

What Is the Proper Way to Baptize?

In some ways it is surprising that there can be so much argument about the proper procedure for baptizing a person. Some Christian churches insist upon sprinkling with water. Others will not accept an individual into their membership who has not been completely immersed. Some churches immerse but require that the person be immersed three times—one for each member of the Trinity. Still other churches maintain that a person who is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has been baptized improperly. They are convinced that a Christian should be baptized only "in the name of Jesus."

It is beyond the scope of this teaching (and your attention span) to deal with all these points of disagreement. Therefore, this teaching will limit itself to the question of the mode of baptism—that is, how much water should be used in baptism and how should it be applied?

How Much Water?

Christians disagree concerning the amount of water that should be used and how it should be applied to a convert. There are three possible modes (or ways) of baptizing a person:

- Sprinkling. Also called aspersion.

- Pouring. Also called affusion.

- Dunking. Also called immersion.

The Issue of the Mode of Baptism is a Fairly Recent Debate

Before 1633 even Baptists practiced pouring or sprinkling.

In 1633 some English Baptists, called the Particular Baptists, insisted upon immersion as the only Biblical mode of baptism. Did they have Biblical grounds to do so? That is where the debate begins.

The Use of Water in the Old Testament

Water Was Used Quite Frequently in the Old Testament to Represent Cleansing From Sin or Impurity

Hebrews 9:10 refers to the frequent Old Covenant use of water when it says, "They [the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant] were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings?external regulations applying until the time of the new order."

"Washings" isn't a totally accurate translation, for the original word is "baptismois," i.e. "baptisms." The writer of Hebrews, to put it simply, refers to "various baptisms" which were practiced under the Old Covenant.

What were these "baptisms" and in what mode were they performed?

Some Old Testament "Baptisms" Involved Sprinkling

When a person came in contact with a dead body or the carcass of an animal they were considered "unclean." The procedure for reentering the camp included being sprinkled with water mixed with the ashes of a heifer (Numbers 19:13,17-21).

When a person was cleansed from their leprosy the procedure involved sprinkling and two bathings. See Leviticus 14:6-9 for the full description.

Levites under the Old Covenant were set aside for their work by a special ceremony that involved water. The Levites were the helpers of the priests (priests were all descended from Aaron). The Levite ordination is described in Numbers 8:5-15. The cleansing procedure mentioned here is by sprinkling with water (v.7).

Some Old Testament "Baptisms" Involved "Bathing" or "Washing"

Other Old Testament laws included commands to "wash" or to "bathe with water" for certain acts of uncleanness. "Wash" and "bathe" commands can be found in Exodus 30:17-21; Exodus 40:30-32; Leviticus 8:6; Leviticus 14:8-9; Leviticus 15:1-27; Leviticus 16:4,24,26,28; Leviticus 17:15-16; Leviticus 22:6; Numbers 19:7-8,19; Deuteronomy 21:6; Deuteronomy 23:9-11.

Some of these commands precisely specify which parts of the body are to be washed or bathed:

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Exodus 30:17-21; 40:30-32 ? hands and feet.

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Deuteronomy 21:6 ? hands.

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Leviticus 15:16 ? entire body.

In the Leviticus 15:16 command to bathe the entire body: we would seem to have an Old Testament parallel for immersion. Perhaps we do. But how one should "bathe" is not really specified by God. The Hebrew word which lies behind these verses does not necessarily imply immersion in water. God's commands only emphasize the result (that the hands, feet or body be washed clean), not the exact method.

In addition, water for dunking was difficult to come by in the wilderness (where the laws were first given) and in the land of Canaan (where they continued to be practiced). Sponge bathing, splashing water over the body, or pouring water over

the head all serve the purpose of "bathing the entire body." Dunking is only one method of cleaning. Old Testament commands to "wash" or "bathe" could have involved more pouring than dunking, just because of the limited amount of water.

