

About Baptism

How did early Christian leaders baptize?

Is being baptized something you should do?



“John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there” (John 3:23, NKJV).

Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey Him.” (Acts 2:38; 5:32, AFV)

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ISBN 978-1-63660-0703

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What do you know about baptism? What form of baptism was the practice of the early Christian Church?

What is an appropriate baptismal ceremony? Is baptism supposed to be by immersion or sprinkling? What about by fire?

Who should perform the baptism? Who should be baptized?

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

About Baptism

Do you know much about baptism?

Roman Catholics sprinkle, Baptists and Eastern Orthodox Catholics immerse, and Protestants tend to baptize with one or the other method.

Some claim that they are just baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Does the method matter?

If you have been called to be a Christian (see our free booklet, online at ccog.org, titled: *Is God Calling You?*), do you need to be baptized?

Could baptism be a salvation issue?

Let's explore these issues and more.

What Was the Original Practice?

Christian baptism includes the concept of burial, cleansing, and resurrection.

But the idea of being cleansed by water is older than that. Being cleansed by water is shown in several parts of the Hebrew scriptures, also known as the Old Testament (e.g. Leviticus 14:8).

The *Jewish Encyclopedia of 1906* teaches that by the time of Jesus, the Jews required converts to be baptized by full immersion before they could be considered to be Jews. Although no specific Hebrew scripture required that, the

Jews seem to have concluded thousands of years ago that since the unclean are to be washed (e.g. Leviticus 15:1-27), having “unclean” Gentiles get baptized was a way to remove their uncleanness. The Jews also have pointed to scriptures such as Zechariah 13:1, Ezekiel 36:25, and Psalm 51:2 to support requiring converts to be baptized.

We can safely conclude that full immersion was the practice of John the Baptist, otherwise he would not have been baptizing where “there was much water” (John 3:23).

John the Baptist was the first person shown in the Bible to baptize. (Although the New Testament also discusses a type of baptism that happened in a sense in the Old Testament, see 1 Corinthians 10:1-2, it was not the same type of baptism.)

Notice that the Bible shows that repentance was necessary, as well as a lot of water (the Jordan was/is a river), for what John the Baptist did:

² ... the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Luke 3:2-3).

Jesus of Nazareth, Himself, was baptized (Luke 3:21). Yet, Jesus never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15) He did not NEED to be baptized as a repentant sinner, but was probably baptized because, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus’ baptism was an EXAMPLE to follow for all wanting to be true Christians. Scripture states that:

¹⁶ 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. (Matthew 3:16)

So, Jesus was immersed in water since He came up from it—this use of water was not sprinkling. Notice also that the Holy Spirit descended on Him AFTER Jesus had been immersed in water.

It is probable that many, if not all, of the original twelve apostles had been baptized in water by John the Baptist as several of the apostles had first been John the Baptist's disciples (John 1:35-41). Furthermore, because they were later involved in water baptism during Jesus' time (cf. Luke 3:21; John 3:21-22), it seems logical to conclude that all of the original apostles underwent water baptism.

The use of water for baptism was continued by the apostles after they received the Holy Spirit. Notice the following:

⁴⁶ ... Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. (Acts 10:46-48)

Water baptism was also practiced by the successors of the apostles.

Roman Catholic scholars know and teach that baptism of early Christians was by immersion (e.g. Fanning W., Baptism. The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1907) and that baptism

was only for adults (Briand J. The Judeo-Christian Church of Nazareth. 1982, p. 54; Bagatti B. The Church from the Circumcision. 1971, p. 239).

In baptism, the old self is symbolically buried:

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. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, (Colossians 2:12-13)

The one properly baptized emerges from the watery baptismal grave as a new person in Christ. The baptized person's whole way of life is now changed. The baptized have a different sense of direction in life. The intention of the baptized is to serve God instead of Satan the devil and his way of life (Romans 6:16-18). The baptized are to emerge as a "new" person (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:21-24; Colossians 3:9-10).

This is part of why mere sprinkling is not enough for the rite of baptism. Immersion helps show total commitment and is consistent with the burial analogies (e.g. Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12) related to becoming a Christian. Sprinkling with a few drops of water is not the same thing and does not convey the totality of the commitment.

Jesus said:

³³ ... whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:33)

To “forsake all” is not what Greco-Roman-Protestant faiths tend to expect of the people they will baptize. Furthermore, to “forsake all” not only means to give to the true church financially, Jesus is also warning against holding on to carnal practices or other matters that are not in alignment with scripture. The Apostle Paul confirmed that understanding when he wrote:

²⁴ And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25)

Those baptized are to “continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22; Colossians 1:23) and love (cf. 1 Timothy 2:15b; Titus 2:2; Philippians 1:9) and progress in the faith (Philippians 1:25) as part of that commitment. For more information on faith, check out our free booklet, online at cccog.org, titled: *Faith for Those God has Called and Chosen*.

True Christianity is a total commitment and baptism by immersion helps to picture that.

Who Can or Should Be Baptized?

Who can be baptized?

The opportunity to be a Christian is open to all God calls who are willing to obey Him. God does not discriminate against any race, sex, or status in society:

³⁴ ... God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. (Acts 10:34-35)

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).

So, people with any background can be baptized.

Who SHOULD be baptized?

Those called to be real Christians (see also the free online booklet: *Is God Calling You?*).

To properly do so, you need to repent and truly believe. You should also pray about it (more on prayer can be found in our free booklet, online at ccog.org, titled: *Prayer: What Does the Bible Teach?*). Jesus said humans were to live “by every word of God” (Luke 4:4)—and the word of God enjoins baptism.

