of course I realise the last group will simply reply: "Baptism means immersion and nothing but immersion - we are simply carrying out our Lord's command." But

it is the purpose of this investigation to see whether this is so. Certainly our examination so far points in precisely the opposite direction.

The Day of Pentecost 2:38,41

The Holy Spirit had come upon the Apostles and as a result of Peter's preaching some three thousand had received his word and were baptized the same day. Two aspects are of interest here. First, if this was done by immersion then each of the twelve Apostles needed to handle some 250 persons. Assuming one minute each that amounts to five hours-allowing for breaks (see earlier calculations relative to John the Baptist); not a bad day's work!

The improbability of this is minor compared with the second aspect-the near impossibility of obtaining the requisite amount of water. Jerusalem, unlike most major cities, is not situated on a river. My copy of The New Bible Dictionary (1962) states that to this day water supply is a problem. Even in this country, where water is abundant and sanitary facilities excellent, anyone with any knowledge of Baptist Churches will be aware of the extensive planning which is often needed to carry out even a single immersion. The candidate may need to travel many miles. Anecdote and the literature list heroic efforts to move and fill tanks etc. And yet we find that on the Day of Pentecost, 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, the Apostles had apparently no difficulty in baptizing about three thousand persons. Well there would be no problem in doing it by sprinkling-or even by pouring.

Now inevitably we cannot know all the possibilities-but even if an extensive reservoir were available is it likely that a probably hostile population would suffer the extensive pollution to their water supplies in immersing three thousand; or indeed that the later candidates would suffer themselves to be immersed in such a polluted pool? We would simply ask which is the probable method? I have never seen the Day of Pentecost cited in the proof texts for immersion- nor am I surprised that it is not!

The Samaritans &12,13,16

We learn nothing directly about mode from this passage but it is worth noting first that "both men and women were baptized." Second, the nature of receiving the Holy Spirit is indicated by the statement: "For as yet He had fallen upon none of them."

The Ethiopian Eunuch 8.36,38,39

This passage is almost invariably quoted by Baptists as a proof text of their position:

"And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water...."

Now this is precisely the account we might give of a baptism by immersion-though it does not prove that it was! Let us examine the circumstances a little more closely. First, we note that the Scriptures specifically call our attention in verse 26 to the fact that: "This is desert." Second, we read that they had encountered "some water." We are not told how much. It might have been water trickling down a rock face; or a spring in the desert; or a small or large pool. That it was a body sufficient to immerse someone in is pure presumption. It may be said that "the eunuch went down into the water" but this does not prove

immersion because precisely the same is said of Philip-if it proves it of one it proves it of both! And as if to make matters quite clear the passage goes on; "when they had come up out," emphasizing what was true of the eunuch was true of Philip. If in fact the water was a small pool or even a spring and they had both stepped into it and Philip had cupped his hand and poured or sprinkled water on the eunuch, all that is said in the account would equally be covered. Indeed the same would be true if it was simply a trickle on a rock face that Philip used. For although the most usual translation of the Greek word "eiV" is "into", it may simply mean "to" or indeed quite a number of other things depending on the context; similarly the word "EK-/~t' translated "out of ' might be "from." I s it perhaps sign)ficant that although there is a perfectly good way in Greek of unambiguously conveying the sense "into" and "out of," the Holy Spirit did not in fact do so?

The truth of the matter is that Baptists begin by assuming "immersion" and then simply read it into the passage and use it for a proof text: which is of course to fall into the logical trap of arguing in a circle.

Saul 9:18; cf. 22:16

Here we have an account of the baptism of Paul of Tarsus. We read:

"...and he arose and was baptized."

Let us simply remind ourselves of the circumstances. On his way to Damascus Saul had been confronted and converted by the risen Lord. Entering the city blinded he had been three days without food or drink when Ananias came to him and he received his sight. Then the account simply says: 1. He arose. 2. He was baptized. 3. When he had received food he was strengthened.

A simple reading of the narrative, without preconceptions, suggests that having risen Paul was baptized by Ananias, standing up - presumably either by sprinkling or pouring in situ - and then took food. Is it at all likely that in his weakened condition Ananias conveyed him either to some public bath, if such existed, or outside the city to the Abana or Pharpar - and having searched out some suitable quiet spot immersed him before he had had opportunity even to break his fast? What simply are the probabilities of the situation?

The Baptism of Cornelius, his relatives and close friends 10:44,47-48

Peter, having been sent for by this Gentile centurion is engaged in preaching to the party when:

"...the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word."

Those who had come with Peter were astonished:

"...because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Then Peter asks the obvious question:

"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the Name of the Lord."

The natural reading of the passage is that water was then brought into the house and the party was baptised-either by pouring or sprinkling. This interpretation is strengthened by Peter's defence of his actions in 11:15-16:

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

They had experienced that the Holy Spirit "fell" or was "poured out" on them. So analogy would obviously lead them to expect that baptism with water would follow a similar mode.

