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One Baptism

Shadows and Substance

Water baptism has variously been seen as initiation to church membership, a public testimony to one's conversion, a burial of one's old man or maybe a washing away of one's sins.

Its meaning is not in itself, but in that to which it points. It is a shadow of the real baptism. Water baptism is like the **blood of bulls and goats that cannot take away sin**. All virtue and all power is in the invisible baptism, the outpouring of the Spirit of God. It was on the day of Pentecost - the first manifestation of that greater baptism - that the disciples became new people.

God is a jealous God and nothing must take his place. Nothing he has ever created or ordained is any substitute for him. Neither Mary, nor church, nor Bible, nor "communion" nor water baptism nor anything else must have places in our lives he has not given them. They must all decrease and he must increase till God becomes *all in all*.

Postscript

Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptised for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them? (1 Corinthians 15:29)

This must be among the most puzzling verses in the Bible! On the surface at least this appears to speak of water baptism performed on behalf of the departed to benefit them in some way. (I believe the Mormons study their genealogies and have themselves baptised for each new ancestor they find!) If we see this baptism as baptism with the Spirit, and the dead as those who are spiritually dead, things become clearer. Before Pentecost Jesus raised those who were physically dead, but alas they died again no doubt a few years later. After that great day when the Holy Spirit came, the spiritually dead were raised, never again to die.

In this sense we are baptised for the dead. We receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon us to speak the words of life that raise them from the dead, and give them life.

Further reading: *The Meaning and Mode of Baptism*, by Jay Adams. This book deals in much greater depth with some of the aspects of baptism I have covered in this writing. Its main purpose, however, is to promote the case of baptism by sprinkling or pouring against baptism by immersion.

raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

These passages must be understood in the light of what we have already discussed. We must relate Paul’s teaching to the baptisms of Jesus. We only understand Paul properly when we look at Jesus first.

Paul says that we are baptised by the Holy Spirit *into Christ Jesus*. As we have said, the children of Israel **were all baptised into Moses by the cloud and by the sea** (1 Cor 10:2). In the dramatic experiences of passing through the Red Sea on dry foot and following the pillar of cloud, they were brought into identity and oneness with Moses. They were consolidated into their allegiance to him. We by our baptism with the Holy Spirit are brought into identity and oneness with Jesus.

We are identified with Jesus in death, burial and resurrection. We share in his death. We die to our old lives, and all that we receive from Adam. We lose all confidence in our human nature. We accept the sentence of death on all that the natural man has to offer.

Death is followed by burial. The ancient method of burial was not like ours. They did not dig a grave for Jesus and cover him with earth! Like his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and most of the kings of Israel, his body was placed in a tomb. This tomb, as with Abraham, was a cave in the rock. By the baptism of the Spirit we are entombed with Jesus. We are shut in with him in the darkness of the burial cave. We are out of sight, cut off from the world. We are totally beyond its reach and no longer subject to any of its rules and customs.

This entombment with Jesus is the setting apart of kings. It is the spiritual anointing with oil. It is the qualification for sharing the throne with him. Kings are not recruited from the street for immediate enthronement. They must be set apart for their high calling.

Jesus spent three days and nights in the tomb. When God’s resurrection moment came the earth quaked and the great stone boulder rolled away. The power of the Spirit of God raised him up. He ascended to the right hand of God to reign. So also it will be for those baptised into his death and burial. The same Spirit that raised him will raise them to sit with him in heavenly places and share his throne.

Conclusion

This writing is not a crusade to promote one method of baptism against another. Rather its object is to promote a deeper understanding of a fundamental experience in God - the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Controversy and Unity

Baptism is a divisive subject. Some baptise by immersion and others by sprinkling. Some baptise infants while others only baptise adults or at least older children who have come to a definite faith. Some baptise in the name of Jesus and others in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. My purpose in writing this article is not to bring further division but to unite. One cannot of course hope to unite all who call themselves Christian. Those who walk in the flesh will never be united. Even those who have identical doctrines will never know true unity unless they learn to walk in the spirit.

Doctrinal unity is a unity of the mind. It is not the unity of the Spirit. People can have identical doctrines and yet be full of quarrels and disagreements.

Spiritual unity is different. People who walk in the spirit automatically have unity with each other, even if their doctrines and ideas differ. When they hear the truth they respond to it. This brings them increasing unity, as not only their spirits, but also their minds become one. Thus all that is said or written under the inspiration and leading of the Holy Spirit creates increased unity among the true saints of God.