Notice what the Apostle Peter taught:

³⁸ 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. 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 (Acts 2:38-39).

The repentant adults were to be baptized. Furthermore, a partial reason was so that their children—who became sanctified if one or both parents were baptized (1 Corinthians 7:14)—could be baptized later. Young children were not being baptized in the Book of Acts. And note that Peter was also stating that baptism would also be needed for those that God would call much later (“afar off”).

Notice also the following involving the Apostle Philip and a certain eunuch:

³⁶ 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?” ³⁷ 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.” ³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. (Acts 8:36-38)

Only those who can believe that Jesus is the Son of God can be eligible for baptism. Notice also that the eunuch also pointed to the availability of water for the ceremony—so obviously he somehow knew (or had been told by Philip) that a lot of water was needed for baptism (consider that he probably had a small amount of water with him when he was traveling). In this case, the water for baptism was either a river or a lake that he and Philip went down into.

After hearing the Apostle Paul:

⁸ ... many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

The original practice in the New Testament was immersion after belief and repentance. In addition to picturing death and burial of the old self, baptism was also considered as the process to wash new Christians of the sins/faults of their past. Notice something from the Old and New Testaments:

²⁵ I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your filth and of all your foul idols. (Ezekiel 36:25, NJB)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Baptism was mostly done out-of-doors, but sometimes inside, but always by immersion. And this was done by true Christians who were clothed (some heretics improperly pushed nude baptism, which is not something ever recorded in scripture).

Notice that the Roman Church admits that immersion was the original practice, without the use of baptismal fonts (like it now uses):

In the Apostolic Age, as in Jewish times (John 3:23), baptism was administered without special fonts, at the seaside or in streams or pools of water (Acts 8:38); (Baptismal Font. The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1907).

The word *Baptism* is derived from the Greek word, *bapto*, or *baptizo*, to wash or to immerse. It signifies, therefore, that washing is of the essential

idea of the sacrament ... The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion. This is not only evident from the writings of the Fathers and the early rituals of both the Latin and Oriental Churches, but it can also be gathered from the Epistles of St. Paul, who speaks of baptism as a bath (Ephesians 5:26; Romans 6:4; Titus 3:5). In the Latin Church, immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century. (Baptism. The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1907).

1214 This sacrament is called *Baptism*, after the central rite by which it is carried out (Greek *baptizein*) means to “plunge” or “immerse”; the “plunge” into water symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as “a new creature” (Catechism of the Catholic Church. Imprimatur Potest +Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Doubleday, NY 1995, p. 342).

Notice that *The Catholic Encyclopedia* admits that immersion was the biblical practice, the practice of the early Church, and was slowly dropped in the Latin/Western Church. Hence, the Church of Rome admits that it is not faithful to the original practice of baptism.

Also notice that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* admits that baptism is a plunging/ immersion that shows a burial and resurrection, but this is certainly not the ceremony that they use of infants (which most likely are the majority of those baptized by Roman Catholics).

Baptismal Counseling?

What about baptismal counseling?

Should this be done?

Yes, in most circumstances. Jesus taught that people should “count the cost” (Luke 14:28), and baptismal counseling helps with that. This is particularly true since Jesus taught that it is only one “who endures to the end” that “shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13)—only those who will endure should be baptized.

Furthermore, scripture shows that Jesus had the Apostle Philip counsel a particular eunuch before he was baptized (Acts 8:26-38). Therefore, that example helps demonstrate that pre-baptismal counseling is endorsed by the Bible.

Remember that Jesus also taught that all sins, except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can be forgiven (Matthew 12:31). Since we do not want any to commit that sin by being baptized when they are not truly ready for it, we want to minimize the possibility of one receiving the Holy Spirit, and then forsaking it. Scriptures show it is better to not know the truth, than to know it and turn against it (Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-21), therefore since pre-baptismal counseling can help prevent that, that is another reason why counseling is generally needed.

Notice what the Apostle Paul told Timothy:

²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure. (1 Timothy 5:22)

To not lay hands upon anyone hastily certainly implies that some type of pre-baptismal counseling was to happen.

The Apostle Paul also wrote:

²¹ Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV)

In my case, counseling with a Church of God minister definitely helped me to prove much about the true church, which then led me to be baptized. And, I have held fast in the decades since then.

In *Continuing Church of God*, Christian ministers (or their designees) normally counsel with people before baptizing them. We try NOT to rush baptism.

The old Worldwide Church of God told ministerial trainees the following about baptismal counseling:

How much knowledge is required before baptism?

Repentance is not based on knowledge. Satan has knowledge but he's not ready for baptism.

Matthew 28:19 - 20

The doctrines and commandments and way of life are to be taught after baptism. However, they must know what sin is and they must understand the sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews 11:6 Are they totally convinced God does exist, that the Bible is His inspired Word and that this is God's Church? Have they really proven it for themselves? Spend time on

this with second - generation Christians who grew up in the Church. Romans 14:1 - 6 They don't have to be perfect. The Sabbath is the test commandment though. There's only one reason anyone would begin keeping the Sabbath — to obey God. Mr. HWA has baptized people who were smoking and eating unclean meats, but whom he knew from their attitudes, would yield to the truth when they came to understand it.

There is no set routine for Baptism counseling, but the following guidelines should help:

Find out why they want to be baptized
People want baptism for various reasons — to be accepted by the Church, to save a guilty conscience, “because God commands it”, “because it's necessary for salvation”, “so I can receive God's Spirit”. Make sure they understand the right reason for baptism and that they want it for the same reason the Bible says they should want it.

Acts 2:37

These men realized they were under a penalty of death — that they had God's blood on their hands. They needed salvation from death forever. Are they throwing themselves on God's mercy? Is this the reason they want baptism?