Lydia and her Household 16:14,15

As a result of the missionary activity of Paul and his party they had come to Philippi. Here two incidents of Baptism are recorded. In the first, on the Sabbath day Paul had preached at a riverside place of prayer. The sequence of events recorded is:

1. Among the worshippers was a certain Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira.
2. The Lord opened her heart so that she heeded God's word.
3. Then "she was baptized and her household"
4. She then constrained Paul and his party to stay at her house.

The implications are so well stated by another writer that we shall avail ourselves of some of his words. Is it likely:

"that this respectable Eastern lady of good position was immersed, without previous preparation, at a public place, by a man she had never seen before? Such a thing would be a flagrant violation of the customs and usages of the East, where women have always been retiring in their habit. And Paul...was not the man to do unnecessary violence to these feelings of delicacy.... Beyond all shadow of doubt Lydia was not immersed."

One has only to try and visualise Paul, Lydia and her household, all dripping wet, making their way back into the city, to see the folly of the contention that Baptism is "immersion and nothing but immersion!"

The Philippian Jailer and his family 16:33,34

The second incident in Philippi concerned Paul and Silas' imprisonment. The facts are very familiar. Around midnight there was an earthquake, and the jailer waking out of his sleep fears the prisoners have escaped and is about to kill himself when Paul intervenes and the man is saved. Then:

"he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately was baptized, he and all his. And when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them...."

Now the story tells us that the jailer took water to wash their wounds. Then immediately he and all the family were baptized. Logically the water for this was drawn from the same cistern or well which served the prison. Is it likely that the prison possessed also a full tank in which he and his family could be immersed? Even less likely is it that, having locked up the other prisoners the whole party proceeded in the early hours to the local

river and were there immersed-particularly in the light of Paul's comment in verse 37. Once again every probability points to these Baptisms being carried out by effusion or aspersion- particularly as they were fitted in between the washing of their wounds and the provision of a meal.

Crispus and his household 18:8. The Ephesian Disciples 19:1-7

Nothing immediately relevant to our enquiry into the meaning of the word Baptism is furnished by these two references. We may note that just as this book began with a reference to the connection between being baptized with water and with the Holy Spirit, so the last reference to the subject, apart from a reference back in Paul's account of his conversion, again links the two items together, for it concludes:

"When they heard this, they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them...."

#### Conclusions

We have now gone over virtually every reference in the Book of Acts to the subject of Baptism. In seeking to elucidate its mode we have considered one passage where immersion may have been possible-that of the Ethiopian Eunuch. But certainly that passage does not prove that it was immersion, and quite apart from the implications of other passages, some of the incidental circumstances suggest it was not. In each and every other case where there is enough information to draw conclusions, on any fair consideration of the evidence, the implications point to pouring or sprinkling being the only probable, or in some cases possible, mode.

This is of course entirely in line with the conclusions we came to from a study of the Gospels-and indeed the meaning of Baptism itself. It remains to round off what may be deduced about the mode of Baptism from the Epistles and Revelation.

#### Baptism in the Epistles and Revelation

##### Introduction

When we turn to the Epistles of the New Testament we find more or less extended treatments of such subjects as Assurance; Church Officers; the Gospel; Immorality; Israel; Judgement; Justification; the Law; Legalism; Marriage and Divorce; Resurrection; the Second Coming; Sectarianism; Sin; Spiritual Gifts; the State; Things Indifferent, etc. Even the subject of Widows occupies 14 verses of I Timothy-some 12% of the Epistle.

By contrast the words: baptizw, baptisma, baptismoV occur only 19 times in the Epistles: three times in Romans; ten in I Corinthians; once each in Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and I Peter; and twice in Hebrews. baptw occurs once in Revelation. We look in vain for any extended treatment of the subject-the references being mainly incidental to the actual discussions.

Now compare this with virtually any Confession of Faith. It would be almost unthinkable that the matter is not discussed-often at length. One has seen an Introductory leaflet put out by a Baptist Church in which, in order to explain their name, substantial space is devoted to stating that only adults are baptized on profession of faith and that Baptism is by immersion! All this is

quite foreign to the New Testament. Even in the Pastorals, where surely we might have expected it, there is only an incidental reference in Titus 3:5.

We have already remarked that the matter simply does not occupy the place in the New Testament that it does in our discussions-and it might well be felt that this extended series of articles already transgresses that balance, were it not that a defence of the Biblical and Reformed position is forced on us by those who so pertinaciously urge what we are convinced is an un-Biblical one.

With these considerations in mind let us examine what we may deduce from the texts themselves.

