

The Wonderful Ordinance Of Water Baptism

Water Baptism

Martin G. Collins

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When I was about seven or eight years old we began listening to Herbert Armstrong, back in the early 1960s. We began attending the Radio Church of God, and my parents were baptized. My Dad wanted to increase my spiritual knowledge, and my understanding of the Bible, at age nine. He sent me to the local summer Bible School. After the first day I came home and I told him that I had been baptized. I knew that baptism was a good thing because I knew that he had been baptized. I could not go wrong getting baptized, so while I was at the Sunday Bible School they asked me a few words, sprinkled some water over me, said I was baptized and I was good to go from there. My Dad hit the ceiling. After he realized that it was not my fault he peeled himself off the ceiling. I was never sent to Bible School again.

My point here is that there is a lot of confusion out there in the world over baptism. In that case I was sprinkled, in some cases they will put you under the water but not get your hair wet. There are variations of baptism for the convenience of the people. Since this subject has not been covered for quite awhile, I thought it would be good to go over it. The last time I remember was about ten years ago when John Reid gave a sermon on baptism specifically. You will find it encouraging if you are already baptized. You will find it encouraging and also very informative and helpful if you are not baptized yet.

We are saved by grace, and through faith; but there are conditions. And one of those conditions is water baptism and all that it involves. We are baptized into Christ Jesus and into His death, then where does life fit into His plan? Let us touch on a few principles as a background to baptism.

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Walking in this "*newness of life*," is an exercise in, it is a practicing of walking in, eternal life. Only God has eternal life inherent within Himself. Only God has eternal life to give. As the Father has life inherent within Himself, He has given this life to His Son, the Christ, to have immortal life inherent within Him. Then through Christ, God gives it to us. Whoever does not have Christ does not have eternal life. Eternal life is a gift that no human has, until he receives it as God's gift.

The blood of Christ does not finally save anyone. The death of Christ paid the penalty for sin in our stead. It wipes the slate clean of past sins. It saves us merely from the death penalty. It removes that which separated us from God and reconciles us to God.

We are saved—that is, given immortal life by—Christ's life, not by His death. He is a living Savior, not a dead one. We could never be saved by His blood alone, if He had not risen from the dead.

We are mortal, without immortal life inherent in us. We are under the penalty of eternal death from sin, unless we are saved. We understand that is very critical that we be saved. To be saved we must be born of God, who is Spirit. To be born of God, we must first receive the Holy Spirit from Him. We are then spiritually born. We then become heirs of the Kingdom of God, not yet inheritors.

Becoming converted simply means being changed. When we receive the Holy Spirit of God, our whole perspective and outlook on life changes. We think and see differently. Our priorities and goals change. Our minds are renewed with the Spirit of a sound mind.

We have to overcome the downward pull of our human nature and achieve self-discipline. We must grow in love, faith and understanding. We have to learn patience and perseverance as we work to overcome sin, Satan, the world and our own human nature.

We must do the works of Christ. In spiritual growth and a life of active service, we must endure persecutions, afflictions and trials to the end. It is only those who do these things that will finally be given immortality—finally changed from mortal to immortal—at the time of the second coming of Christ with the other firstfruits. Paul wrote about these spiritual principles in I Corinthians 15.

Going through the conversion process and receiving the Holy Spirit is only the beginning. This is the beginning of a lifetime of living under God's government with its laws, which express His will, rather than allowing ourselves to express our own self-will and desire.

A person is not even regenerated of God unless he is Christ's; and he is not Christ's unless he has received the Holy Spirit. We are not even spiritually born, that is, converted until we receive the Holy Spirit of God.

With that background let us look at baptism itself. First, pre-Christian or what you might

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call Old Testament baptism.

John the Baptizer baptized people prior to the Christian era. Where did he get the idea of baptizing? Why did Jesus and the apostles continue this practice?

The Old Testament contains a number of examples that typified or foreshadowed New Testament baptism. Understanding these examples deepens the significance of baptism for us.

