

All About Water Baptism

By Herbert W Armstrong
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IS WATER baptism essential to salvation? What about the "thief on the cross"? Was he saved without it?

What is the proper form, or mode -- sprinkling, pouring or immersion?

Should babies and children be baptized? Suppose you were baptized by a minister you have since lost confidence in. Should you be baptized over again?

Suppose you were baptized "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost [Spirit]." Should you be baptized again "in the name of Jesus" only?

Should one be baptized IMMEDIATELY, or only "after a six months' probation"? Must the ordinance be performed by an ordained minister?

WE ARE saved by GRACE, and through FAITH -- make no mistake about that; but -- there are conditions!

And millions are being deceived, misled into thinking they are saved, when they are not!

People have been taught, falsely, that "Christ completed the Plan of Salvation on the Cross" -- when actually it was only begun there. The popular denominations have taught, "Just BELIEVE -- that's all there is to it; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are that instant saved!"

That teaching is false! And because of deception -- because the TRUE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ has been all but blotted out, in these 1900 years by the preaching of a false gospel about the Person of Christ -- and often a false Christ at that -- millions today WORSHIP CHRIST -- and all in vain! "In vain do they worship me," said Jesus, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7: 6-9).

Man is mortal. Man has no immortality inherent within himself. Christ Jesus, only, of all men who have lived, has immortality (I Tim. 6:16). The penalty of sin is DEATH -- the second, or eternal, death, from which there will be no resurrection. And ALL have sinned and come under this sentence. Only GOD has eternal life inherent in Himself (John 5:26) -- only GOD has eternal life to give. And as the Father has life in -- inherent in -- Himself, so has He given to the Son, Christ, to have immortal life inherent within Himself. And through Christ, God gives it to us (I John 5:11-12) -- and whoever has not Christ has not eternal life. Eternal life is a GIFT no man has until he receives it as GOD'S GIFT (Rom. 6:23).

The BLOOD of Christ does not finally save any man. The death of Christ merely paid the penalty of 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.

But we are SAVED -- that is, given immortal life -- by Christ's LIFE, not by His death (Rom. 5:10). Christ is a living Saviour! He is not dead -- He rose from the dead! We could never be saved by His blood alone, if He had not risen from the dead (I Cor. 15:17-18).

We are mortal, without immortal life inherent in us, under penalty of eternal DEATH from sin -- unless saved. To be saved, we must be born of God, who is a Spirit. We were born of human parents, and therefore we are human -- flesh -- dust -- of the earth, earthy (John 3:3, 6; Gen. 2:7; 3:19; I Cor. 15:47-49). To be born of God, we must, first, now in this life, receive the impregnating LIFE -- the Holy Spirit -- from God. We are then merely begotten, spiritually -- comparing to an unborn human babe still in its

mother's womb -- not yet really BORN. We then become merely HEIRS of the Kingdom -- not yet inheritors.

Becoming converted means being CHANGED. When one receives the Holy Spirit of God, his whole viewpoint, his outlook, his purposes, goals, ways of thought -- everything -- becomes CHANGED! It is a renewing of the MIND -- the Spirit of a sound mind. But he is as yet merely begotten. And, as the unborn babe must be fed, through the mother, and must develop and grow physically before it can be born, so the converted human, now spiritually begotten, must be fed on the spiritual food of GOD'S WORD, and must GROW SPIRITUALLY -- must grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ as He reveals His knowledge through His Word (II Peter 3:18). He must OVERCOME the down-pull of his human nature and achieve self-discipline. He must learn PATIENCE, must grow in LOVE, FAITH, and UNDERSTANDING. He must do the WORKS of Christ; and, in this spiritual growth -- this life of active service -- he must ENDURE persecutions and afflictions and trials UNTO THE END.

It is only those who, during this Christian Spirit-begotten life, have grown in knowledge and grace, have overcome, have developed spiritually, done the works of Christ, and endured unto the end, who shall finally be given IMMORTALITY -- finally changed from mortal to IMMORTAL at the time of the second coming of Christ (I Cor. 15:53-54).

So, being, as we say, converted -- receiving the Holy Spirit of God -- is merely the beginning! Then begins a lifetime of LIVING under the GOVERNMENT OF GOD -- by God's laws which express His will, instead of by self-will and desire.

