

**What the Bible Teaches About Baptism
& How the Earliest Christians
Understood These Biblical Texts**

— *by* —

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Preface

On my radio program I regularly point out the fact that the scriptures nowhere teach the popular American Evangelical belief that baptism is a “sign to the world that you’ve made a decision to follow Jesus.” As a result, I receive a lot of emails asking me about and challenging the Lutheran doctrine of baptism.

Recently, I received an email from a fellow who boldly asserted that there are *no Biblical passages* that teach the Lutheran doctrine of baptism. I promptly sent my critic an email containing the clearest passages in the New Testament regarding Baptism along with a note that said, “Here are the clear passages from scripture regarding Baptism. You tell me what baptism does (its purpose) according to these scriptures and who it is for. *I believe exactly what these passages say.*” The Biblical texts I sent him are as follows:

Acts 2:38–39: “And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Romans 6:3–5: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Colossians 2:11–12: “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Acts 22:16: “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Titus 3:4–7: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

1 Peter 3:21–22: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

John 3:5: “Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Upon receiving these verses, my critic promptly sent me a response in which he attempted to demonstrate that none of the texts that I sent him are actually speaking about water baptism but instead about something else. To this I responded by sending him a lengthy email containing quotes from the writings and sermons of the earliest Christians and how they understood these Biblical texts. It is important to note that these citations were written *long before the usurpation of the Bishop of Rome* and the corruption of church’s doctrines that occurred during the Middle Ages.

Upon receiving these excerpts from the ancient church fathers *my critic pronounced every one of them to be heretics*. When I pointed out the fact that none of them were heretics, and that all of them are considered to be orthodox preachers and apologists of the Christian faith, and that some of them were martyred for their confession of Christ, I received one final email. In it, my critic amended his criticism. He no longer claimed that there are no Biblical passages to support the Lutheran doctrine of baptism. Instead, he said that my problem, and by extension the problem of the earliest Christians, is that *we take these Biblical passages literally*.

The document you are about to read was created in order to share with you the clearest passages of scripture regarding baptism and what the earliest Christians understood these passages to mean. In so doing, it is my hope and prayer that you too, along with the ancient church and the Lutherans, will take these passages literally and will learn, in the words of Ignatius of Antioch written in 110 A.D. to, “Let your baptism be your armor; your faith, your helmet; your love, your spear; your patient endurance, your panoply.”

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Acts 2:37–39

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ ***for the forgiveness of your sins***, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ***For the promise is for you and for your children*** and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

Barnabas

“Regarding [baptism], we have the evidence of Scripture that Israel would refuse to accept the ***washing which confers the remission of sins*** and would set up a substitution of their own instead [Ps. 1:3–6]. Observe there how he describes both the water and the cross in the same figure. His meaning is, ‘Blessed are those who go down into the water with their hopes set on the cross.’ Here he is saying that after we have stepped down into the water, burdened with sin and defilement, we come up out of it bearing fruit, with reverence in our hearts and the hope of Jesus in our souls”

— *Letter of Barnabas* 11:1–10 *Date: 74 A.D.*

Hermas

“I have heard, sir,’ said I [to the Shepherd], ‘from some teacher, that there is no other repentance except that which took place *when we went down into the water and obtained the remission of our former sins.*’ He said to me, ‘You have heard rightly, for so it is”

— *The Shepherd* 4:3:1–2 *Date: 80 A.D.*

Irenaeus

“And when we come to refute them [the gnostic], we shall show in its fitting-place, that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God, and thus to a renunciation of the whole [Christian] faith...For the baptism instituted by the visible Jesus was *for the remission of sins*”

—*Against Heresies* 21:1-2 *Date: 189 A.D.*

“Now faith occasions this for us even as the Elders, the disciples of the Apostles, have handed it down to us. First of all, it bids us to keep in mind that *we have received baptism for the remission of sins* in the name of God the Father and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate, died and rose again, and in the Holy Spirit of God. This baptism is the seal of eternal life and the new birth unto God that we should no longer be the sons of mortal men but of the eternal and perpetual God.”