Acts 2:38

Baptism is for the remission of sins. The purpose of baptism is not so we can get God's Holy Spirit. It's to wipe away our guilty past, remove the penalty of eternal death. The gift of God's Spirit doesn't even come at baptism. It comes with the laying on of hands following baptism. Unless an individual understands the purpose of baptism, they probably aren't ready yet. Invariably, they will express a desire for God's Spirit which is a good desire. Explain to them that God can't place His Spirit in an unrepentant mind.

Help them understand the role of the minister

Make them realize that the purpose of coming to the ministry is not to 'get checked out' for baptism. Help them to understand that only three people know what they're thinking and whether or not they've repented — God, Jesus Christ and themselves. Show them why God and Christ won't make the decisions for them — that the ultimate decision to be baptized is theirs! They must decide, because only they can correctly analyze their minds to see if they're repentant.

The purpose of the ministry is to help them correctly analyze their own mind. We can ask them questions, expound the Biblical passages dealing with baptism, use analogies so they can search their own minds — but the ultimate decision must be theirs. If we see they're not ready, we'll do them the service of telling them, explaining why and what they've got to do about it. But we don't decide for them. Get them away from the idea that somehow they've got to

convince us they're ready. Explain that they are responsible for their own salvation — that we are there to help, serve and advise — that no minister is ever going to make the most important decision in their lives for them. Have them explain what repentance means to them personally. Most people's understanding of repentance is superficial. Unless the minister fully understands it and has deeply repented himself, he won't be able to really help another individual see it and understand it.

Matthew 12:34 "Out of the abundance of the heart..."

Get them talking, explaining, expressing themselves. Don't look for pat answers — look for understanding. Repentance is not knowledge, it is an attitude of mind. People need to know they've sinned and had an attitude of hostility towards God's Way. Has the rebellion against God and His Laws gone? Has he a completely submissive attitude? Does he abhor himself? Is he willing to change in accord with the instruction of the Bible?
...

What about fruits?

Matthew 3:8

With brand new people, where you doubt their repentance, you may want to give them time to bring forth the fruit of repentance. The Sabbath is the number one test commandment. You can also use any of the other commandments they may not

know about if there is any doubt. Never let them leave you without their fully understanding why you think they need more time. If there is any doubt in your mind or theirs as to whether or not they're ready, have them wait. Baptism is an act of faith.

Have they counted the cost?

Luke 14:25 - 30

Take them through this. Make sure they have counted the cost. Do they realize they have been bought with a price and their life will not be their own? Explain the meaning of Romans 6:1 - 15 — that baptism is a burial and so far as the Law is concerned, they die with Jesus Christ at baptism and the penalty of the Law is satisfied. After that Christ lives His life in them and they must follow whatever His Spirit and His Word directs.

Help them to understand why they're being called now

Show them that this is a worldwide Work with the greatest commission ever given to a group of human beings. Teach them that God isn't calling people now just to give them salvation. If they don't see and understand their responsibility to support this great Work mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally — if they want baptism just so they can have personal salvation — if they don't want to be a part of what God is doing — they're not ready for baptism.

Let them make the final decision

Don't take the decision out of their hands at the end by telling them they're not ready. Ask them if they think they're ready. If it's obvious they are, say to them that you can't see any reason why they shouldn't be baptized. Ask them for their decision. This will help them to realize salvation is between them and God and that they can't play games with Him — that no minister is going to make decisions of faith for them.

Explain the Laying on of Hands to them. Help them to see that the act of baptism also represents their total willingness to submit to God and His personal rule over their lives and that the Laying on of Hands represents the first extension of the government of God through human instruments into their lives — that if they are going to be a part of God's government forever, they must be willing to live under the government now. Show them how the Laying on of Hands invests them personally with the responsibility of doing a job through that government — of being a part of this Work. (Morton R. Preparing for the Ministry. WCG, 1975)

The laying on of hands is the connection/means of granting the Holy Spirit to those being baptized. Here is one scriptural example of that being done:

¹⁴ ... Peter and John ... ¹⁵ who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ ... They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid hands on

them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)

Who can lay hands on the baptized?

While the Apostles Peter and John did it in Acts 8, they are no longer available. Nor is the Apostle Paul who, as it is recorded elsewhere (e.g. Acts 19:6), laid hands on other baptized persons as well.

Normally, the baptizer will be a true Church of God minister who has had hands properly laid on him or one commissioned by such a minister to do this (cf. John 4:2; 1 Corinthians 1:14-17; Acts 8:14-23).

The man who handles the baptism is merely performing this physical act for Christ, in His stead. We 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 that man later turns the wrong way, your salvation does not depend on that man or any other mortal man, BUT SOLELY UPON CHRIST! Also, one is not to baptize nor lay hands upon oneself.

The laying on of hands remained a Church of God practice after the time of the original apostles (Schaff P, Schaff D. History of the Christian Church, Vol 5. C. Scribner's Sons, 1907, p. 475). The *Continuing* Church of God continues that practice that as well.

That said, the hands of the minister or other persons involved in the baptism do not actually impart the Holy Spirit. The lead man laying on hands (because more than

one can be laying on hands as shown in Acts 6:6, 8:17) prays to God for Him to grant His Holy Spirit. Once granted, we are then “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

The Holy Spirit is given by the Father, if the Father answers that prayer—and that is mainly dependent upon the sincerity/repentance of the person being baptized. Therefore, even if the specific man who performed the ceremony has issues or falls away from the truth, presuming he was properly authorized by the Church of God ministry to perform the baptism, the procedure is still valid. The Holy Spirit comes from God, not anyone’s hands. As no man or minister is perfect and without sin, and since baptism was in reality done BY CHRIST THROUGH HIS NAME/ AUTHORITY, baptism should not be done over by another in order to be rebaptized, even if the man who baptized became unfaithful.

