

How the World Got Wrong on Baptism

by John R. Rice

The world got wrong on baptism when Roman Catholicism changed it from immersion to sprinkling, and this change was inherited by other denominations.

Scripture: Matthew 26:26, John 3:5, Acts 8:38, Acts 9:18, Acts 16:33, Romans 6:4, Ephesians 5:26, Colossians 2:12, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6, Titus 3:5, Revelation 17:5

Topics: "Baptism By Immersion", "Roman Catholicism"

Description

John R. Rice delivers a sermon focusing on Revelation 17:5, interpreting the evil woman as a representation of Roman Catholicism, highlighting the false doctrines, heresies, and religious abominations that have come into Christianity through this institution. Rice discusses how Roman Catholics officially changed practices like baptism to sprinkling, claiming the authority of the church over the Word of God. He provides historical evidence of the shift from baptism by immersion to sprinkling within Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and other denominations, emphasizing the departure from the Bible's teachings. Rice urges listeners to study the Bible diligently, encouraging a return to the scriptural practice of baptism by immersion.

Transcript

There is a strange text of Scripture in Revelation 17:5:

"And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BASYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH"

By reading the rest of the chapter we find that evil woman is certainly used to represent Roman Catholicism. Rome with its worldwide spiritual adultery or false religion; Rome with its persecution of the martyrs; Rome with its riches and cathedrals, art treasures, gold, silver and pearls; Rome, a state church, riding on the beast of the Roman empire (which will be rebuilt again under the Anti-Christ); Roman Catholicism, centered in the city of the seven hills, is the great harlot, mother of harlots and abominations. Ecclesiastical Rome is this modern Babylon. Read the verse again and you will see that God has plainly foretold for us that all the false doctrines, heresies, and religious abominations which come to Christianity in this age are a product of Roman Catholicism. Many individual Catholics are not to blame for this, and I mean no unkindness when I call attention to the plain and unmistakable meaning of this passage in God's Word. I do so to call attention to the fact that Roman Catholics officially changed from baptism to sprinkling. One fatal doctrine of our Catholic friends is that they claim the church, or council, or pope, has

the authority to promulgate a doctrine, which, they believe, is as infallibly correct as if taught in the Word of God. In other words, the Bible is not the authority and guide of Roman Catholics. They do not claim that it is, and they deliberately and purposely depart from some teachings of the Bible. For instance, the Bible plainly says that a bishop or pastor should be the "husband of one wife" (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). Peter himself whom Catholics claim as their first pope, was married (Matt. 8:14). Roman Catholics knew this Bible teaching, yet they deliberately changed it, requiring priests and nuns not to marry. They insist that they had a right to change it, since they say the pope and the church have the authority of Christ on earth. When Jesus gave the Lord's supper (Matt. 26:26-28), He gave the disciples both the bread and the grape juice, or wine. For many centuries Catholics did likewise, and THEN CHANGED IT! Now the Catholic priests drink all the wine (and it is really intoxicating wine) and the common people are given only the bread of the Lord's supper. Catholics admit they changed it, and say they had a right to. On exactly the same basis, Catholics changed from baptism to sprinkling, as their own authorities frankly admit.

CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA ADMITS CATHOLICS CHANGED BAPTISM

I have before me the official Catholic Encyclopedia, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus with the imprimatur of Cardinal Farley and given to the public library by the local council of the Knights of Columbus. On page 209, Vol. II, under the heading "BAPTISM, II, Etymology" is this statement:

"The word baptism is derived from the Greek word bapto or baptizo, to wash or to immerse."

On page 261, Vol. II, second column, (b), begins the following passage which we quote word for word.

"The proximate matter of baptism is the ablution performed with water. The very word 'baptizo' as we have seen, means a washing. Three forms of ablution have prevailed among Christians, and the church holds them all to be valid because they fulfill the requisite signification of the baptismal laving. These forms are immersion, infusion and aspersion. The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion. This is not only evident from the writings of the Fathers and the early rituals of both the Latin and Oriental churches, but it can also be gathered from the Epistles of St. Paul, who speaks of baptism as a bath, (Eph. V, 26; Rom. VI, 4; Titus III, 5.) In the Latin Church, immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century. After that time it is found in some places even as late as the sixteenth century. Infusion and aspersion, however, were growing common in the thirteenth century and gradually prevailed in the Western Church. The Oriental Churches have retained immersion, though not always in the sense of plunging the candidate's entire body below the water."