Summary of Old Testament Baptisms

The Jews had a long history of ceremonial "baptisms." Some of these "baptisms" were by sprinkling. Other "baptisms" under the Old Covenant involved the use of more water. The water was applied to the hands, feet, or the entire body. Exactly how much water was used and the manner in which it was used is not precisely specified. All of these "baptisms" were for the symbolic purpose of cleansing from sin or impurity. To the Jewish mind water cleansed whether it was sprinkled upon a person, poured upon a person or a person was dunked in it.

The Mode of Water Baptism in the New Testament

The Greek Word for Baptism Does *NOT* Always Means Immersion

In spite of what you may have heard from some well-meaning Baptist friends, the Greek word *baptizo* does not mean "to dip and nothing but dip through all Greek literature." (Alexander Carson, Baptist Board of Publication.)

James W. Dale in his book *Classic Baptism* lists many examples in Greek literature where the word *baptizo* means "to sprinkle" or "to pour" (e.g., to sprinkle blood; to sprinkle poppyjuice; to pour water on a hot iron). According to Dale, "baptism is a myriad-sided word, adjusting itself to the most diverse cases....Whatever is capable of completely changing character, state, or condition of an object, is capable of baptizing that object" (*Classic Baptism*, p. 354).

Like the use of water in the Old Testament, "to baptize" is a word that simply means "to apply a liquid so that it changes the state or character of an object." In Greek literature, the means of applying may be by sprinkling, pouring or immersion.

How Were Jesus' Followers Baptized?

The Book of Acts records nine events in which water baptism was performed.

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The converts on the day of Pentecost ? Acts 2:41

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The converts at Samaria ? Acts 8:36-38.

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The Ethiopian eunuch ? Acts 8:36-38

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The Apostle Paul ? Acts 9:18; 22:16

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Cornelius and his household ? Acts 10:44-48.

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Lydia and her household ? Acts 16:14-15

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The Philippian jailer and his household ? Acts 16:32-33

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Crispus, his household, and the other converts at Corinth ? Acts 18:8.

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The disciples at Ephesus ? Acts 19:1-7

Unfortunately, we are not given any indication concerning the amount of water used in these baptisms. When Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch needed water for baptism they stopped at the first available source?"Look, here is water," the Ethiopian says (Acts 8:36). The Ethiopian was on the road which "goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (Acts 8:26). There is a brook in the Valley of Elah along this road. There is also the Wadi el-Hasi just north of Gaza. In addition, there are a few springs and pools in the area. But we don't know which, if any, the Ethiopian actually used. Other than this passage, the locations for baptism and the amount of water are not mentioned.

There are two other passages in the New Testament that mention parallels between Old Testament water events and Christian baptism:

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1 Corinthians 10:2 speaks of how the Israelites were "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" and it likens this to Christian baptism. The cloud "passed over" the Israelites (Exodus 14:19-20) and the Israelites "passed through the sea on dry ground" (Exodus 14:22). But how strictly should we draw the parallels between this event and Christian baptism? They are alike in what they accomplish?that is, merging together the people of God and God's chosen leader. But do these two events also resemble each other in the way they used water (i.e. their mode)? The Israelites certainly were not immersed in water. Perhaps they were sprinkled. Does that mean that Christian baptism should not be done by immersion? Those Christians who hold to sprinkling are fond of pointing out that it was Pharaoh's army that received immersion!

- In a similar vein, 1 Peter 3:18-22 teaches that the salvation of Noah's family in the ark is analogous to Christian baptism. It's difficult to know how much to stretch the comparison, however. Noah and his family remained dry in the ark and were saved from destruction. Those outside the ark were immersed!

But Doesn't the Bible Say That the Eunuch "Came Up Out of the Water?"

Yes, it does. Acts 8:38-39 says, "And the eunuch gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away...." These verses are sometimes used to prove the method of baptism by immersion, but they really do no such thing. Who "went down into the water?" Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. Who "came up out of the water?" "They" meaning Philip and the eunuch. The action described here is not the action of baptism, but actions, which happened before and after baptism.