Rom. 6:3,4

It is perhaps understandable that those who already hold the immersionist position will read into these verses a confirmation of it; and then cite them, as they regularly do, as proof texts for immersion. And certainly when we find a non-Baptist scholar of the stature of Bishop Lightfoot citing verse 4 as an "image of baptism" we should pause. However, not too long-for if we have followed out the logic of the position so far we hold no such presuppositions. Let us then take a longer look at the passage. The following points should be borne in mind.

1. The Apostle is not here dealing with Baptism as such - but with the Antinomian objection which invariably arises whenever the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone is properly expounded.
2. It would be rather odd that we need to base an argument for a particular mode on an incidental reference dealing with another subject altogether. For the essential refutation of the Antinomian position is that we are united with Christ.
3. It is this union of the believer with Christ that is the essential point that Paul is concerned to convey-not only Baptized and Buried but also Crucified and Planted - the latter two having no reference to water baptism. The word translated 'planted' in the AV and "united" in the RV has the idea of grafted - a very intimate union. A full exposition of the passage would extend well beyond the confines of an article-and the interested reader is referred to the appropriate commentaries.<sup>1</sup>

There is however one purely practical consideration which should be borne in mind-and it is this. We are simply being misled by our experience of burials in seeing a connection between that and the immersionists' practice. For our Lord's burial was not a going down into a dug grave. Rather it was an "entombment". Once this is grasped all apparent force in the passage simply disappears.

I Cor. 1:13-17

This passage, though it contains six of our twenty texts, adds nothing to our understanding of the mode of Baptism.

<sup>1</sup>John Murray and D. Martyn Lloyd Jones will both be found helpful. See Murray's Commentary on Romans and also his volume on baptism. I found Lloyd Jones quite convincing in seeing the references to baptism pointing to I Cor 12:13 - that is Real Baptism, though I doubt if his distinction between "with the Spirit" and "by the Spirit" is valid.

I Cor. 10.2

Speaking of the Israelites coming out of Egypt Paul writes: "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea..." This passage has evoked some rather odd exegesis. Gill, in defence of his belief that Baptism always means immersion, visualises the Israelites passing through the Red Sea with the water standing on either side and the cloud overhead as a picture of immersion. Others have wondered whether Psalm 68:9, "thou O God, didst send a plentiful rain...", referring to the wilderness, might not apply-presumably Baptism by sprinkling! But the truth surely is that just as Rom. 6 applies to our union with Christ, so all the text is telling us is that these are united with Moses-they are Moses' men. Incidentally the whole multitude was baptized: men, women and children.

I Cor. 12:13

This text refers to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit-the reality which is symbolized by water baptism.

I Cor. 15.29

If I understood what these two references meant it might add something to our understanding of the Meaning and possibly the Subjects of Baptism. It adds nothing to our understanding of the Mode.  
Gal. 3.27

This text probably refers to what we have called real Baptism, not water Baptism. In other words, to the Baptism with the Holy Spirit to which reference has just been made. It adds nothing to our understanding of the mode.

Eph. 4.5

This occurs in a passage devoted to the subject and importance of Christian Unity. We are reminded that there is: "One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism." Yet it is notorious that baptism is a divisive issue! It would seem therefore that it must point to "real" baptism-and not to any particular mode associated with the ritual.

Col. 2:11,12

Verse 12 parallels Rom. 6:4. However the previous verse introduces an additional item of information for it tells us that: "in whom also you were circumcised..." Now clearly physical circumcision is not meant; indeed the passage goes on to add "with the circumcision made without hands..."

This would confirm the opinion previously expressed that what is in view is our union with Christ effected by the Holy Spirit-not water baptism at all. This then is an additional reason for rejecting any adventitious connection with immersion.

Heb. 6:2; 9:10

The first passage speaks of "the doctrine of Baptisms..." and the second of "various washings..." The Greek has: baptismoV;-baptismos. The only other occurrences are at Mk. 7:4,8-passages which speak of the: "washing of cups, pitchers...", etc., and which we have already considered. These references all seem to point back to the Old Testament modes of symbolic purging of sin-and the

attentive reader will have noted how cleansing is made by various sprinklings and washings: Lev. 14 6,7; Num. 8:7; 19:11-13. cf. Ps. 51:7; Ezk. 36:25-27. That this is what is in mind seems to be confirmed by the examples given in Heb. 9:13,19,21: "sprinkling the unclean...and sprinkled both the book itself, and all the people.... Moreover he sprinkled with blood...."

Now a distinction can just about be drawn between these two almost synonymous Greek words *baptisma* and *baptismoV*: the one referring to Christian baptism, the other to Old Testament purifications: but the obvious implication is that both were carried out by sprinkling or washing.

I Pet. 3.21

This probably refers to Holy Spirit baptism-not water baptism.

