

Chapter Seven

Historic Overview Of The Baptismal Regeneration Tradition

Cardinal Hosius Stanislos presided over the Council of Trent [1545-1563], which was a response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Reformation and to the Anabaptist movements as well as an attempt to reform the Catholic Church from within. Several church histories credit Cardinal Hosius with a unique statement (and admission) about anabaptism [rebaptism]. The statement is supposedly cited from pp. 112, 113 of his *Letters Apud Opera*. We have been unable to find such a work by him in the libraries of the United States. There are those who have conducted research in Europe who claim to have located it but they do not give us a complete citation. Historian John T. Christian gives us the alleged quotation as follows:

If the truth of religion were to be judged by the readiness and boldness of which a man of any sect shows in suffering, then the opinion and persuasions of no sect can be truer and surer than that of the Anabaptists since there have been none for these twelve hundred years past, that have been more generally punished or that have more cheerfully and steadfastly undergone, and even offered themselves to the most cruel sorts of punishment than these people. *Baptist Magazine* CVIII, 278, May, 1826.¹

Although we must consider the possibility that Hosius never made such a statement, we should also consider the fact that it would have been an accurate declaration

for anyone to have made at that moment in history.² The term *Anabaptist* refers to any person or sect that requires a rebaptism for any reason. This may, or may not, refer to an advocate of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Although *anabaptism* can be successfully traced backward to the third century and the Novationists, the history of the Anabaptists should not necessarily be considered a history of the doctrine of salvation by grace.

¹ John T. Christian, *A History Of Baptists* (Texarkana, Ark.-Tex.: Bogard Press, 1922), Vol. I, pp. 85, 86. If anyone knows of a clearer reference to this quotation, it would be deeply appreciated if that person would forward it to the author of this present work. Notwithstanding, the *Fourteenth Session* of the Council of Trent verified the facts of this quotation [See footnote reference 139 of this present chapter and footnote reference 87 in chapter 6].

² Rev. Francis J. Zdrodowski, M.A., S.T.L., *The Concept of Heresy According to Cardinal Hosius: A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Sacred Theology of the Catholic University of America in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), p. 62... "Hosius emphasizes the fundamental fact of heresy; the heretic falls back upon the Bible as the sole source of salvation...thus insisting upon the right of the individual to interpret all truths for himself. Heretics regard the right of private judgment as a special immunity from ecclesiastical or civil supervision in matters of conscience, and join therewith a freedom to ascertain what the word of God teaches on every point of doctrine and practice. Notwithstanding the alterations that the Bible suffers at his hands, the heretic will insist on the Bible as the sole authoritative and sufficient norm concerning things necessary to salvation, and denies that Catholic tradition likewise serves as a necessary and integral element of the rule of faith..."

Some Baptist history books attempt to trace a gospel tradition backward through Catabaptists, Waldensians, Berengarians, Arnaldists, Henricians, Petrobrusians, Albigensians, Bogomils, Paulicians, Donatists and finally to Novationists.³ One of the primary common denominators connecting these groups was the practice of rebaptism. Most contemporary advocates of a pure grace gospel would find little affinity with the gospel conceptions of many of the above named sects. However, their existence does dispel the notion that rebaptism and believer's baptism was an innovation of non-

traditional origin.⁴

Actually, the history of the pure grace gospel (independent of ritual and law) was a view often found outside the ancient Anabaptist circles. Many of the Anabaptists, of whom we will mention, were also believers in baptismal regeneration. Their distinction was that they required a profession of faith prior to their baptism. Some of them advocated a *works* salvation and some of them were mystics.⁵ Though a contemporary advocate of *believer's baptism* and salvation by grace alone will find references to his position in many Anabaptists of the Reformation period and following, the real theological task for the preacher of a pure grace gospel is to find its roots in Scripture alone, for the Bible is the final arbiter in any debate over the nature of the true gospel.⁶ But first we will look at the history of the *baptismal regeneration* view.

For present purposes, we will begin to trace the history of *baptismal regeneration* from the earliest of post-apostolic times. We begin with an inspection of the *Apostles' Creed* which, though certainly not compiled by the Apostles, was indeed purely apostolic in its content. Phillip Schaff gives us the earliest *old Roman* form as given by Rufinus in Latin [c. 390 A.D.], also by Marcellus in Greek [336-341 A.D.] and then the *Received* form which came into general use in the seventh or eighth century. He records the eleven articles of the *old Roman* and the additions of the *Received Form* in brackets as follows:

1. I believe in God the Father Almighty [*Maker of heaven and earth*].
2. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
3. Who was [*conceived*] by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
4. [*Suffered*] under Pontius Pilate, was crucified [*dead*], and buried [*He descended into Hell (Hades)*];
5. The third day he rose from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of [*God*] the Father [*Almighty*];
7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8. [*I believe*] in the Holy Ghost;
9. The Holy [*Catholic*] Church [*The communion of saints*];
10. The forgiveness of sins;
11. The resurrection of the body (flesh);
12. [*And the life everlasting*].⁷

³ It would be advisable for the reader to research the doctrinal distinctives of each of these divergent groups.

⁴ The tradition began officially with the rebaptism of the so-called disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19.

⁵ We will discuss the concept of *mystical illumination* in chap. 8 of this present work.

⁶ This we will endeavor to do in chaps. 8 & 9 of this present work.

⁷ *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Edited by Philip Schaff; Revised by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books), Vol. I, pp. 21, 22.

