

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 36. Place a finger there and turn also to Acts chapter 10. This morning we are finishing our mini-series on the sacrament of baptism. Thus far we have seen that baptism is a means of grace, that it is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and that it is to be administered to those who profess faith in Christ Jesus and their children. We now come to consider how it is that baptism is to be administered. With that in mind, please give your attention to the reading of God's Holy Word from Ezekiel chapter 36 verse 25 and Acts chapter 10 beginning at verse 44.

Read Ezekiel 36:25 and Acts 10:44-48

Pray

This morning we are taking up the mode of baptism, seeking to answer the question how is baptism to be administered. While those of you who have grown up in a Reformed church may think this answer is obvious, I can assure you that those who are in the vast majority of modern evangelical churches would just as assuredly say that the answer is obvious, though they would give an answer quite different from yours. It is safe to say that this is one of the more contentious issues within modern Christianity. You may be thinking to yourself that this is not an important issue, that it doesn't particularly matter how you are baptized as long as you are baptized. But friends, that is not necessarily the case. When we consider the mode of baptism we must do as we did when considering the subjects of baptism, for the spiritual realities conveyed in the sign of the sacrament are important in and of themselves, and they provide a greater understanding of what baptism is and what it signifies and seals. There are great spiritual realities that are signified not only in the sacrament as a whole, but also in the sacramental actions that take place. So much Biblical truth is packed into the mode in which the sacrament of baptism is administered. To mess around with this, to administer the sacrament in a way that is not shown forth in Scripture, in a way that does not show forth the spiritual reality of what is taking place is baptism, is

to distort those vital truths attached to the sacrament. There are some that say one particular mode is absolutely essential to have a valid baptism. That is not the position that we confess. The Westminster Confession of Faith states in chapter 28 paragraph 3, “Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.” This is what we believe and confess is the Biblical teaching concerning the mode of baptism. So taking up this theme of the mode of baptism we will consider in greater detail each of the three mentioned in our Confession, though in a slightly different order: first, dipping or immersion; next, sprinkling; and finally, pouring.

So first, let us consider baptism by dipping or immersion. If you grew up in an evangelical church and were not raised in a Reformed church, this is likely what you were taught as a child what baptism is. In fact, many who hold to this position would say that if you are not baptized by immersion then you have not truly been baptized. They will go so far as to say that anyone who was not baptized by immersion must be baptized again, though they wouldn't use those words because they would say you need to be baptized for the first time. This is the position that historically is known as anabaptism, meaning to re-baptize. While this shouldn't be confused with those radical reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries known as the Anabaptists, this doctrine or understanding of baptism is pervasive throughout much of modern Christianity. While most modern Baptists would trace their heritage back to the Puritan Baptists, and the Calvinistic Baptists today would be appalled to be called an Anabaptist, it is undeniable that anyone holding this position is, in regards to their sacramentology, an Anabaptist. The absurdity of this position is that it places outside of the visible church the overwhelming majority of Christians throughout church history. Immersion, while it is practiced among the eastern sects, is by far the minority position of the Church when we look at the entirety of church history, and it is an incredibly novel concept within the western church having been introduced by the radical reformers in the 16th century and later adopted by the

Puritan and Particular Baptists of the 17th and 18th centuries. In essence it is saying that the millions of people who were baptized by either sprinkling or pouring have not been truly baptized. And if baptism is the initiatory right showing forth one's belonging to the visible church, then it means those who have not been immersed are outside the visible church. Friends, that is an incredibly wicked position to take and is clearly unbiblical.

But looking past that errant understanding of baptism and the insistence upon immersion for baptism to be valid, what of the mode itself? Is immersion a Biblically defensible mode of baptism? The Baptists would say of course it is, and they would appeal to the very word itself. The argument is that the Greek word *baptizo* itself means to dip or immerse. The problem is that the only evidence that they can point to in order to show this is an ancient document from Greece using the word to mean immerse. But that document is actually instruction for pickling vegetables. So unless we are commanded to immerse someone into water and put a lid on the container to let them soak for a few days, I'm not sure that is the right place to be looking for an understanding of the meaning of this particular word. Instead we ought to look to how Scripture uses this word, and we will quickly see that baptism simply means a washing with water. And this is appropriate since we saw a few weeks ago that baptism signifies the washing away of our sins and the cleansing of our hearts before the Lord. In Luke 11:38 we of the Pharisees interacting with Christ, "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner." That word translated 'washed' is a form of the word *bapto*. No one would argue that the text is saying Christ ought to have fully immersed Himself before eating, and very few would say it's in reference to immersing one's hands to wash them. In fact, the Jewish custom at that time was to pour water over the hands to wash them, and this is the practice even to this day. Another passage which proves baptism cannot always mean immersion is Mark 7:4, "And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of

cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.” Are we to believe that everyone was taking their tables, or dining couches, to be fully immerses prior to eating each meal? That is absolutely absurd. And so it proves that Scripture does not teach a strict defining of baptism as immersion, and so we must not either.