Rev. 19:13

The Greek word is *baptw*. It occurs also in Lk. 16:24 and Jn. 13:26, and is translated "dip" in all three places. Here finally we seem to have an example of "immersion"! But when we look up the cross reference in Isa. 63:3,4 from which the image was drawn we read: "and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment...." What John saw in his vision is Christ's garments sprinkled by the blood of His enemies-and the word he used to describe this, *baptw*, is the root word from which we have the four others and whose meaning we have been trying to ascertain.

#### Discussion

I. I have looked at every text in the New Testament which uses the word Baptism in one of its five Greek forms. Most of these have been discussed, but the 14 references to *baptisthV*, i.e. John the Baptist, are generally incidental and mainly omitted.

Now if we take paper and draw on it three columns and label the first, Immersion Certain; the second, Immersion Possible or Probable; and the third, Immersion Impossible or Improbable, we may, apart from those references which are figurative, assign every text. Not a single one goes into the first column-Immersion certain! In the second may go the references to our Lord's Baptism; the Ethiopian Eunuch and Rev. 19:13-the garment dipped in blood. Virtually all the other references where an assignment can be made will be found in the column-Immersion Impossible or Improbable.

I believe these results speak for themselves and I would encourage anyone bothered by this matter to repeat the exercise for themselves. To speak plainly, had Scripture wished us to know that immersion and only immersion constituted Christian Baptism, why in no single case is immersion certain, and why in so many cases does a plain reading lead to the probable conclusion that immersion was not involved?

II. Why then the widespread and unthinking adoption of Baptist views in Evangelical Churches? Well probably "unthinking" actually sums it up! A Greek dictionary is consulted and gives the meaning "dip" or "submerge"; a quick glance at the New Testament suggests both John's Baptisms and that by Philip of the Ethiopian Eunuch were immersion, and a misunderstanding of Romans 6, completes the delusion.

Our experience tells us that the earth is flat; that the sun rises in the east and goes round the earth to the west; and that if you burn things they decrease in weight. But the facts do not bear us out-and we have to learn that in fact the earth is basically a ball and the apparent motion of the sun is caused by the earth's rotation. Only the coming of accurate balances served to explode the phlogiston theory. There is absolutely nothing wrong with framing an hypothesis as to a situation provided it is then checked and if necessary revised in the light of all the facts. The Baptist hypothesis rests on arguing from the particular to the general-a logical fallacy-and not checking out every aspect. For if it can be shown that in a

single case Baptism does not mean immersion then the whole argument crumbles.

In fact we have shown above that there is not a single certain case of immersion in the New Testament and that the probability in case after case is that Baptism was administered by sprinkling or pouring. Let our Baptist brethren go through the whole New Testament and show that every instance recorded was, or probably was, immersion; and if this cannot be done-and of course we are convinced that it cannot-we invite them to abandon their schismatical divisions and return to the Reformed Faith.

III. But there are additional points which confirm our position and which need to be set out. There is in fact a threefold aspect to Baptism. First, lying behind the matter are all the purifications of the Old Testament, which of course pointed forward to the taking away of sins by our Lord Jesus Christ. We find reference to these in the New Testament in the baptizing of pots and vessels, etc. in Mark 7; in our Lord's failure to wash or baptize Himself in Luke 11; in the dispute between John's disciples and Jews "about purification;" and finally in the references to Baptisms in Hebrews. Now all these baptisms or purifications were clearly carried out by pouring, sprinkling or washing.

Second, as we have seen, the strong probability is that most of the Baptisms of the New Testament were carried out by pouring or sprinkling; and as we have shown there is nothing in the terms to imply that immersion was ever practised.

Third, these water Baptisms pointed forward to or signified real Baptism; the engrafting of us into the body of Christ by regeneration-the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. And how is that represented to us? Here is a selection of phrases: "sat upon each of them;" "as yet He had fallen upon none of them;" "the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word;" "the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning;" "the Holy Spirit came upon them..." The point surely which is being emphasised in each case is that 'real' baptism is pictured not as an immersion in the Holy Spirit, but that He falls on us from above-as in baptism by sprinkling or pouring.

Each of these three separate items is congruous with the others. The washings and sprinklings of the Old order point forward to the pourings or sprinklings of the New in Baptism and finally to the great Reality of the falling of the Holy Spirit on believers. And we are reminded in Scripture that a three-fold cord is not easily broken. Substitute immersion in the second and the whole imagery falls apart.

IV. We have earlier remarked that the practical requirements of Immersion pose many problems which are familiar to all-such as the need to build or have available baptistries in buildings. In addition there are medical ones. At least one minister has remarked on being ill for days after baptizing by immersion a large number of persons, and C.H. Spurgeon in his later years delegated the

operation as his health would not justify him in performing it. How odd to have a ministerial ordinance which the minister cannot perform.