A PERSON IS NOT EVEN BEGOTTEN OF GOD UNLESS HE IS CHRIST'S (I John 5:12). AND HE IS NOT CHRIST'S UNLESS HE HAS RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT (Rom. 8:9). One is not even converted -- spiritually begotten- -not even STARTED on the way to final salvation, unless and until he RECEIVES THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM GOD! The question, then -- how to make the first BEGINNING of becoming a Christian -- how to START on the Christian life -- which leads to eternal life -- is how to thus be CHANGED and receive God's Holy Spirit!

"What Shall We Do?"

Notice the very beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15). Jesus said, "REPENT ye, and BELIEVE the gospel." The very first words He proclaimed, at the very beginning of His Gospel, were to command the TWO CONDITIONS to becoming a Christian: REPENTANCE, and FAITH. Those are the two things we must do! Repentance is toward GOD. Faith is toward Christ. Repentance means to quit sinning, and sin is the transgression of God's spiritual LAW -- so repentance means to begin living according to God's Commandments! And Jesus said "believe the GOSPEL." And the GOSPEL is the Good News of the Kingdom of God -- which means GOVERNMENT of God, and government means obedience to LAWS, in this case God's laws, which express the will of God -- government by the WILL OF GOD, no longer by human self-will!

After Jesus had completed His earthly ministry, had paid the penalty of your 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 came upon -- and into -- the disciples that morning, thousands came in awe and wonder at the majestic spectacle. Peter then preached the first inspired sermon of this Christian dispensation. Thousands were convicted in their hearts. They realized their lost condition. They realized Christ was indeed Messiah -- SAVIOUR!

"What shall we do?" they cried out to Peter and the disciples. "HOW SHALL WE BE SAVED?"

Peter was now inspired. The answer came straight and direct! "REPENT"! shouted the inspired Peter in great power, "AND BE BAPTIZED, EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"! (Acts 2:38.)

There are the conditions -- JUST TWO -- the same as Jesus gave them at the very beginning of His Gospel -- REPENT, and BELIEVE! For one cannot be rightly baptized except he believe (Acts 8:37). 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 -- which means His LOVE, faith, understanding, gentleness and goodness, power, etc. -- His attitude of mind -- the Spirit of a sound mind -- His very LIFE -- the impregnation and begetting of eternal life, and the very character of God! The HOLY SPIRIT in one CHANGES one!

"For the PROMISE is unto you, and to your children ... even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

WATER BAPTISM, THEN, IS A REQUIRED PART OF THE WAY OF SALVATION!

Jesus' Example!

Jesus in all things set us an example, that we should follow His steps. He was the example for Christian living for the individual, and also the living example for His called ministers (I Peter 2:21).

Jesus, though He had committed no sins to be remitted, was baptized, setting the example for us. You'll read of it in Matthew 3:13-17. In being baptized, Jesus was immersed in water (not sprinkled or poured upon) because "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water." Immediately the Spirit of God descended upon Him, in this case visibly, and a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God help us, that by His help, power, and grace, we may be enabled to live such overcoming lives that He may finally say the same of us!

Meaning of "In the Name of Jesus Christ"

Jesus also set the example for ministers. Did you know that Jesus baptized more disciples than John the Baptist? Listen:

"After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples) ... " (John 3:22 and 4:1-2).

There is an important meaning here. Actually Jesus did not 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.

Here is a most important truth. His disciples did the baptizing IN HIS NAME -- that is, in His stead -- they did it for Him, by His authority -- and that was considered just the same as if Jesus had actually done it Himself! In fact, the Holy Spirit actually inspired the direct statement that Jesus baptized more disciples than John. When, at His direction, and by His authority, His chosen disciples, chosen by Him, did it for Him, it is considered that JESUS did the baptizing. He did it, in other words, by and through His disciples! 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. And indeed He has! For we are commanded to do all things IN THE NAME OF CHRIST!