— *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, *Date: 192 A.D.*

Cyprian of Carthage

“As to what pertains to the case of infants: You [Fidus] said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, that the old law of circumcision must be taken into consideration, and that you did not think that one should be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day after his birth. In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judge that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born....

If, in the case of the worst sinners and those who formerly sinned much against God, when afterwards they believe, the remission of their sins is granted and no one is held back from baptism and grace, how much more, then, should an infant not be held back, who, having but recently been born, has done no sin,

except that, born of the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of that old death from his first being born. For this very reason does he [an infant] approach more easily to **receive the remission of sins**: because the sins forgiven him are not his own but those of another”

—*Letters* 64:2 & 64:5 *Date: 253 A.D.*

Nicene Creed

“And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge **one baptism for the remission of sins**; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

—*Council of Nicaea, Date: 325 A.D.*

Gregory of Nazianz

“Do you have an infant child? Allow sin no opportunity; rather, let the infant be sanctified from childhood. From his most tender age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Do you fear the seal [of baptism] because of the weakness of nature? Oh, what a pusillanimous mother and of how little faith!”...

“Well enough,’ some will say, ‘for those who ask for baptism, but what do you have to say about those who are still children, and aware neither of loss nor of grace? Shall we baptize them too?’ Certainly [I respond], if there is any pressing danger. Better that they be sanctified unaware, than that they depart unsealed and uninitiated”

—*Oration on Holy Baptism* 40:7 & 40:28 *Date: 388 A.D.*

John Chrysostom

"You see how many are the benefits of baptism, and some think its heavenly grace consists only in **the remission of sins**, but we have enumerated ten honors [it bestows]! **For this reason we baptize even infants**, though they are not defiled by [personal] sins, so that there may be given to them holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, and that they may be his [Christ's] members"

—*Baptismal Catechesis in Augustine, Against Julian* 1:6:21 *Date: 388 A.D.*

Augustine

“What the universal Church holds, not as instituted [invented] by councils but as something always held, is most correctly believed to have been handed down by apostolic authority. Since others respond for children, so that the celebration of the sacrament may be complete for them, it is certainly availing to them for their consecration, because they themselves are not able to respond”

—*On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 4:24:31 *Date: 400 A.D.*

“The custom of Mother Church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned, nor is it to be regarded in any way as superfluous, nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic”

—*The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 10:23:39 *Date 408 A.D.*

“Cyprian was not issuing a new decree but was keeping to the most solid belief of the Church in order to correct some who thought that infants ought not be baptized before the eighth day after their birth. . . . He agreed with certain of his fellow bishops that a child is able to be duly baptized as soon as he is born”

—*Letters* 166:8:23 *Date: 412 A.D.*

Council of Mileum II

“[W]hoever says that infants fresh from their mothers’ wombs ought not to be baptized, or say that they are indeed baptized *unto the remission of sins*, but that they draw nothing of the original sin of Adam, which is expiated in the *bath of regeneration* . . . let him be anathema [excommunicated]. Since what the apostle [Paul] says, ‘Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so passed to all men, in whom all have sinned’ [Rom. 5:12], must not be understood otherwise than the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith even infants, who in themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized *unto the remission of sins*, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration”

—*Canon 3* *Date: 416 A.D.*

Council of Carthage to Investigate Pelagianism May 1, 418

“If any man says that new-born children need not be baptized, or that they should indeed be baptized *for the remission of sins*, but that they have in them no original sin inherited from Adam which must be washed away in *the bath of regeneration*, so that in their ease the formula of baptism ‘for the remission of sins’ must not be taken literally, but figuratively, let him be anathema; because, according to Romans 5:12, the sin of Adam has passed upon all.”

