

Chapter Thirteen

Baptism: A Consideration of the Scriptural Mode

Introduction

The subject of Baptism has been a fruitful source of controversy as well as a powerful occasion for division among believers. This statement of historical fact, however, in no sense impugns the doctrine; for the problem lies, not with the pure, perfect Law of God, but rather with the sin-clouded understanding of those who would interpret it. Whereas it is affirmed that the true and full sense of any Scripture is not manifold but one, it is also a patent fact of experience that good people have apprehended (and continue to apprehend) that one sense from differing points of view. And, since men have differed widely in their preconceptions, their approach, their emphases, and their method, so their interpretations of Scripture have been manifold.

To say that the question of the Mode of Baptism has by no means escaped this problem is to utter a gross understatement. In the history of Christian doctrine, there have been those who have believed that the Mode is of the substance of the sacrament, and is therefore of vital interest and importance. Unless the proper Mode of administering the ordinance has been observed, the ceremony has been considered invalid. A second class, going to the other extreme, have held that the question of Mode is so inscrutable or so divisive, that they have either dispensed with the ceremony in any form or have minimized its proper place in the body of doctrine. A third class, believing that Mode is a matter of indifference, and that the vital thing to be stressed is the underlying significance of the sacrament, have practiced various modes and have considered them all proper and valid.

Historically, three modes of administration of the sacrament have emerged: Immersion (from the Latin *in + mergo* = "to dip"), *Affusion* (from the Latin *ad + fundo* = "to pour"), and *Aspersion* (from the Latin *ad + spargo* = "to sprinkle"). Those who have found themselves in the Anabaptist tradition have as a rule practiced Immersion to the exclusion of other modes. Those who have followed the Reformed or the Lutheran tradition have practiced either Affusion or Aspersion, but as a rule have