

A THEOLOGY OF BAPTISM

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“As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And 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.” And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing¹

Why did the man from Ethiopia ask this question? What led him to believe that he needed to be baptized? Is baptism necessary for the believer today? What is the origin of Christian baptism? It is the goal of this paper answer these questions while tracing the history of the act of baptism.

When looking at the New Testament, one would usually begin there study with John the Baptist. However, as will be illustrated in this paper: “Any thorough study of baptism must begin centuries before John the Baptizer came baptizing in the wilderness of Judea. Christianity sprang from the soil of Moses and the Prophets, and the religion of the Mosaic Covenant had long been acquainted with immersion”.² In the New Testament the word baptize means to immerse. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states: “to dip in or under, to dye, to immerse, to sink, to drown, to bathe, wash. The New Testament uses *báptō* only in the literal sense, to dip (Lk. 16:24), to dye (Rev. 19:13), and *baptízō* only in a cultic sense, mostly “to baptize.”³

Baptism in the Old Testament and Jewish Culture

¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ac 8:36-39.

² Owen

³Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985). 92.

Long before the time of John the Baptizer the Law of Moses outlined several instances of ceremonial washings or immersions. The book of Leviticus contains teaching after teaching about cleanliness, both ceremonial and medicinal, all of which would usually require immersion. An example of this would be the cleansing of one infected with the disease of Leprosy. Part of the cleansing of a leper involved the "washing" of his flesh. "It will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean".⁴ This word *bathe* "refers to ritual washings and is cognate philologically, although not semantically to Akkadian *rahpaṣu* "to overflow," "to flood"⁵. These washings were stated to require large amounts of water and it would thus be assumed that to *bathe* ones body would be equivalent to immersion. After engaging in this act of immersion/baptism the Leper would then be considered pure and could enter the camp.⁶

Not only those who were found to have unclean diseases were required to wash, the High Priest also had such a command. Leviticus 16:4 states that before the Day of Atonement he was to "bathe his body in water". Another instance of washing would be when Elisha told Naaman to "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and *you will be clean.*"⁷

In all of the previously referenced texts the word for wash was always *rahpaṣu*. In all these instances the individual that was to wash understood *rahpaṣu* to mean immersion. This was clearly the case with the example of Naaman, after he decided to obey the command of

⁴*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Le 14:9.

⁵R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980). 843.

⁶Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002). 1:578.

⁷*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). 2 Ki 5:10.

Elisha the Bible states in 2 Kings 5:14 “So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God⁸”. When comparing verse 10 with verse 14 it is clear that at least in this instance that *wash* means to *immerse*. In verse 14 the word for *dipped* is *tabal* which always is defined as to “dip, plunge, soak, bathe, i.e., place a solid object into a liquid mass”⁹.

Throughout Old Testament history there is overwhelming support for the Jewish people (especially the Priests) understanding the need for, and the process of immersion. In 1 Kings 7:23 the Molten Sea of Solomon is described. When observing the dimensions of this immense pool, it seems quite certain that the priests must have immersed themselves in it.

The molten sea was an immense semicircular vase, measuring seventeen and a half feet in diameter, and being eight and three-fourths feet in depth. This, at three and a half inches in thickness, could not weigh less than from twenty-five to thirty tons in one solid casting—and held from sixteen thousand to twenty thousand gallons of water. The brim was all carved with lily work or flowers; and oxen were carved or cut on the outside all round, to the number of three hundred; and it stood on a pedestal of twelve oxen. These oxen must have been of considerable size, like the Assyrian bulls, so that their corresponding legs would give thickness or strength to support so great a weight for, when the vessel was filled with water, the whole weight would be about one hundred tons¹⁰

⁸*The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001). 2 Ki 5:14.

⁹James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). DBLH 3188.

¹⁰Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset, David Brown and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). 1 Ki 7:23.