Jesus Commanded Baptism

Keep in mind the clear picture of the true GOSPEL. 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 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:

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach THE GOSPEL" (the Message God sent and Christ proclaimed) "TO EVERY CREATURE. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Note these points: The GOSPEL to be preached was not the present-day message ABOUT the Person of Christ, but the Message He brought and preached -- the Good News of the GOVERNMENT of God. What is it necessary to BELIEVE to be saved? That which is preached -- the GOSPEL! When even the preachers today do away with God's LAW, and therefore the government (Kingdom) of God -- for there can be no government without law -- they deny that which must be believed to be saved -- and their followers cannot be saved, but are deceived! And, also, it is "he that is baptized" that shall be saved. It's part of the divine Commission -- a required ordinance for salvation!

Notice Matthew's version of the Great Commission:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations ... " surely the disciples were to teach these nations that which 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 -- a Message that has not been preached for 1800 years or more! "... Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Here again, in the final Great Commission for preaching 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 Ghost [Spirit]."

In Name of Jesus Only

Since some today are being baptized over again "in the name of Jesus ONLY" in order to eliminate the Father, and the Holy Spirit, this should be considered here. The contention of these people is that this passage in Matthew 28:19 is the only place in the Bible where the names of the Father and the Holy Spirit are commanded. They argue that a thing must be established "in the mouth of two or more witnesses," and since they claim there is but this one witness to this command, it must be rejected. All other passages mention only the name of Jesus.

The explanation is that two or more witnesses are required only in the case of HUMAN testimony -- where one accuses another. That instruction does not apply to the divine Witness, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and to assume it does is surely close to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit! On the contrary, "ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" And, THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN! If you can break, disprove, reject, or throw out this one scripture, you can reject all the rest!

In this passage, the word translated "in" should properly be translated "into." The meaning, then, is 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 believer under the water performs the act IN THE NAME OF -- that is, by authority of, JESUS CHRIST. Why? Because Jesus said "ALL POWER" -- and that includes all authority -- "is given unto me 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.

New Testament Ordinance

The apostles understood this as a divine Commission and Command. They carried it out. They always baptized repentant believers.

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

And "they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them ... But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:5, 12).

Some, who do not believe in water baptism, may say this baptism was not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. But later, when the apostles sent Peter and John down to these people at Samaria, they, "when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (verses 15-16).

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

Baptism Definitely Commanded

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. It was at the house of a very devout Gentile, Cornelius. But devout though he was, he did not understand -- did not have saving KNOWLEDGE. He knew no better than to fall down at Peter's feet and worship him, a mere man. God had sent Peter to instruct him.

Peter preached to Cornelius' family, "The word which God sent" -- the Message God sent by Jesus Christ as Messenger. And "while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word" (Acts 10:44). 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. In Acts 11:15-17 it is plainly described as the SAME "baptism" with the Holy Spirit the apostles had received. Now these had received the "baptism" with the Spirit.

"Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid WATER, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:46-48).

Here is a definite inspired COMMAND to be baptized in WATER.

Immersion, Sprinkling, or Pouring?

As in all other points of doctrine, the churches today are in utmost confusion -- some practicing pouring, some sprinkling, some immersing. Some say it makes no difference. Those who sprinkle usually apply it to children.

The word "baptize" is not an English word. It is a Greek word. The New Testament was written in the Greek language. In translating it into English, the translators left this Greek word untranslated. Literally, in the Greek, the word is "baptizo". The definition of this word is "IMMERSE." It means to plunge into, put into, dip. It does not mean "to sprinkle" or "to pour." The Greek word for "sprinkle" is "rantidzo", and "to

pour" is "cheo" in Greek. The Holy Spirit did not inspire the use of these words, but baptizo, meaning IMMERSE, PUT INTO.

Therefore sprinkling or pouring IS NOT BAPTIZING! When one understands the meaning of the words inspired, it is silly to talk about "which form or mode of baptizing shall we use -- sprinkling, pouring, or immersing?" It is as ridiculous as to ask which form of IMMERSING shall we use -- sprinkling, pouring, or immersing? Or as to ask "which form or mode of skiing shall we use -- swimming, ice-skating, or skiing?" Swimming and ice-skating are not skiing. Sprinkling and pouring are not baptizing.

John baptized around about Aenon near Jerusalem, "because there was much water there" (John 3:23). He would have needed only a cupful to sprinkle, or a pitcher full to pour -- but baptizing required "MUCH WATER" in a river. Also this verse indicates John baptized the subject with much water, not by pouring a cupful of water on the subject.

