

# Answering a Devout Lutheran's Perspective on Infant Baptism

By Larry and June Acheson

03/26/2017

In late 2015, a devout Lutheran read our study titled "Baptism: Changing the Method, Losing the Meaning" and he decided to respond with a defense of the Lutheran position. I should point out that our original study was a response to a Lutheran magazine article defending infant "baptism," or to be more specific, *sprinkling*. Our study includes a link to the entire Lutheran magazine article, which our Lutheran acquaintance accessed, read and agreed with over and above our findings. To that end, he composed an e-mail aimed at refuting our position, complete with hyperlinks to three online articles that, in his estimation, affirmed the validity of his position. I was hopeful that he and I could pursue a mutually respectful discussion; although the brief exchange was respectful, I never received a response to the following exposé, so after over a year of waiting, I decided to post a revised version of my response for anyone interested. I have removed his name and made a few other changes in the interest of preserving our acquaintance's anonymity.

Please allow me to begin this study by posting the pertinent excerpt from the e-mail he sent me on 11/28/2015:

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]  
To: seekutruth  
Sent: Sat, Nov 28, 2015 8:08 am  
Subject: Baptism perspectives

[REDACTED],  
[REDACTED]

I read through your [response to an Issues, Etc. journal](#) with interest. I also found your web page and read [the original journal](#), with which I not surprisingly agreed. I think that much of what we've been discussing is not a single question, but more precisely two questions:

1. What mode(s) of baptism is/are acceptable (immersion, pouring, sprinkling)?
2. Should infants be excluded from baptism?

I see one important intersection point with those two questions, which is that church bodies which baptize infants use either the sprinkling or pouring modes, because it is dangerous to immerse a baby. There might also be an intersection point with regard to the activity of making a decision and stepping into a deep body of water vs. passively receiving water that is poured or sprinkled as a baby.

I'm focused more right now on the immersion question for the purposes of this email.

I guess this subject area is one that I feel strongly about discussing for a few reasons, namely:

1. I believe and trust that my baptism was a valid sacrament in which God conferred life, forgiveness of sins, and salvation because of His promise.
2. I believe that your first baptism [Larry's note: I was sprinkled at age 12] was valid.
3. I am honored to be recently made a godparent and I wouldn't take on that role if it was meaningless.

I've included three resources on this subject which represent a minuscule portion of the apologetics work out there on this subject. I've chosen them not for their exhaustiveness but for their brevity, and the second one is from a Catholic source though the position they take is shared by Catholics and Lutherans in this case. Of note, the most important resource by far is the Bible, and without the common frame of reference of the literal truth of the Bible we could not have this discussion.

I'd like to highlight two of the places in your article where you make claims that are not sufficiently supported by evidence and rest upon assumptions and speculation.

1. Baptism in its original form could mean *nothing more* than immersion (page 1).
2. Immersion preceded the practice of *substituting* the the act of sprinkling (page 4).

For the first claim, please take a look at resources 1 and 2 below which bring up passages in which *baptizo* is used to refer to washing which does not necessarily require immersion such as in Mark 7:3-4 and Titus 3:5. Your first claim then is not valid.

For the second claim, please take a look at resources 2 and 3 which show that, first, there was not always even enough water available for full immersion in some parts of the Biblical world and it is highly unlikely that full immersion was always used. This would mean that there was likely at least one other mode alongside full immersion. I know your encyclopedia source appears to say one thing about baptism, but I don't really trust the authority/finality of this source and there are multiple kinds of baptism anyway so what may have been true for Jewish baptism or the baptism given by John is not definitive proof of just how baptism was practiced in apostolic times. If there was ever in apostolic times even one valid baptism that did not involve full immersion in water, your second claim can be shown to be false because sprinkling can only be accused of being a substitute for immersion if immersion was the exclusive practice. This is a high burden of proof for you that you will have a hard time meeting.

By the way, as resource 1 asks, how do you even know that Jesus was completely immersed in water as opposed to being waist, chest, or shoulder deep in the water? We don't know that he was fully immersed, because again *baptizo* is not always used to mean full immersion in the Bible.

I am really tempted to keep going, but I don't want to discuss everything at once and lose focus on any individual topic. I would encourage you to read each of the resources below and try to consider their arguments objectively. Certainly I am not looking to change any of your beliefs, but only to show you where I'm coming from and how a strong defense can be made for the baptism we each received growing up. I'm open to further discussion if you would like.

Resource 1:

<http://www.tabletalkradio.org/content/node/10>

Resource 2:

<http://www.catholic.com/tracts/baptism-immersion-only>

Resource 3:

<http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine>

(only part of this page's FAQs are about baptism)

Take care,

My response to the above Lutheran's perspective on baptism is below. As mentioned previously, I am editing my exposé, primarily in the interest of preserving his anonymity.

December 13, 2015

I want to apologize for the lengthy delay in responding to the e-mail you sent me over two weeks ago. It took me quite a while to go through everything you asked me to read and I wanted to do my best to at least answer the most important questions and concerns raised in your e-mail and in the articles whose links you sent me. Just as you were kind enough to take the time to answer the letter I sent to the editor of that Lutheran-based magazine, I feel compelled to share my own insights as we continue this discussion and I hope you understand that I still have questions that I would really like to have answered, just as I know you will have additional questions for me. I knew before I even got started that for me to address every single point raised by the articles you sent me would require a considerable amount of time, not to mention a large volume of reading for both of us. Nevertheless, I will at least try to cover the ones that supporters of infant baptism most strongly feel serve to validate their position; if in this letter I do not address any argument that you feel is important, please let me know and I will do my best to do so as the discussion progresses.

For my part, I should point out that I was raised to believe that the Methodist Church is the repository of all truth and at one time I felt that I could trust my Methodist pastor for any and all answers to my questions. Eventually, I met my future wife, June, who encouraged me to join her for her group's Tuesday evening Bible studies. It was there where one of her friends politely challenged me on the issue of water baptism. I was very defensive in expressing support for my church's doctrine and I'm sure those who were present at that Bible study back in 1977 were surprised when I returned with the *Strong's Concordance* that they loaned me and I admitted that they were right and I was wrong. This is something I was willing to do because I was and still am so determined to do my best to honor our Heavenly Father and His Son that I will put Their will above any church doctrine. Do you share this concern of mine to the point that you are willing to put Them over and above the doctrines of the Lutheran Church? In the interest of you and me working together to mutually pursue truth in the course of this discussion, I really need to know that you are. On the other hand, if you are so intent on defending Lutheran doctrine that you are not really open to the possibility that they may be wrong on any of their teachings, then our discussion will most likely not be very productive. Regardless of the direction you want to go with this discussion, I want to reiterate that our agreement on this issue has no bearing on the way I regard you as a person. Of course, I understand that it's always better for individuals to agree on everything (Psalms 133:1), but that should not be what ultimately defines our relationship.

### **Complicating a Simple Matter**

When I objectively look at the issue of infant baptism versus what is known as "believer's baptism," I readily observe that there is no Scripture whatsoever that teaches infant baptism, nor is there a single recorded instance of an approved Scriptural example of infant baptism. All attempts to justify infant baptism must be done by interpretational inferences. In other words, supporters of infant baptism are obligated to *infer* from certain Bible passages that infant baptism "must" be inclusive of what the author had in mind, even though the author made no mention of infants being potential candidates for baptism. Since infant baptism is not specifically mentioned, you have no choice but to use what's not there to make the point. Making doctrines out of inferences that can be interpreted in more than one way at best interferes with any call for "Sola Scriptura," and that is what complicates this and any issue of this nature. In fact, my personal observation is that, lacking direct support of Scriptural teaching, combined with missing any approved Scriptural examples, supporters of infant baptism complicate what should really be

a very simple matter by redefining the Greek word *baptizo*, then retrofitting this new definition so as to satisfy their doctrinal position.

The fact of the matter is, both secular and Biblical scholars who know Greek agree that the original meaning of *baptizo* is “to immerse.” Even the author of the “Baptism: Immersion Only?” article from Catholic Answers admits on page three that “*baptizo* acquired a specialized Christian usage distinct from its original meaning,” then on page four he concedes, “It is true that immersion adequately symbolizes death and resurrection, bringing out more fully the meaning of the sacrament than pouring or sprinkling (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1239).” I would counter that pouring and sprinkling do not in any way form an analogy with the Messiah’s death and resurrection. These additions to the Word effectively change the method, resulting in the loss of meaning. I am prepared to demonstrate from acclaimed lexicons and dictionaries that the word *baptizo* in its original sense means “immerse, make fully wet.” With all due respect, it cannot mean “sprinkle,” except as understood by those who choose to redefine *baptizo*. Moreover, I am prepared to demonstrate that Judaism understood *baptizo* as meaning “immerse” long before the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Finally, the Scriptural understanding is that baptism is the response of a believer to the call to repent and accept the grace so freely offered by our Heavenly Father through the atoning sacrifice of His Son, but since infants are incapable of repenting or even believing anything, this in and of itself distorts the purpose of baptism.

When we compile the above information, it becomes clear to me that baptism for the remission of sins as the pledge of a righteous conscience before the Almighty can only be achieved by immersion. However, I am persuaded that folks like the Catholics, Lutherans and yes, Methodists, confuse the issue by redefining the Greek word *baptizo*, then conferring this new method on infants who are incapable of either believing or repenting. The arguments they raise require not only redefining words to satisfy a doctrinal position, but they include misapplications, esoteric interpretations and faulty connections that add further confusion to what should be a simple matter. The result is this lengthy e-mail. Please don’t get me wrong: I am glad to look into my own doctrinal stand further when the need arises, but I would much rather focus on more edifying things, such as our mutual faith in a Creator and our agreement that the Bible we use today is the Creator’s inspired Word to His people. I say this because I am encountering more and more people who either thumb their noses at our Heavenly Father or else they outright don’t believe in a Creator at all.

### **Reviewing the Article from *Issues, Etc. Journal***

I suppose the best place for me to begin my official response to your e-mail of November 28<sup>th</sup> is to focus on your actual words before delving into the three articles whose links you sent me. In your e-mail, you quickly addressed the article that formed the basis for the study that June and I wrote titled “Baptism: Changing the Method, Losing the Meaning.” I didn’t really expect you to believe everything we wrote, though that would obviously have been wonderful; nevertheless, I was disappointed by the outright rejection and I will defend my rationale when the need arises, so here goes!