I write then, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for those who want to walk in the spirit in the hope and confidence that it will bless them and increase their unity.

One Baptism

In Ephesians chapter 4 verses 4 to 6, Paul tells his readers that there is, **“one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all”**. In spite of this in times past I, like many others, used to say that there were two (or more) baptisms. “After you believe in Jesus you must be baptised in water, and then you must be baptised in the Holy Spirit”, we said. In the scriptures it seemed clear enough. Two apparently separate baptisms were clearly described in scripture and it was nice and easy for people to understand.

Our thoughts about water baptism were centred on Romans chapter 6. “Baptism means burying the old man,” we said. “That is why you go down into the water. You are buried with Jesus Christ, and you come up out of the water just as he came out of the tomb into resurrection life.”

What then did Paul mean when he stated that there was one baptism? The answer is that baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit are not two baptisms,

but one. Water baptism is the shadow and Spirit baptism is the substance or reality. A tree and its shadow are not two separate trees. In the same way spiritual baptism and its shadow water baptism are not two separate baptisms. One is just the shadow of the other.

How many temples are there in the Bible? At first sight one might answer two or three. Solomon built one that was pulled down by the Babylonians. Ezra began the rebuilding that was completed later by Herod. Ezekiel predicted another that has puzzled Bible students. In reality though I believe there is only one temple, or at least only one that matters. “You are the temple of the living God”, wrote Paul. All other temples were only shadows.

How many lambs are there in the Bible? You could no doubt find many references to lambs as you turned over the pages of the Old Testament. There is only one Lamb that has any real meaning or significance. “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” There has only ever been one Lamb. All other lambs are only foreshadowings of him.

You might find many photographs or pictures of some person taken at different times and places and from different angles, but there is never more than one person. So in the scriptures there are many types and pictures and shadows, but there is one substance.

The types and pictures and shadows are necessary and good for those who do not have or do not yet know the real thing. To quote Paul’s words (referring to the Holy Scriptures), “They are able to make people wise for salvation”. They are less important for those who experience and possess the real thing.

Origins of Baptism

Where did baptism begin? Most people immediately think of John the Baptist. Did he invent the ceremony, or adapt it from customs of the time? Or did it begin somewhere in the Old Testament?

The first five books of the Bible are called in Hebrew the Torah or law. That law was complete and was never added to through the rest of the Old Testament. Indeed Moses said to the Israelites, “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you” (Deut 4:2). Many further inspired writings were added later to the canon of Hebrew scripture, but these were not additions to the law. They were writings of other kinds, such as history, prophecy or poetry. God gave the complete law through Moses.

anointed him with oil. The importance of the occasion is expressed in Jesus’ own words: “I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mat 26:13).

Much has been rightly said about Mary’s sacrificial love and devotion to Jesus, but little about the meaning of her act. High priests and kings, as we have seen, were set apart by the anointing with oil in a solemn and irreversible act. The day after Mary anointed Jesus he rode into Jerusalem as king. The multitudes recognised him and shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!” (John 12:13).

Mary’s act had yet another significance. God said to Moses, “Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household” (Exodus 12: 3). Four days before the Passover the Israelites were to set aside a lamb for death. This was the very day that Mary anointed Jesus the Lamb of God. It was four days before the Passover¹. Hence we may understand his words, “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial” (Mark 14:8).

How may we understand this double significance? To be a priest or a king, as we have seen, a man must be set apart. The ultimate setting apart is burial. A man who is buried is for ever set apart from this world. He can no longer fulfil any of its functions. He is enclosed in the darkness of the tomb. He cannot see the world and the world cannot see him. It is the final separation. Jesus was set apart in the tomb for a kingdom not of this world.

Buried with Christ

We must now look at Romans chapter six in more detail. Verses 3 and 4 read, “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” For many people this is the definitive scriptural passage on baptism. This is the first passage to which they would turn to discover its meaning. Other scriptural passages on baptism must be made to agree with this one. Colossians 2:12 is very similar, “having been buried with him in baptism and

¹ Chronological note: Arthur Ware and Frank Paine prove this in their writings. They also show that John baptised Jesus on the 10th day of the 7th month which was Israel’s Day of Atonement. Mary anointed Jesus exactly 1300 days later on the Day of Atonement in Jesus’ personal life. That is to say it was the 10th day of the 7th month in the 34th year of his life. Thus both these “baptisms” took place on Days of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make annual atonement for the sins of the people.

from sin! Praise God, the Holy Spirit will! I will return to this in more detail shortly.