But those are not baptisms of people. We are talking about the sacrament of baptism, not the ritual washings. Do the baptisms of people in the Scriptures teach baptism by immersion? The example that is always pointed to is Acts 8:38-39 with the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” The going down into the water and coming up out of the water must prove that baptism is by immersion, right? Only if you would say Philip was immersed too, because Scripture is clear that they both went down into the water and both came back up. In fact this probably the only instance in which immersion may have been possible, but remember it was in a desert. If you look at all the baptisms recorded in the New Testament, it would be impossible for them to all have been by immersion. Robert Shaw comments, “When three thousand were baptised in one day, it cannot be conceived that the apostles were capable of dipping all this multitude in so short a space of time. When whole families were baptised in their own houses, it cannot be thought that, on every occasion, a sufficient quantity of water could be found for immersion.” But what of Romans 6? Do we not read that we are buried with Him in baptism? As I said last time, this text has nothing to do with mode of baptism. And as our brothers in the RP Church of Ireland testify, “Christ was not lowered into a grave but placed on a ledge in a cave-like sepulcher. Thus immersion in water is not a proper symbol of Christ’s burial.”

Dear saints, I am not saying that baptism by immersion is invalid. In fact, I and many others here were baptized in this way.

But when we come to consider what our practice ought to be we must look to what Scripture teaches concerning the matter. Just because it is valid doesn't mean it ought to be done. We distinguish between invalid and irregular. Immersion in no way shows forth those great Biblical truths of what is conveyed in baptism. There is no showing forth the sprinkling clean of the heart or the pouring out of the Spirit or the washing away of sins. Scripture gives no example of one who is part of the covenant community being baptized by immersion. In fact, the only example of a baptism taking place and people being immersed is in the crossing of the Red Sea. The Israelites were baptized into Moses but it was the Egyptians who were immersed in an act of God judgement. So friends, if you have been baptized by immersion, rest in it because it is a valid baptism. And if you were not baptized by immersion, do not let the cunning words of men convince you that your baptism was not true. If you have been baptized into Christ, you have truly been baptized.

So let us move on now to consider sprinkling as a proper mode of baptism. Remember what was already said about what is shown forth in the sacramental action of baptism. That it is the sprinkling clean of your hearts before Jehovah. This comes straight from Ezekiel 36:25, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Friends, this is a promise of the New Covenant. That the Lord will "sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." What a glorious truth this is. Matthew Henry writes that this "signifies both the book of Christ sprinkled upon the conscience to purify that and to take away the sense of guilt (as those that were sprinkled with the water of purification were thereby discharged from their ceremonial uncleanness) and the grace of the Spirit sprinkled on the whole soul to purify it from all corrupt inclinations and dispositions." Friends, if you are in Christ your sins have been washed away, you have been sprinkled with the clean water of Jehovah, cleansing every single aspect of your soul. How beautiful a truth this is, that you were once vile, wicked, disgusting, corrupt, dirty with the crimson stain of sin, and yet with just the sprinkling

of clean water upon you by the Lord you are made whiter than snow. This is what we sing of when we sing Psalm 51:7, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” That old man has been stripped away. He is no more. He is dead and buried in the grave nevermore to come forth. You have been cleansed. You have been made new. Remember our Scripture memory from last month. 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Praise God you have been sprinkled with clean water and you are clean.

And what have you been cleansed from? “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” Your thoughts, your desires, your inclinations, your sins, your idolatries, have all been washed away by the sprinkling of the Lord. Sin defiles you. Idolatry is spiritual whoredom against the one true God. You cannot stand before the Lord of glory with the filth of sin and the stench of spiritual harlotry covering you. You must be made clean. You must be sprinkled with clean water by the Lord. Your heart must be made pure and you must be cleansed if you are to stand before God in that last great day. Hebrews 10:22 states, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” If you have not had your heart sprinkled cleaned with the waters of the Lord, purifying your soul, and washing away your sins, then the call to you this day is to turn unto Christ. Be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Confess your sins and idolatries, your filthiness and your harlotry, unto Him and cry out for forgiveness, and you will be saved. He will sprinkle you with clean water. He will wash away your sins. He will make you new. Friends, today is the day of salvation. Do not let it slip by.

