

# Trinity

## Matthew 28:19 STUDY:

Bruce Bivens ~ May 2012

**Matt. 28:19** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name (Singular) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This is, *by far*, the *most difficult* Biblical Text to deal with if you don't agree with the *traditional* doctrine of the Trinity. It is perhaps the *only* real Biblical text containing the *Trinitarian formula* per se. This text has bothered me for a very long time - since *before* I came to the belief I now hold regarding the Godhead and the Holy Spirit. Here is the reason it bothered me so.

In Matthew 28:19 (if we accept these words to be the *words of Christ*) we find a *direct command* from Jesus for His disciples to go and baptize in the "*name*, of the *Father* and the *Son* and the *Holy Spirit*." First of all, we have to wrestle with the fact that the text instructs them to baptize in the "name" (Singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now I understand that Jesus said that He and the Father are "one," but if you want to show that these *three* are separate individuals then you would want to use the *Plural* ("names") instead of the singular. More troubling than that though is the fact that this is a direct command. Surely the disciples realized the importance of *obeying* their Lord and Savior! Surely they would follow His instructions to the letter - especially if Christ had been as specific about the procedure as He appears to be in this verse. WHY is it then that we have absolutely NO examples of the disciples obeying Christ by following this direct instruction on how to baptize? You can search the entire New Testament through and *never* find an example of the disciples baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. What you will find are examples in which they *always*, and only, baptized in the name of JESUS. Why is that? Doesn't that bother you?

In the book of Acts we find examples of the disciples "making disciples" of other men and baptizing them into the Lord Jesus Christ. In each of the examples recorded we find them baptizing in the name of "Jesus."

- Acts 2:38 "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"
- Acts 8:16 "For He [Holy Spirit] had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."
- Acts 10:48 "And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."
- Acts 19:5 "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Were the disciples *careless* about following our Lord's instructions? Or did they understand perfectly what Jesus had told them to do? Isn't it more plausible (likely) that the disciples were obedient to Jesus and followed His instructions? And if this is the case, isn't it *probable* that those instructions were *not* stated as we find them recorded in Matthew 28:19?

**Mark 12:38** He said to them in His teaching, "**Beware of the scribes**" (*Translators of Scriptures*)

Now I don't want to sound like some naysayer who, whenever I come to a "difficult" text, immediately says that it "doesn't belong there" or that it is "corrupt" and inserted by someone other than the actual author of the text.

However, we need to be *honest* in our approach to God's Word and not be afraid to *critically* examine it - comparing Scripture with Scripture - to insure that it maintains its integrity and continuity. Unfortunately, most of us do not want to critically examine these things and prefer to read into a text our own *preconceived opinions and beliefs*. We don't want to "THINK" about or "QUESTION" anything. And we take *great pride* in suggesting that by *accepting* whatever we read in the Bible as being directly inspired by God that we are being more *faithful to God* than someone who critically examines and questions the statements found there (this is especially true in regards to difficult texts such as the one at hand). In fact, we are often predisposed to *attack* anyone who questions something we have believed for so long and who challenges us to look at our *cherished beliefs* in a different manner. I am quite certain that many will attack me for espousing the position I have set forth in this study. But that does not mean that these things are *not true*. Throughout history, *many* have been ridiculed (and even killed) for challenging a long-held belief - only to be proven *correct* as the Spirit of the Lord has brought Truth after Truth back into its proper light and understanding. Wasn't Martin Luther severely chastised for preaching Righteousness by Faith? Haven't Seventh-day Adventists been ridiculed for their preaching the Sabbath? Could we be in danger of *rejecting further light* simply because we are unwilling to let go of a long-held belief? Could we be in danger of rejecting "new light" simply because we have become too lazy to *honestly and critically study God's Word* for ourselves - preferring instead to be spoon fed by the men we consider "leaders" and "scholars"? I simply cannot afford to do this - and neither can you. Mrs. White has told us that this can be a very risky thing to do:

- **"Every soul must look to God with contrition and humility, that He may guide and lead and bless. We must not trust to others to search the Scriptures for us. Some of our leading brethren have frequently taken their position on the wrong side; and if God would send a message and wait for these older brethren to open the way for its advancement, it would never reach the people" (GW 1913: p. 303).**
- **"I have been shown that ministers and people are tempted more and more to trust in finite man for wisdom, and to make flesh their arm....I entreat of you to search the Scriptures as you have never yet searched them, that you may know the way and will of God. O that every soul might be impressed with this message, and put away the wrong" (Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 10 (1909); found in Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 480,481).**
- **"Investigation of every point that has been received as truth will repay the searcher: He will find precious gems. And in closely investigating every jot and tittle which we think is established truth, in comparing Scripture with Scripture, we may discover errors in our interpretation of Scripture. Christ would have the searcher of his word sink the shaft deeper into the mines of truth. If the search is properly conducted, jewels of inestimable value will be found. The word of God is the mine of the unsearchable riches of Christ" (RH, July 12, 1889; par.15).**
- **"There is no excuse for any one in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation" (RH, December 20, 1892; par. 1).**
- **"We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances, to be relinquished. There is but One Who is infallible -- He Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Those who allow prejudice to bar the mind against the reception of truth cannot receive the divine enlightenment" (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers; p. 105, par. 2,3).**
- **"When God's people are at ease, and satisfied with their present enlightenment, we may be sure that He will not favour them. It is His will that they should be ever moving forward, to receive the increased and ever increasing light that is shining for them. The present attitude of the church is not pleasing to God. There has come in a self-confidence that has led them to feel no necessity for more truth and greater light" (5T: pp. 708, 709).**

See [New Light Quotes](#) for additional *New Light* quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy (these will open up in a new window and are real eye-openers)!

Matthew 28:19 is indeed a very *suspect* text. One of the reasons this is the case is that there is a very large gap of time from the time Matthew wrote his Gospel and the *earliest* Greek manuscripts we have containing the words found in Matthew 28:19 - almost *three hundred years* exist between the two. Unfortunately, the "Church" during this time period was also slipping quickly into darkness. The Catholic Church developed much of their theology during this time and was doggedly zealous in its *enforcement* of these doctrines. If you dared to challenge them, you were labeled a *heretic* and could face shunning, censure, and *even death*. To have *only* manuscripts dating to this time (the 3rd and 4th centuries - during which the Catholic Church was *firmly* establishing itself and its beliefs as the *authority* of the Scriptures), is a *very real* and a *very big problem*. This fact alone should immediately call for some *caution* in our acceptance of "*every word*" contained in these documents. It would be nice if we had older, more reliable manuscripts to work from. Unfortunately, as F.C. Conybeare informs us;

- "In the only codices which would be even likely to preserve an older reading, namely the Sinaitic Syriac and the oldest Latin Manuscript, the pages are *gone* which contained *the end of Matthew*" [*The Hibbert Journal. A Quarterly Review of Religion, Theology, and Philosophy. Vol. I, No. 1 (Oxford: October 1902) pp. 102-108. Emphasis mine. See also 'The Eusebian Form of the Text of Matthew 28:19' Zeitschrift fur Neutestamentlich Wissenschaft 2: 1901, pages 275-288. (ZNW 2: 1901, 275-288)*].
- In "Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew" which uses Hebrew texts pre-dating the Greek texts which we have [These Hebrew manuscripts are of the Ante-Nicene era (pre-dating the First Council of Nicaea-325A.D.). Matthew's Gospel was written for the Jew and would most likely have been written in Hebrew. Hebrew scribes were much more meticulous -- careful not to use extraneous material -- in their transcription of manuscripts than were Greek scribes - so these Hebrew manuscripts are likely to be more reliable than the Greek manuscripts], there is a very different ending to Matthew 28:19 which reads: "You go and teach them to carry out all the things that I have commanded you forever" [See Dr. James D. Tabor, [A Hebrew Gospel of Matthew](#) ]. Eusebius, in at least 18 citations of Matthew 28:19, always wrote it this way: "Go ye and make disciples of all nations in *my name*, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I commanded you." (see Conybeare). This reading would certainly be more in line with the Bible's "in Christ" motif.

You do not have to go to the ancient manuscripts in order to deduce that the text, as it reads in most Bibles, does not fit the Bible's Theology. Nor do you have to agree with my position concerning the Godhead to recognize that this text does not really fit into the Bible's teaching about baptism. Please note that I am not suggesting that Christ didn't give the great commission, only that the words that He used are unlikely to be those found in most of the translations we have of Matthew 28:19. **If Christ gave the commission to go and "baptize" then it would only make sense that His words would be in harmony with the rest of the Bible's teachings regarding baptism.**

The Bible clearly states that we are baptized into Jesus Christ (not into the Father or the Holy Spirit):

- **Rom. 6:3,4 "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."**
- **Gal. 3:26,27 "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."**
- **Acts 22:16 "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (KJV). "What are you waiting for now? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away as you call on his name." (ISV).**
- **Acts 10:48 "And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."**

You will **never** find any deviation from this except as it is recorded in Matthew 28:19! Why is that? If Jesus actually said the disciples should be baptizing in the name of "the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit" then why don't we find this being done? This is a very serious question and it demands a serious and straightforward answer.