Peter speaks of baptism with the following words: ... and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the inquiry of a good conscience towards God (1 Peter 3:21). Most people have taken this verse to refer to water baptism. Water cannot symbolise water! Water can and does symbolise spirit! It is not the physical washing of the body with water that saves us, but the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit within us that creates the good conscience towards God.

The Baptisms of Jesus

We have considered the meaning of the word baptism and the baptisms ordained by God through Moses for the people of Israel. We must now look at the baptisms of Jesus. I am deliberately using the word *baptisms* in the plural. He was baptised with water by John the Baptist, and with oil by Mary of Bethany!

Throughout his life Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses. He was circumcised when he was eight days old. He went up to Jerusalem for the feasts of Israel at their appointed times. He lived under the law to redeem those who were under the law. He totally took *our* place in the natural that he might bring us to *his* place in the spiritual.

Why then did Jesus join the crowd of sinners who went to confess their sins and be baptised by John in the river Jordan?

John felt things were the wrong way round. Their conversation ran as follows: John: “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Then John consented (Mat 3: 14,15).

Jesus did not need the cleansing of blood to wash away his sin and give him new life. He had no sin, and he had life in total measure. He came, as he said, to fulfil all righteousness or to fulfil the law. At thirty years of age priests became eligible to serve in the temple. He and his father had waited till this day. John was a Levite of priestly descent (His father Zacharias served in the temple) and was therefore qualified according to the law of Moses to ordain Jesus. This baptism or washing was that ceremony. Now Jesus officially became God's high priest, and his earthly ministry could begin.

Three and a half years on, Jesus' earthly ministry was drawing to its climactic end and his heavenly ministry was soon to begin. This was the time when Mary

After king Solomon died, the kingdom of Israel was divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Rehoboam had the southern part containing Jerusalem and. Jeroboam had the northern part. The law commanded Israelites to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to keep the feasts of the Lord. This did not suit Jeroboam who therefore ordained new priests, new holy places and a new festival to be kept on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. From then on throughout the history of the northern kingdom Jeroboam the son of Nebat is referred to as the king who caused Israel to sin. ***He had added to the law of Moses.***

Jesus himself did not come to bring new laws. His own well-known words were, “I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it”. He came to bring substance and reality to what till then had only been shadow.

Against such a background is it possible that John should take it upon himself to bring in a totally new ritual called baptism? We can tell that it was not a new ritual by the reaction of the Pharisees. The question they asked him was “Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (John 1:25). They accepted baptism as valid, but questioned his right to perform it.

If we adopt the traditional “Baptist” view that the word baptism always and only means immersion, then there is nothing in any old testament law or ritual that corresponds to it. If the word baptism has the sense of pouring or sprinkling then it is a word that occurs repeatedly in the Hebrew scriptures.

I believe that baptism can mean pouring or sprinkling as we will soon see. I believe the word *anointing* has a similar meaning and the New Testament certainly speaks of anointing with the Spirit as well as baptism with the Spirit.

We find strong confirmation that New Testament baptism relates to Old Testament sprinklings when we turn to the Letter to the Hebrews. The word baptism there occurs twice. Once is in chapter 6: “the doctrine of baptisms”. The other is chapter 9 verse 10, which speaks of “various baptisms”. The NIV translates this, “They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings - external regulations applying until the time of the new order.” The Greek word translated *ceremonial washings* is the same as the one translated *baptisms* in chapter 6. Immersions simply did not exist in Old Testament rituals, but there were plenty of sprinklings and pourings as we shall see¹.

1. There are actually two Greek words βαπτισμος and βαπτισμα which differ only in their ending. The masculine form βαπτισμος is used in Hebrews and Mark 7:4 and in some manuscripts in Col 2:12. The neuter form βαπτισμα is used elsewhere. This may or may not be significant.