One has heard of one Anglican missionary in Kenya who insisted on baptizing converts by immersion and who contracted bilharzia as a result so that his missionary career was terminated- and indeed his life imperilled. In other cases people have nearly been drowned when baptisms have been performed in the sea. More might be said-but we forbear.

V. This consideration rather naturally leads on to our final one. The worship of the Old Testament with its types and shadows and sacrifices must have been extremely laborious. But our Lord tells the Samaritan woman: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers

shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." In the Acts and the Epistles we can identify the elements of that worship. It was performed "with reverence and godly fear" on the Lord's Day and consisted of:

1. Reading the Scriptures.
2. Praise-in the singing of the Psalms.
3. Prayer.
4. Preaching the Word.
5. Benediction. To that were added the two Sacraments:
6. Baptism, and
7. The Lord's Supper.

This extremely simple New Testament worship required no Temple, not even a synagogue. Rather regularly the Scripture speaks of "a church in a house". Even two or three gathered together were promised God's presence. The head of the household or an elder to minister, a supply of the

Scriptures' some water, a little bread and wine and all was provided for. Meeting Houses could come later-and would obviously be convenient where larger numbers were involved. But there are now in areas of persecution, and doubtless may be in the future, particularly where no Reformed worship is available, great advantages in such simplicity.

But on the Baptist premise all this is distorted! Much water is needed, some large container- and as all who have experienced it know, no small performance. Does this sound like the simplicity of New Testament worship - or some Pharisaic distortion which has crept in later to distort the primitive and Biblical mode?

#### Conclusion

We rest our case - believing it to be unassailable. It only remains to consider the Subjects of Baptism in the concluding section.

#### THE SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM

## Introduction

ONE of the advantages of writing on the Reformed Faith is that there is no particular exegetical axe to grind. It is not likely, after some centuries, that any serious alteration may need to be made, though clearly there may need to be minor adjustments or clarifications. The one requirement is simply to set out as clearly and faithfully as possible the Biblical position-and there is no need to be concerned about or suppress any fact; even if it may point in another direction.

In the earlier material dealing with the Mode of Baptism, attention was called to three separate lines of evidence. First, the principle modes of ceremonial purification in the Old Testament were pouring, sprinkling or washing; and these cleansings are called Baptisms in the New Testament. Second, when we examine all the references to actual Baptisms in the New Testament we find that individuals, small numbers or large, are instantly accommodated and with a complete lack of bother. The clear practical implication is that Baptism meant pouring or sprinkling-not immersion. Third, ritual Baptism with water simply points to real Baptism with the Holy Spirit: "I indeed have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Now the Spirit is always spoken of as "falling" or being "poured out" etc., so we would expect the mode of the ritual to picture the reality. Each of these lines of evidence confirms the others, and a threefold cord is not easily broken. They point to the fact that the Apostolic Mode was Affusion or Aspersion (Pouring or Sprinkling) -not Immersion.

The only significant line of argument I have seen against this evidence is that there is some historical material pointing to Immersion in the sub-apostolic period so that around AD 150 the usual practice was Triune immersion in the nude. In fact over the centuries a vast number of different ceremonies have arisen varying from Triune immersion at one extreme to the practice in St. Martin's, Birmingham, in the last century where those to be baptized were arranged round the communion rails and sprinkled from the font by the minister with a brush.

Now to these various modes the Reformed response is that our authority is simply Scripture-not what may be gleaned from archaeology or history - and to remind our readers that the Biblical requirement is that all things be done decently and in order."

There is an interesting aspect to this as we come to consider the subjects of Baptism, for there is reasonable historical evidence pointing to the Baptism of some children as early as AD 70 or 80 - till within the Apostolic period-and continuing thereafter with hardly any dissent for 600 years. Nonetheless we repeat, our authority is Scripture. The matter must be fairly determined from there; however interesting or illuminating the historical record may be.

## State of the Question

The Christian Church is, or should be, a missionary organisation. As it extends its bounds men and women will be converted to Christ. Profession of the Faith is ratified by Baptism. We read in Acts of individuals, families and multitudes who are baptised. We have no problem here. Our Service books provide for adult Baptisms. We believe in them and practise them. 'here is no dispute between us and Baptists on this matter! The real question between us is this: Should the children of one or both professing parents be baptized? To that we who are Reformed reply:

"Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized."  
[Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXVIII - Of Baptism]

That is the sole point at issue. We are not concerned to defend abuses of infant baptism, or misunderstandings of particular services which may be used, nor here to discuss the effects of Baptism. The question in fact may be put another way round: Are our infant seed to be treated as members of the Church?