One obvious example is Noah and the flood. Noah lived at a time when the earth was corrupt and filled with violence. Noah was a righteous man. By faith he prepared the ark in anticipation of the Flood. When the rain began to pour and waterspouts discharged tremendous amounts of water, Noah and his family were safely in the ark. Water cascaded over, under and around the ark. The New Testament tells us that this was definitely a type of baptism.

I Peter 3:20-21 who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype, which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

In addition to the miracle of the flood, one of the greatest miracles of the Old Testament was a forerunner and type of what true baptism pictures today. It was the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea. When the Israelites fled Egypt and Pharaoh's army pursued them, Moses led the people through walls of water, mounting waves held back supernaturally.

Israel was "baptized" (or, as the word in the original Greek means, "immersed" or "plunged into") in the cloud and in the sea. The apostle Paul refers to this in:

I Corinthians 10:2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

Symbolically, the Israelites left their old lives in Egypt by going into what normally would have been a "watery grave." Anyone else on earth other than the Israelites would have been destroyed or killed in the waters of the Red Sea, as the Egyptians were.

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In I Corinthians 10:11, God reveals that these Old Testament events occurred to be examples to Christians.

Israel had just come out of captivity in Egypt. God said that He was going to bring them up out of the land of oppression—that pagan land of strange customs and evil ways. So God sent Moses to deliver them from their bondage in the land of sin. Israel was in sin, living the wrong way. And God set His hand to deliver them.

After Israel's exodus from Egypt, God brought them to encamp beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. To Israel's amazement they found themselves trapped, with Egyptians closing in on them. The only way of escape was through the Red Sea.

When Israel saw Pharaoh's army pursuing them, they became filled with fear. However, Moses assured them of God's deliverance.

Exodus 14:13 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LoORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.

Exodus 14:21-22 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LoORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

This type of "immersion" was a veritable grave for anyone who was not an Israelite at that time, and Pharaoh and his men all perished in it. Pharaoh was still in sin and therefore was doomed.

Israel went through the Red Sea, picturing the death of that former way of life—then, coming up out of the grave by God's grace, they were to enter a new way of life, a promised land.

And so in the New Testament God requires Christians to crucify the old man, the former way, and to come up out of a watery grave into a better way of life. We are to walk in newness of life. The Israelites were a type of that when they came through the Red Sea. After being baptized they came into a newness of life.

Israel's baptism was only a type. That baptism was under the Old Covenant, a physical

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agreement with physical ordinances and material rewards. But notice what God says about the New Testament Covenant.

Hebrews 10:16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LoORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"

John the Baptizer got his understanding of the principle of baptism and his authority, from the teaching that he received from his righteous parents as they taught him from the Holy Scriptures, which then only contained the books of the Old Testament.

Luke 1:5-6 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

This is describing John the Baptizer's mother and father, saying that they were righteous and walked in all of the commandments and ordinances. God, through the power of His Spirit, revealed to John the spiritual principle of baptism—that a people had to be prepared to hear the message of the soon coming Messiah.

The Jews, even before the days of John the Baptizer, used a type of baptismal ordinance for proselytes to Judaism. When John the Baptizer and, later, Jesus required their followers to be baptized, it was not thought to be a new or strange observance.

Repentant sinners needed to prove their repentance by an outward sign, as Israel did under Moses. That is why John saw in scripture that the original crossing of the Red Sea, by a whole nation, was a type of what each individual should do—be immersed, or baptized, in water.

What is the first thing we must do when God calls us?

At the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, recorded in Mark 1:15, Jesus said, "...Repent, and believe in the gospel."

The first words Jesus proclaimed, at the beginning of His Gospel, were to command the two conditions to becoming a Christian: repentance and faith. We must do those two

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things first. Repentance is toward God. Faith is toward Christ.

What is repentance?

John 8:3-11 illustrates what God wants to see. Stated in a simple phrase, Jesus Christ says, "*Go and sin no more.*"

Repentance means to quit sinning, and sinning is the breaking of God's spiritual law. Therefore, repentance means to begin living according to God's Commandments. God's Commandments are God's laws enforced by His government—His Kingdom. This means that we must be obedient to His laws, which are His will, instead of our own self-will.