Summary of the Mode of Baptism in the New Testament

God's Word does not seem to be particularly concerned to describe one method of baptism. The word *baptizo* does not exclusively mean "to immerse." And the examples of baptism in the book of Acts do not describe the action of baptism, merely the fact that it was done. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament does not specify one sole method of ceremonial cleansing.

The Baptism of Christ

What was Jesus' baptism like? Why did He need to be baptized? And is His baptism completely unique or does it become a model which we should follow for the baptism of Christians?

To understand the way Jesus was baptized we need to understand the meaning of

Jesus' baptism. So let's spend a few minutes on the purpose of Jesus' baptism.

The Baptism of Christ Was Not a "Johannic Baptism."

As startling as this statement may seem, there are very good reasons for making it. "Was not Christ baptized by John?" someone will object. But, it is one thing to be baptized by John and quite another to receive the 'baptism' of John. This is unquestionably true because:

The baptism of John was for sinners (Matthew 3:1,6). Christ was not a sinner. John's baptism represented repentance for the forgiveness of sin (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:3). Jesus Christ could neither repent nor receive forgiveness of sins.

This baptism of John was to prepare the way for the Lord by preparing a people ready for the Lord (Luke 1:17). Jesus did not need preparation for receiving Himself. The unwillingness of John to baptize Jesus (Matthew 3:14) indicates that John considered it an improper thing that Jesus should come to him. Why should Jesus be classed with the others who came for John's baptism? John never changed his mind about this. But something? something that Jesus said? did so change John's point of view that he readily baptized the Lord. What were these interesting words, and what was their meaning?

"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." (Mathew 3:15)

These were the words that changed John's mind about baptizing Jesus. What do they mean?

Deuteronomy 6:25 tells us that "righteousness" involves obedience to the law. Christ was "made under the law (Galatians 4:4)." What Jesus is saying, then, is the He was submitting to baptism in order to obey the Old Testament law. But how?

Christ underwent the law of circumcision (Leviticus 12:3 and Luke 2:21). He was presented in the temple as the law commanded (Leviticus 12:2-8 and Luke 2:22-23). He went to the Passover (Exodus 34:23 and Luke 2:41-42). He observed the Jewish feasts commanded by the law (Mark 14:12, Luke 22:3, John 17:100). But what law was Jesus obeying at His baptism?

The law of the Old Testament, which Jesus was obeying when He was baptized,

concerns the ordination of a priest. The procedure commanded by God is found in Exodus 29:1-9. The key verse of this passage is Exodus 29:4: "Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water." Jesus Christ was (and is) a priest (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14, 5:5; 9:11); He is our High Priest forever. Christ's baptism was the ceremonial act of His ordination to the high priesthood. This was the rite that set Him apart as a priest and a minister of holy things.

Before any man could become a priest, three things were required: first, he must be 30 years old (Numbers 4:3,47). This is why Christ's age at His baptism is given as 30 years (Luke 3:23). Second, He must be called of God as was Aaron, the first high priest (Exodus 28:1). Christ was thus called (Hebrews 5:4-10). And thirdly, he must be washed with water (Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 8:6) by one already a priest. John was a priest, inheriting the office from his father (Exodus 29:9; Numbers 25:13; Luke 1:4,13). Christ knew His call, waited until He was 30 years old and then came to John "to fulfill all righteousness," that is, to meet the last demand of the Old Testament Law for a priest before He began His public ministry.

As Evidence of the Fact That Christ Was Made a Priest by John's Baptism, Jesus Cleansed the Temple (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:14).

After Jesus turned over tables and threw out money changers, the Jewish leaders came to Him and demanded to know: "By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:28), Jesus cited to them John's baptism, which He had received, and asked, "Was it from heaven or of men?"

In Jesus' mind there is obviously a definite connection between His cleansing of the temple (the act of a high priest) and His "baptism by John." He indicates that if John's baptism was from heaven, and He surely believed it was, then He possessed the authority to cleanse the temple because He truly had been ordained a high priest by John.