Notice that Catholic authorities admit that "IMMERSION SEEMS TO HAVE PREVAILED UNTIL THE TWELFTH CENTURY" IN THE LATIN OR ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND IN SOME PLACES AS LATE AS THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. Notice the words "THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES" meaning the Greek Catholics and some others, "HAVE RETAINED IMMERSION." Roman Catholics changed from baptizing by immersion to sprinkling. Greek Catholics keep the original form, immersion.

CATHOLICS ORIGINALLY HAD LARGE BAPTISTRIES FOR IMMERSION

Visitors to ancient churches or cathedrals in Europe built before the thirteenth century, would know that this is true. But we would rather prove it by this official encyclopedia prepared by Roman Catholic authorities under the supervision of a Roman Catholic cardinal. On Page 274, Vol. II of this Catholic Encyclopedia, under the heading "Archaeology" are the following passages;

"In the apostolic age, as in Jewish times (John 3:23) baptism was administered without special fonts, at the seaside or in streams or pools of water. (Acts 8:38)" ... "Indoor baptism, however, was not uncommon (Acts 9:18, 16:33) and, for the sake of both privacy and solemnity, came to be the rule: while reverence for the rite itself and for the water, which came in time to receive a special consecration, gave rise to the use of a special font or basin for the baptismal ceremony, and at a later period, for the preservation of the water. With the establishment of distinctly Christian places of worship, this font became one of their important adjuncts. In the East it took the form of a pool or cistern, similar to those of the baths, often larger, and deep enough to permit total immersion."

NOTICE THAT THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BAPTISTRIES WERE ORIGINALLY LARGE ENOUGH AND DEEP ENOUGH TO PERMIT A TOTAL IMMERSION! Catholics changed baptism from immersion to sprinkling.

CATHOLICS ADMIT GROWTH OF "INFANT BAPTISM" AMONG THEM

In the same Volume II, on page 275, first column, the official Catholic history of baptism, in this Catholic Encyclopedia, says:

"The passing of the period of adult conversion to Christianity, and the growing prevalence of infant baptism with the consequent frequency of administration determined a change in the structure of the fonts. Instead of a basin below the floor level, walls of masonry were built up to a height of three or four feet to facilitate the minister's holding a child over its opening: or a font hewn from solid stone rested on the chapel floor. Immersion of children had come to be the rule, and as the practice was adopted, too, in the case of adults, the fonts were sometimes large enough to admit of their being immersed. In the thirteenth century, however, simple infusion came by degrees, to be adopted, and was generally used, the font became smaller and more shallow, and was raised from the floor on piers or columns. The older type of font continued to find favor in Italy but in the northern countries the winter chill of the waters hastened the general use of infusion, and as this rite required for each person baptized, but a small quantity of water, the font generally took the simple form and small dimensions it has today."

Notice the statement "in the thirteenth century, however, simple infusion (he means sprinkling) came by degrees to be adopted and was generally used." Notice the frank statement that because of cold weather, and the "growing prevalence" of the custom of "baptizing" infants, Catholics felt free to change the Lord's way of baptizing by immersion to sprinkling for their own convenience. This is the origin of sprinkling and pouring for baptism and of so-called "infant baptism." All modern denominations which use these customs got them from Roman Catholics, who began them, as the Scripture so clearly prophesied in Revelation 17:5:

"And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABEL THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

LUTHER, BREAKING LOOSE FROM ROMAN CATHOLICISM, KEPT SPRINKLING

Early in the sixteenth century, a Catholic monk named Martin Luther became dissatisfied with the unscriptural teachings and practices of Roman Catholicism and tried to start a reform within the church. He discovered in the Bible that marvelous doctrine that people are saved by faith, not by church membership, nor baptism, nor by confessing to a priest and doing penance. Luther was excommunicated and his movement led to the creation of a new denomination, Lutherans. Luther was a great and good

man, but he did not complete his reform and carried over into the new denomination many of the customs and traditions to which he had become accustomed as a Catholic. The Lutherans clung to the idea of a state church, and to certain of the rituals such as confirmation, and continued to use sprinkling for baptism. Luther believed in baptism by immersion and understood that the Bible so taught. Dr. Philip Schaff in the History of the Christian Church, Vol.VII, on pages 218 and 219 quotes Luther as saying the following:

" 'Baptism,' he said, 'is that dipping into water, since it takes its name from the Greek, to baptize, signifying to dip, and baptism is a dipping. Baptism signifies two things death and resurrection: that is, full and complete justification. When the minister dips the child into the water, this signifies death; when he draws him out again, this signifies life. Thus Paul explains the matter (Romans 6:4) ... I COULD WISH THAT THE BAPTIZED SHOULD BE TOTALLY IMMersed, ACCORDING TO THE MEANING OF THE WORD AND THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE MYSTERY; not that I think it necessary to do so, but that it would be well that so complete and perfect a thing as baptism should also be completely and perfectly expressed in the sign.' " (Type emphasis mine, J.R.R.)