Dan Owen writes: “Such a structure was certainly used for more than sprinkling or pouring. It was used for immersing the priest before he ministered in the holy place”¹¹

Not only is ceremonial immersion revealed in the pages of the Old Testament, the theology of baptism also existed in extra-biblical Jewish writings. One of these writings would be the Mishnah. The Mishnah is a

Series of interpretations of the meaning of the law; according to rabbinic tradition, they were given when Moses received the law from God on Mt Sinai, and they were to be passed down in oral form. This “oral tradition” was the “law” to which Jesus referred, for example, in Matthew 15:1–9. By about AD 200, under Rabbi Judah, the work begun by Rabbi Akiba around 120 was completed, and the oral tradition was finally written down. This written material is called the Mishnah.¹²

What is striking when studying the history of immersion/baptism is that the Mishnah devotes an entire section to the discussion of *miqvaots* (immersion pools) . There was several times in the life of a Jew where immersion was required for one to be declared clean. In *Miqvaot* 2:1 it is discussed that if one is immersed but yet there is a doubt about if he was totally submerged, he is to be considered unclean. “The unclean person who went down to immerse... it is a doubt whether he immersed or whether he did not immerse [and] even if he did immerse... his matter of doubt is deemed unclean”¹³. No *miqvaot* could be used for immersion if it did not contain at least 40 *seahs* of water. A *seah* was around 5 quarts¹⁴, so 40 *seahs* of water would be around 800 gallons of water. In fact the Mishnah even teaches that if there was a doubt about the

¹¹ Dan Owen. *That You May Believe*. (Abilene: Quality Publications, 1993).

¹²Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001). 903.

¹³Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah : A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, c1988).

¹⁴Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001). 1298.

amount of water in pool, one should still be considered unclean. It states if there “is a doubt whether there are forty *seahs* in it, or whether there are not two immersion pools, in one of which there are forty *seahs*, and in one of which there are not forty *seahs* he immersed in one of them and does not know in which one of them he immersed his matter of doubt is deemed unclean”¹⁵.

Mikvaots were used for religious ceremonies, ritual cleansing, and even for the purification of a women on her menstrual cycle. “Instruction on purification through the use of the mikveh (ritual bath) by menstruants may be traced to the time of the sages. An entire tractate of the Mishnah, Mikvaot, is devoted to immersion pools. To this day, for Jewish women committed to halachah (religious law), immersion in the *mikveh* is considered obligatory before marital relations can resume”¹⁶

Long before the time of John the Baptist, the Jews had already started practicing immersion as an initiatory rite, thus when Christian Baptism was introduced in the New Testament the Jews were not surprised . For Proselytes to be accepted as Israelites they had to be initiated through immersion. “A proselyte who converted on the eve of Passover [the fourteenth of Nisan]— the House of Shammai say, ‘He immerses and eats his Passover offering in the evening’¹⁷”. It would be assumed that proselyte Jews engaged in this initiatory rite even during the time of the baptism taught by Jesus and the apostles.

Another testimony to the rite of baptism is the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls are “Ancient manuscripts discovered in and around the cliffs along the W shore of the Dead Sea. In the broadest usage, the expression Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) embraces all epigraphic remains

¹⁵Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah : A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, c1988).

¹⁶ Wilson, Marvin R. *Jewish Laws of Purity in Jesus' Day*.

<http://www.jerusalemerspective.com/Default.aspx?tabid=27&ArticleID=1456> (Jan 1, 2004)

¹⁷Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah : A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, c1988).

discovered since 1947 over a 75 km stretch from Wadi ed-Daliyeh 25 km N of the Dead Sea southward to Masada, mostly in caves.¹⁸ These scrolls give us great insight into the ancient Qumran community, which some feel John the Baptist may have got his theology of baptism. Like John's baptism, those in Qumran emphasized repentance and associated baptism with conversion.¹⁹

Baptism in the New Testament

All that has been observed this far attests that baptism/immersion was quite common to the Jews prior and up to Jesus' day and thus would not be a shock when preached by John. John the Baptist came, "preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"²⁰ The role of John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Ladd says "John's entire bearing was in the prophetic tradition. He announced that God was about to take action, to manifest his kingly power; that in anticipation of this great event people must repent; and as evidence of repentance must submit to baptism"²¹. John's job was to announce the coming kingdom and to prepare individuals for its arrival.

John's baptism was a water baptism, but scholars are not in total agreement of its source. Some think that John adapted the previously discussed lustrations of the Qumranians for his baptism of repentance. Others feel that his baptism came from the ritual that was practiced upon proselytes mentioned in the Mishnah. There are many differences between these two baptisms, one of which is that John's baptism was administered to the Jews while the proselyte baptism was administered to the Gentiles. It is supposed that John's baptism could have also originated with the ceremonial washings of the Old Testament. Whatever the background, John gives a new

¹⁸D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962). 263.

¹⁹ George Eldon Ladd. *The Theology of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 36.

²⁰*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Mt 3:1-2.

²¹ ²¹ George Eldon Ladd. *The Theology of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 33.

meaning to the rite of immersion in calling to repentance in view of the coming kingdom” (39). His baptism was not for the same reasons as that of a proselyte, priest or member of the Qumran community. It was, however, by immersion as they were, and it was something those of a Jewish background would immediately recognize as a religious act.