Repentance is something begun and required by God before baptism, and it is something that we must do for the rest of our lives. Romans 3:23 tells us we are all sinners. And we know from experience that we have constant need of this attitude of repentance.

Baptism pictures our deeply realizing the fact that we are all sinners and asking God to forgive our sins. We ask Him not to condemn us for them. True repentance is to change, to overcome our wrong ways, and to stop sinning. Sin is the breaking of God's law.

Before baptism God must see real repentance—deep, genuine change—not just being sorry. To be sorry over sin is not enough. Many people are sorry, but never really change. That is worldly sorrow. Many people are sorry about the penalties that they have to pay for sinning, but they are not sorry that they have crucified Jesus Christ through their sinning!

We are instructed in Matthew 3:8 to "*bear fruits worthy of repentance.*" And, Matthew 7:20 says, "*By their fruits you will know them.*" So, bearing fruit is a very important indication that a person is repentant of his sins. Bearing fruit is changing, and it is overcoming.

A repentant attitude is not just an emotion. God is looking for fruits, not emotions.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

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We should be seeing these things in our lives in the way of fruit. They are foundational items of fruit to be produced by the converted person, but they are just the foundation. Everything else should be built on those fruits, especially on love.

After Jesus had completed His earthly ministry, had paid the penalty for our sins, had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent on the Day of Pentecost.

Thousands were in Jerusalem for this festival. When the Spirit of God was given to the disciples that morning, Peter then preached the first inspired sermon for the Christian church. Thousands were convicted in their hearts, having realized the fruitlessness of their past lives and realizing that Christ was and is the Savior.

Acts 2:37-39 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Peter spelled out, in no uncertain terms, that there are two conditions. Those two conditions are the same that Jesus spelled out at the beginning of His Gospel—repent and believe. No one can be rightly baptized unless he believes.

Acts 8:36-37 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

So, we see him fulfilling those conditions. Baptism is an ordinance symbolizing faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Once these conditions are complied with, God stands bound by a promise to put within the repentant believer His Spirit. Then, many of His attributes begin to be imparted to us. His love, faith, understanding, goodness, and power—the power to develop the very same things that make up who He is and how He thinks and acts begin to be made

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This is the beginning of eternal life, and the very character of God. The Holy Spirit in a person changes that person. If there is no change in the person after baptism and the receipt of the Holy Spirit, then that person was most likely just dunked.

Acts 2:39 "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

You do not join a church. God calls you into His church. Water baptism is required for those God calls to begin the process of conversion and salvation.

Baptism is the greatest step a person can take. And, true baptism—that is, one that is genuine and valid in God's sight—is an once-in-a-lifetime step.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

It is God who ordained the baptism ceremony and its deep significance. And God's word reveals that unless the right ministers of God with the right understanding carry out baptism in the right attitude, with the right knowledge, in the right manner, it is not honored and recognized by God.

It is God's job to draw, call and convert a person. Many times when a person first comes into the truth and is baptized, he just wants to tell everybody because he has his first love and it is so exciting to let other people know this knowledge.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws [calls] him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

"Calling" is the action of God in summoning people to sanctified responsibilities.

Luke 5:32 "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

I Thessalonians 4:7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

If God calls a person to a duty or responsibility, the called person has a commission to commit himself to it. In addition to this authorization, there is the element of compulsion. If God calls a person, it is never in doubt that a person is under obligation to obey the summons.

The general calling is the call of God to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior and to follow their instruction for living. Unique specific callings are God's leading a person into specific duties and responsibilities in life.

When wanting to be baptized, we have to tell God that we have repented of our sins and want the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover them. And, we have to tell Him that we understand that we need and want the gift of His Holy Spirit so we can live and think like Him. This is a huge responsibility to ask for.

So, what we are saying is, "Yes!" to God's way; and, "No!" to the self. We must be fully aware of what God's way requires.

When the minister, just before immersing a person into the water, asks that person two simple, but important, questions:

"Have you repented of your sins?" In addition, "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?"

Your answer, "Yes" is a vow. A contract, an irrevocable agreement between you and God has been formed. It is a contract that we cannot get out of once agreed upon.

God promises total forgiveness and the gift of His Spirit, and we promise total commitment to follow Him for the rest of our lives.