You wrote: “I read through your response to an *Issues, Etc.* journal with interest. I also found your web page and read the original journal, with which I not surprisingly agreed.”

I reply: Your agreeing with the “original journal” piqued my interest, so since I hadn’t read it for several years, I decided to take the time to reread it. Here are some things you apparently agree with:

The fact of the matter is that those who reject and even disdain the Baptism of infants and promote a “Believer’s Baptism” are in the minority and actually out-of-step with the historic position of the early Christian Church.

I reply: I will agree that those of my position are in the minority, but since when is truth decided by majority vote? Please read Matthew 7:22 and other similar verses and tell me if truth is determined by majority vote! As for being “out-of-step” with the historic position of the early Christian Church, I will here express surprise that you agree with such a remark in light of the immense volume of evidence supporting the fact that *baptizo* was originally understood as conveying immersion as opposed to sprinkling. I was hoping that we could at the very least agree on this much, but since we do not, I will here add a few quotes from reliable sources, both secular and Biblical. The following comes from the *Encyclopedia International*, Vol 2, Grolier, Incorporated, New York, 1972, p. 378:

The original mode of baptism was by immersion of the entire body in water, but a widely accepted method since the 2d century has been baptism by affusion.

I also quoted the above in our study and your response is that you “don't really trust the authority/finality of this source.” May I ask on what basis you do not trust the validity of this source? I should point out that the author of the above encyclopedia article was Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., of The Church Divinity School of the Pacific, which is a seminary for the Episcopal Church. I checked and confirmed that the Episcopal Church practices infant baptism, yet Massey Shepherd understood that the *original* mode was by immersion. I am not certain that many Lutherans are willing to admit this; in fact, it appears that Dan Matzat outright rejects it. So the above author wrote from a completely unbiased perspective and he represented a seminary whose churches openly practice baptism by sprinkling, yet he concedes that the original mode of baptism was by *immersion*. But you don't trust the source? On what basis? Please tell me his not being a Lutheran has nothing to do with your remark! Based on the fact that the resources you supplied are from pro-infant baptism sources and are therefore certainly biased, the question of a strategy known as “Selective Scholarship” is raised. This is when proponents of a certain belief reject the legitimacy of any sources that are not written or published by scholars known to support the belief in question. I really hope this does not describe your research methods!

In this same article on baptism, Massey H. Shepherd, Jr. writes, “It [baptism] developed from the ancient Jewish custom of baptizing Gentile converts.” This is a fact that I will validate later in this e-mail, so whether you agree with his statement or not, it comes from a trustworthy historical record.

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* is an acclaimed reference tool consisting of six volumes. In volume 1, Lars Hartman, Professor Emeritus of New Testament at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, authored an extensive article on baptism that I believe is well worth reading. Here is the opening paragraph:

**1. Greek Terminology.** The Gk verb for “baptize,” *baptizein*, is formed from *baptein*, “dip,” and means “dip frequently or intensively, plunge, immerse.” By Plato’s time and onwards it is often used in a figurative sense (e.g., in the passive, “soaked” in wine, Plato *Symp.* 176 B). It appears 4 times in the LXX: 4Kgdms 5:14 (Naaman in the Jordan), Jdt 12:7 (purification), Sir 34:30—Eng 34:25 (purification after touching a corpse), Isa 21:4 (figuratively of lawlessness). The noun *baptisma* is only used in Christian literature, where it refers to the baptism of John or to Christian baptism. The word *baptismos* is used in a wider sense for dipping, washing (of dishes Mark 7:4), of ritual washings (Heb 9:10; John’s baptism, Joseph. *Ant.* 18.117; Christian baptism, Col 2:12 [variant]). A synonymous noun is *loutron* “bath” used of both ordinary and

ceremonial baths, but in the NT only with reference to baptism. The corresponding verb *louein* “wash, bathe” is encountered in its everyday use in, e.g., 2 Peter 2:22 and John 13:10. It refers to ceremonial baths in Lev 15:11 and to Christian baptism (probably) in the compound form *apolouein* in 1 Cor 6:11.

Please notice that the above author does not attribute the meaning of “sprinkle” to *baptizein*. He does, however, equate it with *loutron*, a word that means “bath,” and he understands that when you dip something into a body of water or a container of water, this is an example of *baptismos*. Sprinkling is not equated with *baptismos*.

### **Drowned by Sprinkling?**

First-century Jewish historian Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 15, ch. 3 section 3, describes the murder of a boy named Aristobulus, who was forcibly drowned at the command of King Herod, by his companions in a swimming pool. Josephus writes, “But after a while, the young man, at the instigation of Herod, went into the water among them, while such of Herod’s acquaintances as he had appointed to do it, dipped him as he was swimming, and plunged (Gk. βαπτίζοντες, *baptizontes*) him under water, in the dark of the evening, as if it had been done in sport only; nor did they desist till he was entirely suffocated.” I highly doubt that anyone would dare suggest that Aristobulus was drowned by sprinkling.

Even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* refutes the “historic position” claim made by the *Issues, Etc. Journal* author. Please notice the following admission in their “Baptism” article, section titled “Matter and form of the sacrament”:

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 (Ephesians 5:26; Romans 6:4; Titus 3:5). 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. Billuart (*De Bapt.*, I, iii) says that commonly the catechumen is placed in the font, and then water is poured upon the head. He cites the authority of Goar for this statement.  
(<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm#iii>)

To be fair, I wanted to also find an authoritative Lutheran reference. The best I could find is CHRISTIAN CYCLOPEDIA, located at [www.cyclopedia.lcms.org](http://www.cyclopedia.lcms.org). They don't come right out and inform their readers of what the original mode of baptism was, but they do at least uphold immersion while not mentioning sprinkling at all. Here's an excerpt:

The *Didache*, 7, describes the duties of the candidates for baptism and the method of administering it (trine **immersion or infusion**).



Note: “Infusion” is apparently another word for “pouring.” I disagree with that method, yet I find it interesting that the author makes no attempt to identify an original mode of baptism. Here's another excerpt:

3. Luther's *Taufbüchlein verdeutscht* (1523) was essentially a *tr.* of the liturgy of Baptism then in use in Wittenberg. It included the lesser exorcism, the sign of the cross, prayers, the tasting of salt, the “Flood” prayer, the greater exorcism, further prayers, and the greeting of peace, the Holy Gospel from *Mk 10*, the Lord's Prayer, the *ephphatha* ceremony, procession into the church, renunciation of Satan, Creed, **Baptism by 3-fold immersion**, anointing (cross on head only), putting on of the chrisom, placing of the lighted taper in the hand of the child or sponsor. A simplification of this form published in 1526 became part of the Small Catechism in 1529 (*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelischlutherischen Kirche, 5th, rev. ed. [Göttingen, 1963], pp. 535–541*); it underlies the normal *Luth.* baptismal rite, though the greater exorcism and clothing with the chrisom were often omitted. ACP

I find it fascinating that the above encyclopedia produced by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod doesn't even *mention* the words “infants” or “sprinkling”! If that encyclopedia author had been influenced by Dan Matzat, I am pretty sure he would have sung the praises of infant baptism (sprinkling). Nevertheless, a well-respected German Lutheran historian did indeed write that the first-century practice was to immerse (as opposed to sprinkling). Johann (John) Mosheim, an 18th century Lutheran historian, wrote the following on page 108 of his work *An Ecclesiastical History*, Volume I:

The sacrament of baptism was administered in this [the first] century, without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and **was performed by an immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font**. At first it was usual for all who laboured in the propagation of the gospel, to be present at that solemn ceremony; and it was customary, that the **converts** should be baptized and received into the church by those under whose ministry they had embraced the Christian doctrine. But this custom was soon changed. When the Christian churches were well established, and governed by a system of fixed laws, the right of baptizing Christian **converts** was vested in the bishop along.

The above is taken from [An Ecclesiastical History, Book the First, Containing the History of the Church from the Birth of Christ, to Constantine the Great](#), John Lawrence Mosheim, D.D., and Chancellor of the University of Gottingen, translated from the original Latin by Archibald MacLaine, D.D., Volume I, Published by Evert Duyckinck, Collins & Hannay, Collins & Co., E. Bliss & E. White, G. Long, and J. V. Seaman, 2nd edition, 1824, Part I (Century I), Chapter IV, § 8, page 108.

**Question:** Shall I believe the authors of *Issues, Etc. Journal* who maintain that the original practice of the 1<sup>st</sup> century church was to baptize (sprinkle) infants or do I believe a highly-acclaimed trusted 18<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran who writes that **CONVERTS** were baptized by immersion? Note: I highlighted the word “converts” because *converts* are the only baptismal candidates mentioned and I have a very difficult time believing that infants can be converted to faith in the Almighty of Scripture.

And now a quick note about the *Didache*. I know that you expressed that this writing gives the green light to sprinkle. I found the *Didache*'s quote for the pertinent passage and from my perspective, it upholds immersion as the primary and preferred method, but sanctions pouring water upon the head as what I would describe as an emergency measure. I know you asked what one would do if he found

himself in the middle of the desert and he decided to convert, but the poor soul only has a few drops of water to work with – what does he do? This ultimately boils down to a question of “Does an action performed under the most dire of circumstances determine how it should be performed under normal circumstances?” Lutherans seem to answer, “Yes, since we only had a few drops to work with out there in the desert in that one extreme example, this one example shall determine how we will henceforth baptize *everyone*, even though we are now in a location that has an abundance of water.” Do you truly ascribe to this kind of reasoning? Here, by way, is the quote from chapter 7 of the [\*Didache\*](#):

And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19 **in living water**. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you can not in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before.

First, please note that the basic instruction is to baptize (immerse) in living water (water either flowing from a river or from a spring into a pool that empties itself through some sort of drainage system). It doesn't say “with living water,” which some would certainly take to mean “sprinkle.” It says to do it IN living water. It is difficult to imagine “sprinkling in water.” The above writer essentially maintained that we are to always do the best we can with the resources made available to us. If we are simply unable to immerse the convert in living water and the only water available is in a container AND he wants baptized, then the *Didache* author contends that you do the best you can and pour the water on his head. Of course, there is no mention of sprinkling in the *Didache*.