In the Gospels, people come to John, confessing their sins while being baptized in the Jordan River. If one would not repent, John would not baptize them, but instead warn them of the coming judgment. The scriptures state:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. “The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”²²

Jesus, like many others, was baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus, believed that John was a prophet and stood up for John on several occasions and believed John’s baptism as being “from heaven” (Matt. 21:25). Jesus’ reason for being baptized by John was to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). During His earthly ministry Jesus preached a similar message to

²²*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Mt 3:7-12.

John's. He proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God and baptism. The scriptures even state that "Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were)"²³.

After Jesus fulfilled the predetermined plan of God, by becoming an appeasement sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind, he commanded his disciples to make disciples. In Matt. 28:19-20 He teaches that the way that a disciple is made is by baptizing and be teaching. In the great commission account of Mark He says: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved and he that believes not shall be condemned"(Mark 16:16). Thus, it can be concluded that Jesus believed and taught the necessity of baptism.

One of the clearest passages of Jesus' teaching on Baptism is found in John 3:5 when Jesus told Nicodemus "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". This passage is sometimes in the midst of great controversy. Usually the controversy is not surrounding the first command, but the second command concerning being born of "the Spirit". The phrase "be born of the water" is to be interpreted as talking about water baptism by immersion. Most scholars, in fact, and early church writers almost all unanimously agree that "being born of the water" is referring to water baptism. There are, however, many in the religious community today that believe it is referring to the waters of a physical birth. "Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril, Beda, Theophylact. Eutymius, in the commentaries on this place (3:5), along with Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Ambrose, Hierome, Basil, Gregory, Nyssan, and many more, yea most of the fathers... have constructed this text as our church doth, of an outward baptism".²⁴ On the same topic Henry

²³*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Jn 4:1-2.

²⁴ James Burton Coffman. *Commentary On John*. (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1974).

Alford although influenced by his personal religious beliefs in his quotation he does assert that “born of water” must be in reference to baptism when he says that it is “... the honest interpretation of these words”²⁵. Then he goes on to add that “born of water refers to the token or outward sign of baptism”.²⁶

A study of the theology of baptism must move from the gospels to the book of Acts. “The book of Acts, our only history of the early church, reveals that this "administered immersion" for the remission of sins was the doorway into fellowship with the people of God according to the teaching of the apostles”.²⁷ The most significant text on baptism in the book of Acts is found in chapter two and verse 38 which states “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”.²⁸ What is striking about this command preached by Peter, is the result of ones immersion being “the forgiveness of sins”. If the individuals on the day Pentecost wanted their sins taken away they needed to repent and be baptized. Johnson writes:

No man can receive pardon without faith and repentance, nor can he without submission to the will of Christ. "Eis (for) denotes the object of baptism, which is the remission of the guilt contracted in the state before metanoia (repentance)."--Meyer. "In order to the forgiveness of sins we connect naturally with both the preceding verbs. This clause states the motive or object which should induce them to repent and be baptized."²⁹

The book of Acts reveals for the reader that baptism was no longer a rite for Jews or for priests, but for all. In Acts 8:12 concerning the Samaritans states “But when they believed Philip

²⁵ Henry Alford. *Alford's Greek Testament*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) 468

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Owen 37

²⁸ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ac 2:38.

²⁹ B.W Johnson *Johnson's Notes on the New Testament*. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1992).

preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike”.³⁰ Saul of Tarsus was baptized (Acts 9:18; 22:16). The house of Cornelius was baptized (Acts 10:47-48). Lydia was baptized at Philippi, as was the Jailer who was actually immersed around midnight (Acts 16). In all these examples in the book of Acts it is clear that a believer becomes a disciple at the point of baptism and that each and every time, baptism was by immersion in water. When these in Acts were immersed into Christ, they did it in imitation of their Savior’s death burial and resurrection. They were raised from the water a new creature, to walk by the spirit in a new life just as Jesus was raised from the tomb the third day. Paul describes it this way in Romans 6:1-4:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 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.³¹

Both the baptism of John and the baptism commanded by the risen Jesus were immersions and both for the remission of sins. The word translated in our English Bibles as “baptism” is the equivalent to the Hebrew Old Testament word *tabal* which as mentioned previously is to be defined as “to dip, immerse, submerge for a religious purpose, to overwhelm, saturate, baptize”.³²

³⁰*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ac 8:12.

³¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ro 6:1-4.

³²Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993). G907.

The difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of the Great Commission, and those in Acts is what the one who came to be baptized believed. The designed function of John's baptism was to prepare the one being baptized for the coming Messiah. The baptism of the Great commission made disciples of those who had repented and placed their trust in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. It can be said that John's baptism was based on an expectation (of the coming Messiah). On the other hand, the baptism preached by the apostles was predicated on a real person. The real person is the Son Of God, and baptism was a representation of the real events of his death, burial and resurrection.

The Christians baptized in the book of Acts were done so "in the name of" Jesus (Acts 2:38). This was not a verbal pattern commanded by the apostles to be repeated verbatim at baptism, but instead was the basis for baptism. The phrase "in the name of" or "in his name" or something akin to these is used many times in the New Testament. Concerning its usage in Acts 2:38 the TDNT states: "In Ac. 2:38, however, the ἐπί with dat. may denote the basis of repentance and baptism. The hearers receive the message of Christ, and on this account they repent and are baptized. The ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι of 10:48 can be taken in the same way. The people in the house of Cornelius have received the Spirit. They know who Jesus is. They must be baptized on the basis of the name of Jesus".³³

Repentance and remission of sins were to be preached "in his name" among all the nations. (Luke 24:47) In Acts 3:6 after Peter and John healed the lame man, the council asked them:

“By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial

³³*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). 5:276.

today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health.³⁴

The name of Jesus carries with it great authority and clout. Finally, in Acts 10:43 Peter told the Cornelius and his household that “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”³⁵ “These examples all prove that the phrase "in his name" simply means because of Him, or by His power, or on His command. Therefore, if a person is baptized with the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, our Savior and that he is coming again to deliver us, he is baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" whether those words are pronounced over him or not”.³⁶

When placing all the examples of baptism in the New Testament together, it is observed that immersion was administered to men and women of all backgrounds, who place their trust/faith in Jesus, for the forgiveness of their sins by the authority of the Son. Example after example in the book of Acts correlates the moment of conversion with baptism. It is at baptism when one figuratively dies to sin, emulating the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, to rise to walk a new life as a child of God, being added to the church of God (Rom. 6:3-4, Acts 2:47). When one is baptized into Christ they have a great reason to rejoice because they are now clothed with Him, they become the spiritual Israel and a partaker of the promise of Abraham. Galatians 3:26ff declares: “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. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in

³⁴*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ac 4:7-10.

³⁵*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ac 10:43.

³⁶ Owen

Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise".³⁷

Baptism in the Post-Apostolic Period

A study of baptism would not be complete without studying the teachings of the early church following the period of the Apostles. Men that wrote during this period are often referred to as "The Church Fathers". These men were the influential writers in the early Christian era, particularly those of the first few centuries of Christian history. The term is used loosely in reference of writers and teachers of the church. The term is not used to refer to founders of the church, as there is only one founder and that founder being Jesus Christ, the term is neither used in reference to inspired Apostles or any writer of the New Testament. In fact it could probably be assumed that these early Christian writers would take offense to the title "Church Father" for they just considered themselves followers of Christ. David Bercot in his book "Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up" makes this statement concerning the designation "Church Father".

When I start talking about the early Christian writers people usually respond by saying "Oh, you mean the early church fathers." But these men were not church fathers! Most of them were fairly ordinary, hard-working Christian leaders with above-average education. They would have been highly indignant at being called "church fathers." The only "church fathers" they recognized were the apostles.

Actually, the very fact that these writers were not church fathers is what makes their writings so valuable. If these men had been great founders of theology, their writings would be of limited value to us. They would simply tell us what doctrines these particular "founding theologians" had developed. But these

³⁷*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Ga 3:26-29.

men did not write theological treatises. In fact, no one in the second century church can even be called a theologian in the modern sense. And there is no real systematic theology in the entire pre-Constantine church.³⁸

The number one benefit of using the writings of the fathers is that they often times will shed light on what the common beliefs of the church were at a particular time. It should, nonetheless, be noted that no doctrine can be formed solely on the basis of a Patristic teaching without any New Testament support. Often times the teachings of the Early Church Fathers were false, their interpretations were misguided, and through many of their beliefs the New Testament church went into apostasy. This being said, it is wonderful to observe what the early church writers believed concerning various topics. One of these topics that the early church wrote a great deal on was baptism.