#### Preliminary Considerations

1 Systematic Theology is connected and therefore any specific doctrine inevitably depends on others. There are two specific ones that concern us here: Church and Covenant. There has been extensive discussion of both points, not least in the Journal where this material originally appeared. Here we simply wish to bring out two points. Although a new form is implied by our Lord's words, "I will build my church...", there is a generic unity with the church (Acts 7:38) of the Old Testament so that Paul in Romans 11:16-21 can speak of us as being grafted into and partaking "of the root and fatness of the olive tree;" and we are reminded that "thou bearest not the root, but the root thee."

Likewise, though we speak of an Old and a New Covenant, there is an essential unity so that Galatians 3 tells us that we are partakers of the Covenant made with Abraham, and Hebrews refers to "an everlasting Covenant." Both aspects are summed up in the terms of the promise to Abraham; "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Gen. 12:3: The unity of both is further confirmed by the repeated promise of God: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

#### Arguments for Infant Baptism

1. We begin by reminding our readers that "Salvation is of the LORD." Who are saved, and consequently who are lost, lies in the Decree of God formed in eternity. But practically God uses means, and we perceive from Scripture that it normally pleases Him to save in the line of generations. At the outset of the sacred volume in Genesis 4 and 5 we note two lines being traced. First we have the line of Cain. Here we see the development of husbandry, mechanics and music; also of polygamy and warfare. But nothing is said of grace. Then there is the line of Seth. We note here that "then began men to call on the name of the LORD." Although we cannot know whether all his named descendants were saved, yet in the seventh generation we read: "and Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Further Lamech and Noah were gracious men. Now clearly not all the Sethites were regenerate for we read in Gen. 6. of mixed marriages between the two lines-and in spite of many sons and daughters being born- by Noah's time in the tenth generation only he and his family remained godly.

2. From Noah's line came in time Abraham; but we note in passing a significant prophecy. "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem." Now we have already noted that in Abraham all nations are to be blessed, but as we read the story we see the development of the Covenant promise signified by circumcision for the adult Abraham and the men of his house and all the male infants eight days old: "and God said

unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations." Gen. 17:9. Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had...." But Isaac is circumcised at eight days old. The infant church contained not only believers-Abraham; but also their seed-Isaac.

3. Further we read of Abraham that the Lord said: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him." There was to be godly training in the ways of the Lord, or as the New Testament puts it; "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

4. In the time of Moses a second sacrament was added-the Passover. Now both involved the shedding of blood and of course pointed forward to the one great and final sacrifice of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us." Now, as we look back, the shedding of blood is no longer appropriate, so Baptism replaces Circumcision: "In Him you were also circumcised...buried with Him in baptism. . .," and the Lord's Supper replaces the Passover.

5. The position then is this: for 2 000 years Church and Covenant included not only believers but their infant seed. All male children were circumcised at eight days-or they were treated as cut off from the Covenant. Adult proselyte members were circumcised on admission. This continued in the Church as late as AD 60, for we read of those who continued circumcising their children at the time of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem.

6. Now Christ is "the messenger of the covenant," Mall 3:1-the Covenant made with Abraham-and He is "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." Rom. 15:8,9. Now what were the terms of the Covenant? Just this, that He would be "a God unto Abraham and to his seed." Is there then any command that this privileged position of children has been abrogated under the terms of the New Covenant?

7. Let us then seek to review the various references with this question in mind.

Matt. 19:13-15

Here we see our Lord's attitude when the disciples would have resisted. "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Acts 2.37-39

Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost and in response to the question "Men and brethren, What shall we do?" replies: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...For the promise is to you and to your children...."

Acts 16:14,16

Here we read of a certain Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household...."

Acts 16.30-34

Then in the story of the Philippian Jailer he asks him: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be

saved, and thy house. And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all who were in his house... And was baptized, he and all his, straightway...and he...rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." Note: the jailer asks what must I do, but the reply includes his house, so we see that all the family were baptized, but it was he, singular, who had believed.

I Cor. 1:16

"And I also baptized the household of Stephanas." Here we have a third example of a household baptism.

I Cor. 7:14

"Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now are they holy." The children of the Covenant are in a special position before God. There is debate as to what precisely is meant by "Holy" in the Corinthian passage but I suggest that the texts which follow do throw some light on the matter. In Ezk. 16:21 God complains: "You have slain My children..." and in Mall 2:13- 15 rebukes Divorce, "that he might seek a godly seed."

Eph. 6:1-3

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. "Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth".

Col. 3.20

"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."

Now, who are being addressed in these two Epistles? In the first it is: "To the saints who are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus;" and in the second: "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, who are at Colosse." We see instruction being given to husbands, wives, masters, servants and children. All are equally being treated as members of the Church!

Discussion

Let us now be clear. It is not asserted that these texts prove infant baptism. We do not know whether the households of Stephanas, Lydia or the Philippian jailer contained any children, though there must be a good probability that one or more did. What is being asserted is this. The children of Church members under the Old Covenant were also treated as Church members and the males received the sacrament of circumcision. There is no evidence that this privilege has been withdrawn under the New Covenant and the incidental notices of the New Testament are entirely consistent with their membership and consequent baptism. Put negatively we may reasonably ask our Baptist brethren with their emphasis on individual repentance and faith, to say what in their system and practice corresponds to the three household baptisms mentioned above?