Meaning of the Word *Baptism*

We must now consider the meaning of the Greek words βαπτίζω (baptizo = baptise) and βαπτισμα (baptisma = baptism). Many people (and dictionaries) state that the words simply mean immerse and immersion through all Greek literature as well as throughout the Bible. This view is passed from person to person as a statement of indisputable fact. Very few even of those who can read Greek have enough knowledge of Greek literature to raise any kind of objection. However the writer R.W.Dale in his book *Classic Baptism* has shown conclusively that this is not so. He offers many quotations from Greek literature to show that although the word can mean immerse it is in no way limited to that meaning. It can also mean to pour and to sprinkle and has various other shades of meaning besides.

Dale defines the meaning of the word baptism in the following words: **“Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state, or condition of any object, is capable of baptising that object: and by such change of character, state, or condition does, in fact, baptise it.”**

More important than usage in Greek literature is of course the use of the words *baptizo* and *baptisma* in the Bible itself. These words are obviously used in connection with both water baptism and baptism with the Spirit.

We will now look at the new testament passages which give some clue as to how water baptism was performed.

Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water (John 3:23).

If we accept the standard translation of this verse, it certainly seems to favour immersion. The original Greek is *polla hudata*, which itself is a translation of the common Hebrew phrase *maim rabbim*. Both literally mean *many waters*. Both are translated in several different ways such as deep water, abundant waters, rushing water and mighty waters (in the NIV). However the name of the place, Aenon, means springs. (It is from the Hebrew word En or Ein, which occurs in place names such as En Gedi where there are springs.) A fair translation would therefore be *Many Springs*.

If John wanted plenty of water for immersing he would have stayed at the river Jordan where he was before. If he wanted pure water for pouring or sprinkling, as required by the law, the springs of Aenon would be much better than the Jordan, which I understand is muddy. This verse therefore, when rightly translated and understood, favours sprinkling or pouring rather than immersion.

and folly to believe that an outward ceremony can make the ultimate difference to someone's eternal destination. God judges people by their hearts and not by their rituals.

If however we take these words to mean baptism with the Spirit, they begin to make sense. The baptism with the Spirit brings full salvation. The Holy Spirit takes up residence within us and transforms us, and creates the divine image in us, making us fit for God. That is genuine salvation.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus said, **“Therefore go and make disciples of all peoples, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (28:19). Can this also be baptism with the Spirit? Can man baptise man with the Spirit? I believe he can, but we must see this baptism more clearly before we can understand. When a man is inspired by the Spirit of God and speaks the word of God to others there is a washing of the word. A washing is baptism, and a baptism is a washing. When rivers of living water flow from us, we baptise those we meet.

Many of us were taught to view the book of Acts as an all time model for church and Christian life. I now believe it describes the church's infancy and childhood. It is a time of growth and transition. We see Jewish believers slowly and with difficulty leaving laws and ceremonies ingrained into them for fifteen hundred years. Little by little they began to grasp the spiritual substance of which those laws had only been shadows.

Jesus spoke to the disciples of baptism with the Spirit. They understood it as baptism with water, and then as today God saw the sincerity of their hearts and forgave the ignorance and slowness of their minds. He blessed what they did.

As one reads through the book of Acts, it often makes much better sense to read baptism as baptism with the Spirit. In the case of Paul (chapter 9), Ananias came to him that he might **be filled with the Holy Spirit**, and he **stood up and was baptised**. Was that water baptism or Spirit baptism? Other cases are equally ambiguous. In general though it seems that the apostles took the words of Jesus to mean water baptism, and practised that in his name.

When we move on to the teaching on baptism in Romans chapter six and the parallel verses in Colossians chapter two we find that there is no mention of water in either of these passages. Paul is talking about a work of God in us that can only be done by the Holy Spirit. He is speaking of identification with Jesus in death, burial and resurrection, and a resulting deliverance from sin. Such blessings are the result of baptism with the Holy Spirit. No amount of water will ever deliver anyone

is frequently muddy and defiled with earth, which represents the flesh. Symbolically speaking I don't want to be plunged down into the waters below, the contaminated waters of the earth. I want to be soaked with the pure water that comes from above, that comes down from God.

Water or Spirit?

Baptism and baptising are often mentioned in the Gospels and Acts. Sometimes water is mentioned and sometimes the spirit and sometimes neither. The natural mind adds the word water whenever it sees the word baptism. Baptist theology has been developed by people who have not had a strong consciousness of baptism with the Holy Spirit, if indeed they have experienced it at all. They have assumed that the word baptism means water baptism unless clearly stated to be baptism with the Holy Spirit. All we like sheep have followed them! We have automatically assumed baptism with water whenever we have seen the words baptise or baptism alone.