Jesus could **not** have commanded the disciples to baptize people in the name of [into] the Holy Spirit for if we are baptized into the Holy Spirit what need would there be to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Jesus could **not** have told His disciples to baptize people into the Holy Spirit quite simply because this is not a baptism that the disciples were to perform [If Jesus could not have told His disciples to baptize men into the Holy Spirit, then it is highly unlikely that He would have told them to baptize men into the Father either - especially given His emphatic statement: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me. (Jn. 14:6).]. We are told that Jesus is the one who will baptize us with the Holy Spirit - that this is the baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist said: **"I baptized you with water, He [Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8 cf. Mat. 3:11 & Lk. 3:16). "...this [Jesus] is the One who baptizes in [with] the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 1:33).** Since this is obviously a separate baptism - a baptism in which we are immersed [baptized] with [or in] the Holy Spirit - a baptism that Christ is to perform - then Jesus could not have told the disciples to baptize people into the name of the Holy Spirit.

Once we understand who Jesus is and how He has provided us with Salvation, we are to be baptized into Him. He will then baptize us with His Holy Spirit. Christ's Holy Spirit is the gift we receive when we accept Him and are baptized into Him. In **Galatians 3:27** we read: **"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."** To be "clothed with Christ" is to be baptized "with the Holy Spirit." We "put on" Christ through the reception of His Spirit in our mind and heart. **"He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 Jn. 3:24). 1 John 4:13** makes all of this perfectly clear: **"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit."**

So the prescribed order is to learn of Christ, be baptized into Christ, and then to receive Christ's Spirit. **"Peter said to them, Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).** While there are some exceptions to this order (see **Acts 10:47**), the normally prescribed order is repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Spirit - and there is a reason for this order.

Jesus said to **"go and teach"** or **"make disciples"** of all nations. Teach them what? Make them disciples of whom? We are to teach men of Christ in who's name is the **"forgiveness of sins"** (See **Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38 & 10:43**) -- for **"there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).** Jesus said: **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14:6).** We must be taught (learn) that we are in a lost condition and that there is only one hope for us - the person of Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us that we might not die but have eternal life. We must be persuaded to place our faith in the Son of God and we must learn to depend upon Him for the power to overcome and to live a new life in the power of His Spirit. We must repent (die to "self") and make a public proclamation of that repentance and of our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Savior, Lord, and God. That public proclamation is made through the ordinance of baptism - in which is symbolized our acceptance of Christ and His sacrifice, our death to self, and our resurrection to a new life in Christ - a life powered by the Spirit of Christ! Paul stated it very clearly in this way: **"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).**

Baptism is an absolute imperative for all those who are mentally and physically capable of making such a public proclamation for to deny it is to deny Christ and to have no part in Him. To neglect such a proclamation is to neglect (or deny) the eternal price paid by Christ for our Salvation, and **"how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:3).** To refuse baptism is really a "public proclamation" in itself - that we do not

accept Christ's death on our behalf and that we do not accept Him as our Lord and Savior. Refusing to repent (die to self) and be baptized (being buried with Christ and resurrected to a new life in Christ) is to remain "in the flesh" or in our "sin." And the Bible tells us that this is to remain dead in sin: **"For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit [Christ] is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him"** (Romans 8:6-10).

The Bible is very clear about the fact that Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. No one need be confused about this: **"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"** (John 3:16). This is the whole theme of the Bible. **Period**. Once we understand this, we are to show our acceptance of Him by being baptized into Him. This is why I believe that Jesus did not instruct His disciples to baptize new disciples into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. He instructed them to baptize men into HIS name - the only **"name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

We need to be baptized into the name of Jesus and not into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: because when we are baptized into the threefold name we are being baptized into a misconception. We are being baptized into a false belief about God, about Jesus Christ, about the Holy Spirit, and about the Plan of Salvation. What I am saying is not sacrilege. Nor is it heresy. I am not diminishing the value or the persons of the Father or the Holy Spirit in any way. Nor am I suggesting that the Father and the Holy Spirit do not play an important part in our salvation. I am simply saying that doing what the Lord has commanded and in the way that God has ordained is what we, as Christians, ought to be doing. When we are baptized into the threefold name (even ignorantly) we are being baptized into the *traditions of men* and not of God. Jesus said: **"BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN"** (Mark 7:7 & Matthew 15:9). I don't want my worship, or my service to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to be *"in vain"* - do you?

