

**“And this Gospel
shall be preached...”**
Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

What the Bible Says About Water Baptism

by Herbert W. Armstrong

I haven't spoken on the subject of water baptism for a long time. What I'm going to tell you will be a little different than how anybody else would tell you.

Is water baptism essential to salvation? Why do we need it? Millions of members of traditional, professing Christianity have been absolutely deceived. And I'll tell you, brethren, we too, have been assuming more of the false doctrines generally believed in professing Christian churches than we realize.

Notice what Jesus said in Mark 7:7: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me." Most people will tell you that nobody can worship Christ in vain. If you worship Him, it can't be in vain. But Christ Himself said that many are worshipping Him in vain. How? "Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men."

I am accused quite often of not going along with traditional Christianity. Well, I want to tell you that I don't want to go along with it, holding to "the tradition of men," because that's what it is and they who are a part of it do not hold to the commandments of God.

Notice what Jesus said in verse 9 of this same chapter: "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Do we do that? I hope not.

Now let's look at what the Bible—not traditions of men—says about salvation and water baptism.

How to Be Saved

God has required two conditions to salvation which you will find in Acts 2:38. Here the inspired apostle Peter had just

received God's Holy Spirit, and on the same day he preached an inspired sermon. We read in verses 37-38: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, 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 Ghost [Spirit]." First "repent" and second "be baptized."

There are the two conditions! Repent and be baptized.

Repentance is toward God. There's one lawgiver—God (Jas. 4:12). Then, being baptized is an outward profession of faith. Faith is in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His shed blood, and in what He has done to reconcile us to God. But we must also believe God—believe what He says—instead of rejecting His word like Adam and Eve did. God is the source of knowledge.

What does it mean to repent? Well, I wonder if you've heard the story of the Methodist bishop who had come to a town to preach. It was quite a big thing for the bishop to come to this particular local church. And he preached a whole long sermon on repentance. But somehow his congregation there "didn't get it." And some of them asked him questions but still couldn't seem to understand. Then one humble old brother, near the back, raised his hand and said, "If you please, sir, I think I can explain this so the people will understand."

"Well," the bishop said, "all right. Go ahead and explain it."

So he marched down the aisle toward the pulpit and said, "I'm going to hell, I'm going to hell, I'm going to hell, I'm going to hell, I'm going to hell, I'm going to hell." When he got down by the pulpit, he turned around and started back

saying, "I'm going to heaven, I'm going to heaven, I'm going to heaven, I'm going to heaven." Finally he said, "What you means, sir, Mr. Bishop, is to turn around and go the other way."

Now that's about the best explanation of what it is to repent that I think I've ever heard. And the bishop had it explained to him.

Repentance means to turn from what you've allowed to come into you. Turn from the kind of life you've lived, the kind of thoughts you've been thinking, what you have let yourself become, that is, to become something else. Instead of Satan's spirit getting to you, you now want the Spirit of God in you.

When I say, "turn from the kind of life you've lived" or "turn from what you have let yourself become," people ask, "Uh, can I repent of what God made me?" Well, God did not make humans the sinners that they are. We drink that in from Satan. I hope that explains that.

Now, there are two phases of what we call human nature. The first phase is spiritual or of the heart and mind, the attitude. The second is a physical phase, the natural desires of the flesh. But this doesn't necessarily mean inordinate—that is, lawless and uncontrolled—desires. Adam had physical desires. He was created with a nervous system, of course, but not Satan's attitude, which causes most of the yielding to lust of the flesh.

What God is correcting is the self-centered attitude of the heart. It's this that is so wicked, desperately wicked and deceitful (Jer. 17:9)—not the nervous system.

The Ten Commandments are a spiritual law. Though concerned with physical actions, their principle is spiritual. Committing adultery may be a physical act, but it violates a spiritual principle. It is defrauding, it is unfaithfulness to a mate, and that's a spiritual principle. And it's the same with coveting what is not yours, etc. It's the attitude of Satan that really gets into you and makes you want to do it.