But How Could Jesus be a High Priest, if He Wasn't From the Line of Aaron, the first High Priest?

Wilbur A. Christy (A Modern Shibboleth, Pentecostal Publishing Co., Louisville, N.D., p. 82) writes:

The right to enter the Jewish Priesthood was rigidly confined to the descendants of Aaron, and we know that Jesus could not count His descent from that line, not even from that of Levi, which was closely related to the Priestly line in the temple service. But New Testament authority meets and surmounts this difficulty in a way that must excite our admiration. Referring to the Old Testament authority (Psalm 110:4), we learn that Jesus was not inducted into the Jewish or Aaronic Priesthood, but into the Order of Melchizedek, as a Priest of the whole world (Hebrews 5:6). He thus became our High Priest, not that He might, as the priests in the temple, "offer continually sacrifices and offerings, which could never take away sin," but as is shown in Hebrews 7:17-21, "that he might once for all offer up himself a sacrifice for sin to take away the sin of the world."

A priest descended from Aaron could only be a priest for the nation of Israel. But God had a larger vision, which included the whole Gentile world. This larger vision required an enlarged priesthood? someone who was greater than simply a son of Aaron. God needed a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

And yet, even though Jesus was greater than a Jewish high priest, He did not feel Himself absolved from the obligation imposed upon Him by the law of the Jews. For that law was the law of God. Jesus always recognized His obligations under the law and as a Jew was ever eager to observe it in every detail, throughout all His life. As Christy says: "All the long way through His long life and labors it was His declared will and purpose to fulfill the law, and in this instance we are compelled to believe that He did in every detail of His baptism, thus completely meeting all its requirements" (A Modern Shibboleth, p.82).

Jesus said, "Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Isn't it an interesting parallel that "Melchizedek" means "king of righteousness"? In being baptized by John, Jesus proved Himself to be the king of righteousness.

The Anointing of Jesus, Our High Priest

In the Old Testament after high priests had been "washed," they were anointed with oil (Exodus 29:7; 30:22-33; 40: 12-15; Leviticus 8: 2, 12). If Jesus was being baptized as a high priest by John, Jesus must have been anointed as well. It was only if He had been anointed that Jesus could apply Isaiah 61:1-2 to Himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18)." This was the Scripture He used at His first sermon after the baptism.

Jesus was anointed, but when? At his baptism. Each of the gospel writers emphasizes the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. Since in the Old Testament oil was a symbol of the Spirit (cf. Zechariah 4), we see God anointing Jesus not just with the symbol, but the reality.

Okay, Jesus was baptized as a high priest. That is the purpose and meaning of His baptism. Now that we understand the meaning, let's look at the method of Jesus' baptism.

The Method of Jesus' Baptism

How was Jesus baptized by John? What amount of water was used? We have shown that Jesus' baptism is the baptism of a man as he is about to begin his priestly ministry. This gives us some clues as to the mode of Jesus' baptism. Aaron and his sons, the priests, were "washed" with water from the bronze water basin in the courtyard of the Tabernacle (Exodus 29:4; 40:12; Leviticus 8:6) and then dressed in their sacred garments. The word "wash" certainly seems to imply more than sprinkling. And the fact that they were dressed in garments afterward indicates that in some manner their entire body was ceremonially cleansed.

Now I certainly have nothing against immersion. If Jesus was immersed for His baptism, then I can accept that and rejoice in it. But the issue is not that easy to solve, as it would first appear, for two reasons.

First of all, the Tabernacle basin used for the procedure of "washing" was not made for immersing the entire body. Check it out: Exodus 30:17-21. The Tabernacle basin was made for the purpose of washing the hands and feet of the priest before entering the presence of the Lord (Exodus 40:30-32). That was its regular use.