Let's question this assumption.

At the beginning of his ministry John the Baptist said: "I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). In each of the other three gospels similar words are recorded. At the beginning of Acts Jesus said, "John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." Peter quoted these words yet again, in Acts 11:16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: "John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

In the mind of God I believe there is only one baptism, the baptism with the Spirit, and Jesus perfectly had the mind of his Father. The disciples moved slowly step by step from the natural to the spiritual, and for this reason frequently could not understand what he was saying. When he was speaking of the heavenly they understood the earthly. When he spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees they thought he was talking about physical bread, when he meant their doctrine. He told them to preach the gospel to the whole creation, but for three years they preached only to the Jews. With baptism as with other things the disciples only understood afterwards what Jesus meant, as the Holy Spirit gave them understanding and lead them into all truth.

Jesus commissioned his disciples with the well known words of Mark 16: 16: "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Some people have used these words to prove that water baptism is essential for salvation. However Jesus said nothing here about water. It is blindness

Can any forbid water that these should not be baptised?

(Acts 10:47).

This verse strongly suggests that water was brought to those who were baptised, rather than that those being baptised were brought to the water. This again clearly favours sprinkling or pouring rather than immersion.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him (Acts 8:38).

This verse is often quoted in favour of baptism by immersion. It does not take much thought to see that for whatever method of baptism it would be necessary to go down to the water. It would be natural enough to stand in the water while the baptiser poured water on the one being baptised. Also if this verse implies that the eunuch was immersed, it also must imply that Philip was immersed as well, because both went down into the water.

Additionally the Greek preposition *eis* can be translated *into* or *to*. It is equally valid to translate this verse, *they went down to the water*. It also makes a more natural translation.

Also verse 26 of this chapter plainly states that they were in the desert. Anyone who has seen deserts knows that they are unlikely places for baptism by immersion. We might add that few places either now or then are well suited for immersion. Most are too cold or too dry or too far from water. The land of Israel is certainly no exception. Sprinkling or pouring, on the other hand, can easily be done anywhere.

This verse is not then as conclusive as it appears at first sight. It is neutral in any discussion on how the baptism was performed.

Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day

(Acts 2:41).

It seems unlikely that there were facilities in Jerusalem and available to the apostles for immersing three thousand people in one day! Either they were sprinkled with water or possibly this verse refers to baptism with the Holy Spirit - but more on that later.

We must now turn to baptism with the Holy Spirit. Many scriptures indicate that the Holy Spirit was poured out from above. Nothing ever suggests that they were dipped down into the Holy Spirit. The following quotations from the book of Acts are among many that illustrate this: "But you will receive power when the

Holy Spirit comes on you” (1:8). “I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (2:17). “Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them” (8:16). “... the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles” (10:45). “the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning” (11:15). Not a single scripture indicates anything resembling being dipped or immersed in the Holy Spirit. All imply that the Spirit came from above.

We have seen already that baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water are one. Baptism in the Spirit is undoubtedly a pouring from above. We would therefore expect the word baptism to have the same meaning when the medium is water.

Meaning of *εν* - *in* or *with*?

“First I was baptised in water; then I was baptised in the Holy Spirit.” Such statements are commonly made, and few charismatic or pentecostal people would notice anything controversial in them. Does the new Testament speak of baptism *in* or baptism *with* when referring to baptism of the Holy Spirit? Of the versions I’ve studied, the NASV is the only one to put *in* and it puts *by* or *with* in the margin. The NIV and the KJV both put *with*. When we look at the Greek the situation gets more complicated. In Greek we have the word *en*, which is the standard word for *in*. What do we make of that? Baptism *in* water sounds more like immersion. Baptism *with* water sounds more like sprinkling. Are the Baptists right after all?

A closer study of the Greek word *en* shows that although its most common meaning is *in*, it also frequently has the meaning *with*. For example in Rev 9 we read of those who are “killed *with* the sword”. The Greek word here is also *en*.

Certainly *in* is the most common sense of the Greek word *en*. Equally certainly it sometimes must be translated *by* or *with*. In the case of baptism, as anywhere else, we have to choose the meaning that fits the context. It is neutral in the argument and can go either way. It is one of many places in scripture where two different translations are equally legitimate. The translator must decide which is right by context and comparison with other scriptures.

