A DEEP LOOK INTO SPRINKLING AND POURING (AFFUSION) AS FORMS OF BAPTISM

Friend, in our quest to serve God in spirit and in truth, we must get scriptural justification for every practice of church today. The beliefs and practices of the church must be backed with apostolic examples and unbiased biblical inferences.

Baptism is an essential requirement for salvation. As such it is not a practice that must be treated lightly because it is part of God’s scheme of redeeming man. Considering the essentiality of baptism in salvation, we have to ask ourselves; can God who want to redeem His children from their sinful ways, cause them to be confused about how they are to be baptized? God has given us His answer in 1Corinthians 14:33 for God is not a God of confusion but of [a]peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

In this write-up, I want us to look at the biblical, historical and scholarly writings of the Reformation leaders as evidence to attest to the fact that baptism in the early church was solely immersion. Tracing back to our routes, we shall know how baptism by sprinkling or pouring crept into the church and it is now practiced to this today.

Let us examine the following Bible verses.

- **John 3:23** - John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—“and

- **Mark 1:4-5** - John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness [b]preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

- **Romans 6:4** - Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

In **John 3:23**-If the scripture is not referring to immersion, then why the necessity of much water? Wouldn’t a few drops of water do just as well? It says he was baptizing there because there was much water. The presence of much water was neither incidental nor accidental.

In **Mark 1:4-5**-they came to the Jordan River. Such would hardly have been necessary if the baptisms were done by sprinkling or pouring. It would have been an inconvenience wholly without reason.

Also in **Romans 6:4**- Which represents burial? Sprinkling or pouring or immersion. Which represents resurrection? Coming up from an immersion in water or having water sprinkled on the head. From all these verses, it is obvious that baptism is by immersion.

From the historical perspective;

- **Mosheim**, in his classical Ecclesiastical History, wrote of the first-century church: The sacrament of baptism was administered in this century, without the public assemblies,
in places appointed, and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font. (Vol. 1, p. 36.)

- “In this century (the first), baptism was administered in convenient places without the public assemblies, and by immersing the candidate wholly in water.” (Ecclesiastical History, Mosheim. Century I, Part II, Chapter 4.)

- “Immersion and not sprinkling was unquestionably the original form. This is shown by the very meaning of the words baptizo, baptisma, and baptismos, used to designate the rite.” (HISTORY OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH, Schaff, p. 488.)

The church practiced baptism by immersion until the middle of the second-century when sprinkling and pouring crept in.

The **first certain baptism by affusion** was that of Novation in 251 A.D. Eusebius, the father of church history, wrote of this occasion in his classic Ecclesiastical History, Book 6: “Who [Novation] aided by the exorcists, when attacked with an obstinate disease, and being supposed at the point of death, was baptized by aspersion, in the bed on which he lay; if, indeed, it be proper to say that one like him did receive baptism.” (Baker House Publishing, 1968.) Sources differ on the amount of water poured in Novation, but they range from “buckets” to “three barrels.” Those involved wanted to get as close to immersion as they could. Because of the illness associated with such “baptisms,” they were called “clinical baptisms.” This baptism was though imperfect, and not solemn, for several reasons. Also, those who were so baptized were called clinici, and by the 12th Canon of the Council of Neocaesarea, were prohibited from the priesthood. This clinical baptism slowly advanced, but never gained much favor for thirteen centuries. In 1311 A.D, the Council of Revenna declared that from henceforth baptism by affusion is as acceptable as baptism by immersion. The Reformation not only failed to reform the Catholic Church, it adopted and continued every departure from scripture by the Catholic Church, including sprinkling and pouring.

In 753 A.D. The first general law for sprinkling was obtained in the following manner: Pope Steven II, being driven from Rome by Adolphus, king of the Lombards, in 753, fled to Pepin, who a short time before had usurped the crown of France. While he remained there, the monks of Cressy, in Brittany, consulted him whether, in case of necessity, baptism poured on the head of the infant would be allowed—which, however, some Catholics deny---yet pouring or sprinkling was admitted only in CASES OF NECESSITY

In 1643 A.D. As a result of the indifference of many of the Reformation leaders in teaching others the proper form of baptism, Europe, England, and America were greatly affected in the variety of practices that arose.

The scholarly writings of the Reformation leaders also affirm that immersion was the only form of baptism in the primitive church.

- Martin Luther (Lutheran) had said **"Baptism is a Greek word, and may be translated immerse. I would have those whose who are to be baptized to be altogether dipped"**
• John Calvin (Presbyterian) had said—“The word baptize signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive church.”
• Brenner, (Roman Catholic)—“For 1300 years baptism was an immersion of the person under water.”
• John Wesley (Methodist)—“Buried with Him into baptism—alluding to the ancient Christians, received their baptisms”

After a thorough study of the pieces of evidence (biblical, historical and the scholarly writings), it is indisputable that immersion was the only form of baptism in the early Church. The fact that Pope Steven II endorsed sprinkling does not make it right. The Bible categorically says we should obey God rather than men. Acts 5:27-29

There is nothing in the New Testament remotely related to support sprinkling or pouring. There is no divine command, apostolic example, or inference (reasonable or necessary) that would sanction such a procedure. Rather, the practice had its genesis in the post-apostolic era when a divinely-foretold digression already was well underway (2 Thessalonians 2:1ff; 1 Timothy 4:1ff; 2 Timothy 4:1ff).

Galatians 1:10—“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.”

Friend, the question in Galatians 1:10 is directed to you as well. Obey God and do what he has commanded in his written word. The gospel has come to you today, do not harden your heart. Visit the church of Christ nearer to you for further studies on God’s word.

References
1. How sprinkling or pouring replaced scriptural baptism? Available at http://www.bebaptized.org/sprinkling.htm
2. An inquiry into Baptism, Sprinkling, pouring or immersion. Which shall it be? http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/AnInquiryIntoBaptism.html

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