We may summarize what we have been saying by recognising that God is Sovereign in Salvation. But it pleases Him to use means to His ends and it is His gracious and merciful provision to normally call His elect in a Covenant line. We see this in the line of Seth over against that of Cain. We do not see for instance election operating apparently randomly between the two lines. That of course does not mean that all the Covenant line are saved-amongst the Sethites it would

appear that the majority fell away. Nor does it mean that God may not start a fresh Covenant line at any time; for we see precisely that happening in all missionary outreach. I have heard of Dutch Reformed people who can trace back their ancestry 400 or 450 years and say that in every generation there have been those who have called upon the name of the Lord. Under the Old dispensation the sign of the Covenant line was circumcision; under the New, baptism. It is entirely in line with this that we should expect to baptize our infant seed-and all the evidence points in this direction. The line of Shem ran down through Abraham to the Patriarchs and thus to all Israel. Most of us in the west are Japhethites. It is appropriate that in this, as in other regards, we should dwell in the tents of Shem!

#### Conclusion

We have sought, up to this point, to set forth the truth in a positive manner. It only remains to consider objections to paedobaptism and to draw some practical conclusions from the whole discussion.

#### OBJECTIONS TO PAEDOBAPTISM

IN the previous pages we attempted to set forth the positive truth that the infant seed of believing parents are to be baptized. "The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established His Church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until He puts them out. He has nowhere put them out. They are still then members of His Church and as such entitled to its ordinances. Among these ordinances is baptism, which standing in a similar place in the New Dispensation to circumcision in the Old, is like it to be given to children."

The quotation is taken from the conclusion of a fascinating article by B.B. Warfield entitled: "The Polemics of Infant Baptism" in which he takes up six objections to Infant Baptism listed by A.H. Strong in his Systematic Theology and shows that not one is valid. (Studies in Theology, pp.389ff.) The whole article is well worth reading. Here, in a much briefer response, I simply want to consider three objections which regularly occur.

Objection I. "There is no command in the New Testament for Infant Baptism."

The first response must surely be that the argument is on the other foot! That infant circumcision as well as adult was practised by the express command of God in the Old Testament Church is admitted by all. Where, under the New Dispensation, has it been revoked? And why, under the brighter and fuller light of the Gospel, are our children to be spiritually disadvantaged as compared with their position in the Old?

Second, when, as usually happens, our objector states that he needs a positive command, there is surely a measure of arrogance here. God instructs us in His Word in Prose: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In Poetry: "The heavens declare the Glory of God." By Parable: "A Sower went forth to sow." There is Allegory: "Which things are an allegory", and also Apocalyptic: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ.... "

Matters may be: "either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I.VI). It is not for the creature to stand in judgement on how the Creator should instruct us-let us reverently accept whatever way He does.

Third, it may be objected that "I care not a fig for your 'good and necessary consequence'. Give me a plain command of Scripture-and I will obey!" Do you not? Every Christian Church I know rightly admits believing women to the Lord's Supper. But there is neither command nor example of such in the New Testament. We do so, and properly do so, as a result of "good and necessary consequence."

A consideration of these points shows that this argument simply falls to the ground.

Objection 2. "The Scriptures require Faith and Repentance before Baptism."

The argument is of course that as infants are incapable of exercising either they are not proper subjects of baptism. But let us spell the argument out a little further and it will be seen to be a sophism. What is actually being implied is this:

The Scriptures require faith and repentance of Adults, in order to baptism; but as Infants cannot exercise these they cannot be baptised. The fallacy lies in the fact that the premise is about adults but the conclusion is, about infants.

This will perhaps be made clearer by substituting another Scripture: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned " So: the Scriptures require belief and baptism of Adults, in order to be saved; but as Infants cannot exercise these they will be condemned.

Again: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." So: the Scriptures require work of Adults, in order to eat; but as Infants cannot work they may not be fed!

The sophism, a specious but fallacious argument, is surely now clear. We do not believe all infants are lost, nor do we believe they should not eat. The mistake arises simply by applying to infants what was intended for adults-and clearly then this argument falls to the ground also.

Objection 3.

This series has been primarily concerned with analysing and commenting on the Biblical data. But there is an historical objection which is rather regularly brought up. The Reformers, and those of us who take the Reformed position, are accused of having carried over Infant Baptism from Rome. Now, if I were to point out to Baptists, that in practising immersion they were simply following the Jehovah's Witnesses, they would indignantly and rightly reply that they were following their practice long before the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses were ever invented.