But on special occasions it was used for the ordination of the priests. The Bible says that Moses assembled the congregation and brought the priests to the Entrance of the Tent of Meeting. "Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water" (Leviticus 8:6). The "washing" of the priests for ordination was apparently done by taking water from the basin and then pouring it over the body of the priest. There is certainly no indication that Aaron took off his clothes and got into the basin! The basin as described in the Scripture doesn't allow for that. If Jesus was baptized in the exact same manner as a priest, then John *poured water* over Jesus' body. John did not immerse Him.

The second reason that the method of Jesus' baptism is not by immersion is John's location for baptism. We are told that John was baptizing "At Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water" (John 3:23). John would probably not need "plenty of water" for sprinkling. But he would need plenty of water for washing. But again what does "washing" mean? Was Jesus dunked under the water or was water applied to his body by pouring or splashing or rubbing? The answer to this question can be found in a further investigation of Aenon.

Aenon comes from the Aramaic word which means "springs" or "fountains." Aenon is probably to be identified with a place about eight miles south of Scythopolis, west of the Jordan. In this locality there are seven springs within a radius of a quarter of a mile. This certainly sounds like immersion territory!

But unfortunately for those who are hoping to find proof for immersion, "these springs trickling through marshy meadow land on their way to the Jordan, offer little or no facilities for immersion" (Christy, *A Modern Shibboleth*, p. 82). Assuming that the area has changed little since Jesus' day, we are again forced to conclude that John's baptism was probably by pouring water over the body, rather than by immersion.

In summary then, Jesus probably went through the ordination ritual of "washing." The evidence seems to indicate that He was "washed" by pouring water over His body.

But Doesn't the Bible Say That Jesus "Came Up Out of the Water?"

Mark 1:10 says "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open..." and Matthew 3:16 says, "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up

out of the water." At first glance we might feel that the issue of the mode of Jesus' baptism is settled by these two verses. But I believe that this is because we have been conditioned to read these verses in an immersionist way.

Do Mark and Matthew's words indicate that Jesus was immersed or only that He stood in the water, was baptized, and then walked out of the water? Put another way, does the phrase "went up out of the water" describe the action of baptism or does it describe an action following baptism? Look carefully at Matthew's statement. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water." This clearly means that Jesus' coming up out of the water was an action that occurred *following* His baptism, not during.

Summary Regarding the Baptism of Christ

Jesus was not a sinner. Therefore, he did not need to be washed as cleansing from sin. So why was Jesus baptized? Jesus' baptism was the ceremonial "washing" of a high priest. This explanation fits all the facts. John the Baptist was the descendant of a priest. Jesus was 30 years old at the time of His baptism. Jesus was always zealous to fulfill every detail of the Mosaic law. Jesus received His anointing following His "washing" by John the Baptist.

How was Jesus baptized? The evidence indicates that Jesus' baptism was a priestly ordination done by pouring.

Of course, there is another question. Should our baptism follow the priestly pattern of Jesus? The Scripture calls us holy priests (1 Peter 2:5,9). So perhaps our baptism should follow the pattern of priestly ordination. But if that is the case, should it follow the pattern of baptism for the high priest (like Aaron and Jesus) or the pattern of the helper priests? You see, the helper priests were baptized by sprinkling (Numbers 8:5-11).

Can you see why someone can be a non-immersionist and still believe the Bible? The issue is not as simple as *baptizo* means "immersion" and Jesus was baptized by immersion and we should be baptized like Jesus! As a person diligently and carefully looks at the Scripture, you come to be more tolerant of other views on the issue of the proper method of baptism.

The Mode of Baptism in the Early Church

The Writings of the Early Church

A document from the early Christian church called the Didache contains a section on baptism. The Didache was written to teach new converts about the faith. It is variously dated as being written between A.D. 80 ? 200. Below is the section on baptism contained in the Didache. It specifies baptism in running water, standing water, or water poured over the head:

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then baptize in living (i.e. running) water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Before the baptism, moreover, the one who baptizes and the one being baptized must fast, and any others who can. And you must tell the one being baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand.