Jesus set us an example -- there was no other purpose in His baptism -- and 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 (Acts 8:38). There was no reason whatever 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 (verse 39).

The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is a BURIAL, and a RISING from a grave. Notice Colossians 2:12. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are RISEN with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Neither sprinkling nor pouring is a burial, and one rises up out of neither. They do not picture the symbolic meaning of baptism, and therefore are meaningless.

When one is plunged INTO the water, he is in a watery grave. He would not live ten minutes unless brought up out of the water -- unless RISEN from this watery grave. Therefore a person immersed in water is in a literal grave.

Notice further:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5).

There is the beautiful symbolism -- the real meaning of baptism. It pictures, in symbol, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

But it is a DUAL picture, as all things in God's Plan are DUAL in operation. It also pictures the crucifixion of the old self (verses 6-7), 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.

Going down into the water pictures the DEATH of Christ, and of the old self.

Burial in the water pictures the BURIAL of Christ, and of the old self.

Coming up out of the water pictures Christ's RESURRECTION, and a spiritually resurrected person walking henceforth "in newness of life."

Water baptism is the ordinance ordained of Christ by which we express our FAITH in Christ as Saviour -- 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 henceforth. It is a beautiful ordinance, full of meaning!

Not Baptized Into a Denomination

Notice carefully, too -- we are "BAPTIZED INTO JESUS CHRIST" (verse 3, above), or, as Jesus expressed it in Matthew 28:19, into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- NOT INTO SOME CHURCH ORGANIZATION OR DENOMINATION.

In many sectarian churches today the minister will refuse to baptize one except into his church -- his group or organization of human beings. That is not proper baptism. 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.

Baptism has degenerated in many churches into a rite or ceremony of entrance into the fellowship of that sectarian organization -- nothing more than a rite by which one joins a lodge or social club!

Note well these facts: One may "join" a lodge, social club, or organized group of MEN (and most churches today have degenerated into social societies). But ONE CANNOT JOIN THE TRUE CHURCH OF GOD! You cannot GET in of your own accord! No, GOD MUST PUT YOU IN -- no man can do it -- you cannot do it yourself!

How does one gain entrance into the true CHURCH? "By ONE SPIRIT are we all baptized into [PUT INTO] one body" -- the Body of Christ, the true Church of God. "Baptize" means "PUT INTO." When we receive the Holy Spirit of God to change us -- to make us as new creatures in Christ -- it is the impregnation of eternal LIFE from God. It is the very life-germ from God the FATHER. It is the Spirit of sonship whereby we become HIS CHILDREN, and may call Him "FATHER" (Rom. 8:14-15). The CHURCH OF GOD is the Household of God- -composed of GOD'S CHILDREN. We do not become His children until begotten of Him -- until we receive His Spirit -- His Nature -- His Life. When we receive His Spirit, therefore, we are automatically PUT INTO His family -- HIS CHURCH! Joining one of the social clubs called churches does not put one into GOD'S Church!

Now 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 (Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-6). 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 "ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The Thief on the Cross

Is baptism essential? How about the "thief on the cross"?

The answer is, GOD COMMANDS WATER BAPTISM. The 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 -- the DEATH OF CHRIST. While also it pictures His resurrection, by which we are finally SAVED, it is merely the symbol, not the reality.

The true explanation is that the "thief on the cross" was unable to be baptized. And since baptism is not the thing which saves us from the death penalty, makes us righteous, or imparts eternal life, he did not lose salvation because of circumstances out of his control. God makes allowance for such cases.

But God commands water baptism; and for one WHO IS ABLE to either defy the command and refuse, or neglect, or even put off obedience to this command until too late, certainly would be an act of disobedience which would impose the PENALTY of sin, and cause loss of salvation.

You need not worry about the thief on the cross -- or one utterly UNABLE to be baptized. You need be MUCH concerned, however -- you who are able -- about obedience to the command. It is essential to salvation inasmuch as God commands it, and noncompliance is disobedience which would mean loss of salvation.

How Long Should We Wait?

This brings us to the question -- how soon must we be baptized?