Schaff, quoting from Dr. Shedd (Presbyterian, *History of Christian Doctrine*, II, p. 433), writes:

The Apostle's Creed is the earliest attempt of the Christian mind to systematize the teachings of the Scripture, and is, consequently, the uninspired foundation upon which the whole after-structure of symbolic literature rests. All creed development proceeds from this germ.⁸

But to search back even further we see traces of the leading articles of this Creed in Ignatius [A.D. 30-107], Chapter IX of his *Epistle to the Trallians*.⁹ Tradition tells us that Ignatius and Polycarp were direct disciples of the Apostle John. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch during the time of Trajan. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* admits the Apostles' Creed is the—

formula of belief in twelve articles and contains the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Its authorship comes from being a summary of apostolic teachings, not from being written by the Apostles.¹⁰

The *Apostles' Creed* is a distillation of the apostolic teaching. Schaff says:

As the Lord's Prayer is the Prayer of prayers, the Decalogue the Law of laws, so the Apostles' Creed is the Creed of creeds. It contains all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith necessary to salvation, in the form of facts, in simple Scripture language...¹¹

He describes the Creed as the profession of faith *of candidates for baptism and church membership*. It is not a logical statement of abstract doctrines, but a profession of living facts and saving truths.¹² Schaff refers to Tertullian as teaching the Creed to be a *summary of the Gospel*.¹³

We began with this review of the *Apostles' Creed* in order that the reader might notice the conspicuous fact that neither *baptismal regeneration* nor the necessity of baptism for salvation is anywhere mentioned in the twelve articles. If baptism were the centerpiece of the true gospel, one would think that it would not have been left to assumption, but rather conspicuously written into the context, as in the *Nicene Creed* of A.D. 325 [Article 10] which states: *We [I] acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins*.¹⁴

⁸ Ibid., *Creeeds of Christendom*, Vol. I, p. 16.

⁹ *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Editors, Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), Vol. 1, pp. 69, 70. Ignatius speaks of Christ as truly born "of the Virgin Mary," "Suffered under Pontius Pilate," "Was Crucified and died," and "was raised from the dead." The same articles can be traced in Justin Martyr's [A.D. 110-165] *First Apology* Chapters X, XIII, XXI, XLII, XLVI, L. Ibid. Vol. 1, PP. 165-179.

¹⁰ *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*, Rev. Peter M. J. Stravinskias, Ph.D., S.T.L., Editor (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.), p. 85.

¹¹ Ibid., *Creeeds Of Christendom*, Vol. I, p. 14.

¹² Ibid., *Creeeds Of Christendom*, Vol. I, p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., *Creeeds of Christendom*, Vol. I, pp. 16, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., *Creeeds of Christendom*, Vol. I, p. 28.

However, we will note that most of the Church Fathers of the second through the fifth centuries taught baptismal regeneration to be the essential grounds for entering the kingdom of Heaven. Concerning Ezekiel 47:12 the *Epistle of Barnabas* [A.D. 100] says: *This meaneth that we indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up, bearing fruit in our heart, having the fear [of God] and trust in Jesus in our spirit.*¹⁵

Justin Martyr [A.D. 110-165] was an advocate of both *believer's baptism* and *baptismal regeneration*. Chapter LXI of his *First Apology* is entitled *Christian Baptism*, wherein he states:

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting 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 Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven...And this washing is called illumination because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings."¹⁶

Chapter XLIII of his *Dialogue With Trypho* [the Jew] Justin argues that, *we, who have approached God through Him, have received not carnal, but spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism...*¹⁷

Hermas, a brother of Pius, the ninth Bishop of Rome [c. 140] composed an allegory entitled *The Shepherd, or The Pastor*. Irenaeus quotes him as Scripture.¹⁸ Clement of Alexandria [c. A.D. 150-215] seems to quote Hermas as Scripture also.¹⁹ Nevertheless, *The Shepherd* was excluded from the NT canon because of the late date of its authorship and its non-apostolic beliefs. Hermas taught that water-baptism was essential to salvation even for OT souls in Hades who were baptized by the apostles after the latter had died:

"Accordingly, those also who fell asleep received the seal of the Son of God. For," he continued, "before a man bears the name of the Son of God he is dead; but when he receives the seal he lays aside his deadness, and obtains life. The seal, then, is the water: they descend into the water dead, and they arise alive, and to them, accordingly, was this seal preached, and they made use of it that they might enter into the kingdom of God... These apostles and teachers who preached the name of the son of God, after falling asleep in the power and faith of the son of God, preached it not only to those who were asleep, but themselves also gave them the seal of the preaching. Accordingly they

¹⁵ *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Down to A.D. 325*, The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D. D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., Editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), Vol. I, p. 144. The writer of the *Epistle of Barnabas* is alleged to be an Alexandrian Jew of the times of Trajan and Hadrian [A.D. 100].