Secondly, the author of the *Didache* upholds fasting for one or two days prior to baptism. Is this what you recommend as well? Infants included?

I do not mean to take up any more space than absolutely necessary for demonstrating that there is nearly a *universal scholarly consensus* that baptism not only carries the original meaning of “immersion,” but this was also the original belief and practice of the early believers. So yes, I am surprised that you agree with the portion of the *Issues, Etc. Journal* author wherein he writes that those who promote a “Believer’s Baptism” are out-of-step with the historic position of the early Christian Church. Even an acclaimed Lutheran historian disagrees with him. Since immersion was the *original* method of baptism and since there is no record of divine authorization to change from the original, this can only mean that man has taken it upon himself to make the change. This effectively makes it a “commandment of men” (Matt. 15:9). I further maintain that, in keeping with the title of the study that June and I composed, when you change the method, you lose the meaning. That is what is going on here and that is why June and I parted ways with an organization that supports the man-made change. We strive to conform our lives to Scripture instead of conforming Scripture to what we want it to mean.

Dan Matzat, the author of the *Issues, Etc. Journal* article “In Defense of Infant Baptism” to which June and I responded, wrote the following:

They [those who reject infant baptism] promote an understanding of grace and faith that is of recent origin. In fact, their theology **arrogantly** suggests that the mode of Baptism received by the church fathers and the likes of Athanasius and Augustine and by the Reformers Luther and Calvin was not proper.



I reply: First, I find Dan Matzat’s assertion that June and I promote an understanding of grace and faith that is of “recent origin” to be insulting and yes, I am saddened if you are in agreement with him that this portrayal represents us. June and I believe that grace has been extended to all of mankind since the creation of Adam, but it is not a cheap grace that we can just snub and blatantly ignore. Faith does enter into the picture and righteous actions always accompany faith. It’s a faith that Abram understood and embraced, which is why we read that Abram believed the Almighty and it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). That’s because he didn’t “just believe” as many of today’s churches teach we should do; rather, his actions validated his faith. Many of today’s churches regard any actions on our part as “works,” and the mere suggestion that “works” should accompany grace and faith is preposterous to them. Yes, I am sad to report that this does include the Lutheran church, at least based on what I’ve read from their writings. I have not yet seen any Lutheran writings wherein they cite the book of James, and certainly not James 2:17, where we read:

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

The bottom line for June and me is, if we put our complete trust in the Almighty, then we will trust that everything He says is true and we will trust that if He says that we should do something, then He knows what He is talking about and for that reason we simply do our best to DO IT. We call that a “childlike faith” – the kind of faith in which we take our Heavenly Father at His Word. At the same time, we recognize that we, like the rest of humanity, have sinned and therefore we deserve the penalty for sin, which is death. However, in spite of our sinful nature, the Almighty extends His grace to us. In fact, we would agree with Mr. Matzat that grace was extended to us before we even turned to our Heavenly Father. But just as there is a law of gravity that we cannot bend or break, in the same way, there is a law wherein there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22), so this is not some “cheap grace” because blood must be shed for our redemption. It is through our loving Heavenly Father’s grace that He gave us His only begotten Son to die for us, in place of us, in our stead. For many churches, this is indeed a cheap grace because they teach that all we need to do in response to that sacrifice is “just accept and believe” without any need for repentance or “works” of obedience on our part. June and I are persuaded that if we have been extended grace, we exhibit our gratitude for this undeserved pardon by finding out what the Almighty wants us to do, then we do our best to fulfill His wishes, just as His Son did, Who is our Example (I Peter 2:21). If Dan Matzat and other Lutherans who agree with him believe that this perception of grace and mercy is of “recent origin,” then yes, we do find it insulting, but not only to us, but to our Heavenly Father as well. June and I do not believe any works we do can save us; rather, they are the fruits of our faith. I am concerned that you may disagree with most or all of what I have just written about grace, faith and works and this core disagreement does indeed prove to separate June and me from much of current Christianity. We may be out-of-step with the Lutheran Church, but we are persuaded that we would be considered “in-step” with ancient believers and most importantly, with our Creator.

Second, I highlighted the word “arrogantly” above because your expressed agreement with Dan Matzat’s article strongly suggests that you agree with him that those of our persuasion (including June and me) are “arrogant” in our theological approach. Do you really believe we are arrogant with our faith? If so, this frustrates us, especially in view of how we have never tried to twist your arm (or anyone else’s) to get you to accept any of our beliefs. Moreover, in view of what I have presented regarding our heartfelt desire to do the Father’s will, i.e., exhibiting a child-like faith, as well as following His Son’s example, I am amazed at how any serious Bible student could regard such a lifestyle as “arrogant.”

I cannot help but also be surprised that you would agree with Dan Matzat’s citation from one of Martin Luther’s writings. He quotes Luther’s *Book of Concord* as follows:

Now if God did not accept the Baptism of infants, he would not have given any of them the Holy Spirit nor any part of him; in short, all this time down to the present day no man on earth could have been a Christian. Since God has confirmed infant baptism through the gift of his Holy Spirit... our adversaries must admit that infant baptism is pleasing to God. For he can never be in conflict with himself, support lies and wickedness, or give his grace and spirit for such ends.

So do you believe the Almighty gives His Holy Spirit to infants? According to Acts 5:32, the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey the Almighty. What evidence do you or Martin Luther have for believing that the Holy Spirit is given to infants? I know Martin Luther certainly didn't supply any supporting evidence in the brief quote above. Don't get me wrong, I love babies, I love my grandchildren dearly and I can personally relate to them better than I can to adults because they are so much like me! They just like to eat, drink and have fun and so long as you give them consistent boundaries, they are usually content with just enjoying life. But I've been around children who have been sprinkled and children who have not been sprinkled and it really doesn't matter either way; you're still going to get those same selfish behaviors wherein the one child wants all the best toys for himself or herself. Is this the Holy Spirit working in the life of that child?

And if it is so important for infants to get sprinkled before receiving the Holy Spirit, I cannot help but wonder why this isn't a teaching found within the pages of Scripture anywhere. I mean, after all, we read specifics about when to circumcise a newborn; so why is there a dearth of information about when to "baptize" a newborn? If this teaching is true, then this is not some trivial oversight on the part of the New Testament authors because, after all, we are talking about when an individual can receive the Holy Spirit.

Since June and I are persuaded that the Scriptural directive is to "repent and be baptized" instead of "baptize your newborn infants ASAP," we reject Martin Luther's commentary above. To be clear, however, we do at least agree with his comment that our Heavenly Father can never be in conflict with Himself, nor does He support lies and wickedness or give His grace and spirit for such ends.

Dan Matzat goes on to write the following:

Even though the title of this article is *In Defense of Infant Baptism*, the truth of the matter is that those who reject the Baptism of infants are the ones who should be defending their stance. While infant baptism is rooted in the history of the early Christian Church, the so-called "Believer's Baptism" originates in the post-Reformation Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century.

I reply: Who's being arrogant here? I have already shown that both secular and religious scholars, including those of the Lutheran faith, concede that the original mode of Baptism was by immersion only and that baptism was only for converts, which must of necessity exclude infants. I will later demonstrate that this baptism does indeed include repentance and is the pledge of a righteous conscience on the part of the one being baptized (not on the part of the one performing the baptism). So I have researched this matter, using not only the reference works that I previously cited, but I left out others, such as *The NewThayer's Greek-English Lexicon* and [The 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia](#) for the sake of trying to keep this e-mail as brief as reasonably possible. I am researching with an open mind, turning to historical sources and unbiased scholars to help me form my present conclusions. I cannot help but notice that the references you gave me to look up are quite biased (coming not from an unbiased angle, but from a defense of either a Catholic or Lutheran doctrinal position, both of which favor infant baptism

(sprinkling). I am also concerned that you may reject articles from any other authors in the same way that Jehovah's Witnesses will not read any literature other than that published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. I say this because of your unsubstantiated remark that you do not trust the validity of the encyclopedia reference that June and I cited in our study (a concern that I have already previously addressed in this e-mail, so I will withhold further comment, but at least you know my concern and why).

### **Reading Into the Text: “Five Baptized Households Must Have Included Infants”?**

As I reexamine Dan Matzat's writings and ponder how you can so readily agree with his every comment, I know I cannot expend too much time on any given comment of his that I find objectionable and I have already taken up considerable space as it is. Nevertheless, on page 5 he apparently succeeded in persuading you that of the five households of which the “entire household” was baptized as an act of family solidarity, this must have included infants. Have you seriously looked at each of those five recorded instances? Let's take a quick look:

**Instance #1:** The household of Cornelius (Acts 11:14): I believe everything this verse says, but I don't necessarily believe the interpretations that men will tack on, and let's face it: The word “baptizo” doesn't appear in Acts 11:14.

**Instance #2:** The household of Lydia (Acts 16:15): First, Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. She lived in Thyatira, but her business brought her to the city of Philippi, which is 210 miles away. Do you seriously believe this woman was nursing an infant? Moreover, we read that the Almighty opened her heart to respond to the Apostle Paul's message. Her baptism was a response to hearing the truth, not something that she had conferred upon her without her knowledge or consent (which is what happens when babies are sprinkled). To use this verse as a validation of infant baptism is simply absurd.

**Instance #3:** The household of the jailer (Acts 16:33): I think Mr. Matzat neglects the words found in verse 34 of this chapter, where we are told that the jailer rejoiced because he and his whole family had come to believe in the Almighty. So are we supposed to believe that infants “came to believe” in the Almighty that day? I guess we are, at least judging by Mr. Matzat's inclusion of this account! Again, this is quite a stretch!

**Instance #4:** The household of Stephanas (I Cor. 1:16): Yes, this verse certainly states that Paul baptized “the household of Stephanas,” but shall we assume that was inclusive of infants? No, at least not based on what Paul wrote LATER in I Cor. 16:15: “You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.” So are we supposed to believe that infants were converted and that they devoted themselves to the service of the saints?? Really?

**Instance #5:** The household of Crispus (Acts 18:8): Here we are told that Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household “believed in the Master.” So if we are expected to believe that infants were baptized that day, did they really “believe in the Master”? Again, this is absurd reasoning, all for the cause of attempting to redefine “baptizo.”