—*Canon 2 Date: 416 A.D.*



Titus 3:4–7

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, ***not because of works done by us in righteousness***, but according to his own mercy, ***by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit***, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

Theophilus of Antioch

“Moreover, those things which were created from the waters were blessed by God, so that this might also be a sign that men would at a future time receive repentance and ***remission of sins through water and the bath of regeneration***—all who proceed to the truth and are born again and receive a blessing from God”

—*To Autolycus* 12:16 *Date: 181 A.D.*

Clement of Alexandria

“When we are baptized, we are enlightened. Being enlightened, we are adopted as sons. Adopted as sons, we are made perfect. Made perfect, we become immortal . . . ‘and sons of the Most High’ [Ps. 82:6]. This work is variously called grace, illumination, perfection, and washing. ***It is a washing by which***

we are cleansed of sins, a gift of grace by which the punishments due our sins are remitted, an illumination by which we behold that holy light of salvation”

—*The Instructor of Children* 1:6:26:1 *Date: 191 A.D.*

Hippolytus

“And the bishop shall lay his hand upon them [the newly baptized], invoking and saying: ‘O Lord God, who did count these worthy of deserving *the forgiveness of sins by the laver of regeneration*, make them worthy to be filled with your Holy Spirit and send upon them thy grace [in confirmation], that they may serve you according to your will”

—*The Apostolic Tradition* 22:1 *Date: 215 A.D.*

Cyprian of Carthage

“While I was lying in darkness . . . I thought it indeed difficult and hard to believe . . . that divine mercy was promised for my salvation, so that anyone might be born again and quickened unto a new life *by the laver of the saving water*, he might put off what he had been before, and, although the structure of the body remained, he might change himself in soul and mind. . . . But afterwards, when the stain of my past life had been *washed away by means of the water of rebirth*, a light from above poured itself upon my chastened and now pure heart; afterwards, through the Spirit which is breathed from heaven, a second birth made of me a new man”

—*To Donatus* 3–4 *Date: 246 A.D.*

Basil the Great

“For prisoners, *baptism is ransom, forgiveness of debts, the death of sin, regeneration of the soul*, a resplendent garment, an unbreakable seal, a chariot to heaven, a royal protector, a gift of adoption”

—*Sermons on Moral and Practical Subjects* 13:5 *Date: 379 A.D.*

Ambrose of Milan

“Who is the one who is born of the Spirit and is made Spirit? It is one who is renewed in the Spirit of his mind. *It is one who is regenerated by water and the Holy Spirit.* We receive the hope of eternal life *through the laver of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.* And elsewhere the apostle Peter says: “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” For who is he that is baptized with the Holy Spirit but he who is born again through water and the Holy Spirit? Therefore the Lord said of the Holy Spirit, “Truly, truly, I say to you, except a man be born again by water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” *And therefore he declared that we are born of him into the kingdom of God by being born again by water and the Spirit.*”

—*Of the Holy Spirit* 3.10.64 *Date: 381 A.D.*

John Chrysostom

“There came out from his side water and blood.” Beloved, do not pass this mystery by without a thought. For I have still another mystical explanation to give. I said that there was a symbol of baptism and the mysteries in that blood and water. It is from both of these that the church is sprung “*through the bath of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit,*” through baptism and the mysteries. But the symbols of baptism and the mysteries, water and blood, come from the side of Christ. It is from his side, therefore, that Christ formed his church, just as he formed Eve from the side of Adam.

—*Baptismal Instructions* 3.17 *Date: 387 A.D.*

Augustine

“If anyone wonders why children born of the baptized should themselves be baptized, let him attend briefly to this. . . . *The sacrament of baptism is most assuredly the sacrament of regeneration*”

—*Forgiveness and the Just Deserts of Sin, and the Baptism of Infants* 2:27:43 *Date: 412 A.D.*

“If the forgiveness of sins were not to be had in the church, there would be no hope of a future life and eternal liberation. We thank God, who gave his church such a gift. Here you are; you are going to come to the holy font, you will be washed in saving baptism, you will be renewed in “*the bath of rebirth.*” You

will be without any sin at all as you come up from that bath. All the things that were plaguing you in the past will be blotted out.”