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 183. There is a great contradiction between the view that illumination of understanding cooresponds with the need to believe the gospel prior to baptism and the view that illumination happens only at baptism.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, xx, 2, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p.488.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book I, xxix, Vol. II, p. 341.

descended with them into the water, and again ascended. [But these descended alive and rose up again alive; whereas they who had previously fallen asleep descended dead, but rose up again alive.]... For they slept in righteousness and in great purity, but only they had not this seal...²⁰

Clement of Alexandria quotes this passage but goes one step further by supposing that Christ also baptized in Hades.²¹

Irenaeus [A.D. 120-202] was the disciple of Polycarp who was himself the disciple of the Apostle John. He was bishop of Lyons, in France, during the last quarter of the second century. His greatest work was *Against Heresies*. Chapter XXI of Book One discusses the views of redemption entertained by heretics and affirms:

And when we come to refute them, 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.²²

Tertullian [A.D. 145-220] is another example of one who advocated *believer's baptism* yet still believed in baptismal salvation. He believed that no one could obtain salvation without ritual baptism. In chapter VII of his work *On Baptism* he writes: *The act of baptism itself too is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, but the effect spiritual, in that we are freed from sins*. Chapter XII of the same work entitled *Of The Necessity Of Baptism To Salvation*, he writes: *When, however, the prescript is laid down that "without baptism, salvation is attainable by none" (chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, "Unless one be born of water, he hath not life")*.²³

Cyprian [A.D. 200-258], in contrast to Tertullian, believed in infant baptism, baptismal regeneration, and rebaptism of heretics. He held that withholding baptism from an infant was to withhold God's saving grace:

But in respect of the case of the infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think that one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day, we all thought very differently in our council. For in this course which you thought was to be taken, no one agreed; but we all rather judge that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man [Epistle XVIII.2].²⁴

When Cyprian was in council with forty-nine other bishops, he prescribed the rebaptism of those baptized by heretics outside the Catholic Church because only the one true Church could bestow remission of sins through baptism:

²⁰ Ibid., *Shepherd of Hermas* [Similitude xvi], Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. II, p. 49. The fragment known as the *Muratorian Canon* became the basis for assigning the date A.D. 160 to this work. The fragment found by Muratori in Milan in the seventeenth century, says that "Very recently in our own times, in the city of Rome, Hermas compiled *The Shepherd*; his brother, Bishop Pius, then sitting in the *cathedra* of the Roman Church." Ibid. (Introduction to *The Shepherd*) Vol. II, pp. 3, 4.

²¹ Ibid., Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* II.9, Vol. 2, p. 357; VI.6, Vol. II, p. 490.

²² Ibid., Vol. I, p. 345.

²³ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity: its Founder, Tertullian*, Part III, *On Baptism*, Chapters vii and xii, Vol. III, pp. 672, 674, 675.

²⁴ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. V, pp. 353, 354.

But, moreover, the very interrogation which is put in baptism is a witness of the truth. For when we say, "Dost thou believe in eternal life and remission of sins through the holy Church?" we mean that remission of sins is not granted except in the Church, and that among heretics where there is no Church, sins cannot be put away.²⁵

Cyprian denied that this was a rebaptism, for the former was not a baptism in the first place:

But we say that those who come thence are not re-baptized among us, but are baptized. For indeed they do not receive anything there, where there is nothing.²⁶

And therefore it behooves those to be baptized who come from heresy to the Church, that so they who are prepared, in the lawful, and true, and only baptism of the holy Church, by divine regeneration, for the kingdom of God may be born of both sacraments, because it is written, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."²⁷

The *rebaptism* conflict can be traced to the persecution of Christianity by the Roman emperor Decius who reigned from A.D. 249-251. His persecution threatened Christianity more than any which had preceded it. The extent of its execution can be observed in the reports from North Africa, Rome, Egypt, and Asia Minor. It was held by Anabaptists of that period that public profession was a mechanical contingency to a saving gospel.²⁸ A public recantation either meant the loss of salvation or that the recanting soul was never a born again Christian in the first place. The Epistle to the Hebrews; the First Epistle of Peter and the letters to the seven churches of Asia in the Apocalypse exhort faithfulness, even unto death, under sufferings and persecutions. God will have a special crown, reward, and inheritance for those who are faithful unto death.. However, the Scriptures never taught that martyrdom would purchase eternal life for its victim.

Believing that martyrdom will save one's soul for eternity is a greater error than the public denial of the faith. Though Cyprian correctly spoke of special reward, crown, glory and inheritance that awaited martyrs in heaven, he made many statements implying that martyrdom would save one's soul from hell. In his treatise *On The Glory Of Martyrdom* he wrote:

For assuredly you ought to consider what glory there is in expiating any kind of defilement of life, and the foulness of a polluted body, and the contagions gathered from the long putrefaction of vices, and the worldly guilt incurred by so great a lapse of time, by the remedial agency of one stroke, whereby both reward may be increased, and guilt may be excluded. Whence every perfection and condition of life is

²⁵ Ibid., Cyprian, Epistle LXIX, *To Januarius And Other Numidian Bishops, On Baptizing Heretics*, Vol. V, p. 376.

²⁶ Ibid., *Epistle LXX.1, To Quintus, Concerning the Baptism of Heretics*, Vol. V, p. 377.

²⁷ Ibid., *Epistle LXXII.21, To Jubaianus, Concerning the Baptism of Heretics*, Vol. V, p. 385.

²⁸ This concept was derived from a misinterpretation of (Matt. 10:33; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26; 12:9). Later in this chapter we will show from Scripture that public denial does not result in the loss of salvation but rather in loss of communion with the Savior.

included in martyrdom. This is the foundation of life and faith, this is the safeguard of salvation, this is the bond of liberty and honor.²⁹

Cyprian even suggested that the spilt blood of the martyr is that which would present him spotless before God at his judgment:

For there is no doubt how much they obtain from the Lord, who have preferred God's name to their own safety, so that in that judgment-day their blood-shedding would make them better, and the blood spilt would show them to be spotless.³⁰

Heaven lies open to our blood; the dwelling-place of Gehenna gives way to our blood; and among all the attainments of glory, the title of blood is sealed as the fairest, and its crown is designated as most complete.³¹