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We must be totally committed, no matter what comes as a result.

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The reward of the firstfruits of the Kingdom is so great, because it is such a narrow and difficult way for those who follow God's call, and are placed in God's church by God. Following Christ is a lifetime commitment.

Matthew 24:13 tells us that those who endure to the end will be saved. A lack of total commitment has terrible consequences. As Luke 9:62 says, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God. If people fall away after receiving God's Spirit, they will not repent.

Hebrews 6:4-6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

The word "impossible" is used there. That is a very powerful, strong word. What a terrifying thought to consider. If they know Christ but return to the world, their end is worse than the beginning, as the apostle Peter informs us in II Peter 2:20.

To be totally committed, we must count the cost. First and foremost, we have to seek the Kingdom of God, as Christ tells us, in Matthew 6:33.

Luke 14:25-33 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

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Part of counting that cost is to love family and self less than God the Father and Jesus Christ. The word "hate" means, to love less. But, that is not enough; we must also forsake all our possessions, interests, and normal human desires. We have to be less interested in these things than we are in God the Father and Jesus Christ and their giving way of life.

The costs are extremely high to follow Christ. It may cost friends and family, jobs, possessions and someday even our own lives. The price may be ridicule, rejection or persecution. We must be willing to suffer persecution with enduring patience. In following Jesus Christ's example, we are to be living sacrifices. In many ways the toughest part of living God's way of life is actually going against the world, Satan and our own human nature and sin.

It is easy to look at the negative side and say, "What if I cannot do it?" The fact is we cannot do it ourselves! That is why it takes faith to be baptized. We cannot, of and by ourselves, go God's way. But with His Spirit helping, guiding and leading us, and with Jesus Christ actually living His life over in us, God promises that we can make it.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

It takes faith to be confident that God will complete what He has started in us.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Satan will try to discourage and cause doubts to weaken anyone being drawn by God. There is no doubt about that.

What must be the source of our salvation? We have to totally, faithfully rely on God. God does not expect us to make it into His Kingdom, or even spiritually survive this present life, based on our own works. Our own works will not save us.

The key to being willing to pay the price is to understand what God is offering to you through baptism. It is eternal life reigning and ruling in the Family and government of God.

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Jesus is the epitome of the righteous example in all things. He set us an example to follow with regard to the process of our conversion as well. Though He committed no sins to be remitted, He was baptized, setting the example for us. Matthew 3:13-17 describes the account of His baptism by John the Baptizer.

In being baptized, Jesus was immersed in water (not sprinkled or poured upon). We know from the Gospel account that,

Matthew 3:16-17 *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

So, He came up out of the water because He was under the water, so that His sins would be symbolically washed away, not His sins but our sins because He was only symbolically doing it to show us an example. He had no sin to be washed away.

Not only did Jesus set the example by personally being baptized, He also baptized more disciples than John the Baptist did.

John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

John 4:1-2 Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples),

So, Jesus set the example in this way as well, in that He had His disciples do the actual baptizing under His authority. He did not actually do the physical work of baptizing these people Himself—He had His disciples do it for Him! And what they did, by His authority and command, is attributed to Him! So it was considered as if Jesus Himself had baptized them. It is the same today that when a minister of God baptizes someone, it is by the authority of Jesus Christ.

His disciples did the baptizing in His name—that is, in His place—they did it for Him, by His authority, and that was considered the same thing as if Jesus had actually done it Himself.

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To ask for anything in prayer, or to do or perform anything, in the name of Jesus Christ, is to ask or do it by His authority. It is to act for Him—to do it for Him, in His stead. It is acting as if by power of attorney to act for Him. It implies He has delegated that authority to us. We are commanded to do all things in the name of Jesus Christ!

The true Gospel of Jesus Christ is the message, which God sent to the world, and Christ was the divine Messenger who brought and proclaimed it. It was not primarily a message about Himself, but about the Kingdom—the government—of God. Jesus devoted three-and-a-half years to teaching this message to His twelve disciples who later became apostles.