However, instead of following the Bible in practice, Luther followed Roman Catholicism on baptism. Our Lutheran friends sprinkle today because they inherited that custom from Rome.

EPISCOPALIANS, COMING FROM CATHOLICISM, KEPT SPRINKLING INSTEAD OF GOING BACK TO BIBLE BAPTISM

About 1530-33, the fat king of England, Henry VIII, became dissatisfied with his wife, Queen Catherine. We can sympathize with him, for he had been forced, while a mere child, for reasons of state, to take as his bride Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his brother, much older. We can understand how it was never a love match. Besides that, she did not bear him an heir to the throne. And to cap it all, he fell in love with Anne Boleyn. He applied to the pope for a divorce from Catherine, his elderly, barren, and unloved wife. The pope refused, partly because of the strict Catholic teaching against divorce, and partly because that his strongest supporter in the world at that time was the Catholic monarch, Philip, King of Spain, and brother of Catherine, Henry's wife. The pope dared not lose the friendship of the strongest king in Europe. There had been much unrest in England over corrupt practices among the Catholic clergy and dissatisfaction with Catholic rule. So Henry VIII promptly threatened to make the English branch of the Roman Catholic church independent. That was soon done and the "Anglican Church," or the English Episcopal denomination was born. The Episcopalians retained many of the forms of Catholicism. They followed the customs of sprinkling and "infant baptism" which had originated in the Roman Catholic church, and to which they were all accustomed.

THE NEW MEDIEVAL AND MODERN HISTORY by Samuel Bannister Harding, Page 345, gives the following account of the origin of the English, or Episcopalian Church:

"The actual separation from Rome came from the desire of Henry VIII to have his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, with whom he had lived for 18 years, declared void, in order that he might marry Anne Boleyn, with whom he was infatuated; When the Pope refused to grant the annulment of his marriage, Henry obtained his divorce from a court of the English Church, presided over by Cranmer, his Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1533 he proclaimed Anne queen, in defiance of the Pope.

"In November, 1534, the separation from Rome was made complete by the Act of Supremacy, passed by Parliament."

Episcopalians are sprinkled today because when they came out from Roman Catholicism they retained that form which the Catholics had adopted after doing away with the Bible form of baptism by immersion. They teach the sprinkling of babies and make it a part of the plan of salvation as their Catholic forefathers did.

EPISCOPAL PRAYER BOOK REQUIRED IMMERSION, EVEN OF BABIES UNLESS WEAK

Earnest men tried to break with Roman Catholic practice and doctrine when the English church became independent, but tradition was too strong. The first Episcopalian or English church Prayer Book, adopted 1549, provided for baptism by immersion even of babies. That rubric under the heading "Public Baptism of Infants," says:

"Then the priest shall take the child in his hands, and ask the name; and naming the child SHALL DIP IT IN THE WATER THRICE. First dipping the right side; second, the left side; the third time dipping the face toward the font; so it be discreetly and warily done, saying,

" 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.' "

"And if the child be weak, it shall suffice to pour water upon it, saying the aforesaid words." (Type emphasis mine, J.R.R.)

In the prayerbook as revised in 1662 the above was changed to provide for dipping babies only once, "If they shall certify him that the child may well endure it." It was this English prayer book that John Wesley later followed, baptizing by immersion unless "certified that the child was weak." At this time the custom was already established to do it the easier and unscriptural way, and so they do it today though the Prayer Book still stays concerning "the baptism of such as are of riper years," as well as of babies, that the priest or minister "shall dip him in the water or pour water upon him, saying," etc.

Methodists will see how their "Discipline" was patterned after this, though they, like the Episcopalians, follow the Catholic practice, baptizing in the Bible way only when people insist upon it.

WHY BIBLE DOES NOT USE WORD IMMERSE

When King James of England encouraged a group of scholars to translate the Bible into the English language, naturally the instructions he gave were colored by the position and teachings of the state church of England, this Episcopal church, which came out from Roman Catholicism. The translators were ordered, in the case of any word where the literal translation would cause controversy or cast reflection on the state church, to simply Anglicize the Greek word, that is, to spell it with English letters and not translate the word at all. I mention two interesting examples. The Greek word deacon, literally meaning servant, was not translated, but simply spelled with English letters and made into an English word, because in their Episcopal form of church government, one order of the ministry had been named deacons. Likewise, the word, baptizo, which has the plain primary meaning of dip, plunge, immerse or bury was not translated at all. It was simply spelled out baptize and made into an English word. That is why our English Bible says "baptize" instead of saying "immerse."