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit always comes from above, and so I believe that *baptised with the Spirit* is the right translation. To use the phrase *baptised in the spirit* springs from a wrong understanding of baptism and in turn passes on this wrong understanding to others. If baptism with the Spirit and baptism with water are one baptism then equally we must speak of *baptism with water* rather than *baptism in water*.

the water of the word. However we are still unequipped to serve God. We cannot be kings and priests to him. Oil kept the lamps burning and giving out their light. The natural man is in darkness without light. The anointing with oil enables us to shine and give out the light of God.

Blood, Water and Oil

The three sprinklings of blood, water and oil can be studied separately but I believe they are one. They are like three shadows of one tree of which each has a different shape. They all point to the greater baptism with the Spirit, which is the substance and the reality.

Perhaps this is the truth that John is expressing in 1 John 5:7,8: “For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”

We may also compare the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: “I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

Ezekiel’s words bring together much of what has been said: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezek 36:25-27).

In the old covenant we meet the word *sprinkling*, whereas we more often find *pouring* in the new. Pouring is a more intense form of sprinkling, just as in every way the new is greater and better and bigger than the old.

Above or Below?

Next we should consider the different symbolisms of water from above and water below. Baptism by pouring is by water from above. Baptism by immersion is in water below. Throughout Scripture and in all language and symbolism, up is good, down is bad. James wrote, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). In Revelation chapter 13, John saw a beast “coming up out of the sea” and then another “coming up out of the earth”.

In the beginning God “separated the water under the expanse from the water above it” (Genesis 1:7). The water coming down from above pictures what comes from God. It is pure and clean and life-giving. The water below is nearly always contaminated and impure. Sea water is barren because of the salt in it. Other water

The third category of people who were washed with water in the law of Moses was the priests. Details are in Exodus 29. Aaron and his sons were brought to the tent of meeting and washed with water.

Those who are called to be priests must have been washed. They must have been subject to the word of God. The washing with the word is not for removing sin. That is the function of the blood. The word deals with the carnal mind. The word of God washes the mind clean from the stench of death and disease and makes it new.

Many people think of themselves as priests and kings to God, but are neither truly washed with water nor anointed with oil. Such people will exercise a mixed ministry, partly in the flesh and maybe also partly in the spirit. The result is confusion and Babylon.

Sprinkling with Oil

The third sprinkling liquid is oil. Oil in the Bible was the product of the olive tree. Its main use was for burning to give light. Oil today is our main fossil fuel. It is our principal source of power.

In Exodus chapter 30 verses 22 to 38 we read of an anointing oil made with a special formula. Its use was strictly reserved for anointing the tabernacle and its contents and for anointing the priests. This oil had a sweet fragrance and anything anointed with it was set apart for God and for his service. Later the idea of anointing with oil was extended to kings - again people who were specially chosen. The word *Messiah* of course means *anointed* in Hebrew, and Jesus is both our High Priest and our King. *Christ* is the equivalent word in Greek meaning the anointed one.

Two thoughts stand out. Firstly by the anointing with oil we are set apart, or sanctified. In natural religion a church building is set apart only to be used for religious purposes, or a feast day is set apart and not used for normal work. In the same way we are spiritually set apart for God. We are not just ordinary people. God has chosen us for himself, and we belong to him. We must learn to live with being different!

This should not be confused with ordination to a church or doing full time religious work of some kind. Such people only have an outward difference from people who do ordinary jobs. We must be **inwardly** set apart and consecrated to God.

Secondly this oil represents an endowment with power. Without this power we may have received life through the blood of Jesus. We may have been cleansed by

In 1 Corinthians 10:2 we read: “They were all baptised into Moses **in the cloud and in the sea**”. However Exodus records that the Israelites followed the cloud and passed through the sea on dry foot. They were never *in* the cloud, or *in* the sea. It was the Egyptians who were baptised by immersion! I suggest then that this passage is wrongly translated. It should read, “They were all baptised **with the cloud and with the sea into Moses**.” We will consider the meaning of this baptism later.

Old Covenant Sprinklings

We will now return to the origins of baptism. Our root problem in understanding baptism is that we have never even recognised these origins, and never therefore studied baptism in their context.

Our starting point for this will be Hebrews chapter 9. Verse 10 reads, “They (the old testament sacrifices) are only a matter of food and drink and various baptisms, external regulations applying until the time of the new order.” Examples of these “baptisms” are given in later verses of the same chapter:

- v 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer **sprinkled** on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.
- v 19 When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and **sprinkled** the scroll and all the people.
- v 21 In the same way, he **sprinkled** with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.