When the Holy Spirit enters one, that person is begotten by God:

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

The Christian’s remaining physical life can be considered analogous to human gestation. If one remains faithful (Revelation 17:14), “endures to the end” (Matthew 10:22, EOB), one will be born again into God’s kingdom at the resurrection (cf. John 3:5-6; 1 John 3:9; 1 Corinthians 15:49-54) as Jesus, in a sense, was at His resurrection (Romans 1:4-5).

The teaching that Christians are to be born-again at the resurrection was confirmed in the second century by Church of

God pastor/bishop Theophilus of Antioch. Theophilus taught that we are not to be "born again" until the resurrection:

But the moon wanes monthly, and in a manner dies, being a type of man; then it is born again, and is crescent, for a pattern of the future resurrection. (Theophilus of Antioch. To Autolycus, Book 2, Chapter XV. Translated by Marcus Dods, A.M. Excerpted from Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885).

Christians are born-again, not now at baptism, but at the future resurrection. We are begotten by the Holy Spirit after baptism.

Rebaptism?

Although John the Baptist preached repentance, he also did not teach about the Holy Spirit, as the following confirms:

¹ And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples ² he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

³ And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"

So they said, "Into John's baptism."

⁴ Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that

they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. ⁷ Now the men were about twelve in all. (Acts 19:1-7)

So, those called as Christians are to be baptized with water.

Now, some wonder today if they need to be baptized again. Well, notice the following from Jesus, as recorded by Luke:

²⁸ For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:28)

John the Baptist also baptized Jesus (Matthew 3:13).

Yet, John’s baptism was not considered sufficient for Christians--they needed to be baptized in the name of Jesus and have hands laid upon them.

In my case, I was baptized as an infant by the Church of Rome and as a teen by the Salem Bible Church. But, those performing the baptisms were not really doing them with Jesus’ true authority. Later, I realized that I did not truly understand sin or Christianity until learning more from the Bible and then was baptized by a minister in the old Worldwide Church of God over four decades ago.

God’s Gift of His Holy Spirit

Now, **who does God give His Holy Spirit to?**

The Apostles declared God gives His “Holy Spirit ... God has given **to those who obey Him**” (Acts 5:32).

Only those with God’s Spirit are Christians (Romans 8:9) and that Spirit is not given to those who are not humble enough to strive to obey.

So, yes, if God is calling you in this age, in order to respond you need to be baptized as that is part of obedience to the word of God.

Some may point out that the Bible teaches:

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (Ephesians 2:8)

Since that grace passage does not mention baptism, is baptism necessary for salvation?

Some who consider themselves to be “independent” do not think so.

Furthermore, many evangelicals have taught, “Just BELIEVE -- that’s all there is to it; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood, and you are at that instant saved!”

Yet, that teaching is false.

We are not saved by the blood of Jesus, which reconciles us to God, but through His life:

⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:9-10)

It needs to be understood that just calling Jesus 'Lord' and even having done wonders does not save you. Jesus, Himself, warned about that:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

Those who practice lawlessness are those that refuse to obey God and His laws. Jesus says they will not be saved even if they thought that they considered Him to be Lord.

You must change to be a Christian as the Apostle Peter pointed out:

¹⁹ Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out ... (Acts 3:19)

Consider that:

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. (Armstrong HW. All About Water Baptism. 1948, 1954, 1972 edition)

Yes, Christians must endure to the end as Jesus taught (e.g. Matthew 10:22). Furthermore:

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! (Armstrong HW. All About Water Baptism. 1948, 1954, 1972 edition)

Baptism is the start of the new life in Christ (cf. Romans 6:4)—and it is the biblical way to start.

Those who do not think that they need to obey God and be properly baptized would not be real Christians, despite what they may claim or hope.

Understand that the New Testament teaches:

⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, (Hebrews 5:9)

Jesus became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey. Salvation is not promised for those who refuse to obey.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

¹ Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ; (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Jesus is our example (cf. 1 Peter 2:21). Jesus, Himself, was baptized (Matthew 3:16). He said He was doing so to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). So should you.

Furthermore, after He was baptized (Mark 1:9), Jesus began to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14)—that is the work that the baptized should still support to this day (cf. Matthew 24:14).

The Apostle Paul, even after getting a visit from Jesus (Acts 9:3-6), and being “a chosen vessel” by Jesus (Acts 9:15), was also baptized (Acts 9:17-18).

In a special case, God poured out His Holy Spirit on Gentiles that Peter was preaching to (Acts 10:44) apparently to show that God was truly also calling Gentiles. Peter then COMMANDED that they needed water baptism (Acts 10:46-48). So, yes, baptism is essential.

Jesus tied baptism in with salvation:

¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved ... (Mark 16:16)

Jesus made baptism a salvation issue.

Some have pointed to one of the criminals who was killed when Jesus was executed (Luke 23:40-43) as not needing baptism. That was not a matter of need so much as it was baptism being an impossibility. That criminal did not disobey, but did as he was able. If you are repentant and able, baptism is essential. If you are called and able and do not get baptized, you are disobeying and will not be granted God's Holy Spirit. YOU need to be concerned about what YOU CAN DO, not improperly rationalize that you cannot do something you somehow could do (cf. 1 Peter 1:17; Acts 17:30).

Jesus told Nicodemus:

⁵ Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)

Christians become begotten through water and the Spirit after being immersed in water for baptism and having hands laid upon us to receive God's Spirit. We later, then, will be born into the Kingdom of God at the resurrection.

