

In the world of "Christian Denominations," two things about water baptism have long been debated. The "Purpose" (which is the topic of Bible Talks 111-115) and the "Method" (which shall be considered in this Bible Talk). Basically, three methods of water "baptism" are administered in various churches: Sprinkling, Pouring, and Immersion. For all practical purposes, our first and foremost concern should be to determine what was taught and practiced by the Apostles and Evangelists of the first century church. A simple study in language will help us in this pursuit.

Perhaps you realize that the New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek. This language was far more explicit than our English of today, for the Greeks of the first century had very specific words with very specific meanings. For instance, our English word "baptism" is a noun which comes from the Greek word baptisma. In his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W.E. Vine defines baptisma in this way: "baptism, consisting of the process of immersion, submersion and emergence (from *the root word baptō, which means to dip*)." The verb form of this word, baptizo, means "to dip *or* immerse" (as defined in The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised).

When the Greek speaking writers of the first century used the word baptizo, they did not have in mind the idea of "sprinkle" or "pour." They had specific words for those ideas. The word rantizo, which means "to sprinkle," is used in Hebrews 9:21 to describe the sprinkling of blood in the tabernacle. The word Ekkeo, which means "to pour," is used in John 2:15 to describe an occasion when coins were "poured out." Obviously, New Testament writers knew the words which meant "to sprinkle" and "to pour," but they used the word which meant "to immerse" when describing baptism "... for the forgiveness of your sins ..." (Acts 2:38).

Now ... let's see if we can detect any evidence in the New Testament that "immersion" was the method employed for "baptism." In Acts 8:38, when the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized, it says, "... and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him." Obviously, there would be no need for both men to go "down into the water" if sprinkling or pouring were used. But it **is** necessary for both to go "down into the water" if immersion was the method. Again, in John 3:23 we find the implication of immersion. It reads, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized." The reason people had to come to John for baptism was because of the ample supply of water at that location. John could have gone to them and could have sprinkled 500 people from a canteen if immersion was not the method he was using. Add to that Paul's description of "baptism" in Romans 6:4. From this passage it seems certain that immersion must have been the practice used. Paul said we are "**buried** with Him through baptism into death." The symbolism of a **Death, Burial, and Resurrection** is best served by immersion in water. We do not "sprinkle" some dirt on a person who is being buried, but we "enclose" them in the earth.

After looking at New Testament examples of baptism, New Testament descriptions of baptism, and the New Testament word for baptism, we wonder why immersion is not the method used in every case today. The reasons are obvious: "convenience and tradition." What do you think ... is it O.K. to change the doctrine or practice of New Testament writers for the sake of convenience? Is it O.K. to replace the teachings of Christ's Apostles and Prophets with the traditions of uninspired others? Well ... maybe you will not be able to answer that question without some further study. Please move on to the next category of Bible Talks: **THE SUPREME AUTHORITY**. There is some good Bible study awaiting you there!

1. What three methods of water baptism are administered in various churches?

2. Define the following Greek words and site a reference where they are found in the N.T.
EKKEO
RANTIZO
BAPTIZO

3. Which of these three words did New Testament writers use to describe BAPTISM “for the forgiveness of your sins”? (Acts 2:38)

4. What evidence do you find in Acts 8:38 that the Ethiopian man was “immersed” in water?

5. What implication do you see in John 3:23 that immersion was the method of baptism?

6. Explain why Romans 6:4 gives clear evidence for the use of immersion in baptism.

7. How much importance should the church today place on following New Testament commands and examples?