It was thought that if one lived a long life he might backslide and lose his salvation. Dying a martyr's death would insure such a person against this possibility; as Cyprian said: *If you fear to lose salvation, know that you can die...*³² It was even implied that martyrdom was the ground of God's election of some—*And that either their body is thrown to wild beasts, or the threatening sword is not feared, is shown as the reason of their dignity, is manifested as the ground of their election.*³³ It was also implied that Christ is crucified afresh every time a martyr is slain—*In Isaiah He was sawn asunder, in Abel He was slain, in Isaac He was offered up, in Joseph He was sold into slavery, in man He was crucified.*³⁴ And because it was believed that baptism saved the soul, it was also believed that martyrdom would substitute for baptism if one was slain before he could receive the ritual—

Then, that they are certainly not deprived of the sacrament of baptism who are baptized with the most glorious and greatest baptism of blood...But the same Lord declares in the Gospel, that those who are baptized in their own blood, and sanctified by suffering, are perfected, and obtain the grace of the divine promise, when He speaks to the thief believing and confessing in His very passion, and promises that he would be with Himself in paradise.³⁵

Some congregations developed a contempt of death and a passion for martyrdom, but there were also individuals who considered it legitimate to flee from persecution and martyrdom. The *Shepherd* of Hermas contains many examples of the effects which the persecutions of Trajan and Hadrian had on the congregation of Rome, noting that the faith of many had lapsed. The persecutions of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius resulted likewise in a lapse of faith among many professed Christians. One can read of the influence of the Decian and Valerian persecutions from the letters of Cyprian and his

²⁹ Ibid., Treatises Attributed to Cyprian, *On The Glory Of Martyrdom*, Vol. V, p. 579.

³⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 580.

³¹ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 581.

³² Ibid., Vol. V, p. 581.

³³ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 585.

³⁴ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 587.

³⁵ Ibid., Cyprian, Epistle LXXII.22, *To Jubaianus, Concerning the Baptism of Heretics*, Vol. V, p. 385.

treatise *De lapsis*.³⁶ Denial was frequent during the persecution instituted by Julian, but the lapsed were soon permitted to reenter the churches.

After the Decian persecution the lapsed were categorized and distinguished. The *sacrificati* were those who had sacrificed to the gods. The *thurificati* had burned incense to the gods. The *libellatici* had paid bribes to obtain certification that they had already fulfilled all requirements. Following the Diocletian persecution [A.D.303], a new term was coined.³⁷ The *traditores* had either actually surrendered their sacred books and vessels or had created the appearance that they had done so by substituting other books and vessels for them.³⁸ By so doing, they spared themselves from torture and martyrdom. Schaff writes:

In the second century it was generally accepted throughout the Church that a Christian who had relapsed into idolatry could not be readmitted to the congregation. The most sincere repentance was not sufficient; only open profession under a new trial and martyrdom could blot out the guilt. In the middle of the third century milder views were adopted. In 250 Cyprian and the Roman clergy still felt uncertain about the question, but gradually a more lenient practice prevailed in the churches of Carthage, Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, and between 251 and 325 a complete system of penitential rules was elaborated by the bishops.³⁹

Novation became a leader in the controversy over readmitting the lapsed into the Church. He agreed with Cyprian and with the general opinion of Christendom, that though a lapse into paganism was a great sin, it was not unpardonable.⁴⁰ But after he separated from the Catholic Church over a dispute regarding whether he or Cornelius was the duly ordained bishop of Rome, he detected fresh errors in the church that had rejected him.⁴¹ He came to teach that the Church was defiled by restoring those who had been guilty of lapsed faith or profession.

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 437-447 [Treatise III, *On The Lapsed*]. See also Cyprian [Epistle X], pp. 290-292; and [Epistle XXVI, *Cyprian To The Lapsed*], pp. 305, 306; and [Epistle LIII, *To Cornelius, Concerning Granting Peace To The Lapsed*], pp. 336-338.

³⁷ Diocletian issued three edicts and Maximian, a co-regent, issued a fourth. Churches were to be destroyed; sacred writings were to be burned; Christians were to be deprived of public office and civil rights and all were to sacrifice to the gods or die a painful death. In A.D. 308 a fifth edict required every member of families, including servants, to sacrifice and taste the offerings. All provisions in the markets were to be sprinkled with the sacrificial wine. This would leave Christians with a choice of apostasy or starvation.

³⁸ This may be why the earliest of the NT codices belong to the fourth century when the State was at peace with the Church.

³⁹ *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Samuel Macauley Jackson, D. D., LL. D., Editor in Chief (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1950), Vol. VI, p. 416.

⁴⁰ Cyprian and Carthage had a stiffer attitude toward clergy who had lapsed. The lapsed were not to be reinstated. Basilides and Martialis, two Spanish bishops, had been deprived of their bishoprics and Stephen of Rome reinstated them.

⁴¹ He disagreed with Cornelius, who, after the Decian persecution, was nominated bishop of Rome and readmitted to the Church the repentant Christians who had lapsed. Those who opposed the restoration of the lapsed chose Novation to be the bishop. Cornelius excommunicated Novation. Cyprian sided with Cornelius. Novation formed a sect known as the *Cathari*, or Pure Ones, who held that no clemency should be extended to the apostates. This sect propagated itself in the West and the East down to the sixth century. They were known to rebaptize those who were thought to have been baptized by heretics.