If we do surface research and simply read the words of a biased author such as Dan Matzat, we will likely believe what he writes, especially if we are already biased ourselves. However, if we are willing to shed all biases and go deeper, we can then see the futility of his reasoning, which further underscores the lengths that people like him will go in order to prove a doctrine that they are unwilling to part with. If we are inclined to believe that a “whole household” getting baptized must of necessity include an infant or two, then I guess we must believe that when the royal official's entire household believed in Yeshua, this must have included infants. Well, based on the following section, I guess this is indeed what Lutherans must believe:

## Did Charles Darwin Believe?

I find it strange that you would agree with Dan Matzat's comment (p. 6) that "Any Christian who has been baptized as an infant can confidently say, 'I believe, and I have been baptized.'"

I can only respond by asking, "Oh, really? I have never heard any infant say such a thing." Infants do not express or exhibit belief in a Creator. We need to recognize that infants don't "believe" anything, nor are they capable of repenting. It takes a lot of mental gymnastics to impute "belief" into a newborn infant who is not even capable of communicating at all except by crying and/or cooing. But, again, that is why we're having this lengthy discussion instead of a quick and easy one! Authors such as Dan Matzat transform what should be simple, basic reasoning into a set of incredible leaps that defy logic and sadly, Scripture. They certainly defy the way I lived as a teenager and into my 21<sup>st</sup> year of life! Although I was sprinkled as a 12-year-old, it meant nothing to me and I went on to believe in evolution while all but rejecting belief in a Creator. In my heart, I didn't really believe in a Creator. I wouldn't have admitted this truth back then, but it is true, sad to say. My life back then hardly exemplified the "I believe, and I have been baptized" remark promoted by Dan Matzat. I have since been acquainted with others who were sprinkled as infants, yet some of them deny that there is a Creator. A famous example of this would be professing atheist Bill Nye ("the Science Guy"), who says he abandoned his Episcopalian upbringing after reading his Bible twice and concluding that it was made up by men. (See "Bill Nye on the Limits of Religion," <http://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/bill-nye-on-the-limits-of-religion>). Bill Nye is the guy who argued in favor of evolution in his televised debate with Creationist Ken Ham in February 2014. He was baptized as an infant (Episcopalians sprinkle infants), so does he believe? An even more famous example is that of the most famous evolutionist of all, [Charles Darwin](#), who was born in 1809. His father had Charles baptized that same year in the Anglican St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury, England. Obviously, Charles eventually renounced belief in a Creator. Some say he reverted to Christianity on his deathbed; however, these claims were repudiated by Darwin's children and have been dismissed as false by historians. So since he was baptized (sprinkled) as an infant, did he actually believe even though he taught otherwise? Did he have an unconscious faith that even he didn't know he had?

Well, I have certainly expended considerable space here responding to Dan Matzat's article and I haven't even addressed your apparent agreement with him that it's a "theological perversion that places man into a cooperative relationship with the Almighty in the salvation process." I guess I'll just ask you how you would interpret verses such as Romans 2:13 and Philippians 2:12. I know there are other verses that validate believing that we should enter into a cooperative relationship with the Almighty in the salvation process versus entering into the rebellious relationship as upheld by antinomian churches. We strive to obey, not because there is a "salvation process," but because we love our Heavenly Father and His Son and we know Their ways are just and true. We don't seek to obey out of fear as some might suggest.

### *Moving On to Your E-mail Comments*

I know I sent you somewhat of a response to your e-mail a couple of weeks ago and I stand by the comments from that e-mail, but I want to add a few more details this time. You wrote:

I think that much of what we've been discussing is not a single question, but more precisely two questions:

1. What mode(s) of baptism is/are acceptable (immersion, pouring, sprinkling)?
2. Should infants be excluded from baptism?

I see one important intersection point with those two questions, which is that church bodies which baptize infants use either the sprinkling or pouring modes, because it is dangerous to immerse a baby. There might also be an intersection point with regard to the activity of making a decision and stepping into a deep body of water vs. passively receiving water that is poured or sprinkled as a baby.

I reply: I am persuaded that I have already sufficiently addressed question #1 above. Frankly, if I were in your position, I would go with immersion simply because you know you can't go wrong. Authorities, including scholars from both Lutheran and Catholic communities, admit that it's the original and best, which in turn means it's what the Creator had in mind from the very beginning. Man decided to make changes, so for me the question is whether or not mankind has the Creator's blessing to alter what He prescribed.

For question #2, if you really believe infants have "unconscious faith" or that there is some sort of preemptive salvation accorded to infants who get baptized, then I guess go for it. But if you believe that baptism is a response to the grace extended to us by our loving Heavenly Father and as a pledge of our decision to turn away from our previous life of sin we choose to get baptized, then I would recommend *excluding* infants from baptism because I don't think they are capable of making a conscious decision to turn away from sin (or at least do their best to turn away from sin). My old college roommate and his wife are Lutherans. We remained friends until our daughter was born and they wanted to make sure we had her "baptized." When I explained that we would allow her to make that decision when she was ready to follow our Creator's ways as established in His Word, my ex-roommate's wife's countenance dropped to the floor and she exclaimed, "Aren't you afraid that if she dies, she'll go to hell!!!!!!?" When I answered that little children *already* belong to Yahweh and I pointed out Matthew 18:1-10 to them, they rushed to end our visit and they left. We haven't seen or heard from them since. I am curious if this is a Lutheran doctrine – that if children don't get baptized by their parents/guardians, then if they should happen to die a premature death, they go to hell? Do you believe this?

We have a friend named Kathy who was raised in the Catholic faith. Kathy mentioned having once attended a presentation given by a woman who had six children that were murdered by a family acquaintance. A priest who was sent to console her and her husband ended up achieving the opposite effect when he (the priest) learned that none of her murdered children had been baptized. The mother was then informed that her children are in Purgatory. On the other hand, it was revealed that the murderer had been baptized, so he will be in heaven when he dies. Is this close to the way you believe? If this *isn't* Lutheran and Catholic doctrine, then it cannot be far from it for so many people to believe this way, yet the perception is created that folks like June and me who strive to live Torah-observant lives are the ones who don't understand or appreciate the grace extended to us by our loving Heavenly Father and His Son. In fact, we are called "arrogant."

I understand from the "Frequently Asked Questions | Doctrine" from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that Lutherans interpret Matthew 18:6 as meaning that infants believe. The exact statement is as follows:

Although we do not claim to understand fully how this happens, we believe that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant. We believe this because the Bible says that infants can believe (Matt. 18:6) and that new birth (regeneration) happens in Baptism (John 3:5-7; Titus 3:5-6). The infant's faith cannot yet, of course, be fully expressed or articulated by the child, yet it is real and present all the same (see e.g., Acts 2:38-39, Luke 1:15; 2 Tim. 3:15).

First, Matthew 18:6 says nothing about whether or not the child that Yeshua called to come over to Him in that narrative had been baptized. I dare say that he or she had *not* been baptized at that time. Moreover, that child was certainly *not* an infant! Finally, Yeshua's homily had nothing to do with the baptism of infants or even children. It was about the child-like faith (trust) that we as adults need to have in Him and in His Father. Young children (pre-teens) have this "blind faith" that their parents know what is best for them and they tend to act accordingly. We need to have that same kind of child-like faith in our Heavenly Father; however, I have found that when I exercise that same child-like faith, doing what His Word says to do, I have had pastors (in so many words) tell me that I am practicing a "salvation by works" lifestyle, not one of faithful acceptance of the grace extended to us by our Heavenly Father and His Son.

By the way, I don't expect Lutheran doctrine to ever change in my lifetime, so I don't look for Lutherans to ever start immersing infants, nor would I ever recommend that they ever start doing such a thing for reasons already laid out in this e-mail. Nevertheless, I will say that I do not necessarily agree with your statement that it is dangerous to immerse a newborn infant. Newborn babies are "born swimmers"! For more on "[Infant Swimming](#)," please read this Wikipedia article. There are also YouTube videos out there, but, again, I don't look for Lutherans to discontinue their practice of sprinkling babies anytime soon.

### ***How My Being "Sprinkled" Helped My Spiritual Walk***

You continue: I guess this subject area is one that I feel strongly about discussing for a few reasons, namely:

1. I believe and trust that my baptism was a valid sacrament in which God conferred life, forgiveness of sins, and salvation because of His promise.
2. I believe that your first baptism was valid.
3. I am honored to be recently made a godparent and I wouldn't take on that role if it was meaningless.

I've included three resources on this subject which represent a minuscule portion of the apologetics work out there on this subject. I've chosen them not for their exhaustiveness but for their brevity, and the second one is from a Catholic source though the position they take is shared by Catholics and Lutherans in this case. Of note, the most important resource by far is the Bible, and without the common frame of reference of the literal truth of the Bible we could not have this discussion.

I reply: **1.** If you were sprinkled or baptized as an infant, I do not believe it was a valid sacrament, nor do I believe the Almighty conferred "life" on you at that moment, nor do I believe he "pre-forgave you," even though the price has already been paid for sin, nor do I believe that you were granted salvation at that time. I would say that Hebrews 6:1-4 invalidates believing that getting baptized confers eternal salvation. Moreover, unless we pursue peace with all men and holiness, we will not see the One Who died for us (Heb 12:14). Do you believe it's possible for someone who was baptized (sprinkled) as an infant to later in life outright reject belief in a Creator and live a life marred by criminal behavior? We both know it happens and according to I Corinthians 6:9, the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of the Almighty. Finally, the author of Hebrews warns us that if we willfully sin after having come to the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins; rather what we have to look forward to is a fearful prospect of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. See Hebrews 10:26-27. Is it possible to be baptized, then "shrink back" (Heb. 10:38-39)? For me, it's not only about recognizing my lost state and turning to the Almighty for salvation and then exhibiting a response of love-bearing fruit, it's also about remaining true to Him and as Yeshua Himself said, "enduring to the end."



Baptism is not the “end” to the means. It symbolizes the beginning of a new life and a rejection of the old one. I know, it’s more than all that, but hopefully you get the picture.

2. I know that my first baptism (actually “sprinkling”) was not valid because it meant nothing to me; in fact, I eventually rejected the Almighty altogether. With my baptism by immersion, I knew that I knew that I know there is a Creator and I made a conscious decision to turn away from my selfish ways and live for the Almighty henceforth. I’m not saying I’m perfect, but June will tell you that I’m not the same guy I used to be and I hope I never try resurrecting that “old man of sin” that I buried so many years ago.