—*Sermons* 213.8 *Date: 417 A.D.*

“Those who, though they have not received *the washing of regeneration*, die for the confession of Christ—it avails them just as much for the forgiveness of their sins as if they had been washed in the sacred font of baptism. For he that said, ‘If anyone is not reborn of water and the Spirit, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven,’ made an exception for them in that other statement in which he says no less generally, ‘Whoever confesses me before men, I too will confess him before my Father, who is in heaven’”

—*The City of God* 13:7 *Date: 419 A.D.*

Council of Mileum II

“[W]hoever says that infants fresh from their mothers’ wombs ought not to be baptized, or say that they are indeed baptized *unto the remission of sins*, but that they draw nothing of the original sin of Adam, which is expiated in the *bath of regeneration* . . . let him be anathema [excommunicated]. Since what the apostle [Paul] says, ‘Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so passed to all men, in whom all have sinned’ [Rom. 5:12], must not be understood otherwise than the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith even infants, who in themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized *unto the remission of sins*, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration”

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—*Canon 2* *Date: 418 A.D.*

John 3:5–6

“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, ***unless one is born of water and the Spirit***, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

Irenaeus

“And [Naaman] dipped himself . . . seven times in the Jordan’ [2 Kgs. 5:14]. It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [this served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, ***we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord***, from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes, even as the Lord has declared: ‘***Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven***”

—*Fragment 34 Date: 190 A.D.*

Justin Martyr

“As many as are persuaded and believe that what we [Christians] teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, and instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we pray and fast with them. Then ***they are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated*** in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father . . . and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, ‘***Unless you are born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven***”

—*First Apology 61 Date: 151 A.D.*

Hippolytus

"[P]erhaps someone will ask, 'What does it conduce unto piety to be baptized?' In the first place, that you may do what has seemed good to God; in the next place, being born again by water unto God so that you change your first birth, which was from concupiscence, and are able to attain salvation, which would otherwise be impossible. For thus the [prophet] has sworn to us: '*Amen, I say to you, unless you are born again with living water, into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*' Therefore, fly to the water, for this alone can extinguish the fire. He who will not come to the water still carries around with him the spirit of insanity for the sake of which he will not come to the living water for his own salvation"

— *Homilies* 11:26 *Date: 217 A.D.*

The Recognitions of Clement

"But you will perhaps say, 'What does the baptism of water contribute toward the worship of God?' In the first place, because that which has pleased God is fulfilled. In the second place, because *when you are regenerated and born again of water and of God*, the frailty of your former birth, which you have through men, is cut off, and so . . . you shall be able to attain salvation; but otherwise it is impossible. For thus has the true prophet [Jesus] testified to us with an oath: '*Verily, I say to you, that unless a man is born again of water . . . he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*'"

— *The Recognitions of Clement* 6:9 *Date: 221 A.D.*

Testimonies Concerning the Jews

"That unless a man have been baptized and born again, he cannot attain unto the kingdom of God. In the Gospel according to John: 'Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God'"

— *Testimonies Concerning the Jews* 3:2:25–26 *Date: 240 A.D.*

Cyprian of Carthage

“[When] they receive also the baptism of the Church . . . then finally can they be fully sanctified and be the sons of God . . . since it is written, ‘Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’”

—*Letters* 71[72]:1 *Date: 253 A.D.*

Council of Carthage VII

"And in the gospel our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with his divine voice, saying, ‘Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’ . . . *Unless therefore they receive saving baptism* in the Catholic Church, which is one, they cannot be saved, but will be condemned with the carnal in the judgment of the Lord Christ"

—*Seventh Carthage, Date: 256 A.D.*

Aphraahat the Persian

"From baptism we receive the Spirit of Christ. At that same moment in which the priests invoke the Spirit, heaven opens, and he descends and rests upon the waters, and those who are baptized are clothed in him. The Spirit is absent from all those who are born of the flesh, until they come to the water of rebirth, and then they receive the Holy Spirit. . . . [I]n the second birth, that through baptism, they receive the Holy Spirit"

—*Treatises* 6:14:4 *Date: 340 A.D.*

Cyril of Jerusalem

“Since man is of a twofold nature, composed of body and soul, the purification also is twofold: the corporeal for the corporeal and the incorporeal for the incorporeal. The water cleanses the body, and the Spirit seals the soul. . . . When you go down into the water, then, regard not simply the water, but look for salvation through the power of the Spirit. For without both you cannot attain to perfection. It is not I who says this, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power in this matter. And he says, ‘Unless a man be born again,’ and he adds the words ‘of water and of the Spirit,’ ‘he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”

—*Catechetical Lectures* 3:4 *Date: 350 A.D.*

Athanasius

“[A]s we are all from earth and die in Adam, so being regenerated from above of water and Spirit, in the Christ we are all quickened”

