

# Baptism By Immersion

By Mister James Wells

Taken from the 1851 volume of the Earthen Vessel pages 127, 128 by Richard Schadle

On Wednesday evening, April 9th, the ordinance of Baptism by immersion was administered by Mister James Wells, at the Surrey Tabernacle, to eighteen persons, eleven women, and seven men. The address which our esteemed brother delivered on that occasion was considered most powerfully convincing as regards the divine authority of the mode and manner of this truly Christian observance. The text was 1 Corinthians 10:15, "I speak as unto wisemen; judge you what I say." We trust the Address will be printed in a cheap and separate form.

I speak as unto wise men, judge you what I say." Corinthians 10:15

The following will show the main drift of the address given on the occasion.

First that the proper mode of Baptism is by immersion. This is proved, first, by the meaning of the word "Baptize." The Greek word *baptizo*, and the Latin word *immerso*, both answer to the Hebrew word, "*tebal*." This word *tebal*, is mostly rendered in our version, "dip;" as in Genesis 37:31, "And he took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and 'dipped' the coat in the blood." Again, Joshua 3:15. "And the feet of the priests that bare the Ark were 'dipped' in the brim of the water, for Jordan overflows all his banks at the time of harvest." Again, Ruth 2:14 "'Dip' your morsel in the vinegar." Again, 2 Kings 5:14 "Then went he down and 'dipped' himself seven times in Jordan." Now in all these cases, IMMERSION is the leading and prominent meaning. Joseph's coat was IMMERSED; the feet of the priests were IMMERSED; Ruth's morsel of bread was IMMERSED; Naaman was IMMERSED, or rather IMMERSED himself seven times in the Jordan, In two of these cases, the Septuagint, (The old testament translated into the Greek about the second century before the Christian era.) uses the word BAPTIZE: "BAPTIZE your morsel in the vinegar." "He BAPTIZED himself seven times in the Jordan," thus proving that these learned translators well knew that the word BAPTIZE meant neither sprinkling nor pouring, but IMMERSION. Nor is the word BAPITZE ever once so used in the Now Testament as to exclude the idea of immersion, for when it is used in the comparative or figurative sense, it rather favors than excludes the meaning of the word immerse. "They (the Israelites,) were BAPITZED unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Here was neither sprinkling nor pouring. They were immersed in the light of the cloud, and in a figure immersed in the sea, and they also rose in a figure from the dead. They emerged from the bed of the sea to the elevated land, and from the light of the cloud, to the light of the rising sun.

The abundant fullness of the Holy Ghost, with which the apostles were favored on the day of Pentecost, is called a Baptism. But why is it called a Baptism? Is it because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit! I answer No, this is not the reason why it is called a Baptism, for the word Baptize never means either to pour or to sprinkle; as well may we contend that the word Immerse means either to pour or to sprinkle. The 2nd verse of the 2nd chapter of Acts will show the reason of the abundant fulness of the Holy Spirit given on that day being called a Baptism, "And it filled all the house where they were sitting." Is there not something here like Immersion? This Fulness, this

Immersion, and not the Pouring, is the reason it is called a Baptism. Nor do I make any hesitation, or fear any contradictions, when I say that every one of those Scriptures where we are said to be Baptized with water, and with the Holy Ghost, every one, I say, of these Scriptures ought to be rendered not WITH, but IN: "I indeed Baptize you in water unto (or on the ground of, evidential) repentance; but he shall Baptize you, not with, but in the Holy Ghost." In, not with is the primary meaning of the Greek preposition *en*. Take one Scripture as a sample, "Now when Jesus was born in (Greek *en*) Bethlehem." Could we with propriety, say, "Now when Jesus was born with Bethlehem?" The word Baptize, in its primary, literal, and proper acceptation, then, means immersion.

Infant sprinkling is nothing but a human device, having not even the shadow of foundation in the Scriptures. There be some that say Baptism and the Lord's Supper are substitutes for Circumcision and the Passover; but the Scriptures nowhere say this. This subterfuge, then, is also a human device. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," are words which have nothing whatever to do with Baptism: but that Baptism is by immersion, is proved not only by the meaning of the word itself, but also by the circumstances with which it is connected. "They were Baptized in the Jordan;" "They were Baptized at Enon, BECAUSE there was MUCH water there "And they came to a certain water and the Eunuch said, See here is water, what does hinder me to be baptized? And they went down both into the water, and he baptized him." that is, he IMMERSED him.