Those who want to be true Christians are not to be disobedient, but are to be properly baptized.

Noncompliance with the biblical commands is disobedience, and does not bring salvation (cf. Hebrews 10:26-27).

When Should You Be Baptized?

So, when should you be baptized?

The Apostle Paul wrote that God's law was spiritual and that the carnal (unconverted) person does not please God:

⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (Romans 8:8-9)

If you want to please God, YOU should get properly baptized as soon as you can. The unbaptized are not fully developing the type of love God wants us all to have and share.

Those baptized are to be the ones that have the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:22-24)

It is only those who have God's Spirit who are Christ's (Romans 8:9).

Since one cannot truly spiritually understand God's spiritual Law or many spiritual things UNTIL after receiving the Holy Spirit, and one is to be baptized before attaining the promise of the Holy Spirit, one should be baptized when one is ready and able.

Yet, many are afraid to request baptism as they do not feel they “know enough.” This fear is usually unfounded. The two basic prerequisites for baptism given in God’s Word are repentance and belief (Acts 2 :38). What we repent of is sin, which is the violation of any of God’s laws (1 John 3:4)—and we are to believe that Jesus is our Lord (means “master”) and Savior, hence we are to be willing to obey Him.

The Bible teaches, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Yet, God can, and will, grant repentance to a carnal mind before the conversion of that mind for those He is calling. You do not need a spiritual college education in Bible knowledge to repent and be baptized into Christ. Jesus told His ministry the following order of events: 1st) PREACH THE GOSPEL, 2nd) BAPTIZE repentant believers, and 3rd) TEACH THEM ALL JESUS COMMANDED (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20). That is also consistent with what the Apostle Paul taught (Romans 10:15; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 28:31; Colossians 1:28).

Notice that more teaching comes AFTER baptism as we are to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18).

So, how long should baptism be put off?

The answer is, just as soon as one has been convicted in his/her heart of his/her past sins and sinful life -- just as soon as one realizes his/her own way of life has been WRONG, and no longer wants to tolerate it, and turns from his/her own ways and wants to find GOD’S WAYS and live them, truly REPENTS of his/her past life of sins, and BELIEVES in and ACCEPTS Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, and the One whom he/she must obey always, and WANTS TO TURN TO THE CHANGED, TRUE, 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. And the one who wants to be baptized should immediately strive to live as a Christian until (and, of course, after) baptism. For assistance on that, please see our free booklet, online at ccog.org, titled: *Christians: Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, Biblical instructions on living as a Christian*.

Do not delay for baptism might be neglected until it's too late!

The Bible teaches:

¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

¹⁰ Therefore, **brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;** ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Yes, you, if called by God, need to fully respond. Not partially, but fully with all your ability.

Now, that does not mean to compromise regarding baptism. Yet, NOTHING IS GAINED BY DELAY IN ACTING ON THE KNOWLEDGE GOD ALMIGHTY HAS ALREADY REVEALED

TO YOU! “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7). If you will not harden your heart, this is a day of salvation for you (2 Corinthians 6:2).

In the New Testament, repentant believers were baptized quickly (e.g. Acts 2:40-41). God sent Ananias to baptize Saul, whose name was changed to Paul and said:

¹⁶ 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)

Saul/Paul had been convinced of Jesus’ Messiahship by then, so having heard and accepted counsel from Jesus Himself, it was time for him to be baptized.

If God has called you, and you are willing to accept that calling, and are striving to live by the word of God, you should counsel and if appropriate, be baptized.

Sometimes, you may be in an area or country where we have no one who can baptize you. Or you may be so far away in your country that it cannot be arranged.

In that case, YOU MAY HAVE TO WAIT.

The Bible teaches:

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

Do not compromise because you think you know better or that God has to have His church do what you think it needs to do related to your baptism.

God knows your circumstances, so do not blame God or the church if you cannot travel to meet with someone who can properly baptize you when you want it done.

Do not rush off just any place to get baptized:

Some, not realizing one of God's own called and consecrated ministers could call and explain, answer questions, and even baptize, have JOINED one of the churches of this world. You cannot JOIN the true Church of God -- the Almighty God puts you in. ... make your decision and take what steps GOD shows you. (Armstrong HW. All About Water Baptism)

In the early days of the Philadelphia era, those in the Radio Church of God often had to wait years before they could be counseled or baptized. Do not deceive yourself that if you cannot be counseled or baptized when YOU WANT IT, that you should push aside the faithful church and find other options.

The Book of Revelation shows that in these last days, the most faithful Christians are Philadelphia Christians, but that the bulk of Christians at this time would not be as faithful (cf. Revelation 3:1-22). You do not wish to risk being part of the bulk of Laodicean Christians that Jesus said He would vomit out of His mouth because they basically thought their own ways and judgment were fine (Revelation 3:14-22).

The 20th and 21st centuries have shown us that those wishing to be Philadelphian Christians (cf. Revelation 3:7-13) often have had to wait months or even years for baptism.

Waiting tests and helps build your faith so you can “let patience have its perfect work” (James 1:4). You want to persevere, and build character (cf. Romans 5:3-4)—and may wish to realize that Jesus commended Philadelphian Christians for their perseverance (Revelation 3:10).

Furthermore, a Philadelphian Christian has love for the brethren, whereas a Laodicean Christian seem to have more love for his/her own ways of judgment. Laodicea is made up of two Greek words which basically mean “people decide” or “judgment of the people” —these are real Christians that have deceived themselves that doing things in a lukewarm way and/or supporting a lukewarm work is fine. Jesus disagreed (cf. Revelation 3:14-22). If God is calling you, YOU can chose whether or not to be a Philadelphian Christian like Jesus would want you to be.