When Stephen became bishop of Rome a new conflict developed with Carthage regarding whether the fallen should be rebaptized in order to reenter the Church. Seventy-one bishops convened at Carthage and affirmed the doctrine of rebaptism. Stephen would readmit apostates to communion without rebaptism, but not Cyprian. The bishops of Africa and Asia Minor sided with Cyprian. So, Stephen excommunicated the church at Carthage while the churches of Asia Minor agreed with Cyprian. The council of Arles [A.D. 314] was comprised of Western bishops of York, Lincoln, and London, in Britain. This council decided against Carthage and for Rome.

From a purely scriptural perspective, all parties to this conflict were in error. Rome was wrong in believing that the sacrament, the bishop, and the Church could absolve the *lapsi* of the sin of apostasy.⁴² Any Christian can confess any sin to Christ at any time; experience forgiveness; and be restored to fellowship with Him (I Jn. 1:9). The Novationists and the followers of Cyprian were wrong in assuming that the lapsed could not be restored without a rebaptism and that lapsed clergy could not be restored at all. Rome was wrong in assuming that Christians could be damned to Hell by the excommunication of the Church. It is not necessary to enter into a voluminous study of history on this point in order to resolve the essential question regarding a Christian whose faith experiences a lapse to the extent that he may even embrace apostasy. The final authority on this question should be resolved by the Scriptures themselves, which predate all of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

Jesus told Peter that Satan desired to *have* him and to *sift* him *as wheat* (Lk. 22:31). Even though the Lord knew that Peter's faithfulness and public profession would fail, He prayed that his faith would not fail. And, without suggesting a long period of trial and probation or a rebaptism, Jesus told Peter that as soon as he had recovered from this experience he must resume an ordained ministry to *strengthen thy brethren* (Lk. 22:32). Peter presumptuously and vehemently corrected the Lord, claiming that he was ready to go to prison and die for his Master (22:33; Mk. 14:31), whereupon the other disciples made the same boast. Christ then prophesied that Peter would publicly deny Him three times before the cock would crow twice (22:34; Mk. 14:30).

When Jesus was on trial, Peter sat outside the palace, following *afar off* (Mk. 14:54), where a woman recognized him as a follower of Jesus. Peter openly denied that there was any truth to the accusation (Matt. 26:69, 70). When he went out onto the porch he was identified by another woman as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, whereupon he publicly denied, with an oath, even knowing Christ (26:71, 72). When a third person made the same accusation, Peter tried to become more convincing by swearing and cursing in his denial of knowing Christ—

...And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly (26:74b, 75; also, Mk. 14:71, 72).

⁴² Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* [Study Edition] (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, Inc., 1981), pp, 777, 778... "The first to deny the Church's and the bishop's right to forgive those guilty of serious sins were the *Montanists* and the *Novationists*, both arguing that certain sins (e.g., apostasy, murder, adultery) were outside the Church's powers."

It was precisely at this moment that Jesus was within sight of Peter and suddenly turned and looked at him as he uttered his denial (Lk. 22:60, 61).

Peter was not a unique exception in his lapse of public profession and faithfulness, because all of the other disciples forsook Jesus as well (Mt. 26:56; Mk. 14:50). Cowardice, doubt, and unbelief became a common experience among the followers of Christ, but none were rebaptized because of it, and none had to wait for restoration to communion upon repentance. Let us review briefly the state of faith in the followers of Jesus after His death.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women had stopped believing in the resurrection of Christ when they went to the tomb on the third day to anoint His body (Lk. 23:55, 56; 24:1, 10). Upon arrival, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Instead of believing that He had risen from the dead, they were *much perplexed* about what had taken place (24:4). Suddenly two angels appeared and asked, *Why seek ye the living among the dead* (24:5)? It wasn't that they hadn't been told, for the angels said:

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again (24:6, 7).

They remembered that Jesus had said these things but they hadn't come to the tomb that day in belief.

The women returned and reported to the eleven apostles and to all the rest of the disciples with them. Their response was that the women were spreading *idle tales* and they also professed unbelief that He had risen from the dead (24:9, 11). But, just in case there might be some truth to the report, Peter ran toward the sepulchre to investigate their story. When he found the tomb empty, with the linen wraps laid neatly, he still did not consider the probability of a resurrection; instead, he walked away *wondering in himself at that which was come to pass* (Lk. 24:12).

Next, we see two disciples on the road to Emmaus recounting the recent events that led to the crucifixion of Christ (Lk. 24:13, 14). Jesus suddenly appeared to them in supernatural disguise and inquired about their conversation and their apparent sadness (24:16, 17). The two disciples professed to Him that Jesus was at least a prophet (24:19).⁴³ This was the wrong answer. To add insult to injury, the two then professed that they had at a previous time believed that He would be the prophesied redeemer of Israel (24:21). Their sadness also betrayed their unbelief in the reports of the women and that their own inspection of the empty tomb had left them unconvinced of His resurrection (24:22-24). At this point Jesus called them *fools* and *slow of heart* to believe the OT prophets—*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory* (24:25, 26)? Then Jesus began to expound all these truths to them from Moses and the Prophets.

⁴³ When Jesus had previously asked the disciples whom men said that He was, they answered that it was generally thought that He was a prophet (Matt. 16:13, 14). This was the wrong answer. But when Jesus asked: *whom say ye that I am?*, Peter gave the only correct answer: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God* (16:15, 16). Jesus had previously said to the scribes and Pharisees: *...if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins* (Jn. 8:24).