Before we move on from the topic of sprinkling as a proper mode of baptism, I want you to see that sprinkling as a mode of ratifying and applying the covenant to the people of God is not a

new concept unique to the New Testament. Consider with me Exodus 24:8, “And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.” It was not by having all the people be immersed in the blood of the sacrifice, but by sprinkling the blood upon the people that the covenant was sealed unto them. This is what takes place when the waters of baptism are sprinkled upon the recipient. Friends, the covenant has been made with you; it has been sprinkled upon your hearts with the sprinkling of Christ’s blood; it has been sprinkled upon you with the sprinkling of clean water washing away your sins. This is what we signify when the waters of baptism are sprinkled upon one who is in this covenant community and made partakers of that blessed covenant. It is not the amount of water which makes effectual the baptism of one who belongs to the people of God, but the power of the Spirit of God working in the life of the recipient makes it effectual.

Let us finally now consider the last of the modes of baptism, pouring. Recall that baptism signifies the pouring out of the Spirit upon the people of God. Look at our text in Acts, “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.” Here we see that the Holy Ghost fell upon some after they had been baptized for their confirmation, but upon these Gentiles the Spirit was poured out upon them before they had received that sign and seal of the covenant. Just as Abraham was justified by faith, being yet circumcised, here God shows that His operating power is not tied to a method or to the particular time in which the sign is received. He is not confined to the external signs,

but in His due time makes those external signs effectual means of grace. What a beautiful thing we see here. The Holy Spirit fell upon those who were neither circumcised nor baptized. This shows that it is not the actions itself which quickens the heart, but the Spirit alone. Upon these Gentiles, converted yet unbaptized, was the Spirit poured out. Then they received the sign and seal of that which had already been made real in their hearts.

And this pouring out of the Spirit seen here in Acts 10 is a fulfillment of prophecies concerning the New Covenant age. Isaiah 44:3-4, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.” Joel 2:28-29 (which was initially fulfilled in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost), “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.” Brothers and sisters, this is what the Lord has promised to do. He has promised to pour out His Spirit upon His people. In Acts chapter 2 and chapter 10 we see that this pouring out of the Spirit is what is signified in the waters of baptism. In Acts 1 verses 5 and 8 we read Christ speaking to His apostles right before His ascension saying, “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” It is the Holy Ghost being poured out, coming upon His people, which we see in Acts 2 was not by being immersed in the Spirit but by the Spirit descending upon them, that Christ speaks of His baptism. This is what is shown forth in this sacrament. Jehovah has made this promise to pour out His Spirit; who are we to not show forth this great promise by pouring out the waters of baptism?

And so when the Lord in His good timing blesses us with another person to be baptized, whether it be another covenant child or it be an adult convert, this will be the mode that is used in that baptism if I administer the sacrament. This is the most comprehensive display of the spiritual realities conveyed in this sacrament. Immersion fails in every way to show forth these glorious Biblical truths. Sprinkling shows forth but a portion of this great reality. But it is in pouring that the beauty of the sacrament is shown for, putting on full display the reality of pouring out of the Spirit upon the people of God. And I know that I said that the amount of water does not determine the efficacy of the sacrament, and that is true, but when baptism is administered by pouring it ought to be with an abundance of water, for the Spirit of God was poured out in great measure. It is this mode, pouring of water over the head of the recipient, which is the most proper Biblical mode of baptism. When it is said that those who received baptism went down into the water, then went and stood in the stream and had the water poured over them. In a river, a fountain, a city of persecutors, in a desert, in a prison, or in a private house, it is possible to baptize by putting water upon the person. The baptism which the Scripture teaches is the putting of water on the person, not the putting of the person into the water. It is the pouring of water upon the head, just as the Spirit was poured out upon you.

Dear saints, this is a controversial topic. Many pages have been written and much ink spilled over this. Unfortunately, the evil one has caused this to stir up great division within the holy catholic Church. We have lost our sense of unity, we have lost our catholicity, all because we have become dogmatic in invalidating a brother or sister's baptism because we do not agree with the mode. As Matthew Henry says, "On the whole then it appears, that the dust which has been raised about the mode of baptism, is nothing else but a device of Satan, to perplex ignorant, and to delude unstable souls." Do not let that be you. Do not cause division over this issue. Do not let others deceive you into believing that you have not been baptized and are deprived of the sign and seal of this covenant of grace. But

that does not mean you cannot uphold what the Scriptures put forth as the proper mode of baptism. We must stand for purity in practice, especially in the worship of God. Let us stand on this truth, that you have been sprinkled with clean water, and that the Spirit has been poured out in abundance upon you. Rest in that.