What the Early Church Fathers Taught on the Meaning of Baptism

...In order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe... (Justin Martyr, 160 A.D)³⁹

When we come to refute them (the Gnostics) we will show in its proper place that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial that baptism which is regeneration to God. Thus they have renounced the whole faith... For the baptism instituted by the visible Jesus was for the remission of sins. (Irenaeus. A.D)⁴⁰

³⁸ David Bercot. *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*. (Tyler: Scroll Publishing, 1999) pL6

³⁹ Justin Martyr. *The First Apology of Justin*. *The Anti Nicene Fathers*, vol.1 N.p., n.d.; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004). 1:183)

⁴⁰ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. *The Anti Nicene Fathers*, vol.1 N.p., n.d.; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 1.346.

The union of the Logos with baptism is like the agreement of milk with water. For, of all liquids, milk alone receives water. It allows itself to be mixed with water for the purpose of cleansing – just as baptism does for the remission of sins. (Clement of Alexandria. 195 A.D)⁴¹

“Unless a man has been born again of water and Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.” These words have tied faith to the necessity of baptism. Accordingly, all thereafter who became believers were baptized. So it was, too, that Paul, when he believed was baptized. (Tertullian. 198 A.D)⁴²

...from that death which once the blood of Christ extinguished and from which the saving grace of baptism and of our Redeemer has delivered us. (Cyprian. 250 A.D)⁴³

As the aforementioned quotes show, the majority of the early church fathers had a theology of the purpose of baptism that would mirror that of the Apostles and Jesus. However, when looking through their writings, many of them viewed the method baptism differently. In the New Testament it is quite clear that baptism was to be by immersion. Immersion is the literal definition of the Greek word *bapto* and all the examples in Acts and other passages imply baptism by immersion in representation of the burial of Jesus. The Church Fathers, however, were divided on this topic.

What the Early Church Fathers Taught on the Method of Baptism

Concerning baptism, baptize in this manner: Having first said all these things, baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize in other water. If you cannot baptize in cold water, baptize in warm. But if you do

⁴¹ Clement of Alexandria. The Instructor. The Anti Nicene Fathers, vol.2 N.p., n.d.; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 2.222.

⁴² Tertullian. On Baptism. The Anti Nicene Fathers, vol.3 N.p., n.d.; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 3.676.

⁴³ Cyprian. The Epistles of Cyprian. The Anti Nicene Fathers, vol.5 N.p., n.d.; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004. 5.332).

not have either, pour out the water three times upon the persons head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, before the baptism, let the baptizer fast, and the one being baptized, together with whoever else can. But you will instruct the one to be baptized to fast one or two days before (the baptism). (Didache. 80-140 A.D.)⁴⁴

The apostles themselves also gave them the seal of the preaching (i.e., baptism). Accordingly, they descended with them into the water and ascended again. (Hermas. 150 A.D.)⁴⁵

With great simplicity, without pomp, without any considerable novelty of preparation, and without expense, a man is dipped in water. Amid the utterance of some few words, he is moistened, and then rises again, not much the (physically) cleaner. Because of that, the consequent attainment of eternity is esteemed the more incredible. (Tertullian. 198 A.D.)⁴⁶

One could devote a great deal of space to quoting all the writings of the Church Fathers on baptism. However, space does not permit, and the aforementioned quotes give enough witness to the fact that the early Church Fathers practiced baptism, usually by immersion, for the remission of sins, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When looking the history, background and teaching of baptism it can be plainly seen that baptism was usually practiced by God's people. Whether it be the ceremonial washing of a Jewish Priest, baptism for the initiation of proselyte, the cleansing immersion of a Jewish women in a Migvaot all the way up to the baptism proclaimed by Peter in Acts 2, baptism is always commonplace among God's followers. Those who desire to submit to the precepts of God can clearly observe the necessity of baptism. Jesus and His apostles commanded that penitent believers be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. Centuries of historical evidence, plus

⁴⁴ Didache 1.379

⁴⁵ Hermas 2.49

⁴⁶ Tertullian. On Baptism. The Anti Nicene Fathers, vol.3 N.p., n.d.; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) 3.670,671.

simple word studies make it absolutely certain that this original baptism, the one baptism of the apostolic church, was supposed to be by the method of immersion. With this, the correlation between the immersion of a believer and blessing of the remission of sins is identified. In immersion one emulates the death, the burial, and the resurrection of the Jesus Christ. When one does this, they are to die to sin, become a new person and live every day as a slave to Christ and not the flesh. There is no difficulty in understanding the clear teaching of scripture when such is distanced from the biased speculations of men. One must be born again.

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