When they came to the village of Emmaus, they constrained Jesus to be their guest for the evening (24:28, 29). Then suddenly a strange development occurred. As He sat as their guest at the evening meal, instead of waiting for the blessing and the food to be passed, He took the bread, *and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them* (24:30). Suddenly, something about this moment seems familiar. Ah, yes! The last Supper before Jesus died, *he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me* (Lk. 22:19). As disciples, they would have doubtlessly heard of the events of the last supper from the other apostles. Instantly their eyes were opened; they recognized Him, and He disappeared before their eyes (24:31). The lapse of faith had ended and they were back into intimate communion with the Savior.

Subsequently, the two disciples returned to Jerusalem and reported their experience to the eleven apostles and the disciples who were with them. This group was still wallowing in their own unbelief when Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst of them and said, *Peace be unto you* (24:33-36). Still, instead of being uplifted and strengthened in faith, they were fearful and concluded that they were seeing a ghost (24:37). Jesus read their minds and questioned their unbelief. Then He offered them objective, empirical evidence that he was not a ghost, saying: *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have* (24:39, 40). This is embarrassing indeed, for after investigating the empirical evidence, they were still in a state of unbelief: *And while they yet believed not...* (24:41). Then Jesus asked for a piece of their broiled fish and a honeycomb and ate it before them as further proof that He was not a spirit (24:41-43). Jesus reminded the disciples that He had predicted all of this to them before His crucifixion, including His death and resurrection (24: 44-47). At this point Jesus told these *lapsed* disciples that they are to be *witnesses of these things* without mentioning a period of probation.

For some reason, Thomas was not with them on this occasion (Jn. 20:24), but when the disciples reported to him that they had seen the Lord he said: *except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe* (Jn. 20:25). Eight days later, Jesus walked through a closed door and invited Thomas to indeed put his finger into the nail prints and thrust his hand into His side. Then He said to Thomas: *be not faithless, but believing* (Jn. 20:27).

When the Apostle Paul was given legal authority to punish and even execute Christians, he successfully compelled many of them to blaspheme Christ (Acts 26:10, 11), but there is no scriptural record of their rebaptism. Paul had personally won the Galatians to the grace of Christ, but they later left him and embraced another gospel (Gal. 1:6, 7). There is no record of their rebaptism upon returning to fellowship with Paul.

These men had not lost their salvation; they had no need of rebaptism; they had not forfeited their ministries; but they had fallen into a state of unbelief and denial. Yet Jesus said: *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day* (Jn. 6:39). This describes a permanent transaction that was certain to the believer at the moment of faith—

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn. 6:40).

Numerous contemporary evangelical scholars argue that the NT uses the Greek term for the verb *belief* in the present tense, meaning that, by God's sovereign will, it cannot lapse. It is argued that if the original act of belief in Christ as the sole source of saving grace and mercy were a one-time transaction, it would be in the aorist tense.⁴⁴ But John 4:39, 41; 10:42; and 11:45 do use the term *pisteuo* ("believe") in the aorist tense as if it were a one time, permanent transaction. We observe the aorist of the same verb again in Acts 14:1; 16:31; Rom. 4:3; I Cor. 15:11; Gal. 3:6; and James 2:23. This question cannot be resolved by studying the tenses of the verb, for both tenses are used interchangeably. The solution is in the dozens of cases of lapsed faith we have just observed in Lk. 24 and Jn. 20.

Jesus said that there was never a greater prophet born of woman than John the Baptist. He saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus and proclaimed Him to be the Lamb of God which would take away the sin of the world. He was a confirmed believer. Yet, being overwhelmed with doubt, he became agnostic in his prison cell. Therefore, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Christ or whether they should be looking for someone else (Matt. 11:2, 3). This was a lapse of faith, but if he had died at that moment he would have awakened in Paradise. His salvation was not contingent upon an unbroken continuation of his original act of faith. And again, what of the Galatians who were *so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel?* This is not a continuing faith in the one true gospel.

A slight breath of fresh air surfaces in the Cyprian/Novation controversy through *A Treatise Against The Heretic Novation By An Anonymous Bishop* found in the appendix of Vol. V, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. The writer was certainly a contemporary of Cyprian and wrote in the early part of the reign of Valerian (A.D. 254-256). Most scholars believe him to have been an African. We will call him the *Unknown Bishop*. He attempts to cite all the major Bible cases of lapses in faith, illustrates the fact that God was willing to restore them to communion immediately upon repentance, and then concludes with an exhortation to Novation:

And now blush if thou canst, Novation; cease to deceive the unwary with thy impious arguments; cease to frighten them with the subtlety of one particular. We read, and adore, and do not pass over the heavenly judgment of the Lord, where he says that He will deny him who denies Him. But does this mean the penitent? And why should I be taking pains so long to prove individual cases of mercies? Since the mercy of God is not indeed denied to the Ninevites, although strangers, and placed apart from the law of the Lord, when they beseech it on account of the overthrow announced to their city. Nor to Pharaoh himself, resisting with sacrilegious boldness, when formerly he was stricken

⁴⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr, *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academic Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 172..."The continuing nature of saving faith is underscored by the use of the present tense of the Greek verb *pisteuo* ('believe') throughout the gospel of John (cf. 3:15-18, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; 7:38; 11:25-26; 12:44, 46; 20:31; also Acts 10:43; 13:39; Romans 1:16; 3:22; 4:5; 9:33; 10:4, 10-11). If believing were a one-time act, the Greek tense in those verses would be aorist."

with plagues from heaven, and turning to Moses and to his brother, said, "Pray to the Lord for me, for I have sinned." At once the anger of God was suspended from him. And yet thou, O Novation, judgest and declarest that the lapsed have no hope of peace and mercy.⁴⁵