3. I have no idea what the role of godparent entails, nor do I see how it relates to this issue. Since we’re already covering a lot of ground with the other angles addressed to this point, I would prefer to at least table this one for now.

About the “three resources” that you refer to above: I have accessed all three links. I read the *Table Talk Radio* document titled “Infant Baptism: The Perfect Picture of Sola Fide” and the Catholic Answers article titled “Baptism: Immersion Only?” I read the “Frequently Asked Questions” web page, at least the questions dealing with baptism. I’m not sure what you felt it had to offer that the other two did not. If there was anything compelling, then I’m sorry, but I missed it. The author supplies a plethora of proof texts, some of which I feel are better used to support baptism by immersion and the others don’t prove anything one way or the other. I am glad that we can agree that the most important resource of all is by far the Bible. It must be our foundation if we are to have a productive discussion, but we also need to be careful that we correctly interpret and follow what our Heavenly Father tells His children to do.

You wrote:

I'd like to highlight two of the places in your article where you make claims that are not sufficiently supported by evidence and rest upon assumptions and speculation.

1. Baptism in its original form could mean *nothing more* than immersion (page 1).
2. Immersion preceded the practice of *substituting* the act of sprinkling (page 4).

For the first claim, please take a look at resources 1 and 2 below which bring up passages in which baptizo is used to refer to washing which does not necessarily require immersion such as in Mark 7:3-4 and Titus 3:5. Your first claim then is not valid.

I reply: I took the time to look up two of your references that you believe support non-immersion (Mk 7:3-4 and Titus 3:5). I am unable to find any form of the Greek word *baptizo* in Titus 3:5, so could you please be more specific about how that verse potentially supports non-immersion? May I ask which Greek text you are using to produce a form of *baptizo* in that verse?

But let's say that a form of the Greek word *baptizo* does indeed appear in Titus 3:5. Regardless of the Greek word translated “washing” in that verse, since it refers to a washing away of sin, I have a difficult time believing this is something that can be achieved by sprinkling, unless we radically trivialize the effects of sin in our lives. Personally, I don't think sin can be sprinkled away. If we are going to figuratively wash sin away, I am not persuaded that sprinkling is satisfactory. However, symbolically burying the “old man of sin” in the same way that sinners were drowned at the time of the Flood *does* fit my understanding. I will need to read more into how you believe sprinkling achieves burial of the old man of sin.

As for Mark 7:3, I do not find a form of the Greek word *baptizo* in that verse either. Coincidentally, I DO find the Greek word for “sprinkle” in the Nestle Greek text (*rantizontai*, which means “they

sprinkle”). This certainly provides a line of demarcation between *rantizo* and *baptizo*. They do not mean the same thing.

Mark 7:4 refers to the washing of cups and vessels. I can assure you that if you should have a job as a dishwasher in a fine restaurant and you are caught “sprinkling” the cups and dishes instead of fully immersing them and scrubbing them clean, you will not last long at that job. Also, in these modern times, one might think that running water from a faucet is sufficient for washing vessels, and maybe in some cases it is. However, they didn't have instant highly-pressurized water back in the first century. They used basins of water, similar to what my great-grandparents used. My great-grandparents did not pour water from their hand pump (which they had in their kitchen) to clean dishes. They washed the dishes by immersing them in a basin and scrubbing them clean. I want to be figuratively washed clean in much the same way that I want my dishes cleaned before I eat off of them. That's just me.

To this point, I must say that I find no difficulty with understanding the author's intentions when Mark 7:4 was penned; it is the interpretation that men apply to those verses that concern me. The bottom line is, a washing can certainly be achieved by completely immersing oneself, presuming scrubbing is also done. To assume that sprinkling was the intended understanding is, from my perspective, reading too much into the text, essentially making it mean what one wants it to mean. From my perspective, those who get “sprinkle” out of *baptizo* are intent on redefining words to satisfy a doctrinal position. I don't want to do or believe something because my church says it's okay; I need a clear and satisfactory understanding from an overall examination of Scripture.

Historically Jews have understood *baptizo* to mean immerse; they refer to this immersion as a *mikveh*, a custom that predates the first century. You can read about it here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual\\_washing\\_in\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual_washing_in_Judaism)

Moreover, in II Kings 5:14, when Naaman fulfilled the command to “dip” seven times in the Jordan River, the Hebrew word translated “dip” is the word *tabal*, which means “dip, plunge.” It is a form of the Hebrew word *taba*, which means to drown or sink (vastly different from the effects of sprinkling). I feel I need to point this out just in case you may be persuaded that Naaman didn't *really* immerse himself in the Jordan River in the same way that you are not persuaded that the Messiah was actually immersed. This is an important point because this same Hebrew word is translated as *ebaptizato* in the pre-first century Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Just to be clear, in the Greek translation of 2 Kings 5:14, the Hebrew word *tabal* is translated *ebaptizato*. *Tabal*, then, is used both to describe the way in which Naaman “dipped” in the Jordan River and the means by which John the Baptist baptized *Yeshua* the Messiah. Just as Naaman “dipped” (Heb. *tabal*, Greek *ebaptizato*) in the Jordan River, so did *Yeshua*. Only those who attempt to redefine the Hebrew word *tabal* would say that *Yeshua* may not have been fully immersed. I will address this point in greater detail later.

Please believe me when I tell you there was a time when I would have loved to believe that “baptizo” isn't necessarily a reference to immersion. I hope you don't think that all it took to persuade me that I needed to be immersed was just doing some light reading of select Scripture texts one evening. It took considerable study and a determination to fulfill what Scripture says, not what some preacher or denomination teaches me as being good enough. As a result of that intense study, I came away believing that I was not “baptized” the Scriptural way at the age of 12. Rather, I became persuaded that I was “rantized.” I know you disagree, but to this point, you have not persuaded me otherwise.

In summary, I have demonstrated that Mark 7:3-4 and Titus 3:5 do nothing to support the cause of sprinkling vs. immersion. Mark 7:4 involves the washing (immersion) of cups, pots and bronze vessels, all of which need to be immersed if we are to properly wash them (at least by 1<sup>st</sup> century standards). I have no problem with immersing cups and dishes when they get washed; in fact, I would have a problem if they were washed any other way, at least by 1<sup>st</sup> century standards. I understand that modern dishwasher appliances are capable of shooting out a powerful spray that gets dishes clean. Either way, the dishes get “fully wet,” something that cannot be accomplished by sprinkling. The word *baptizo* does not appear in Titus 3:5, but certainly baptism involves a “washing of regeneration (rebirth),” which is beautifully represented by the emergence of a “new creature” from the watery grave of baptism. Beautiful imagery, but I don’t see how this rebirth imagery can be captured via sprinkling. The meaning gets lost in the process of redefining *baptizo*.

When we assimilate all the above facts, it is clear that I have demonstrated in this e-mail that *baptizo* in its original form could mean nothing less than immersion. We will see that an 18<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran historian upholds this fact, as well as unbiased secular and Bible scholars alike. The modern-day Lutheran Church’s attempt to invalidate this understanding requires believing that “baptizing” cups and dishes must equate to sprinkling them to get them clean. Even the act of properly washing one’s hands involves immersing them in water, so from my perspective this is not about whether or not *baptizo* can have the alternate meaning of “sprinkle”; it’s about an attempt to redefine a word so as to make its meaning fit a desired interpretation.

Your point #2 above summarizes your belief that immersion did not precede the practice of *substituting* the act of sprinkling, which in turn means you are persuaded that sprinkling constitutes the original understanding and practice of *bapizo*. This is simply a false assumption, likely based on a biased upbringing from the Lutheran school that you attended. Since even Catholic and Lutheran resources agree that immersion was in fact the original form of baptism, I am confident that immersion did indeed precede the practice of sprinkling. This is not speculation on my part; it is fact which I, again, have demonstrated in this e-mail.

You continue:

For the second claim, please take a look at resources 2 and 3 which show that, first, there was not always even enough water available for full immersion in some parts of the Biblical world and it is highly unlikely that full immersion was always used. This would mean that there was likely at least one other mode alongside full immersion. I know your encyclopedia source appears to say one thing about baptism, but I don't really trust the authority/finality of this source and there are multiple kinds of baptism anyway so what may have been true for Jewish baptism or the baptism given by John is not definitive proof of just how baptism was practiced in apostolic times. If there was ever in apostolic times even one valid baptism that did not involve full immersion in water, your second claim can be shown to be false because sprinkling can only be accused of being a substitute for immersion if immersion was the exclusive practice. This is a high burden of proof for you that you will have a hard time meeting.

I reply: Your second claim doesn’t really make any sense. First, people do not generally choose to dwell in locations where there is “not enough water,” so what you are doing here is not really fair – choosing a potentially extreme situation, then allowing the response to that extreme situation determine what should be the course of action for *all* situations. This is what you are doing and that is simply not fair, nor does it change the original meaning of the word *baptizo*. I maintain that most people choose to dwell in places where there is an abundant water supply, so the contingency that you attempt to infuse into this discussion is unfair and invalid. Since you reason that I would have a difficult time meeting your

“high burden of proof,” I’m curious if you can supply examples of individuals dwelling in places where there is no water. Moreover, if it is true, as I have demonstrated, that *baptizo* does indeed mean to “dip” or “immerse,” then would it be possible for someone to be dipped or immersed if they lived in a location where there is insufficient water?

Second, I recommend researching ancient baptisteries found in the land of Israel. Ronnie Reich, in an article published in the *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 1993, reported that during the last quarter of the twentieth century over 300 *miqva’ot* or immersion pools were discovered in Israel and date from the first century B.C. to 70 A.D. He wrote:

Of these about 150 have been found in Jerusalem—about 60 in the Upper City (Avigad’s excavations), about 40 from the excavations near the southern gates of the Temple Mount and the rest in various locations.<sup>1</sup>

Jewish ritual baths involving the *miqva’ot* were used for purification of the entire body and were by immersion since, according to the *Mishna*, no part of the body’s surface could be untouched by water. Bill Grasham reported,

It is noteworthy that visitors to archaeological sites in Israel today can easily observe that all of the pre-A. D. 70 synagogues that have been discovered — at the Herodium, Masada, and Gamla—had immersion pools in close proximity for the purificatory washings of those who attended their services.<sup>2</sup>

I remember you mentioning that there was very little water available for baptisms by immersion in Jerusalem during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. This is simply not true. There are certainly springs in Jerusalem (cf., the [Gihon Spring](#)) and even the New Testament references at least two pools in Jerusalem (the Pool of Bethesda and the Pool of Siloam). There is also a pool known as the [Struthion Pool](#). These pools and springs certainly refute the Lutheran argument that there was not enough water in Jerusalem to baptize between 3000 and 5000 people in a single day.