THE BIRTH OF METHODISM

An Episcopalian clergyman on a trip to America, became acquainted with some earnest people of Moravian Brethren faith, and so learned about that blessed doctrine of the new birth and was happily

converted. After his return to England, he with his brother and a group of other earnest young men, formed what was called "The Methodist Society". This Episcopalian preacher became a flaming evangelist and started a soul winning movement which went around the world and blessed millions of people. His name was John Wesley and the people who followed him soon formed a separate denomination called "Methodists" or "Wesleyans." In America, the Methodist Episcopal church was founded by them, later dividing into two branches, North and South. They turned away from much of the formalism of the Episcopalians and Catholics, but they retained the Episcopal form of denominational government, the doctrine that staying saved depended on one's works, and they kept sprinkling for baptism and "infant baptism" as Episcopalians and Catholics did before them. However, Wesley plainly taught that "the ancient form" of baptism was by immersion and he used that form often, even with babies!

JOHN WESLEY BAPTIZED BY IMMERSION; SAID IT WAS "THE ANCIENT MANNER OF BAPTIZING."

The great John Wesley first made an effort to go against the tide of tradition and custom and baptize by immersion. However, he made the mistake of following Episcopal rules, "baptizing" babies, instead of only believers, as the Bible teaches, and also using sprinkling instead of baptism if one was "certified" to be weak! But he plainly admitted that immersion was the Bible way of baptizing, and used immersion ordinarily, though he was greatly criticized for it by his Episcopalian brethren.

Once, in fact, Wesley was tried in court because he insisted on immersion. He tells about it, himself, in "John Wesley's Journal," something of a diary which he wrote. In the "Popular Edition, Condensed," of this Journal, published by Charles H. Kelly, London, 1903, I read and copied his account of that incident, which happened in Georgia in 1736. Here it is.

"Wed. May 5th - I was asked to baptize a child of Mr. Parker's, second bailiff of Savannah; but Mrs. Parker told me, 'Neither Mr. P. nor I will consent to its being dipped.' "I answered, 'If you certify that your child is weak it will suffice (the rubric says) to pour water upon it.' She replied, 'Nay the child is not weak, but I am resolved it shall not be dipped.' This argument I could not confute. So I went home; and the child was baptized by another person."

September first of the same year Wesley records in his Journal the "List of grievances presented by the grand jury," delivered to the court at Savannah, Georgia that day. Number 5 of these grievances for which Wesley was tried was, as Wesley copied it in his Journal,

"5. By refusing to baptize Mr. Parker's child, otherwise than by dipping, except the parents would certify it was weak, and not able to bear it."

The jury seems to have disagreed, and Wesley left the colony for England. Another entry in his journal, quoted by Robert Southey in LIFE OF WESLEY AND RISE AND PROGRESS OF METHODISM, footnote, page 58 edition of 1871), in Wesley's own words, is as follows:

"Mary Welch, aged eleven days, was baptized according to the custom of the first church and the rule of the church of England, by immersion. The child was ill then but recovered from that hour."

Robert Southey, in the book mentioned above, criticized Wesley severely on this question of baptizing by immersion. On page 498 Southey says:

"Both brothers (referring to John and Charles Wesley - J. R. R.) retained the fancy of baptizing by immersion, after they had outgrown many eccentricities; and Wesley sometimes followed the mode out of

condescension to the whims of others where he had ceased to attach any importance to it, and must have perceived inconvenience of the practice. One of the charges which the virulent Toplady brought against him, was that of having immersed a certain Lydia Sheppard in a bathing tub in a cheesemonger's cellar, in Spittafields * * * *

Wesley frankly believed that the Scripture taught immersion. In his "Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament," he honestly declared himself, specially when commenting on Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:4, and when he came to those Scriptures mentioned baptism as a burial. In that commentary as published by Carlton and Porter, New York, page 376, the note on Romans 6:4, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, says:

"We are buried with him - Alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion."

WESLEY FOLLOWED EPISCOPALIANS AND CATHOLICS IN SPRINKLING AND "INFANT BAPTISM"

Wesley had been taught from childhood from the Episcopal or English church Prayer Book that babies were born again at baptism, as that Prayer Book still teaches, and he never got away from this tradition of men. In his sermon on The New Birth, part IV, point 2, as published by B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835, Vol. I, page 405 of "The Works of the Reverend John Wesley," Wesley says:

"It is certain our church supposes, that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again: and it is allowed that the whole office for the baptism of infants proceeds upon this supposition."