After His resurrection, Jesus gave them the final Gospel commission for this age, and in it He commanded baptism as an obligatory ordinance for this Gospel dispensation:

Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

The Gospel was the message He brought and preached—the Good News of the government of God. It is necessary to believe the Gospel to receive salvation. The government (or Kingdom) of God is a kingdom of laws. There can be no government without law. It is "he that is baptized" that will be saved. It is part of the divine commission—a required ordinance for salvation!

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

So the disciples were to teach these nations what Jesus had taught them—the message God had sent Him to deliver and proclaim to the world—the Good News of the government of God. In stating a major commission that His disciples preach the Gospel in this age, Christ commanded baptism. And here He specifically stated "*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*"

In verse 19, the word translated "*in*" should properly be translated "*into*." This means that repentant believers are baptized into God the Father, and into Christ the Son, and into the Holy Spirit. But the one who plunges the new repentant believer under the water

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performs the act in the name of—that is, by authority of, Jesus Christ, because He is "all power"—and that includes all authority, which is given to Him in heaven and in earth. He has all authority! Either we do it by His authority, or else we are doing it without any authority.

The apostles understood this as a divine commission and command; and so, they always baptized repentant believers.

In the first inspired sermon, after the Holy Spirit came to convert Peter and the apostles, Peter commanded all to repent, and to be baptized.

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

The apostles sent Peter and John down to these people at Samaria.

Acts 8:15-16 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

None of them had been as yet baptized with the Holy Spirit—yet they already were baptized with water. Since they had not been baptized with the Holy Spirit, obviously they had been baptized in water.

As Peter preached the first inspired sermon after the coming of the Holy Spirit, and commanded baptism—to the Jews in Jerusalem, so God sent Peter also to first preach the gospel to the Gentiles ten years later.

Peter first went to the house of a very devout Gentile named Cornelius. He was a devout man, but he did not understand God's truth. He did not have God's Holy Spirit to enable him to acquire that saving spiritual knowledge. He knew no better than to fall down at Peter's feet to worship him, a mere man.

God had sent Peter to instruct him. Peter preached to Cornelius' family, "the word which

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God sent" and the message God sent by Jesus Christ as Messenger.

Acts 10:44-45 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

Notice in verse 45, it is termed "the gift of the Holy Spirit." The word "also" indicates the same "baptism" with the Holy Spirit as Peter and the apostles had received. So that was extend to the Gentiles as well.

In Acts 11:15-17, it is plainly described as the same "baptism" with the Holy Spirit that the apostles had received. Now these had received the "baptism" with the Spirit, is the way it is worded there in Acts 11.

Acts 10:46-48 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Here is a definite, inspired command to be baptized in water.

The word "*baptize*" is a Greek word, not an English word. Since the New Testament was written in the Greek language when translating it into English, the translators left this Greek word untranslated. Literally, in the Greek, the word is "*baptize*." The definition of this word is "*immerse*." It means to plunge into or, put into. It does not mean "*to sprinkle*" or "*to pour*."

The Greek word for "*sprinkle*" is *rantidzo*, and "*to pour*" is *cheo*. The Holy Spirit inspired the use of the word *baptizo*, meaning immerse or, put into, not any of these other words. Therefore sprinkling or pouring is not baptizing!

John would have needed only a cupful to sprinkle, or a pitcherful to pour—but baptizing required "much water" in a river.

John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

This verse indicates that John baptized the person with much water, not by pouring a cupful of water on the person.

The purpose of Jesus' baptism was to set us an example. He was put down into the water, for He went up out of the water. Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. There was no reason for Philip to go actually into the water, except for the reason there was no other way he could plunge the eunuch into the river. "They came up out of the water together" is the way that it is worded.

Baptism is a burial, and a rising from the grave.

Colossians 2:12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Neither sprinkling nor pouring is a burial. A person cannot rise up out of sprinkling or pouring water. Neither pictures the symbolic meaning of baptism, therefore they can have no meaning or significance.

When a person is plunged into the water, he is in a watery grave. He would not live but a few minutes unless brought up out of the water—unless he rises from this watery grave. Therefore a person immersed in water is in a literal grave.