Precisely the same consideration applies here. The history of infant baptism goes back as far as we have historical records. To suggest, as one writer did, that it does not occur before 400 AD is simply wrong. The earliest development of sacerdotalism occurs around AD 250 with Cyprian. Over the centuries the See of Rome steadily increased her pretensions-as the restraining hand of Caesar went down so the power of the Man of Sin went up-II Th. 2. But a millennium was to pass before the Roman system was fully developed.

One might just as well argue that to sing Psalms is not Biblical because Rome sings Psalms. We sing them just because we find that our Lord and His Apostles sang them. It is those who do not sing them who are being un-Biblical. The

Reformed practice owes nothing to Rome-and yet the fact that the canard is so readily repeated suggests some desperation in the Baptist case!

#### IMPLICATIONS

WHAT conclusions may we draw from the foregoing?

I. When a person has been baptized in the name of the Trinity it is not to be repeated. It simply will not do for it to be set aside with some comment about "infant sprinkling." The minister who carries out such a repetition should know better-and the candidate could know better if only he or she had enquired. I know the word anabaptist carries negative overtones, and one would not for a moment seek to defend the terrible incidents which have occurred in earlier centuries, but it still seems the only word to apply to this practice of repetition. But, says someone, my parents were only nominal Christians. I was baptized because it was "the done thing". So God in mercy has given you the reality to correspond to what, in perhaps ignorance, was given in ritual as a child. Rejoice-but do not repeat. But, says another, the Church in which I was baptized is largely apostate and the minister was an ungodly man. If true, these things are common and deplorable-but do not invalidate official actions-any more than the character of a Registrar performing marriages affects their validity. The only exception to this rule concerns the cults such as Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, etc., where in all cases the Triune God is denied. In these cases Christian Baptism should be sought.

II. Where a person has been brought to true faith in Christ and has not previously been baptized then they should seek it as a matter of urgency. Baptism is the defining evidence to themselves and the world that they are Christians. It is perhaps ironical that the one place where one is most likely to meet unbaptized believers is in Baptist Churches-or amongst those connected by birth with them. It may be that, just as in some Presbyterian Churches there is a reluctance to take the Lord's Supper because of its infrequency and consequently the emphasis placed on it, the

un-Biblical emphasis placed on Baptism and the demand for a particular (and we are persuaded un-Biblical) mode, often along with a great deal of associated display, inhibits precisely the more exercised and sensitive souls who in the judgement of charity are proper candidates.

III. But beyond our quarrels and divisions we must seek the reality of the Faith. Have we truly repented and believed the gospel? Has God in Christ saved our souls? Whatever conclusions we come to about mode and subjects-the ritual-are we partakers of the reality to which it points-the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the New Birth? If not, all our theologizing will be in vain-and it would be better if we had never been born!

#### Final Conclusions

In somewhat thankfully coming to the end I want to again recognise the danger mentioned at the start of getting the whole subject out of proportion. The defence of the Reformed and Biblical position is forced on us by those who see the matter as of such importance as to set up Baptist Churches, appoint Baptist Ministers and structure a whole denomination. Historically this whole movement is schismatic.

We now invite all such to carefully reconsider their position. It is common for Baptists to see baptism as symbolising the death and resurrection of Christ. If however they will consider what has been written on its Meaning I suspect there is little with which they will wish to quarrel. As regards the Mode, let the reader, instead of relying on a few proof texts, carefully go through the New Testament and note every place where Baptism is spoken of-including those texts where the original is hidden by the translation. Let him consider the multitudes at Jordan, the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, the Jailer at night, etc. Then compare this with the amount of work involved in the average church in say immersing one person. Now recollect that the ritual is to represent the reality of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. I believe the only conclusion can be to give up the insistence on immersion. As regards Subjects we are agreed that converted adults should be baptized. The only real question is the treatment of their children. Here we need to consider the whole data of Scripture. The fact that children were included in the Covenant from the first, the absence of any indication of a change, and then the incidental notices of family baptisms and the commands addressed to children as members of the church, can only point one way.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The best book on Baptism is the Bible! The purpose of these articles has simply been to bring out the Biblical position, and we simply invite our readers to emulate the Berean Christians and search out for themselves the truth of the matter, and we are confident of the result. But many of us are deficient in Greek, and also we will overlook matters unless our attention is specifically called to them. Certainly these articles could not have been written without drawing on others. The interested student may find help in the following amongst many:

Jay E. Adams            The Meaning and Mode of Baptism.  
James M. Chaney      William the Baptist.  
Peter Edwards        , Candid Reasons for Renouncing the Principles of  
Anti-paedobaptism.  
Edmund B. Fairfield    Letters on Baptism.  
W,J. Lowe      Baptism, Its Mode and Subjects.  
Pierre Ch. Marcel The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism.  
John Murray Christian Baptism.  
Duane Spencer        Holy Baptism.