I believe that one of the reasons we have received so little of the Holy Spirit is because we have never truly been baptized into Jesus Christ. That is to say, that we have not had a clear conception of who He is or what He has done in order to make Salvation available to us. Or, as Mrs. White puts it, **"because we are so far behind our privileges"** (RH: October 8, 1889; par. 2). I am not suggesting that there is some kind of magic in the manner of our baptism [There is no 'magic' in being baptized by immersion - but this is the only manner of baptism that demonstrates our understanding of the significance of this ordinance. We can be baptized by immersion and still not be baptized into Christ! There is nothing magical about the method, but the method is important because it demonstrates our understanding of the significance of the act - and it demonstrates our commitment to doing things as God has prescribed, as opposed to how we may have been taught or might like to do things ourselves]. I am suggesting that the manner of our baptism is what shows our understanding of, and our commitment to, God's Will and our willingness to demonstrate that understanding and commitment in the way that He has prescribed. Until we intelligently understand the will of God in the person of Jesus Christ we will never be prepared to fully partake of His Spirit.

**Additional Evidence of a "CHANGE" in the text of  
Matthew 28:19 is listed below:**

ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, 11TH edition, (1910), Vol 2, Pg 365 **"The Trinitarian formula and triune immersion were not uniformly used from the beginning... *Bapti[sm] into the name of the Lord [was] the normal formula of the new Testament*. In the 3rd century baptism in the name of Christ was still so wide spread that Pope Stephen, in opposition to Cyprian of Carthage, declared it to be valid."**

**BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPEDIA, 11TH Edition, Volume 3, page 365-366** – “Baptism was **changed** from the name of Jesus to words Father, Son & Holy Ghost in **2nd Century.**” SEE also p. 82 of this volume: “Everywhere in the oldest sources it states that baptism took place in the name of Jesus Christ.”

**CANNEY ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION**, page 53 – The early church baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus until the second century. --- “The early church always baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus until development of Trinity Doctrine in 2nd century.” Page 53.

**HASTINGS ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION**, Volume 2, page 377 – “Christian baptism was administered using the words, ‘in the name of Jesus.’” See also p. 389 - “Baptism was always in the name of Lord Jesus until the time of Justin Martyr when Triune formula was used.” And p. 378 – “The use of a Trinitarian formula of any sort was not suggested in early Church history.”

**CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, VOLUME 2, PAGE 263** – “The Baptismal formula was changed from the name of Jesus Christ to the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit **by the Catholic Church** in the 2nd century.” **NOTE also:** “The basic form of our (Matthew 28:19 Trinitarian) profession of faith took shape during the course of the second and third centuries in connection with the ceremony of baptism. So far as its place of origin is concerned, the text (Matthew 28:19) came from the city of **Rome.**”...Catholic Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger: **INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY**, pp. 50-51

**SCHAFF – HERZOG RELIGIOUS ENCYCLOPEDIA**, Volume 1, page 435 – The New Testament knows only the baptism in the name of Jesus.

**HASTINGS DICTIONARY OF BIBLE**, page 88 – It must be acknowledged that the three fold name of Matthew 28:19 does not appear to have been used by the primitive church, but rather in the name of Jesus, Jesus Christ or Lord Jesus.

**INTERPRETERS DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE**, (1962) I, 351 “The evidence ... suggests that **baptism in early Christianity was administered, *not in the threefold name, but ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus.’***”

**A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT** (Otto Heick), (1965), I, 53 “At first baptism was administered *in the name of Jesus*, but gradually in the name of the Triune God: **Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**”

**CANNEY’S ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIONS**, (1970), Pg 53 “Persons were baptized at first *‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ ... or ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus.’*... Afterwards, *with the development of the doctrine of the Trinity*, they were baptized ‘in the name of *the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.*”

**ENCYCLOPEDIA BIBLICA**, (1899), I, 473 “It is natural to conclude that *baptism was administered in the earliest times ‘in the name of Jesus Christ,’ or in that ‘of the Lord Jesus.’* This view is confirmed by the fact that the earliest forms of the baptismal confession appear to have been single – *not triple, as was the later creed.*”

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHURCH FATHERS**, Vol. 1, Harry Austryn Wolfson, 1964, pg 143 “Critical scholarship, on the whole, *rejects* the traditional attribution of the tripartite baptismal formula to Jesus and regards it as *of later origin.*”