Baptism of Infants/Children

Of the 100 or so times the terms Baptist, baptize, baptized, etc. are used of those in the New Testament, there is never one time that infants or young children are specifically mentioned as being baptized.

One cannot be baptized until after he/she 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).

Pre-teenage children have not reached that maturity where they have the self-discipline to truly repent, and believe.

Furthermore, when Jesus said to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28), that eliminated infants. Jesus was also saying to not just act on temporary emotional feelings. And church experience suggests it should be at least an older teen in order to be able to fully consider the cost.

Now, let’s notice what happened with some Samaritans:

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. (Acts 8:12)

It was only the adults who were mature enough to be ready for baptism.

Consider the following:

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. (Armstrong HW. All About Water Baptism)

So, yes, adults who are ready should be baptized—and not even all of them who think they should be baptized are ready for it.

Baptizing or Blessing Infants?

Some claim that because the New Testament records that some households were baptized that this proves that infants were also baptized. But this is reading something into the Bible that is not there. Let's look at the first example of a household being baptized in the Book of Acts:

¹ There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. (Acts 10:1-2)

¹³ And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:13-17)

Thus, since the household was also fearing God, and infants obviously cannot do that, the term household should not be

concluded as proof that infants were baptized. Using passages like Acts 11 is not a solid foundation; and few would insist that infants started speaking then. Furthermore, if that was the case then early Christians would have accepted infant baptism and there would not have been controversies later associated with it. Thus, early Christians — who would have known *koine* Greek better than modern scholars — did not understand that the baptism of households in the New Testament authorized infant baptism.

If infant baptism was a New Testament need or practice, why, then, does the Bible nowhere command us to baptize children?

While circumcision was required for infant boys in the Old Testament (Genesis 17:12), there is no similar requirement for the baptism of infants in the New Testament. In ancient days, infant mortality rates were high, thus one would expect Scripture to mandate infant baptism if it was essential to save the child from eternal torment like some groups have taught. To the contrary, there is not a single clear example of a child being baptized in the New Testament.

As far as God's plan of salvation for those who die as infants or young children, check out the free book, online at ccog.org, titled: *Universal OFFER of Salvation, Apokatastasis: Can God save the lost in an age to come? Hundreds of scriptures reveal God's plan of salvation.* God does have a plan for all, but it does not include baptizing infants in this age.

That said, there are claims from both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox sources that Polycarp of Smyrna (who was a disciple of the Apostle John) was baptized as an infant since he claimed to have served Jesus for 86 years when he was martyred. The problem with that conclusion is that records point to Polycarp being 104 when he was killed (Weidman FW. Polycarp and John: The Harris Fragments and Their Challenge to Literary Traditions. University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, pp. 43-44; cf. Gloc. C. Letter to the Remembrancer, August 1821. The Christian remembrancer. Printed for F.C. & J. Rivington, 1821, p. 454), hence Polycarp would have been baptized no earlier than age 18.

Infants are incapable of possessing a “faith in the working of God,” hence biblically ineligible for baptism (cf. Colossians 2:12).

A 16th century Roman Catholic named Jodocus Tiletanus wrote that holy water, mixing oil, and baptizing infants did not come from “that which the apostles or the Gospel do declare.” He then admitted, “Have we it not of a secret and unwritten ordinance?” (Harvet G. Review of Epistles, PP. 19B, 20A, London 1598).

Hence, it has long been known that infant baptism was not from scripture and that somehow it entered Greco-Roman Catholicism from a secret and unwritten ordinance. Thus, it did not come from either the Bible or writings of early Christians. According to the Apostle Jude, we are to contend earnestly for the original faith “entrusted to God's holy people” (Jude 3, NJB) and that did not include baptizing infants.

Infant baptism probably did not become widely practiced until the third or fourth centuries (and not universally done in the Roman/Orthodox faiths until even later).

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

The Waldenses and Cathari and later the Anabaptists, rejected the doctrine that infants are capable of receiving valid baptism, and some sectarians at the present day hold the same opinion. (Baptism. The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1907)

Some called the names above by the Roman Catholic were Church of God Christians and they rejected the Greco-Roman change to perform infant baptisms.

The Protestant reformer Martin Luther, himself, taught baptism of infants. Luther's followers, themselves, formally condemned those who opposed infant baptism (The Confession of Faith: Which Was Submitted to His Imperial Majesty Charles V. At the Diet of Augsburg in the Year 1530).

Protestant reformers John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli also condemned those opposed to infant baptism as well as those who advocated what they considered "re-baptism" (Davis T. A General History of the Sabbatarian Churches. 1851; Reprinted 1995, p. 106).

But as far as rebaptism goes, the Bible shows that those who received John's baptism had to be "re-baptized" (Acts 19:3-5).

After the Apostle Peter taught about baptism in Acts 2, the Bible shows:

⁴² Then those that gladly received his word were baptized (Acts 2:42).

Christian baptism cannot include those who cannot actually receive the word or repent, like infants.

On the other hand, the Bible does enjoin the fact that infants/toddlers can be prayed for and blest. Notice what Jesus said and did:

¹⁴ “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” ¹⁶ And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:14-16).

In the *Continuing* Church of God we do not forbid blessing, but do bless, little children. Jesus’ blessing of little children practice is also discussed in Luke 18:15-17 and Matthew 19:13-15.

It is likely that the worldly churches, who had read the accounts in the gospels and perhaps heard of it performed in the early true church, may have used that as part of their justification for infant baptism.