Romans 6:3-5 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

This is the amazing symbolism—the true meaning of baptism. It pictures, in symbol, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

This symbolism is a dual picture, as all things in God's plan are dual in operation. It pictures the crucifixion of the old self, or of the sinning life, the burial of this sinning self, and the coming up out of this watery grave, symbolic of a changed person resurrected to a new, righteous, spiritual life in Christ Jesus.

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Baptism also symbolizes purification which prepares a person for the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 6:3-7 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

These 5 verses are packed full of symbolism. Baptism pictures:

- » Those who have been baptized have been baptized into Christ's death.
- » We were buried with Christ through baptism.
- » The old man is crucified with Christ.
- » We are raised with Christ to walk in newness of life.

Going down into the water—burial in the water pictures the death of Christ, and of the old self. Coming up out of the water pictures Christ's resurrection, and a spiritually resurrected person walking from that day on "in newness of life."

Water baptism is the ordinance ordained of Christ by which we express our faith in Christ as Savior—our acceptance of His death, burial, and resurrection for us, and our repentance of the old life and burial of it, rising to new and higher life from that day on. It is a wonderful ordinance, full of meaning.

We are "baptized into Jesus Christ." Reading verse 3 again, "...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

Also, Jesus expressed it in Matthew 28:19, which we read earlier, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

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Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Not into some church organization or denomination. We are to be baptized into the divine family —the family of God. And it is to be done "in the name"—by the authority—of Jesus Christ.

We gain entrance into the true church through baptism by one spirit, putting us into one body—the Body of Christ, the true church of God. When we receive the Holy Spirit of God to change us—to make us as new creatures in Christ—it is the beginning of eternal life from God.

It is the Spirit of sonship whereby we become His children, and may call Him "Father."

Romans 8:14-15 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

The church of God is the household of God—composed of God's children. We do not become His children until we are spiritually born—until we receive His Spirit, which is, His nature and life. When we receive His Spirit we are automatically put into His family—His church. Joining one of the social clubs called churches does not put us into God's church!

Water baptism is a required condition to receiving the Holy Spirit. At Samaria, and again at Ephesus, they did not receive the Holy Spirit until after they were baptized in water.

True, at Cornelius' house they did receive the Holy Spirit, and thereby were baptized by the Spirit into the church before water baptism—but Peter immediately commanded water baptism. This was a rare exception to the rule.

But there is no promise that anyone will receive the Holy Spirit until baptized in water—even though God in His wisdom and love may on rare occasions make an exception. The command is, "Repent, and be baptized"—and then, "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

God commands water baptism. The ordinance of water baptism is not the thing that saves us. While it is commanded "for the remission of sins," yet it is merely symbolic of that which remits our sins, which is, the death of Christ! While at the same time, it pictures His resurrection, by which we are finally saved; it is merely the symbol, not the

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reality.

If a person who is being called is able to defy the command, or refuse it, or neglect it, or even put off obedience to this command until too late, that would certainly be an act of disobedience which would impose the penalty of sin, and cause loss of salvation.

It is essential to salvation inasmuch as God commands it, and noncompliance is disobedience which would mean loss of salvation.

When?

So the question remains: How soon should a person be baptized?

A person should not have to wait until he has proven himself. He cannot prove he has the Holy Spirit, because he does not have it until after baptism and has had ministers officially lay hands on him.

This is not to say that he does not need to understand what he is promising God. He has to understand that he must repent of his sins; that he must have faith; that he must count the cost; and, that it requires total commitment.

But, before baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit, he cannot already be living a righteous spiritual life because he does not have God's Holy Spirit abiding in him. Certain spiritual knowledge cannot be understood until he has the help of the Holy Spirit to reveal spiritual knowledge. Although he may understand the letter of God's law, as the ancient Israelites did, he cannot come to see, accept, and apply the spirit of God's Law without the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 7:14; 8:7, Paul says God's Law is spiritual and that the carnal (i.e., the fleshly, the unconverted) mind is not subject to the Law and cannot be.

The order that God the Father and Jesus Christ use with regard to this calling is:

First, preach the Gospel, leading to a conviction of sin in the hearts of those God calls, and leading to repentance and faith in Christ. Second, baptize repentant believers; and third, give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, which renews their minds, teaches them, and reveals spiritual truth, such as God's commandments.