Tertullian, one of the early Christian teachers wrote a pamphlet entitled "On Baptism" (circa A.D. 200). In that pamphlet he mentions the following places for administering baptism: "rivers, fountains, pools, sea, lakes or canals." In other words, just about any public place where you can find water.

In summarizing the evidence from the writings of the early church Edward Blaiklock, Emeritus Professor of the Classics at the University of Auckland, says, "From patristic evidence, immersion, aspersion, or affusion would all seem to have been acceptable....from quite early times, the rite of baptism was variously administered..." (New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology, pp. 91-92).

An Additional Clue From Archaeology

The earliest baptistery that we presently know of is one which is found in the catacombs of Pontianus. It provides some evidence about the mode of baptism. The baptistery is hewn from the rock and measures 4.8 feet long by 3 feet wide by 3.5 feet deep. How is this significant? It is obviously too small for immersion.

Above the baptistery is a fresco which depicts the Lord standing in the Jordan River, and the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. In the picture, John is baptizing Jesus by pouring water on his head! (New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology, p.91.)

Summary Concerning the Mode of Baptism

New Life Church's Position

What is the proper way to baptize? At New Life Church we have left the question of the mode of baptism up to the one being baptized. We have not come to this conclusion because we are wishy-washy and are afraid of offending someone. We have based our decision upon clear Biblical and historical grounds.

The Pattern of Water Cleansing In the Old Testament

Each particular mode of baptism (whether it be Presbyterian, Congregational, or Baptist) has its roots in Old Testament laws of purification. The sprinklers can exhibit the numerous references to purification by sprinkling in the Old Testament. Those who prefer pouring can point to the "washing" of the priests at their ordination. The dunkers can show the references to "bathing the whole body" in the Leviticus 15 rites of cleanliness.

Baptism in the New Testament and the Early Church

There is not one particular method of baptism which is spelled out for us in the New Testament, either by way of command by God or by way of an understanding of the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*. *Baptizo* does not mean "to immerse." The baptism of Jesus is certainly NOT a clear cut case for immersion.

What We Have Seen is a Consistent Pattern of Not Having One Pattern

If God was terribly concerned about the amount of water that we use and how it should be applied, wouldn't He be more clear on the subject? Instead we have seen Old Testament, New Testament, and early church examples which indicate that no one pattern of water cleansing was ever practiced exclusively. Given this evidence, why should present day Christians be so dogmatic about their

particular view? They shouldn't.

Each mode of baptism contains good, biblical, Christian symbolism. Immersionists argue that dunking best symbolizes our dying to the old life and being resurrected to the new (Romans 6:3-4). Affusionists point to the parallel between the action of pouring water upon the believer's head and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-7). Aspersionists say that their method best demonstrates the fulfillment of the New Covenant to have our hearts "cleansed from all impurities by the sprinkling of clean water" (Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 10:22).

Conclusion

What is the proper way to baptize? The answer is: "WITH WATER!" Beyond a shadow of a doubt cleansing was demonstrated in the Old Testament by all three modes. Is it so difficult to think that the same is true in the New Testament? I believe we would do well to not be dogmatic on this issue, lest we be found to be fighting God. Rather we should be willing to practice any of the modes of baptism based upon the needs of the recipient, the availability of water, and the symbolism which would best suite the needs of baptism. This is our pattern at New Life.

The Actual Baptism

What should a baptism really look and sound like? Let's summarize all the evidence from the Bible and early church history and make some definite statements about Christian baptism in this century.

Where Should Baptisms Take Place?

As a general rule baptisms should be done in a public place. This would mean that as a norm they should not be done in a church building or a Christian home. It seems evident from the New Testament and early church history that a person's baptism was a public recognition of their commitment to Jesus (see teaching titled "What is the Meaning and Purpose Of Water Baptism?").