One or two denominations insist it be put off until the candidate has PROVED HIMSELF -- has proved he has the Holy Spirit and is living a righteous spiritual life -- or has come to certain spiritual KNOWLEDGE. One denomination will not baptize people until they come to "see" and accept God's LAW, and many of this denomination's doctrines, and usually there is a six-months' probation period.

Paul says God's Law "IS SPIRITUAL," and that the carnal (unconverted) mind is not subject to the Law and CANNOT be (Rom. 7:14 and 8:7). The order of God is: 1st) preach the Gospel, leading to a conviction of sin in the hearts of those God calls, leading to REPENTANCE and FAITH in Christ; 2nd) BAPTISM; and 3rd) they shall receive the HOLY SPIRIT, which renews their minds, teaches them, reveals spiritual truth. Since one 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 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. One does not need a spiritual college education in Bible knowledge to repent and be baptized into Christ. Jesus' order of events was, 1st) PREACH THE GOSPEL, 2nd) BAPTIZE repentant believers, 3rd) TEACH THEM THE COMMANDMENTS (Matt. 28:19-20).

Therefore, how long should baptism be put off? The answer is, just as soon as one has been convicted in his heart of his past sins and sinful life -- just as soon as one realizes his own way of life has been WRONG, and becomes sick and tired of it, and turns from his own ways and wants to find GOD'S WAYS and live them, truly REPENTS of his past life of sins, and BELIEVES in and ACCEPTS Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, and the One whom he must obey henceforth, and WANTS TO TURN TO THE CHANGED, DIFFERENT, NEW AND HAPPY LIFE OF FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, and to become a child of God -- then that person should be baptized IMMEDIATELY if possible -- and if this is not possible, then AS SOON as a true servant of God is available to perform the baptism.

Baptism Should Never Be Delayed

It might be neglected until too late! In every case recounted in the New Testament, repentant believers were baptized IMMEDIATELY.

On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 were baptized THAT SAME DAY. Philip baptized the eunuch AT ONCE. God sent Ananias to baptize Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, the apostle. Immediately on meeting him, Ananias said: "And now WHY TARRIEST THOU? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Paul baptized the Philippian jailer and those in his house "the same hour of the night" -- and it was after midnight (Acts 16:33). They did not even wait until daylight!

Should Children Be Baptized?

One cannot be baptized until after he has fully REPENTED. Only those who BELIEVE, both the true GOSPEL (the Message Jesus preached, which is the Kingdom, or Government of God) and on JESUS CHRIST as personal Saviour, 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 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 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.

In the case of some awaiting baptism among our radio listeners and readers, unable to find a man of God qualified to baptize them, this very necessity forces them to wait until we can send them a minister. Where NECESSITY prevents immediate baptism, in such cases, or like the thief on the cross, God understands and makes allowance. But avoid all unnecessary delay.

Must Baptism Be Administered Only by Ordained Ministers?

Finally, who is authorized to administer baptism? Must the repentant believer be baptized ONLY by an ordained minister? How much depends upon the goodness, or belief, or spirituality of the man who performs the ordinance?

First, let us look to the example of Jesus; next, to the instructions of Christ; and then, to the teaching and practice in the early New Testament Church.

Was Jesus Himself an "ordained minister" -- that is, ordained and approved by one of the popular denominations around Him? No, He was despised and rejected of them -- opposed, persecuted, belittled as a non-conformist. And He baptized more disciples than John. Even John was not recognized, ordained, or sponsored in any way by any popular group or church. He was in their sight a rank outsider. Actually, as pointed out earlier, Jesus Himself immersed no one with His own physical hands -- His disciples did it for Him, by His authority. And right there is the point which answers the whole question. The one qualified to do the immersing must always perform it IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST -- which means by His authority, acting for Christ as His disciple.

The principle is that IT IS CHRIST WHO IS BAPTIZING YOU. The man who puts you under the water is merely performing this physical act for Christ, in His stead. You are not to look to the human man, further than to conscientiously try to go to one you honestly feel is a man of God, called of Christ, and used of Him in the work of His true Church. And if later he turns the wrong way, your salvation does not depend on that man or any other mortal man, BUT SOLELY UPON CHRIST! There is no cause to be baptized again by another man.