These verses establish that the baptisms referred to in verse 10 are the *sprinklings* of the law. They are referred to as *various baptisms* and we can distinguish three of them. Much the most common was sprinkling with blood. There were also sprinklings with water and sprinklings with oil. Water was sometimes combined with ashes.

If we study these *various baptisms* of the Old Testament we will build a basis for a right understanding of baptism in the new.

We will find as we consider the sprinklings of blood, water and oil that they all interrelate. They are separate, but not fully. They are like three different shadows of the same tree, with the sun in a different position. Each gives a different view of the real thing. Though there are three substances, there is only one baptism.

Sprinkling with Blood

The most important sprinkling in the Old Testament law is the sprinkling with blood.

Blood sacrifice is a central theme of the Bible. It begins with Abel's animal offering in the book of Genesis - or even before him when God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins - and continues till its climax in the one all-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

To understand the meaning and significance of blood, we must look at the state of the human race. Mankind since Adam is in a state of sin and death. Sin causes separation from God, and separation from God is death. Union with God is life. God told Adam that in the day he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil he would die. He ate the fruit and was thrown out of the garden, away from the presence of God. Union with God is life; separation from God is death. Paul wrote to the Romans, "**The wages of sin is death**", and to the Ephesians, "**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.**" Sin and death are inseparably linked.

In all human and scriptural thought, blood is life. "**The life of a creature is in the blood**" (Leviticus 17:14). Shedding of blood is taking of life. The sinner stands condemned and guilty before God. He deserves to die. He presents his animal offering to die in his place and bear his sin. God accepts that offering, not for what it is in itself. "**It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**" The shed blood of the animal points to the life of Jesus, the Lamb of God, given for us. I am forgiven because Jesus died for me. The sin that separated me from God is washed away. Nothing stands between him and me. I am united with him and live. I receive the life that is in the blood of Jesus.

Sprinkling with Water

The second liquid that is sprinkled is water. The main idea associated with water is cleansing. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 5: 25 to 27: "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless.**"

Paul's writings are sometimes easier to understand if one has read some of the same books that he had! From infancy he was steeped in the law of Moses. When we turn to the law we find three kinds of people who were washed with water.

Firstly anyone who touched a dead body was unclean and had to be cleansed with water. Full details are given in Numbers 19: 11-22. The new believer rejoices in forgiveness and new life but he must also be cleansed from the realm of death. His mind still thinks and works largely according to the old ways of the flesh in which he has lived for so long. He has lived his past life without God, and his mind has developed patterns of thought in which God has no place. Further he is surrounded by people who live and think according to the flesh, in whose minds there is no place for God. His mind must be made new. It must be washed with the word. Jesus said to his disciples, "**You are already clean through the word I have spoken to you.**" The word of life that he spoke entered their hearts and they were "**transformed by the renewing of their minds.**"

Secondly in the law of Moses people with leprosy were unclean. Bible leprosy was different from modern leprosy. It was basically a skin disease. The NIV recognises this and sometimes, but not always translates it as that! Three chapters of Leviticus (13 to 15) give details of diagnosis and cleansing rituals for leprosy. These include washing with water. Jesus instructed his disciples to *cleanse the leper*.

Leprosy was a disease of the flesh. It could be skin-deep or deeper. Miriam was smitten with leprosy when she and Aaron wanted equality with Moses. King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy when he wanted to usurp the priests' function of burning incense in the temple (2 Chronicles 26:19). Each was trying in the strength of the flesh to have a ministry that God had not given them. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was also smitten with leprosy when he tried to get what was not his.

Some people are genuine servants of God. God has called and chosen them and they exercise their ministry according to his leading and in the power of his Spirit. Others see the power and position and influence of such people and want it for themselves. They produce their imitation in the power of the flesh. Such people, I believe, have **spiritual leprosy**. Sometimes the leprosy is skin-deep only, and less harmful. In others it is deeper and highly contagious. The flock of God is then fed on counterfeit ministries that imitate real ministries and may even produce signs and wonders, but lack the real power and truth of God.

Here again we need the washing of the word. "**The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart**" (Heb 4:12). The word of God exposes all that is of the flesh. The washing with the word will create a church that is without spot or wrinkle. These are the very things that leprosy causes!