I speak as to wise men, judge you what I say," is it right to hearken unto men more than unto God?" Take the Word of God, and that only for your guide, and you will cease to fight against God; will cease to put the abomination of human tradition and device in the place of his holy ordinances and righteous commands; you will see that, while the ordinances of believer's baptism is not essential to salvation, yet that it is essential to gospel church order. And can it be wrong to seek our God after the due order? Can it be right to pervert the words of the Most High and to despise the words of the Holy One? Shall we profess to love him, and not keep his commandments? Has he not said, "You are my friends if you do whatsoever, I command you?" Shall he establish a certain order of things and we by human guidance or something worse step in and break that order? Must the command of God be set aside to admit people to one ordinance while they despise or lightly esteem the other? I would certainly rather not preach at all than preach un-scripturally. I would rather not baptize at all than baptize un-scripturally; I would rather not come to the Lords table at all than to come un-scripturally; for I am sure we can be saved only according to the Scripture.

But to return. That Baptism is by immersion is proved also by allusions thereto in the Epistles; it is there called "burying," but never either pouring or sprinkling.

Second, that believers are the only proper subjects for Baptism. "They were baptized of John in the Jordan, COFESSING their sins." "I indeed, Baptize you IN water, (that is those of you whom I Baptize, I Baptize in water,) but he shall Baptize you in the Holy Ghost, and IN fire." These were believers, and the apostles were first to teach, and then Baptize. On the day of Pentecost, they were pricked in the heart, and were baptized. Said Philip to the Eunuch, "If you believe with all your heart you may," if you do not believe, then you may not; is fairly implied, Saul of Tarsus became a believer before he was baptized, and Paul was sent more to preach than to baptize. It was not because he thought it wrong to baptize that he thanked God he baptized so few, but lest any should

say he baptized in his own name. God had given Paul a great name in the churches, and he saw Satan taking advantage thereof, to sow discord among brethren. The whole households that were baptized also believed.

Being baptized was in the Apostolic age made one of the outward proofs or acknowledgments of the belonging to the Lord; hence said Mark 16:16, "He that believes and is baptized, (believing first as usual) shall be saved," that is, he that, believes and is not ashamed to own the Lord shall be saved.

The Pharisees and Lawyers despised John's preaching, and thus rejected the counsel of God within themselves, and therefore as one outward proof of it, were not baptized with John's baptism; but the Publicans received the truth and justified God, and as one proof and expression of the same, were baptized with John's baptism. Thus, to him that understands, it is clear that immersion is the proper mode, and believers the only proper subjects for baptism.

Third, how suited is this mode to set forth things thereby intended. The infant sprinkler says, his is much more suited to set forth spiritual things, and chiefly because the babe is brought passively to his (so called) baptism, whereas the believer comes to it. We will just remind our respected opponents that every argument they use upon the above grounds, will apply with equal force against their own people coming to the Lord's supper.

Baptism is intended to set forth death unto sin and woe, and resurrection unto life and peace; and thus, sets forth both the work of the Savior and of the Holy Spirit.

What reasons have we to follow the Lord in this as well as in other respects? Is not the greatness of the blest Mediator's sufferings a reason? Look at what he has thereby done for us; and then see if you can make light of his command. Is not the everlasting love of God another reason? Is not his calling us out of darkness into his marvelous light another reason? Are not the great things he has yet in reserve for us another reason? Who and what are we to follow if we are not to follow him? For this is our God for ever and ever and will be our guide unto death.

The above is a mere outline of the main drift of the address, which occupied one hour. Many, we believe, found it truly good to be there. The throng of people was immense. Some supposed there were 2,000 persons present: but, perhaps, 1,700 would be nearer the actual number. Perfect order, when the people were once crowd in, prevailed during the whole of the service. The whole seemed solemnly attentive, and evidently very much interested.

The administration of the ordinance of Believers Baptism is more frequent, (and in most cases, a larger number of persons are baptized), than ever.