As was mentioned previously, one author writing in the 2nd century gave these public places for administering baptisms: "rivers, fountains, pools, sea, lakes, or canals." Baptism was a humbling experience done before the eyes of the world (Matthew 3:5-6; John 3:22-23; Acts 8:36-39). Baptism made a person a marked

man or women. A person's public "washing" marked him as a confessed sinner and a believer. It set him apart as a Christian in the eyes of his neighbors. The only time that baptisms were done in secret in the early church was during times of intense persecution.

It is true that we need to avoid exhibitionism and parading sacred things before the world (Matthew 7:6). But we also need to understand that baptism was created to be a public sacrament (unlike the Lord's Supper which was done behind closed doors in the early church). Baptism, when correctly done, can be a marvelous means of evangelism. Baptisms should happen where God in His providence can bring unbelievers to hear a person's testimony, see the humility required to receive Jesus, and witness the joy of new birth.

Before the Baptism

In one sense, there should be no "before the baptism," if we are following New Testament practice. An unbaptized Christian was pretty much inconceivable in the church of the apostles and the church of the first few centuries. New Testament baptism took place immediately. When a person wished to become a Christian, he or she was baptized (Acts 2:38; 10:47). We should strive for this practice in our own church. Altar calls and sinners prayers should be replaced with baptisms. This would be the ideal.

But in reality many people wait until long after their conversion to be baptized. Because of this reality we schedule baptisms at regular intervals at New Life for the purpose of baptizing people who have already given their life to God.

On occasions when baptism has been delayed it is good for candidates of baptism to fast prior to their baptism. This was the practice of the early church (which also struggled with the problem of postponed baptisms). Furthermore, baptism is not just a ceremony. It is a time in which we seek God's blessing and a special outpouring of His Spirit. At New Life we expect God to do something in the life of each person baptized. So we encourage people to seek God's blessing by fasting prior to their baptism.

Finally, the pastor should meet with the candidates in prayer prior to the baptism ceremony for the purpose of seeking that blessing of God. Baptism is a unique encounter with the God who pours forth His grace upon all His children.

The Baptism Service

Testimonies should be encouraged, so that believers can be edified and unbelievers can hear the good news of Jesus.

People should be encouraged to clap their hands and cheer as the candidate arises from the water or water is poured or sprinkled upon them. This is a celebration time? a joyous occasion.

The questions which are asked of the baptismal candidate should be a mini-gospel presentation: Are you a sinner? Is Jesus your Savior? Is Jesus your Lord? Are you willing to become his disciple?

The response of the person being baptized ought to include the confession "Jesus is my Lord!" This confession was the heart of baptism from the earliest times according to the New Testament (see Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Colossians 2:6). Baptism appears to have been done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Here is a suggested baptismal ceremony for an adult candidate:

Testimony by the person about to be baptized.

Elder: " (Name) , do you admit that you are a sinner and in need of a savior?"

Candidate: "I do."

Elder: " (Name) , do you promise to follow Jesus' commands with His help and power and turn from whatever displeases Him to a life that pleases God?"

Candidate: "I do."

Elder: " (Name) , who is your savior?"

Candidate: "Jesus is my Savior."

Elder: " (Name) , who is your Lord?"

Candidate: "Jesus is my Lord."

Elder: " (Name) , I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Clapping, cheering, and joyous praise.

A Final Word on Our Position at New Life Church

Christians have been fighting about the method of baptism for centuries. The reason that Christians have been unable to come to agreement is that the Bible itself does not choose one method of baptizing. All three modes of baptism are found in the Old Testament. The New Testament either demonstrates all three modes or is silent on the issue. We truly don't believe that God cares one bit about the *amount* of water used to baptize his children. The essential elements in baptism are God's presence, the believer's pledge, a sincere heart, and the use of some amount of water.

At New Life Community Church, we have decided to cease disputing about the mode of baptism. We will communicate our beliefs and opinions in love, but we will not make this issue a point of division among us. Our elders offer solid Biblical teaching on the essential elements of the Christian faith. But, when the Scripture is unclear and there are godly people on both sides of a non-essential issue, we offer love rather than rigid teaching.