In fact, the Roman Catholic Church does refer to this account in Luke 18 & Matthew 19 as part of its justification for the practice of infant baptism (Baptism. The Catholic

Encyclopedia). Yet sadly, they are confusing a blessing ceremony with baptism. The Lutherans do as well and tend to cite Mark 10 (e.g. Conrad JT. *What Do Lutherans Believe about Baptism?* CSS Publishing, 2000, p. 7).

Yet, none of the children that Jesus laid hands on are recorded to have been immersed into water or sprinkled with water prior to (or immediately after) Jesus blessing them.

Therefore, what Jesus did WAS NOT a form of infant baptism. Instead Jesus did something consistent with the blessing of little children ceremony that is retained by relatively few today, like those of us in the *Continuing Church of God* who follow Jesus' example with this.

Oddly, those groups that embrace infant baptism do not seem to have kept with a regular blessing of little children ceremony. The *Continuing Church of God* generally performs the blessing of little children ceremony in the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar when the people are gathered for the annual Feast of Tabernacles.

It may be of interest to note that there is also a Jewish tradition to bless children in the seventh month, so they will "inspire their sons and daughters to faithfully keep the path of the Torah" (Gelbard SP. *Rite and Reason: 1050 Jewish Customs and Their Sources*. 1998, p. 519). Perhaps Jesus also gave his blessing in the seventh month.

Blessing of little children is enjoined in the New Testament, infant baptism is not.

Insert: Baptism for the Dead or Be a Worker for Jesus?

What about baptism for the dead?

Before a person may be baptized, one must first REPENT (Acts 2:38) and BELIEVE (Mark 16:16).

Notice:

¹⁶ He who believes **and is baptized will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16)

The dead cannot believe:

⁵ For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

So, where did the idea of being baptized for the dead come from? Well, at least partially, from an incorrect understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:29. Let's see it in context:

²⁷ For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. ²⁸ Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. ²⁹ Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? (1 Corinthians 15:27-29)

So, we see Jesus came to destroy death. People are to be baptized for the hope of the dead, not for others.

People must work out their own salvation and be workers:

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

If you are NOT going to be a worker with Jesus, you may have received the “grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Although Christians are to be contributing parts of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16), others cannot save you:

²⁰ The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezekiel 18:20)

Even pious believers cannot save you:

¹⁹ “Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, ²⁰ even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,” says the Lord God, “they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver

only themselves by their righteousness.” (Ezekiel 14:19-20)

1 Corinthians 15:29 needs to be understood in light of other scriptures that we have seen that do not allow for someone to be baptized for the salvation of others. It also should be understood in the context of 1 Corinthians 15 where Jesus is shown to be the one to destroy death and that the Christian hope of the dead is the resurrection, not someone being baptized in their place (1 Corinthians 15:42-55).

It is only those that believed who will be resurrected.

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ... ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ ... And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:14,16-17)

Those who did not die in Christ, do not become Christians while dead.

Jesus said:

³⁷ Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice. (John 18:37)

The truth is that someone being baptized for someone else who is dead will not make that dead person a believer who will be part of the first resurrection.

Although the Bible does not precisely record all the statements used in a Christian baptismal ceremony, the Bible teaches:

⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 19:5-6).

¹⁹ 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, (Matthew 28:19)

And that is what we in the CCOG strive to do.

Questions and Process

What has been used in the baptismal ceremonies of the old Radio Church of God, Worldwide Church of God, and the *Continuing* Church of God tends to include the following statements (the following was originally provided to the *Continuing* Church of God by Aaron Dean, a minister who probably spent more time with the late Herbert W. Armstrong than any other minister in the latter years of his life):

Baptizing man: Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, do you repent of your sins, and accept Christ as your Savior?

Person being baptized: Yes (if not, the ceremony ends).

Baptizing man: As a result of your repentance of your sins, which are the transgressions of God's holy and righteous and perfect law, and your acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal saviour, Your Lord and Master, your High Priest and soon coming King, I now baptize you, not into any sect or denomination of this world, but I baptize you into the name of the Father and the Son and through the Holy Spirit, by and through the authority of the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Amen.

After those statements, the baptizing man then fully immerses the person being baptized under water (some people hold their nose shut to prevent water from going into it) and then brings them back up.

The baptizing man then lays hands on the newly baptized and prays. While the prayer should be a bit individualized, the following is typical of what Church of God baptizers tend to pray at this stage:

Almighty God, I lay my hands on (name of the one just baptized) as in the example of Jesus and His apostles. We pray that you will honor your promises and grant him/her the gift of your Holy Spirit to help and guide him/her throughout the rest of his/her life. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

After that, the baptizing man may wish to say something to the effect of, 'Welcome to the Body of Christ.'

The baptismal statements are consistent with not only Matthew 28:19, but the other passages in the New

Testament about clearly being baptized in Jesus' name (e.g. Acts 2:38)--under His authority.

In Name of Jesus Only

Since some have been 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 many of these people is that this passage in Matthew 28:19 is the only place in the Bible, associated with baptism, where the terms Father and Holy Spirit are included. 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. They suggest all other passages make only mention of the name of Jesus—but that is not the case (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:11).

In Matthew 28:19, 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 authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus has ALL authority! Jesus further tells the ministry:

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ 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. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Either we in the church do it by His authority, or else we are doing it without any real authority.

In Jesus' name means under His authority—it does not mean that we should not mention the Father or the Holy Spirit.

Notice something that John the Baptist declared:

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)

Consider that the Bible says:

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

So, while Jesus had His disciples immerse people in water, He also was not laying hands on the baptized to pray for the Holy Spirit. Instead, He told His church leaders to perform baptisms for Christians (Matthew 28:18-19).