Wesley was there discussing John 3:5, and makes it clear that the reason he "baptized" babies was that it saved them! He followed this reasoning of Catholics and of the English church of which he was still a minister and member, and gradually gave way to their custom of sprinkling or pouring instead of Bible baptism. Now, however, Methodist ministers argue against that which Wesley so stoutly defended and practiced, immersion for baptism. How sad that men should follow "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth," Rome, instead of following the Word of God!

JOHN CALVIN, FOUNDER OF PRESBYTERIANISM, ADMITTED IMMERSION WAS ORIGINAL MODE OF BAPTISM

History tells a similar story concerning John Calvin and our Presbyterian friends. That great man had a part in the reformation, went back to the Bible teaching that salvation is altogether of God's grace, not of our works, and is obtained by simple faith in Christ. However, to avoid making more enemies, he retained the forms of sprinkling and "infant baptism" as they had been established by Roman Catholics, instead of going back to the Bible way of baptizing only saved people, by burial in water.

Great scholar that he was, John Calvin could not entirely break away from his Catholic training and tradition. He knew that the word baptize in the Greek literally means immerse. and said so, admitted that New Testament practice and teaching was immersion. Yet he said it was "of no importance," and continued the Catholic customs of sprinkling and even sprinkled babies. In that famous work of his, "Institutes of the Christian Religion." in chapter XV on Baptism, at the close of paragraph XIX, Calvin says:

"But whether the person who is baptized be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, or whether water be only poured or sprinkled upon him, is of no importance: churches ought to be left at liberty in this respect, to act according to the difference of countries. THE VERY WORD BAPTIZE, HOWEVER, SIGNIFIES TO IMMERSE; AND IT IS CERTAIN THAT IMMERSION WAS THE PRACTICE OF THE

ANCIENT CHURCH."!!! (Type emphasis mine, J. R. R.)

Our Presbyterian friends, saying that what Jesus did and commanded about the form of baptism "is of no importance," have followed the Catholic example away from the Bible!

WHY GREEK CATHOLICS STILL BAPTIZE BY IMMERSION

You can very easily see that the Roman Catholic church has led most of the world away from the Bible form and doctrine of baptism. It is an interesting fact that Greek Catholics have always baptized by immersion, as they do today. Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics were the two sections in the "Great Schism" which split the Old Catholic Church, in the year 1054. Roman Catholics, you remember, did not make any essential change in the form of baptism until in the 13th century, and at the time of the split, the whole of the Old Catholic Church baptized by immersion. Greek Catholics, or Orthodox Catholics have simply continued the form which they had at the time of the split. It is possible that Greek Catholics would have changed to sprinkling also, since so many of their adherents were in cold countries like Russia; but that would have been very inconvenient as the New Testament is written in Greek and the word baptizo plainly means to immerse, as Greek Catholics have always known. So Greek Catholics in this matter did not follow Roman Catholics into the modern way of sprinkling instead of the Bible way of baptizing. Today they still baptize by immersion, their priests marry, and both bread and wine are given in communion, unlike Roman Catholics who changed all these Bible teachings.

ALL DENOMINATIONS THAT SPRINKLE ADMIT THAT IMMERSION IS BAPTISM

Christians over the world are divided on many questions concerning baptism. Some say that baptism is essential to salvation; others say not. Some say that infants should be baptized as well as saved people, while some of us contend for baptism of believers only. Some people say that sprinkling is good enough, that since baptism does not save, it does not especially matter what form is used. Some modernists try to do away with baptism entirely. But people of every so-called Christian faith agree that immersion is acceptable as baptism. Catholics admit they changed to sprinkling, but will accept baptism by immersion as valid. The Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others who sprinkle yet receive immersion as valid baptism and admit that it is Bible baptism.

STUDY THE PROOF CAREFULLY: THEN AWAY FROM TRADITION, BACK TO THE BIBLE!

Sprinkling used for baptism, and so-called "infant baptism" IN EVERY CASE came from following the example and tradition of Catholics who first began them, as they themselves plainly admit. No group of people ever began sprinkling or "infant baptism" because of any Scripture on the subject, since not a single case of either, as baptism, nor a command for either is found in the entire Bible! I beg you to study the proof of every statement in this book. If you will come with an honest, humble heart, willing to follow the Bible alone, God will clearly reveal His will and teaching to you. The only safe guide is the Word of God! Put away your prejudice, leave the teachings of your childhood, cast out the traditions of men, and you will find the Scriptures absolutely unanimous in their teaching on baptism, and as clear as daylight!

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