—*Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3:26 *Date: 360 A.D.*

Gregory of Nazianz

“Such is the grace and power of baptism; not an overwhelming of the world as of old, but a purification of the sins of each individual, and a complete cleansing from all the bruises and stains of sin. And since we are double-made, I mean of body and soul, and the one part is visible, the other invisible, so the cleansing also is twofold, *by water and the Spirit*; the one received visibly in the body, the other concurring with it invisibly and apart from the body; the one typical, the other real and cleansing the depths”

—*Oration on Holy Baptism* 7–8 *Date: 388 A.D.*

Ambrose of Milan

“The Church was redeemed at the price of Christ’s blood. Jew or Greek, it makes no difference; but if he has believed, he must circumcise himself from his sins [in baptism (Col. 2:11–12)] so that he can be saved . . . for no one ascends into the kingdom of heaven except through the sacrament of baptism. . . ‘Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”

—*Abraham* 2:11:79–84 *Date: 387 A.D.*

“You have read, therefore, that the three witnesses in baptism are one: water, blood, and the Spirit (1 John 5:8): And if you withdraw any one of these, the sacrament of baptism is not valid. For what is the water without the cross of Christ? A common element with no sacramental effect. Nor on the other hand is there any mystery of regeneration without water, for ‘unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”

—*The Mysteries* 4:20 *Date: A.D. 390*

The Apostolic Constitutions

“Be ye likewise contented with one baptism alone, that which is into the death of the Lord [Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12–13]. . . . [H]e that out of contempt will not be baptized shall be condemned as an unbeliever and shall be reproached as ungrateful and foolish. For the Lord says, ‘Except a man be baptized of water and of the Spirit, he shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.’”

—*Apostolic Constitutions* 6:3:15 *Date: 400 A.D.*

Augustine

“It is this one Spirit who makes it possible for an infant to be regenerated . . . when that infant is brought to baptism; and it is through this one Spirit that the infant so presented is reborn. For it is not written, ‘Unless a man be born again by the will of his parents’ or ‘by the faith of those presenting him or ministering to him,’ but, ‘*Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit.*’ The water, therefore, manifesting exteriorly the sacrament of grace, and the Spirit effecting interiorly the benefit of grace, both regenerate in one Christ that man who was generated in Adam”

—*Letters* 98:2 *Date: 412 A.D.*



Colossians 2:11–14

“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the **circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.** This he set aside”

See also: ***Romans 6:1–5***



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

Justin Martyr

“For since you have read, O Trypho, as you yourself admitted, the doctrines taught by our Saviour, I do not think that I have done foolishly in adding some short utterances of His to the prophetic statements. ***Wash therefore, and be now clean, and put away iniquity from your souls, as God bids you be washed in this laver, and be circumcised with the true circumcision...***

The command of circumcision, again, bidding [them] always circumcise the children on the eighth day, *was a type of the true circumcision*, by which we are circumcised from deceit and iniquity through Him who rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath, [namely through] our Lord Jesus Christ”

— *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew* 18 & 41 *Date: 160 A.D.*

Tertullian

“The apostle indeed teaches, in his Epistle to the Colossians, that we were once dead, alienated, and enemies to the Lord in our minds, whilst we were living in wicked works; *that we were then buried with Christ in baptism*, and also raised again with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. “And you, (adds he), when ye were dead in sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” And again: “If ye are dead with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?”

— *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 23 *Date: 211 A.D.*

Nisibene Hymn

“If Zipporah has circumcised her son with the temporal circumcision and has averted death, will not death with much more reason be banished by the true baptism? The one baptism into Christ puts on the Living One who vivifies the whole world.”