You continue:

By the way, as resource 1 asks, how do you even know that Jesus was completely immersed in water as opposed to being waist, chest, or shoulder deep in the water? We don’t know that he was fully immersed, because again *baptizo* is not always used to mean full immersion in the Bible.

I reply: In response to the question, “How do you even know that Jesus was completely immersed in water as opposed to being waist, chest, or shoulder deep in the water?” I reply, “*How do you know He wasn’t?*” Do you see my point? You cannot go wrong by going with the agreed-upon original,

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<sup>1</sup> Ronny Reich, “The Great Mikveh Debate,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April, 1993), pp. 52-53. See also Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land: An Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Grasham, “[Archaeology and Christian Baptism](#),” *Restoration Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2001), 115. See also William LaSor, “Discovering What Jewish *Miqva’ot* Can Tell Us about Christian Baptism,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (January/February 1987): 57. LaSor believed that the Jewish *miqva’ot* provided the background for Christian baptism.

unadulterated meaning of the word *baptizo*. I therefore answer, “We know that He was completely immersed because that is what the word *baptizo* means, in spite of your efforts to redefine it.”

Not only that, but please consider how unlikely it is that Yeshua was only sprinkled or “poured upon.” Why would He venture out into the river just to have a few drops sprinkled upon Himself? Does that *really* make sense to you?? This same thought applies to Him being “poured upon” (“affusion,” if you prefer). Why not just say to John, “John, reach hither with thy horn, dip it into the water and pour it upon My head as I lean out over the water -- and take care that thou gettest not a drop on my garments!”?

The above may seem like a bit of an exaggeration, but let’s face it – there’s no need to wade out into the Jordan River to get “poured upon” or “sprinkled” if that’s all that’s needed to fulfill the mitzvah of baptism. And let’s not forget the Jewish tradition from which the practice of baptism is derived requires immersion. See the [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yebamoth 47a and 47b](#) for validation of this fact:

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: 'What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions'? If he replies, 'I know and yet am unworthy', he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. He is informed of the sin [of the neglect of the commandments of Gleanings, the Forgotten Sheaf, the Corner and the Poor Man's Tithe. He is also told of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments. Furthermore, he is addressed thus: 'Be it known to you that before you came to this condition, if you had eaten suet you would not have been punishable with *kareth*, if you had profaned the Sabbath you would not have been punishable with stoning; but now were you to eat suet you would be punished with *kareth*; were you to profane the Sabbath you would be punished with stoning'. And as he is informed of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments, so is he informed of the reward granted for their fulfilment. He is told, 'Be it known to you that the world to come was made only for the righteous, and that Israel at the present time are unable to bear either too much prosperity or too much suffering'. He is not, however, to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith. Should any shreds which render the circumcision invalid remain, he is to be circumcised a second time. As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. **When he comes up after his ablution** he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects.

While researching this topic, I found that in 1755, a renowned Catholic expressed the same disbelief that I have with regard to how anyone could believe that Yeshua waded out in the Jordan River only to either be sprinkled or have water poured on His head. This Catholic, a man by the name of Paul Maria Paciaudi published by the authority at Rome a volume of Christian antiquities, which he dedicated to Pope Benedict XIV. The pope, being fond of antiquities, admitted Paciaudi to his presence and took pleasure in examining his compilations. In the fourth chapter of the second dissertation, Paciaudi speaks of the two baptisteries at Ravenna, and finds fault with the artists for representing John the Baptist pouring water on the head of the Messiah. Paciaudi wrote, “Nothing can be more monstrous than these emblems! Was our Lord Christ baptized by aspersion? This is so far from being true, that nothing can be

more opposite to truth, and it is to be attributed to the ignorance and rashness of workmen.”<sup>3</sup> Again, this came from a Catholic!

Another Catholic, Joseph De Vicecomes of Milan wrote the following:

I will never cease to profess and teach that only immersion in water, except in cases of necessity, is lawful baptism in the church.<sup>4</sup>

You might also be interested in a booklet written in 1838 by an author who maintains that infant baptism is borrowed from heathen customs. He cites both heathen and Catholic writers in support of his premise. The name of the booklet is “[Infant Sprinkling not Christian Baptism but Heathen Lustration](#),” by G. H. Orchard, J.F. Winks Publisher, The British Library, 1838. If nothing else, I hope you at least understand that this issue (sprinkling vs. immersion) is not by any means a recent one!

More recently, a Lutheran theologian wrote, “There is no definite proof of the practice [of infant baptism] until after the third century.” This statement comes from a German Lutheran named Kurt Aland, who was a Professor of Theology at the University of Münster, in his book *Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Translated and with an introduction by G.R. Beasley-Murray. London: SCM Press, 1963. p. 120). As for those who upheld infant baptism during and after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, I trust you understand that and I simply disagree with such “Church Fathers” as Origen and all those who supported infant baptism at the “Council of Carthage” of 254 AD.

### **The Hebrew Matthew and Yeshua’s Baptism**

It is common knowledge that Matthew not only composed the book of Matthew in Greek, but that he also produced a copy in the Hebrew language. The famous Church historian Eusebius testified to this effect and there are in fact Hebrew copies of the book of Matthew that have survived through the ages. We have in our possession a copy of what is known as the *Shem Tob Hebrew Matthew* with Hebrew text and accompanying English translation by Professor George Howard of Mercer University, Macon, GA. In the *Hebrew Matthew*, the Hebrew word from which the word “baptize” is translated is the Hebrew word *tabal*. You can look up this word for yourself in *Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*. It is word #2881 and it plainly means “dip” or “plunge.” A similar word in Hebrew, the word *taba*, means “to drown” or “to sink.” *Taba* is word #2883. The correlation between these two words is unmistakable.

When Naaman “dipped himself” seven times in the Jordan River, (cf., 2 Kings chapter 5) the Hebrew word translated “dipped” is the word *tabal*. In the Greek translation of 2 Kings 5:14, the Hebrew word *tabal* is translated *ebaptizato*. *Tabal*, then, is used both to describe the way in which Naaman “dipped” in the Jordan River and the means by which John the Baptist baptized *Yeshua*. Just as Naaman “dipped” (Heb. *tabal*, Greek *ebaptizato*) in the Jordan River, so did *Yeshua*. Only those who attempt to redefine the Hebrew word *tabal* would say that *Yeshua* may not have been fully immersed. Please notice the definition found for *tabal* in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, R. Laird Harris, Editor, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1980, p. 342:

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Antiquities*, by Paul Maria Paciaudi, 1755, p. 56. This citation of Paul Maria Paciaudi was borrowed from *Concise Comments on Baptism, With References Verified*, by William Wallace Everts, Jr., C. H. Simonds & Co., Printers, Boston MA, 1890, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *On the Ancient Rites and Ceremonies of Baptism*, by Joseph De Vicecomes, Lib. IV.; chapter 6. This citation of Joseph De Vicecomes was borrowed from *Concise Comments on Baptism, With References Verified*, by William Wallace Everts, Jr., C. H. Simonds & Co., Printers, Boston MA, 1890, p. 40.



טָבַל (*tābal*) **I, dip, plunge.** (ASV and RSV similar.)

The verb conveys the immersion of one item into another: bread in vinegar (Ruth 2:14), feet in water (Josh 3:15), a coat in blood (Gen 37:31). *baptō* is the common LXX rendering of this root.

“Dipping” is employed in Israel’s religious ritual of cleansing. (See I Sam 14:7 for dipping in the literal sense). In the sin offering, whereby the sinner’s (individual or national) iniquity is atoned, the priest dips his finger into the blood of the sacrificial animal and sprinkles it before the veil or places it upon the altar’s horns (Lev 4:6, 17; 9:9). The sinner is identified with the animal’s blood shed as a representation of the death paid for the sin. Hebrews 9:19-22 draws on this figure of cleansing by blood. Similarly blood was placed on the doorposts at Passover, representing the lamb’s blood shed substitutionally for the first born (Ex 12:22). Identification is also conveyed in the cleansing ritual for lepers (Lev 14:6, 16, 51; II Kings 5:14) and the dead (Num 19:18). Hyssop, or the priest’s finger, is dipped in water or oil, cleansing agents, and sprinkled upon the unclean object to identify it as cleansed.

Job 9:31 employs the root to represent Bildad “plunging” Job into the filthy pit of accusations. Blessing is depicted by “dipping” one’s feet in oil (Deut 33:24; cf. Job 29:6).

I might point out that the Hebrew word *tabal* is translated in the King James Version as “dip” 15 times; it is translated “plunge” once and “dyed” once (because dyeing was done by dipping). I hope you can see why I am persuaded that it is quite a “stretch” to believe that Yeshua was not immersed by John the Baptist.

You wrote:

I am really tempted to keep going, but I don't want to discuss everything at once and lose focus on any individual topic. I would encourage you to read each of the resources below and try to consider their arguments objectively. Certainly I am not looking to change any of your beliefs, but only to show you where I'm coming from and how a strong defense can be made for the baptism we each received growing up. I'm open to further discussion if you would like.

I agree that we shouldn’t discuss everything all at once and I have already expended considerable time responding to the claims you have presented; yet, I am obviously not satisfied with your answers, so I would like to see what else you had in mind. I encourage dialog in the interest of “iron sharpening iron” and if one or both of us come away with a different perspective – one that enhances our walk with our Creator and His Son, then it will have been worth it. I do appreciate that you are only showing me where you are coming from and I again encourage you to help awaken my power of reasoning if I am mistaken in my beliefs.