So repentance means an about-face, a turn to a new and a different life; and that's toward God.

The Sign of Repentance and Belief

We saw that when Peter was asked, "What shall we do?" he replied, "Repent, and *be baptized . . . for the remission of sins.*" These are actually the same two conditions Jesus gave at the very beginning of His gospel when He said, "repent . . . and believe the gospel." He "came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying . . . repent ye, and believe the gospel [the Good News of the Kingdom of God]" (Mark 1:14-15).

We can see the same thing again in Acts 8. Philip had been sent by the Holy Spirit as a divine miracle and met the caravan of a eunuch. Verse 35: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

Now many tell you today that you can't preach Jesus out of the Old Testament. But Philip did.

Verses 36-37: "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou *believest* with all thine heart, thou mayest." He had already repented and that was quite evident. But he had to believe now, and believe not only *in* Christ, but believe *what* Christ said.

Verses 37-38: "And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water." They didn't stand and bend over and get sprinkled a little bit. They went down *into* the water, ". . . both Philip and the eunuch; and he [meaning Philip] baptized him."

Verse 39: "And when they were come up out of the water"—now that shows again baptism by immersion; ~~they~~ went *into* the water—"the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."

Baptism is a symbolic ordinance proclaiming *faith* in the death (going down under the water), the burial (being covered over by the water), and the resurrection (coming up again out of the water) of Christ. And also it's symbolic of the death of your old self, burial of it and the coming up again to live a new life.

Once these conditions are complied with, God stands bound by a promise to put within the repentant *believer* His Spirit, which means to receive His love, faith, understanding, gentleness, goodness, power—His attitude of mind instead of Satan's hostile attitude; the spirit of a sound mind and actually the very life of God—divine life—the impregnation and begetting of eternal life and the very character of God. The Holy Spirit in you changes you.

"For the promise," Peter said, "is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, 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.

What Jesus Showed by Example

Jesus set us an example in all things that we should follow in His steps. He was the example of Christian living for the individual and also the example for His ministers. Jesus, though He had committed no sins to be forgiven, was baptized, thus setting the example for us (Matt. 3:13-17).

When baptized, Jesus was immersed into the water, not sprinkled or poured over, because "when he was baptized, [He] went up straightway *out* of the water." So obviously He had been down *in* it. 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."

Jesus also set the example for His ministers. Did you know that Jesus baptized more disciples than John the Baptist? In John 3:22 and John 4:1-2, you read, "After these things came

Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried [lingered] 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,)” so on and so forth. It was considered Jesus who did the baptizing although Peter, James, Matthew, etc., actually baptized for Him.

Now that brings up the meaning of doing something in Christ’s name. There is an important meaning here. Actually Jesus did not do the physical work or act of baptizing people Himself. He had His disciples do it for Him. And what they did was by His authority and command so it was considered as if Jesus Himself had baptized.

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 this was considered just 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.

What I have done in the building of the Church and this Work, I’ve only done because it was Jesus doing it and using me as an instrument. That’s why I say, I didn’t do it, He did. But He does use human instruments sometimes, and still it’s His doing. He works, in other words, by and through His disciples.

To ask anything in prayer or to do or to perform anything in the Name of Jesus Christ is to ask or do it by Jesus’ authority. You are acting for Him as His agent when you do it that way, and the responsibility is His. To do it for Him in His stead is acting as if by power of attorney. “In His Name” implies that He has delegated that authority to the one who takes His name and uses it. And indeed He has, for we are commanded to do all things in the name of Jesus Christ.

Baptism Is for the Church

Now 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. Christ was the Divine Messenger who brought and proclaimed it. After His resurrection, Jesus gave the disciples 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 [that’s 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).