— *Date: 4th Century*

Ambrose of Milan

“This, too, is plain, that *in him who is baptized the Son of God is crucified*. Indeed, our flesh could not eliminate sin unless it were crucified in Jesus Christ. ... And to the Colossians he says, “*Buried with him by baptism, wherein you also rose again with him.*” This was written with the intent that we should believe that *he is crucified in us, that our sins may be purged through him, that he, who alone can forgive sins, may nail to his cross the handwriting which was against us.*”

— *Concerning Repentance* 2.2.9 *Date: 388 A.D.*

John Chrysostom

“Circumcision is no longer performed with a knife, Paul says, but in Christ himself; for no human hand circumcises ... but the Spirit. *The Spirit circumcises the whole man, not simply a part.... When and where? In baptism.* And what Paul calls circumcision, he again calls burial.... But it is not burial only: for notice what he says, “Wherein you were also raised with him, through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

—*Homilies on Colossians 6* Date: 395 A.D.

Augustine

“This is the meaning of the great sacrament of baptism, which is celebrated among us: all who attain to this grace die thereby to sin—as he himself [Jesus] is said to have died to sin because he died in the flesh (that is, ‘in the likeness of sin’)—and they are thereby alive by being reborn in the baptismal font, just as he rose again from the sepulcher. This is the case no matter what the age of the body. For whether it be a newborn infant or a decrepit old man—since no one should be barred from baptism—just so, there is no one who does not die to sin in baptism. Infants die to original sin only; adults, to all those sins which they have added, through their evil living, to the burden they brought with them at birth”

—*Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love 13* Date: 421 A.D.

Theodore of Mopsuestia

“Circumcision” refers to the life of immortality embraced through baptism, just as “uncircumcision” is the old life of mortality. Commentary on Colossians.”

—*TEM 1:287, Date: Early 5th Century*

Severian of Gabala

“*Through baptism comes the stripping away and circumcision of sins.* ... Those being baptized in the blood of Christ confess that they share in his death through baptism and that following this they enjoy the resurrection. Resurrection is used here in a twofold sense, the one spiritual and the other physical. All persons will rise through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Those, however, who have not been baptized in Christ but have died without faith will share in the general resurrection. However, they will not enjoy the

promise of redemption.... As many as were baptized into Christ, these have freely benefitted before the general resurrection from the spiritual resurrection, for they have already risen from the death of sins. Thus, Paul also says: “in whom you were raised,” not “in whom you will be raised.”

—*Pauline Commentary, Date: Early 5th Century*



1 Peter 3:21

“**Baptism**, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

Justin Martyr

“our Christ, by being crucified on the tree, and by *purifying [us] with water*, has redeemed us, though plunged in the direst offenses which we have committed, and has made [us] a house of prayer and adoration...

“the mystery of saved men appeared in the deluge. For righteous Noah, along with the other mortals at the deluge, i.e., with his own wife, his three sons and their wives, being eight in number, were a symbol of the eighth day, wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead, for ever the first in power. For Christ, being the first-born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by Himself *through water*, and faith, and wood, containing the mystery of the cross; even as Noah was saved by wood when he rode over the waters ...I mean, that *by water, faith, and wood*, those who are afore-prepared, and who repent of the sins which they have committed, shall escape from the impending judgment of God.”

— *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew* 18 & 41 *Date: 160 A.D.*

Cyprian of Carthage

Peter showed and vindicated the unity of the church by commanding and warning *that we can be saved only through the baptism of the one church*. Just as in that baptism of the world by which the ancient iniquity was purged, the one who was not in the ark could not be saved through water, so now anyone who has not been baptized in the church cannot be saved, for the church has been founded in the unity of the Lord, as the sacrament of the one ark.

—*Letters* 74.11. *Date: 253 A.D.*



Acts 22:12–16

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? ***Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins***, calling on his name.



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

Tertullian

"Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, ***by washing away the sins*** of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life. . . . But we, little fishes after the example of our [Great] Fish, Jesus Christ, ***are born in water***, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water. So that most monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine, knew full well how to kill the little fishes—by taking them away from the water!"