About the resources that you encouraged me to read: As I already mentioned, I have read through two of them and the portion of the FAQ web page that addresses baptism; for the record, I have already addressed my concern about your expressed lack of trust for the resource I use (*The Encyclopedia International*) while simultaneously expecting me to accept the trustworthiness of the three sources that you offer. I would say that the articles you asked me to read are all very clearly biased, not to mention poorly-researched, emanating from either Lutheran or Catholic sources, whereas the author from my encyclopedia source that you distrust was unbiased, being an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, a church that practices *paedobaptism*. Again, I am persuaded that your approach is unfair and I’ll leave it at that.

## Response to Table Talk Radio: Infant Baptism: The Perfect Picture of Sola Fide

The first article that I read is “Infant Baptism: The Perfect Picture of Sola Fide.” In this article, the author (Evan) clearly attempts to redefine the Greek word *baptizo* so as to make it inclusive of sprinkling. I cannot say it enough times that regardless of how hard people try to do this, the fact of the matter is, unbiased Greek scholars understand that this word in its original sense means “immerse” and even a highly acclaimed Lutheran scholar plainly wrote that this is how 1<sup>st</sup> century believers understood the word to mean. Nevertheless, Evan attempts to give *baptizo* a different meaning, then he uses his new user-definition to set the stage for his comment that the Messiah never instructed His disciples to “baptize by immersion.” Here’s what he wrote:

If immersion was necessary for baptism, we would have that instruction in the Scriptures. Matthew 28 is where Jesus institutes Baptism when He instructs the apostles to “baptize and to teach.” He doesn’t say, “baptize by immersion and teach.”

My answer: Since *baptizo* already carries the original meaning of “immerse,” what Evan would actually have Yeshua say is, “Immerse by immersion and teach.” Does that make any sense to you? I have already demonstrated that the word *baptizo* was historically understood as meaning “to immerse,” so with that understanding, what Yeshua *actually* said was, “IMMERSE and teach ....” When you *baptizo* your hands in water, you *immerse* your hands in water. When you *baptizo* a cup in water, you *immerse* the cup in water. This is really not a difficult concept to grasp, but Evan seems bent on complicating things by stating that *baptizo* can mean “to wash,” which in his mind can apparently be accomplished by sprinkling water on a cup (or on a person). Evan ever-so-slightly alters the basic understanding of the word just enough to satisfy his desire for the word to mean what he wants it to mean, even though the ancients never understood the concept that he attributes to the word. It’s kinda like saying, “The word ‘nap’ is a temporary state of unconsciousness, so when the man received a severe blow to the head, he napped until he was revived by paramedics.” Just as no one will deny that the man was temporarily unconscious and that we are also temporarily unconscious when we take naps, it is a perversion of the word “nap” to apply it to someone who was accidentally rendered unconscious. In the same way, no one will deny that when we *baptizo* something, it can then be washed; but does this mean we can scrub a dish with a wet rag and say that the dish was thereby immersed? No, but if you scrub that same dish while placing it under water, *then* you can say that it was immersed. Thus, what we have going on here is an attempt to *redefine a word* in order to satisfy a doctrinal position.

Evan obviously feels he succeeded in presenting the Greek word *baptizo* as meaning “to wash” instead of “immerse,” which in turn (in his estimation) justifies coming up with the meaning of “sprinkle.” Did his attempt work for you? It didn’t work for the ancients, nor did it work for 18<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian and historian John Mosheim, nor did it work for 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran scholar Kurt Aland. It certainly didn’t work for June and me.

Once Evan feels he succeeds at redefining *baptizo*, he then apparently feels at liberty to teach his readers that the Messiah didn’t expect His followers to immerse anyone at all; after all, according to Evan, the Messiah didn’t instruct His disciples to “*baptizo* by immersion”! Do you see the paradox here? To say that Yeshua didn’t instruct His disciples to baptize by immersion would be like saying, “I never sit by reclining” or “I would never gaze by staring.” I could go on and on!

Evan goes on to produce what I feel is a very confusing exposé about how, since we cannot be saved by works, then there is no reason someone who can do no works (e.g., an infant) is unable to have faith

(???). So since none of us can do works to obtain faith, then this apparently doesn't exclude a newborn infant from having faith (???). Keep in mind he has just succeeded in persuading some of his readers that *baptizo* means something other than immerse, and now he defines who is capable of having faith enough to need baptism. He presents a baby as a sinner that perfectly typifies our "old Adamic nature," adding that the act of baptism somehow demonstrates the Almighty's gift of faith. Here's what Evan writes:

So the fact that a baby can't do anything doesn't exclude the baby of possessing faith.  
Faith is a condition of the heart—not a condition of the mind.

I reply: Isn't the heart sometimes referred to as "the seat of the mind"? If Evan wants to believe that babies have faith, then that is his right, but for June and me it reveals the lengths that some folks will go to in order to try to justify a certain teaching that is otherwise void of Scriptural support. Do you really believe babies have FAITH? If babies have faith that the Almighty has given them loving parents who will feed and care for them, then why do they cry when they're hungry? Don't they have faith to know they will be taken care of? But that's just the tip of the iceberg. If we can believe what the Apostle James wrote, we should expect babies to bear the fruits of righteousness as a result of having faith. In James 2:24, James wrote, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (This is not a verse Evan would like because he wrote, "And yet we [Lutherans] teach that sinners are saved by faith alone." So the Apostle James teaches that faith produces works; Evan teaches that works have nothing to do with anything, so do not expect babies to produce any works. And he's right about that part: Babies will not produce works while in the infant stage of life, even if they should somehow possess some level of faith in a Creator (which I don't think they do). Yet according to the Apostle James, if babies possess faith, then righteous works will follow -- not a predominantly selfish, disobedient demeanor. Finally, we find the Scriptural definition of "faith" in Hebrews 11:1:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Do you honestly believe that babies are "sure of what they hope for and certain of what they do not see"? I hope you know better!

From my perspective, the Lutheran teaching that babies have faith is simply an esoteric teaching that falls flat under the light of what the Apostle James wrote, not to mention the definition of faith according to the writer of the Book of Hebrews. I encourage you to read all of James chapter 2 and then explain how that verse justifies believing that babies possess faith. I am also wondering if you can produce some actual text of Scripture where we read about the faith of infants (apart from your interpretation of Matt. 18:6). An approved Scriptural example would be helpful instead of asking anyone to drill through Evan's explanation. Seriously, if I were raised in a household where it is esoterically taught that babies have faith conferred upon them when they are sprinkled, I can see how I might abandon faith in a Creator by the time I'm old enough to think on my own. Since Evan has already lost me within the maze of his esoteric exposé, I will simply move on to the next point raised in this "Table Talk Radio" discussion by someone named "tlimonsen" in the "Comments" section of this article.

### **Using Ezekiel 36:24-28 to Validate Baptism by Sprinkling?**

Briefly stated, tlimonsen argues that when the noble Bereans of Acts 17:11 searched the Scriptures to find justification for the Apostle Paul teaching this strange belief about "getting sprinkled" as a rite of initiation into the "Church," lo and behold, they came across Ezekiel 36:24-28, which says:

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. **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. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. (NIV)”

Tlsimonsen interprets the above-described act of sprinkling to be the cross-reference proof text that the noble Bereans were looking for:

Here baptism is a rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the passages that the Pharisees would have been interpreting to mean that the Christ would come baptizing. Moreover, this clearly shows that sprinkling is a method of baptizing.

I can see how someone might read the above and without doing any additional research, conclude that sprinkling is a method of baptizing. After all, the underlying word in that text, both in the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint (Gk. *rhano*), is a word that does indeed mean “sprinkle.” However, even by doing the most basic, elementary research, we can see that this one verse, in and of itself, proves that *baptizo* cannot be used to mean “sprinkle.”

First, in the Greek Septuagint text of Ezekiel 36:25, the Greek word used to translate the English word “sprinkle” is NOT “baptizo.” Rather, it's the Greek word “rhano,” which is from the Greek word “rhantizo” (also *rhaino*, as in “rain”). This Greek word literally means “sprinkle.” So please tell me why the New Testament authors didn't use a form of the word “rhantizo” when they presented their readers with the concept of baptism?? Let's face it: “Rhantizo” is the word that Lutherans and Catholics would like to see in the New Testament verses that mention baptism. If “rhantizo” was the underlying Greek word in those texts, Lutherans like Evan wouldn't have to scramble and go to such great lengths in an attempt to redefine the word that IS there!! Do you see my point?

The bottom line is, the text of Ezekiel 36:25 actually proves that the Greek word *baptizo* doesn't include the meaning of “sprinkle.” Had the Almighty wanted us to understand that baptism is by sprinkling, He would have inspired the New Testament authors to use a form of the Greek word “rhantizo” when presenting the sacrament of baptism. Instead, He inspired them to use a word that can be shown to mean “immerse,” unless someone wants to redefine it to make it fit their doctrinal view.

I have a friend named Chuck Henry with whom I shared the fact that Lutherans go so far as to use Ezekiel 36:25 as a proof text validating sprinkling as a valid form of baptism. He supplied an additional response to that Lutheran claim that is so insightful that I thought I would pass it along to you. Here's what he wrote:

If you do the research, you will find that the early believers understood Baptism as being based on the Torah's washings of purification (i.e., bathing in water). See, for example, Lev. 15:5. The word “bathe” is word #7364 in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (râchats), where it is defined as “a primitive root; to lave (the whole or a part of a thing).” Lave is synonymous with wash or bathe (compare the English word “lavatory,” a place for washing or bathing, commonly called the “bathroom”). However, the Hebrew word translated “sprinkle” in the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 36:25 comes from a completely different Hebrew word: word #2236, zâraq: “a primitive root,

to sprinkle (fluid or solid particles).” As shown in this definition, *zâraq* does indeed mean “to sprinkle,” but as just demonstrated, this is a completely different word than what is used to describe washing or bathing, from which “baptism” is derived. Moreover, the context of the Ezekiel passage does not even describe a literal sprinkling. The Almighty’s message was not that He would literally rain down some water on them in order to cleanse them. Rather, the expression indicates that He will cleanse them from their spiritual filthiness, including all their idols, as stated in the remainder of the verse. This harmonizes with the next verse, which pictures the Almighty replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh. Consistent with the spiritual intent of the previous verse, this does not mean that the Almighty would literally perform a surgical procedure to extract a literal rock from the body and insert a literal fleshly organ in the resulting cavity. Rather, this further describes the spiritual operation the Almighty would do by giving them a heart sensitive to His ways. In conclusion, Ezekiel 36:25 does not describe the act of baptism (or bathing or washing), nor does the context even describe a literal sprinkling.