Since a person cannot spiritually understand God's spiritual Law or spiritual things until he receives the Holy Spirit, and he must be baptized before he has a promise of the

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Holy Spirit, he should be baptized first. Everyone knows he has sinned, and lived contrary to God's will, though he may not have spiritual understanding of God's will. God can grant repentance to a carnal mind before the conversion of that mind.

When should a person be baptized?

When he realizes his own way of life has been wrong, and becomes sick and tired of it.

When he turns from his own ways.

When he wants to seek and find God's ways and live them.

When he truly repents of his past life of sins.

When he believes in and accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, and the One whom he must obey from that point on.

When he wants to turn to the changed, different, new and joyful life of faith in Christ Jesus.

When he wants to become a child of God.

Baptism should never be delayed once a person understands to what he is agreeing. Otherwise, it might be neglected until too late! In every case recounted in the New Testament, repentant believers were baptized immediately.

Immediately on meeting Saul, later named Paul, Ananias said to him, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

What about children?

Let us answer one last question before ending. Should children be baptized?

Here is what Herbert Armstrong had to say about this question in his booklet: *All About Water Baptism*:

One cannot be baptized until after he has fully REPENTED. Only those who

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BELIEVE, both the true GOSPEL (the Message Jesus preached, which is the Kingdom, or government of God) and on JESUS CHRIST as personal Savior, can be baptized (see Acts 2:38; 8:37; 16:31).

Children have not reached that maturity where they have the self-discipline to truly repent, and believe. I am thinking of instances in which children, 8 to 12 years old, were baptized by others against my objections and protests, and without exception, those children soon became more unruly, more disobedient, more sinful, than before.

When some Samaritans repented at Philip's preaching, "they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Only the adults were mature enough to be ready for baptism.

The average mind does not mature until about age 25—though there are often exceptions. Some few mature and become sober and serious in life outlook by 16, or on rare occasions, even younger.

An immature mind may experience an emotional feeling of temporary remorse, and this may be falsely construed as REPENTANCE when it is only momentary, soon forgotten. It is like "puppy-love." How many teenagers, 13 to 17, have a number of temporary emotional experiences of feeling sure they are "in love." Of course they themselves feel sure of it, and cannot be talked out of it. Usually they grow out of it, but in rare cases, of course, they may really "know their minds"—though this is the rare exception, not the rule. So it is also with repentance and belief.

The child who is baptized may be ever so serious about it at the time. But when that child grows older, he or she undergoes an entirely new experience in life—comes under "teen-age" influences which are quite different today than one or two generations ago—must meet many temptations peculiar to energetic, dynamic, restless, excitement-craving youth in the blooming flower of sex-appeal. Experience shows not one in perhaps a hundred can be truly "converted" prior to this age and REMAIN converted, and constantly GROWING SPIRITUALLY, closer and closer to Christ and His Kingdom, through these trying years.

There can be no set rule about the proper age for baptism. It is almost impossible to be ABSOLUTELY SURE about young people under 21 or 25—and especially under 18—and unless POSITIVELY SURE that such a

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one has really repented of self-will, self-desire, and the ways of this world, such a one should be encouraged to live according to God's Word, but refrain from baptism until SURE. John the Baptist insisted on candidates bringing forth "fruits meet for repentance"—or PROVING their repentance by THE FRUITS in their lives.

Youngsters should let a few years of such fruits PROVE their repentance and permanent sincerity and earnestness. Adults should be baptized IMMEDIATELY, or as soon as possible, on real repentance and faith.

However, in the case of some people awaiting baptism who are in areas where no minister of God is readily available to baptize them, by necessity they are forced to wait until a minister can go to his area or he can go to where the minister is. Where necessity prevents immediate baptism, in such cases, God understands and makes allowance. But avoid all unnecessary delay.

God has given us this wonderfully meaningful ordinance of water baptism. It is not something to be taken lightly because it is the most important decision we make in this physical life of ours. Baptism along with the receipt of the gift of the Holy Spirit enables us with the power to overcome sin and to begin to have a right relationship with God.