Jesus' disciples baptized under His authority—HIS NAME! They did it in His stead and this was considered the same as if Jesus had done it Himself.

To do things in Jesus' name is to do things for Him—it is some equivalent in modern times when someone does something with the "power of attorney" for someone else.

Herbert Armstrong also taught the following in a Bible Study on 1 Corinthians 10:

The baptism today is a baptism into the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a public expression of your faith in Christ after you've repented.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is part of the ceremony. And baptismal ceremonies are still done in Jesus' name.

Consider that:

⁴ ... There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (Ephesians 4:4-5)

So, we strive for a consistent baptismal ceremony with prayers for the laying on of hands tailored towards the individual who was baptized.

Meaning of Baptism: Not Into a Denomination

The late Herbert W. Armstrong wrote:

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.

And remember, obedience to God is another required condition per to receive the Holy Spirit per Acts 5:32.

The late Herbert W. Armstrong also wrote:

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." (Armstrong HW. All About Water Baptism)

Baptism is something that those called to be true Christians are to do. Not to 'join a church,' but to demonstrate that they really intend to change their lives. As well as to also have hands then upon them in order for the obedient to receive God's Holy Spirit.

Baptism by Fire

Hebrews 6 tells of baptismS--plural:

¹ Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to

perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

So, while Christians are to go on towards perfection, there is a baptism by water which leads to receiving the Holy Spirit, so what is the other baptism?

That is the baptism of fire.

Should a Christian seek it?

No.

The baptism of fire is not associated, as some say, with the incident in Acts 2:3 on the Day of Pentecost where, “there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire.” There was no actual fire then—unlike the real baptism of fire.

Notice what John the Baptist prophesied and taught concerning the baptism of fire:

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰ And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into

the fire. ¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:7-12)

Great crowds came to see John — mostly out of curiosity. So, related to the baptism of fire, John was speaking in particular to the unrepentant religionists, as well as those others who did repent.

The unrepentant among John’s audience included many hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees. The unrepentant were going to be baptized with fire. John the Baptist taught that the unrepentant would be immersed/baptized into the lake of fire and burned up with the chaff.

This fire is the ultimate fate of all the incorrigible who refuse to properly repent:

¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15)

⁸ But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

¹ “For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. ³ You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,” Says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 4:1-3).

Surely no one will seek the baptism with fire once he or she understands what it really is!

Yet, those who do not get properly baptized with water, when they can, while knowing that they should, are at risk of being part of the baptism of fire, which is the second death.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the New Testament supports baptism for adults who wish to be real Christians. Also, the New Testament does not have any clear recording of the baptism of infants or small children. Jesus blest little children, but did not have them baptized prior to (or immediately after) that blessing.

There is no doubt that the early post-apostolic Church practiced baptism of adults by immersion as well as the laying on of hands.

Yet sadly, many who have adopted non-immersion and infant baptizing practices have a history of condemning those who have held to the teachings and practices of the Bible. Many who claim Christianity have adopted practices that were not used by faithful early leaders.

If you would like to be baptized, contact a *Continuing Church of God* leader in your area. Of course, they will not figuratively “twist your arm” to be baptized. God has made every human a free moral agent.

God compels each to make his/her own decisions, particularly on matters of salvation (cf. Philippians 2:12-13), and the true God will never force you to be converted. Yet, if you, of your own volition, desire personal counsel about repentance and baptism, why not request a private counseling session with one of God’s ministers?

And perhaps you may wish to jot down on paper any questions you want to ask.

Jesus said to “count the cost” and be willing to “forsake all” to be His disciple (Luke 14:28,33). Consider, carefully and prayerfully, your situation, the truth according to scripture, and then make your decision as to what to do next.

If God is calling you, and you are willing to respond as a true Philadelphian Christian, contact a *Continuing Church of God* near you (who may not be physically very near).

Information on contacting Continuing Church of God leaders can be found at ccog.org

Continuing Church of God

The USA office of the *Continuing Church of God* is located at:
1036 W. Grand Avenue, Grover Beach, California, 93433 USA.

Continuing Church of God (CCOG) Websites

CCOG.AFRICA This site is targeted towards those in Africa.

CCOG.ASIA This site has focus on Asia and has various articles in multiple Asian languages, as well as some items in English.

CCOG.IN This site is targeted towards those of Indian heritage. It has materials in various Indian languages.

CCOG.EU This site is targeted toward Europe. It has materials in multiple European languages.

CCOG.NZ This site is targeted towards New Zealand and others with a British-descended background.

CCOG.ORG This is the main website of the *Continuing Church of God*. It serves people with literature and sermon videos.

CCOGCANADA.CA This site is targeted towards those in Canada.

CDLIDD.ES La Continuación de la Iglesia de Dios. This is the Spanish language website for the *Continuing Church of God*.

CG7.ORG This is a website for those interested in the Sabbath and churches that observe the seventh day Sabbath.

PNIND.PH Patuloy na Iglesia ng Diyos. This is the Philippines website with information in English and Tagalog.

News and History Websites

COGWRITER.COM This website has news, doctrine, historical articles, videos, and prophetic updates.

CHURCHHISTORYBOOK.COM Information on church history.

BIBLENEWSPROPHECY.NET and **BNPI.NET** These are online radio websites which cover news and biblical topics.

STUDYTHEBIBLECOURSE.ORG An online Bible course

CCOG.ORG/MULTIMEDIA Lists radio stations around the world, video platforms, language links, social media links, and more!

(Back cover)

Should YOU be Baptized?

The New Testament records the following:

⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. (Mark 1:4-5)



Jordan River

The Apostle Peter taught:

³⁸ ... “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. 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.” (Acts 2:38-39)

If you should be baptized, who should do it?