I agree with my friend Chuck’s commentary above that Ezekiel 36:25 does not describe the act of water baptism, nor does the context make allowance for a literal sprinkling ceremony.

### ***Catholic Answers: “Baptism: Immersion Only?”***

I am honored that the author of this article identifies folks like June and me as being “Fundamentalists.” Fundamentalism is defined as “Belief in the literal truth of the Bible,” and I do believe in the literal truth of the Almighty’s Word to His people. Please don’t get me wrong; I understand that you cannot take *everything* in the Bible literally. There are obviously some things about Scripture that I take literally, but you take figuratively and there are some things that I take figuratively, but you take literally. The primary example of this is the fact that you told us that you believe when you partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, you believe you are literally eating His body and drinking His blood (at least that’s what I am pretty sure you told us on one occasion). June and I regard these elements as *symbols* of the Messiah’s body and blood, but that doesn’t change their chemistry from being physical bread and wine. In the same way, neither June nor I believe that Scripture is literally sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12), but I do get the vivid imagery that is presented in that verse and that we had better take Scripture seriously. In the same way, we don’t really believe we literally die when we symbolically bury the “old man of sin” in baptism, but the vivid imagery certainly fits what happens when we go under water as a pledge to renounce our old selves and emerge a “new creature.” So on the one hand, we don’t believe any part of our actual bodies dies when we are immersed; figuratively, our old self dies to sin and the new creature emerges to serve the Almighty with sincerity of heart and a heart bent on doing His will, not our will. But it is a literal burial in the sense that *baptizo* does indeed mean immerse, so that is what we literally do and if that defines June and me as “Fundamentalists,” then we are honored by that designation. We therefore concur with the first two paragraphs of that article.

We also agree with the third paragraph. I have already shared the story from 2 Kings chapter 5 of how Naaman was directed to bathe himself seven times in the Jordan River. The Greek word translated “dipped” in verse 14 is indeed the word *ebaptizato* and there is scholarly consensus, even among Lutherans and Catholics, that this word is properly translated “immerse” or “dip.”

It is in the next paragraph that the author joins with Evan (and you) and writes that “immersion is not the only meaning of *baptizo*.” Once again, I defer to scholarship in stating that *baptizo* does indeed mean

“immerse,” whether it be immersing cups and dishes or immersing one’s hands in water. It is those who seek to redefine this word that believe it can be retrofitted to their doctrinal view. I will also again remind you that even acclaimed Lutheran historian Johann Mosheim conceded that 1<sup>st</sup> century understanding of *baptizo* was “immersion.” I am fully persuaded that today’s Lutherans and Catholics would much prefer to see the word *rhantizo* (sprinkle) used at least once or twice in the New Testament in reference to baptism, but since it isn’t, they go to great pains in an effort to redefine *baptizo*.

I suppose that June and I could engage you in a discussion over all the parts of this “Catholic Answers” article that you feel support infant baptism, and we can certainly do that at some other time or place; for now, though, in the interest of trying to keep this response as brief as reasonably possible without ignoring those aspects that you deem most important, I would like to focus on a few concessions on the part of the “Immersion Only” article. First, on page 3 he wrote the following:

In the same way, *baptizo* acquired a specialized Christian usage distinct from its original meaning.

The author’s statement above is essentially a concession that *baptizo*, in its original meaning, means “immerse.” He would then of necessity maintain that its meaning changed over time. My comment: *Says who? And by whose authority?*

On page 4 the author concedes that immersion best represents the figurative “death and resurrection” analogy of Romans 6:4-6. I suggest that you carefully read these verses! Here’s what the Catholic author writes:

It is true that immersion best represents death and resurrection, bringing out more fully the meaning of the sacrament than pouring or sprinkling (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 1239).

Wow! Did you read the above statement? Please read it again! If you’ve read the above remark, but it doesn’t have any impact on what you believe about baptism, then the “best representation” (immersion) will not likely be of any consequence to you because few Lutherans, if any, who have been sprinkled as an infant will later in life choose to be immersed. In other words, although Catholic scholars admit that immersion best represents death and resurrection, those words are essentially wasted on fellow Catholics and Lutherans who have no interest in getting “baptized” again.

“The Pledge of a Good Conscience” -- Whose “Pledge” is it?

One thing that has stayed on my mind since the personal visit we had with you is your interpretation about the meaning of “Pledge of a good conscience” as mentioned the baptism narrative found in I Peter 3:20-21. As I understand your interpretation, the “pledge” referenced in this passage is not a pledge on the part of the one being baptized, but rather a pledge on the part of the one *performing* the baptismal rite. We do not agree with this interpretation and in fact it represents a unique view that neither June nor I had ever heard before. Needless to say, it doesn’t make sense to us that the one doing the baptizing should be concerned about his own conscience. I mean, if that’s the case, then why was John the Baptist getting all bent out of shape over people getting baptized whose hearts were not inclined towards bearing fruits of repentant behavior (Matt. 3:4-12)? Why was John worried about their hearts not being in the right place if baptism has nothing to do with a “pledge of a righteous conscience” on the part of the one getting baptized?



Adam Clarke was a 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist preacher and scholar who produced *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Holy Bible*. Methodists, as you most likely know, support infant baptism. Adam Clarke certainly supported baptism by sprinkling. So did Adam Clarke agree with your interpretation that the one doing the “pledging” in I Peter 3:21 is the one performing the baptism? No, he did not. So if an infant cannot pledge or commit to a life of service to the Almighty and His Son, then how could anyone understand from Peter’s narrative that an infant can be a candidate for baptism? Here is what Adam Clarke wrote:

Baptism implies a consecration and dedication of the soul and body to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He who is faithful to his baptismal covenant, taking God through Christ, by the eternal Spirit, for his portion, is saved here from his sins; and through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, has the well-grounded hope of eternal glory. This is all plain; but was it the deluge, itself, or the ark, or the being saved by that ark from the deluge, that was the antitype of which St. Peter speaks? Noah and his family were saved by water; i.e. it was the instrument of their being saved through the good providence of God. So the water of baptism, typifying the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, is the means of salvation to all those who receive this Holy Spirit in its quickening, cleansing efficacy.

Please notice that Adam Clarke regards *those who are baptized* as needing to remain faithful to the “baptismal covenant.” A covenant is made between the one being baptized and the Almighty and Adam Clarke understood that much. Clearly, if one is not faithful to this covenant, it serves no purpose and the covenant is thereby broken – not broken by the Almighty, but by the one who was baptized – the one who had agreed to be faithful, but reneged. In his commentary on I Peter 3:20-21, Adam Clarke goes on to express support for sprinkling as a valid form of baptism, but my point is, he recognized that the covenant is between the one being baptized and the Almighty. The one performing the baptism is an agent who is not responsible for the faithfulness of the one who requested baptism.

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* also provides an exposé addressing I Peter 3:20-21 and it, like Adam Clarke, extends support for believing that the covenant is between the one being baptized and the Almighty. No mention is made of the one who performs the baptism:

In 3:20-21, the only passage in 1 Peter which explicitly mentions baptism, there are a couple of linguistic difficulties which complicate its understanding. Much, however, is clear enough. Thus, the OT story of Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6-9) is made to prefigure what baptism means to the addressees. Like Noah's family they are few, living in a world which deserves judgment from a patient God. And as Noah and his family were saved in the ark, in a corresponding way the addressees are saved (present tense) “through water” in baptism. One of the linguistic difficulties occurs here, but regardless of how one tries to solve it, the meaning should be something like the one just intimated. The author's explanatory comment does not make matters easier: Baptism is said to mean “not the removal of dirt of the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” or “... but a pledge to God of a good conscience through the resurrection ...”. There is a tendency in modern translation and commentaries to favor the latter understanding. Actually, it is in harmony with that which the author otherwise indicates as being one of the aspects of Christian initiation: namely, an upright entering into a covenant with God, a pledge to be holy and obedient (1:13-16; 22-23; 3:8-12), with divine salvation also implied. According to 3:21 this salvation is something taking place in baptism, and according to

1:5, 9 it is a goal, owned in hope. Its foundation, both in 1:5, 9 and 3:21, is Christ's resurrection, the Christ who is now enthroned in glory (3:22). Thus also in 3:19-22 baptism means being brought by God into a new existence, different from the former one, and, because of Christ's resurrection and glory, one can look forward to the glorious fulfillment.<sup>5</sup>

The above reference upholds our understanding that baptism is indeed a covenant between the one requesting baptism (who has repented of sin and has accepted the grace extended by our Heavenly Father). It is an understanding that we share with scholars on both sides of this issue.

I realize I have exceeded even my own self-imposed space limit for replying to your e-mail, but hopefully I didn't leave out any important questions that you wanted me to answer. I didn't dwell very much on that FAQ link that you sent me, but I am persuaded that my answers in this letter do address the answers found within that web page, which I obviously find to be unsatisfactory. I cannot help but notice that whereas the Apostle Paul so vividly brings out the symbolism of death and resurrection as seen in baptism by immersion, the FAQ page makes no mention whatsoever of this analogy. That is most likely because you cannot derive such an analogy when you sprinkle someone. I continue to maintain that when you change the method, you lose the meaning and rather than try to explain away why Lutherans don't think the symbolism/connection of the Messiah's death and resurrection with the sacrament of baptism is important or necessary, they simply avoid addressing it. It's interesting that the author of the FAQ web page lists Romans 6:3-4, but he conveniently avoids all mention of how it's possible to achieve any type of "burial by baptism" with sprinkling. Instead, he offers an esoteric explanation of how the Almighty "creates faith in the heart of the infant" when he or she is sprinkled. This explanation is simply unacceptable; it falls way short, especially because it's certainly not an explanation found in Scripture. It's just another example of the author having no choice but to use what's not there to make his point.

I mean no disrespect with anything I have written you; whenever there is disagreement about the proper interpretation of Scripture, there is simultaneously a danger of offending each other. I hope we can retain a high level of respect throughout this and possibly other discussions and resolve to not allow differences to affect the love we have for each other as members of the same extended family.

Take care!

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<sup>5</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, David Noel Freedman, Editor-in-Chief, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 591.