—*Baptism* 1 *Date: 203 A.D.*

“Baptism itself is a corporal act by which we are plunged into the water, *while its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from our sins.*”

—*Baptism* 7:2 *Date: 203 A.D.*

Augustine

“*Baptism washes away all, absolutely all, our sins*, whether of deed, word, or thought, whether sins original or added, whether knowingly or unknowingly contracted”

—*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* 3:3:5 *Date: 420 A.D.*



Romans 6:1–5

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who **have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”



***Note:** These same themes of being baptized into Christ’s death are discussed in length in Colossians 2:11-14 and all the quotes from the church fathers are listed there.*



Matthew 28:19–20

“Go therefore and ***make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit***, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



How the Earliest Christians Understood This Text

The Didache

“After the foregoing instructions, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living [running] water. If you have no living water, then baptize in other water, and if you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, pour water three times on the head, ***in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.***”

—*Didache* 7:1 *Date: 70 A.D.*

Tatian the Syrian

“Then said Jesus unto them, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and earth; and as my Father has sent me, so I also send you. Go now into all the world, and preach my gospel in all the creation; and teach all the peoples, and baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and teach them to keep all whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you all the days, unto the end of the world’”

—*The Diatesseron* 55 *Date: 170 A.D.*

Hippolytus

“When the one being baptized goes down into the water, the one baptizing him shall put his hand on him and speak thus: ‘Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?’ And he that is being baptized shall say: ‘I believe.’ Then, having his hand imposed upon the head of the one to be baptized, he shall baptize him once. Then he shall say: ‘Do you believe in Christ Jesus . . . ?’ And when he says: ‘I believe,’ he is baptized again. Again shall he say: ‘Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?’ The one being baptized then says: ‘I believe.’ And so he is baptized a third time”

—*The Apostolic Tradition* 21 *Date: 215 A.D.*

Tertullian

“After his resurrection he promises in a pledge to his disciples that he will send them the promise of his Father; and lastly, he commands them to baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, not into a unipersonal God. And indeed it is not once only, but three times, that we are immersed into the three persons, at each several mention of their names”

—*Against Praxeas* 26 *Date: 216 A.D.*

The Acts of Xantippe and Polyxena

"Then Probus . . . leapt into the water, saying, ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, and everlasting God, let all my sins be taken away by this water.’ And Paul said, ‘We baptize thee in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost.’ After this he made him to receive the Eucharist of Christ"

—*Acts of Xantippe and Polyxena* 21 *Date: 250 A.D.*

Cyprian of Carthage

"He [Jesus] commanded them to baptize the Gentiles in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. How then do some say that though a Gentile be baptized . . . never mind how or of whom, so long as it be done in

the name of Jesus Christ, the remission of sins can follow—when Christ himself commands the nations to be baptized in the full and united Trinity?"

—*Letters* 73:18 *Date: 253 A.D.*

Eusebius of Caesarea

"We believe . . . each of these to be and to exist: the Father, truly Father, and the Son, truly Son, and the Holy Ghost, truly Holy Ghost, as also our Lord, sending forth his disciples for the preaching, said, 'Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Concerning whom we confidently affirm that so we hold, and so we think, and so we have held aforetime, and we maintain this faith unto the death, anathematizing every godless heresy"

—*Letter to the People of His Diocese* 3 *Date: 323 A.D.*

Athanasius

"And the whole faith is summed up, and secured in this, that a Trinity should ever be preserved, as we read in the Gospel, 'Go ye and baptize all the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. 28:19). And entire and perfect is the number of the Trinity

—*On the Councils of Arminum and Seleucia* 2:28 *Date: 361 A.D.*

Gregory of Nazianz

"But not yet perhaps is there formed upon your soul any writing good or bad; and you want to be written upon today. . . . I will baptize you and make you a disciple in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; and these three have one common name, the Godhead. And you shall know, both by appearances and by words that you reject all ungodliness, and are united to all the Godhead"

—*Orations* 40:45 *Date: 380 A.D. 380*

Jerome

"[S]eeing that a man, baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, becomes a temple of the Lord, and that while the old abode is

destroyed a new shrine is built for the Trinity, how can you say that sins can be remitted among the Arians without the coming of the Holy Ghost? How is a soul purged from its former stains which has not the Holy Ghost?"

—*Dialogue Against the Luciferians* 6 *Date: 382 A.D.*

Augustine

"Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost has Christ for its authority, not any man, whoever he may be; and Christ is the truth, not any man"

—*On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 4:24 [57] *Date: 400 A.D.*

"O Lord our God, we believe in you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the truth would not say, 'Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' unless you were a Trinity"

—*The Trinity* 15:28[51] *Date: 408 A.D.*