Notice Matthew’s version of the Great Commission. Matthew 28:19-20: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing* them in the name [and it should really be translated “into” the Name] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

In the final great commission for preaching the gospel, Christ commanded baptism. Here He specifically stated baptism “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus said: “All power [that included all authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). And we—whoever is baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are symbolically put into the Name, the authority and power of the God Family and are beginning toward becoming entitled to the power and possessions of God.

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

About ten years later God sent Peter also to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. It was in the house of the very devout Gentile Cornelius. Devout though he was, Cornelius did not understand, did not yet have complete knowledge, so Peter preached to Cornelius’s family: “The word which God sent [that is, the message God sent and brought by Jesus as a messenger] unto the children of Israel.” “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost [Spirit] fell on all them which heard [believed] the word” (Acts 10:36, 44).

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

There is a definite command to be baptized with water.

Now I was reared in the Quaker church. And the Quaker church does not believe in water baptism. They say you’re only baptized with the Holy Spirit. It’s a spiritual baptism, not water. So when I finally surrendered to God and decided I would really believe Him and obey Him, I had to look into this matter of water baptism. I said, “Well now, I’m going to check it in the Bible and if the church I was brought up in is wrong, why I’ll do what the Bible says.” So I studied the Bible, but for help I went to a Baptist minister, and I also went to a Seventh Day Adventist minister, and I also went to the Quaker minister.

Now the Quaker minister believed only in the one kind of baptism, but when I read this passage just quoted to him, that got him.

“Well,” he says, “that’s always bothered me. But, I’ve looked at great leaders in our church and I thought, Well, those men are such great men. If they can do it, why, I can too.” So instead of looking to the Word of God, he looked to other men.

How Water Baptism Is Accomplished

Is it immersion, sprinkling or pouring? As in all other points of doctrine, the churches today are in utmost confusion.

Some practice pouring, some sprinkling, some immersing. Some say it makes no difference. And those who sprinkle usually apply it to children.

Now the word *baptize* is really not an English but a Greek word. The New Testament was written in the Greek language. In translating it into English, the translators left this Greek word untranslated. They didn't change it into an English translation—they merely anglicized a Greek word. Literally in the Greek, the word is *baptizo* and the definition of the word is "immerse." If they had translated it, they would have said, "be immersed." To baptize means "to plunge into, to put into, to dip." It does not mean to sprinkle or to pour. The Greek word for sprinkle is *rantizo* and to pour is *cheo*. The Holy Spirit did not inspire the use of those words, but it did inspire the word *baptizo*, meaning immerse or put into. Therefore sprinkling and pouring are not baptizing.

Baptism is a burial, and then a rising from a watery grave. Neither sprinkling nor pouring is a burial. "Buried with him in baptism," says Colossians 2:12. And one *rises up* out of neither sprinkling or pouring. "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." That's quoted right from the Bible.

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 under water is in a literal grave. Notice this further in Romans 6:3-5:

"Know ye not, that so many of you [or 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 [as you're planted in the water together] in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

Now there is beautiful symbolism, the real meaning of baptism!

It pictures the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ. But it's 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), the sinning life, and the burial of this sinning self. The coming up out of the watery grave is 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 the newness of life.

Water baptism is the ordinance 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 up to a new, higher life henceforth. It is a beautiful ordinance, full of meaning.

Some ask, "How soon should a person be baptized?" The answer is just as soon as one has been convicted in his heart of the past sins and sinful life, just as soon as one realizes that his own way of life has been wrong, 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 the past life of sin and of what he has been himself, and believes in and accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior and the One whom he must henceforth obey, and wants to turn to the changed, different, new and happy life of faith in Christ, and to become a child of God. Then that person should be baptized immediately. And if this is not possible, then as soon as it is possible.

Now about children. You can't immerse children, but anyway children are not mature enough to have truly repented. Baptism is for those who have come to enough of an adult mind to have truly repented.

You're not baptized into any denomination. I haven't space here to explain that, or about the thief on the cross who had no opportunity to be baptized, or about other things. (These things are all explained in our free booklet *All About Water Baptism*. Why not ask for a copy soon.)