Always there is the chance that you may be deceived in the man you believe qualified to act for Christ in the act of baptism. If it depended upon this man, you would have to have divine powers of reading minds and hearts to be sure. You might have to be immersed fifty times before you could be absolutely sure of the man who did it -- and even then you could be mistaken. Just be as careful as you can, as God gives you to see, in the man who acts for Christ in baptizing you -- and then DO NOT LOOK AT THE MAN -- LOOK AT CHRIST -- consider that it is CHRIST who is baptizing you, by and through a human instrument. And even if the instrument turns out to be imperfect, remember all humans are imperfect, and it was done for, and in the name of the only One who ever was perfect. And since it was in reality done BY CHRIST, it should never be done over by another.

Who Should Baptize?

Now back to the example of Christ. In His own earthly ministry, He had this immersing performed for Him by His disciples. At that time they were not even converted -- had not yet received the Holy Spirit -- for the Holy Spirit was not yet given (John 7:39) because Jesus had not yet ascended to heaven to send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7), which first came to enter within and convert these disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Peter was their leader, and even after this baptizing, Peter denied Jesus three times. If you had been baptized by Peter in Christ's name, would you, on learning of his denial of Jesus, be baptized over again? These men, who baptized for Jesus when He was with them in person, were not ordained ministers -- were not recognized by any popular church -- were merely STUDENTS of Jesus at the time, being taught, not yet prepared to be sent out as His apostles and His ministers. And the indications are they were young men, perhaps not yet old enough to be made preachers or evangelists. They were not perfect, not even converted (Luke 22:32).

Consider now Christ's teaching. Those who go forth teaching, or preaching, His Gospel (most popular denominations preach a different gospel) are the ones He commanded and commissioned to do the baptizing (Matt. 28:19-20).

Consider the example of the inspired early Church. Philip was not an apostle, or a regular minister, but merely a deacon commissioned by the Church only to perform physical acts, such as waiting on tables (Acts 6:2-5). Yet he went down to Samaria and preached Christ and His Kingdom, and the people who believed were baptized (Acts 8:5-6, 12). The text does not even state that Philip did the baptizing -- he may have had some of his new converts do it.

If you study the New Testament on the point, you will see it does not appear to attach great importance as to which man puts the believer under the water, since it is considered by the one baptized that CHRIST does it. The Holy Spirit sent Philip later to baptize the eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).

However, notice that the one performing the baptism ceremony was a representative (though not necessarily an ordained minister) of the true Church of God in every New Testament case. This was the Church Jesus founded (Matthew 16:18).

Paul Baptized Few

Consider, finally, Paul's example and teaching.

The Corinthian Church was having a contention as to which man they would follow. At Corinth some wanted to follow Paul and start a church with him at the head -- others wanted to follow Peter; others, Apollos.

"Is Christ divided?" asked Paul of them (I Cor. 1:13). "Was PAUL crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (I Cor. 1: 13-17).

Notice, PAUL BAPTIZED VERY FEW. He had others -- perhaps among them a few lay members who were not ordained ministers at all -- do it for Christ. He was the called minister by whom Christ carried the Gospel to the Gentiles -- through whom CHRIST as head of the Church ruled the churches which had been raised up by the preaching of Paul and the young men he taught and sent out under his direction. Paul did not consider it important or essential that he, personally, baptize all those being converted under the ministry God carried on through his supervision. "Christ sent me not to baptize," he said. Paul had other ordained ministers and helpers do the baptizing for him -- UNDER HIS DIRECTION.

Some, today, being converted under the ministry God is carrying on through the supervision of Herbert W. Armstrong seem to think it important that Herbert W. Armstrong baptize them. But, as in the days of Paul, there is danger lest people get to looking too much to the person or the human instrument God is using, INSTEAD OF LOOKING TO CHRIST, THE HEAD OF THE TRUE CHURCH OF GOD.

And so, as Paul did, we today sometimes have other consecrated and dedicated non-ordained men do the baptizing. It is done IN THE NAME OF CHRIST -- it is really CHRIST doing it, through human instrumentality. A man does it merely as a servant, or instrument of Christ -- just as performing a service, never to his own credit or glory or honor.