However, the greatest breath of fresh air for this period comes from another *Anonymous Treatise On Re-baptism*. Internal evidence indicates that the writer was a bishop. It was probably written while the baptismal controversy was still in contest. The treatise is an attack on the definition of a heretic and upon the rebaptism of anyone who had been baptized as a believer. The writer understands the difference between ritual baptism and Holy Spirit baptism into the Body of Christ and affirms that belief, and not ritual baptism, appropriates remission of sins from Christ:

And further, as you are not ignorant, the Holy Spirit is found to have been given to men who believe, by the Lord without baptism of water, as is contained in the Acts of the Apostles after this manner: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell upon all them who heard the word. And they who were of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with their tongues, and they magnified God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Even as Peter also subsequently most abundantly taught us about the same Gentiles, saying: "And He put no difference between us and them, their hearts being purified by faith." And there will be no doubt that men may be baptized with the Holy Ghost without water,--as thou observest that these were baptized before they were baptized with water; that the announcements of both John and of our Lord Himself were satisfied,--forasmuch as they received the grace of the promise both without the imposition of the apostle's hands and without the laver, which they attained afterwards. And their hearts being purified, God bestowed upon them at the same time, in virtue of their faith, remission of sins; so that the subsequent baptism conferred upon them this benefit alone, that they received also the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, that nothing might appear to be wanting to the integrity of their service and faith.⁴⁶

This unknown author uses the Apostles themselves as an argument against Cyprian's and Novation's concepts of rebaptismal salvation when he writes:

...but all the disciples, to whom, though already baptized, the Lord afterwards says, that "all ye shall be offended in me," all of whom, as we observe, having amended their faith, were baptized after the Lord's resurrection with the Holy Spirit...the baptism of water, which is of less account provided that afterwards a sincere faith in the truth is evident in the baptism of the Spirit, which undoubtedly is of greater account.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, A Treatise Against The Heretic Novation By an Anonymous Bishop*, Vol. V, pp. 660, 661.

⁴⁶ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, A Treatise on Re-Baptism By An Anonymous Writer*, Vol. V, pp. 669, 670.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 671.

We will now give the reader a lengthy quotation which will be redundant to this present chapter. This quotation is such a rare find for this period of history in that it demonstrates why believers, who are subsequently ritually baptized, need never be rebaptized—

And so there was this same presumption concerning Christ in the mind of the disciples, even as Peter himself, the leader and chief of the apostles, broke forth into that expression of his own incredulity. For when he, together with the others, had been asked by the Lord what he thought about Him, that is, whom he thought Him to be, and had first of all confessed the truth, saying that He was the Christ the Son of the living God, and therefore was judged blessed by Him because he had arrived at this truth, not after the flesh, but by the revelation of the heavenly Father; yet this same Peter, when Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, and priests, and scribes and be killed, and after the third day rise again from the dead; nevertheless that true confessor of Christ, after a few days, taking Him aside, began to rebuke Him, saying, "Be propitious to thyself: this shall not be;" so that on that account he deserved to hear from the Lord, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me, because he savoured not the things which are of God, but those things which are of men." Which rebuke against Peter became more and more apparent when the Lord was apprehended, and, frightened by the damsel, he said, "I know not what thou sayest, neither know I thee;" and again, when using an oath, he said this same thing; and for the third time, cursing and swearing, he affirmed that he knew not the man, and not once, but frequently denied Him. And this disposition, because it was to continue to him even to the Lord's passion, was long before made manifest by the Lord, that we also might not be ignorant of it. Again, after the Lord's resurrection, one of His disciples, Cleopas, when he was, according to the error of all his fellow-disciples, sorrowfully telling what had happened to the Lord Himself, as if to some unknown person, spoke thus, saying of Jesus the Nazarene, "who was a prophet mighty in deed and in word before God and all the people; how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and fastened Him to the cross. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." And in addition to these things, all the disciples also judged the declaration of the women who had seen the Lord after the resurrection to be idle tales; and some of them, when they had seen Him, believed not, but doubted; and they who were not then present believed not at all until they had been subsequently by the Lord Himself in all ways rebuked and reproached; because His death had so offended them that they thought that He had not risen again, who they had believed ought not to have died, because contrary to their belief He had died once. And thus, as far as concerns the disciples themselves, they are found to have had a faith neither sound nor perfect in such matters as we have referred to; and what is much more serious, they moreover baptized others, as it is written in the Gospel according to John.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 672.

To prove that belief in Christ alone appropriates salvation prior to ritual baptism, this unknown author uses the case of one who believes and is martyred before he can be baptized:

And what wilt thou determine against the person of him who hears the word, and haply taken up in the name of Christ, has at once confessed, and has been punished before it has been granted him to be baptized with water? Wilt thou declare him to have perished because he has not been baptized with water? Or, indeed, wilt thou think that there may be something from without that helps him to salvation, although he is not baptized with water? They thinking him to have perished will be opposed by the sentence of the Lord, who says “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven;” because it is no matter whether he who confesses for the Lord is a hearer of the word or a believer, so long as he confesses that same Christ whom he ought to confess...⁴⁹

Arguing that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is independent of and distinct from ritual baptism, the unknown author writes:

Which Spirit also filled John the Baptist even from his mother’s womb; and it fell upon those who were with Cornelius the centurion before they were baptized with water. Thus, cleaving to the baptism of men, the Holy Spirit either goes before or follows it; or failing the baptism of water, it falls upon those who believe.⁵⁰

He also argues that salvation through faith suffices for future sins as well, without the necessity of another salvation and that souls are washed through faith in Christ’s blood and not by water baptism:

But neither should I omit that which the Gospel well announces. For our Lord says to the paralytic man, “Be of good cheer, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee.” That he might show that hearts were purified by faith for the forgiveness of sins that should follow. And this remission of sins that woman also which was a sinner in the city obtained, to whom the Lord said, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.” And when they who were reclining around began to say among themselves, “Who is this that forgiveth sins?”—because concerning the paralytic the scribes and Pharisees had murmured crossly—the Lord says to the woman, “Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.” From all which things it is shown that hearts are purified by faith, but that souls are washed by the Spirit; further, also, that bodies are washed by water, and moreover that by blood we may more readily attain at once to the rewards of salvation.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., Vol. V. p. 673. The unknown author qualifies this statement by affirming that the mere speaking of the name of Jesus will count for nothing unless the speaker already has Christ within, having received Him as personal Savior: “Therefore nobody can confess Christ without His name, nor can the name of Christ avail any one for confession without Christ Himself.”

⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 676.

⁵¹ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 677. His reference to forgiveness of sins that were to follow pertains to salvation rather than to fellowship with Christ and chastisement. Unrepentant Christians who have been born again will lose fellowship with Christ and bring upon themselves His severe chastisement but they do not lose their salvation for they are still brethren in Christ (I Cor. 3:1-3; Rom. 12:1, 2).

One thing this document demonstrates for certain is that the view of salvation by grace through faith, totally distinct from ritual baptism, is a tradition as old as the *baptismal regenerationist* view itself. This unknown author, as pertaining to the gospel, had more in common with contemporary Baptists and numerous other advocates of *believer's baptism* than the anabaptists, Cyprian and Novation.

Another point that should be made before moving forward in our discussion, is that fleeing to escape persecution and martyrdom is not necessarily an act of cowardice or a denial of our Lord. This point was eloquently addressed by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria [A.D. 260-300-311] in his *Canonical Epistle*:

Hence neither is it lawful to accuse those who have left all, and have retired for the safety of their life, as if others had been held back by them. For at Ephesus also they seized Gaius and Aristarchus instead of Paul, and rushed to the theatre, these being Paul's companions in travel [Acts 19:26-30], and he wishing himself to enter into the people, since it was by reason of his having persuaded them, and drawing away a great multitude to the worship of the true God, that the tumult arose. "The disciples suffered him not," he says, "Nay, moreover, certain of the chief of Asia, who were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre." But if any persist in contending with them, let them apply their minds with sincerity to him who says, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee" [Gen. 19:17]. Let them recall to their minds also how Peter, the chief of the apostles "was thrown into prison, and delivered to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him" [Acts 12:4]; of whom, when he had escaped by night, and had been preserved out of the hand of the Jews by the commandment of the angel of the Lord, it is said, "As soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers and commanded that they should be put to death" [Acts 12:18, 19], on account of whom no blame is attributed to Peter; for it was in their power, when they saw what was done, to escape, just as also all the infants in Bethlehem [Matt. 2:13-16], and all the coast thereof, might have escaped, if their parents had known what was going to happen. These were put to death by the murderer Herod, in order to secure the death of one infant whom he sought, which infant itself also escaped at the commandment of the angel of the Lord... The Magi... "being warned of God in a dream," he says, "that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way" [Matt. 2:11-13]... Together with whom, having sought to kill another infant that had been previously born, and not being able to find him, he slew *the child's* father Zacharias between the temple and the altar, the child having escaped with his mother Elisabeth [Matt. 23:35]. Whence these men that have withdrawn themselves are not at all to be blamed.⁵²

Notwithstanding, the *baptismal regeneration* theory continued to dominate church history. When Dionysius [A.D. 200-265] was bishop of Alexandria he spoke of the decisions of the councils on the subject of baptism:

For, indeed, in the most considerable councils of the bishops, as I hear, it has been decreed that they who come from heresy should first be

⁵² Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Canons of the Blessed Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria, As They Are Given In His Sermon On Penitence*, Vol. VI, pp. 277, 278.

trained in Catholic doctrine, and then should be cleansed by baptism from the filth of the old and impure leaven.⁵³

We have the remains of an uncommon work called *The Acts Of Xanthippe And Polyxena*.⁵⁴ Section XXI describes the conversion of one Probus as follows:

Then Probus arising from the ground fell again upon the couch, and arising early he came to Paul, and finding him baptising many in the name of the life-giving Trinity, he said, My lord Paul, if only I were worthy to receive baptism, behold the hour. Paul said to him, Son, behold the water is ready for the cleansing of those that come to Christ. Therefore immediately taking off his garments, and Paul laying hold of him, he leapt into the water, saying, Jesus Christ, son of God, and everlasting God, let all my sins be taken away by this water.⁵⁵

Methodius [A.D. 260-312] had served simultaneously as bishop of Olympus and Parara, in Lycia before becoming a martyr. The only complete work of his that we have is his *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, wherein he praises the *virginal life*. Chapter VI addresses *the works of the Church, the bringing forth of children in baptism; the moon in baptism, the full moon of Christ's passion*. Of baptism he wrote:

Now the statement that she stands upon the moon, as I consider, denotes the faith of those who are cleansed from corruption in the laver of regeneration...

[Chapter VII] So that you also must confess that the Church labours and gives birth to those who are baptized.⁵⁶

There is also an ancient work entitled *Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles*. The first six books are the oldest. The seventh and eighth books are later but it is generally agreed that the entire work is not later than the fourth century. In section xv of Book VI it is written:

Nay, he 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 God" [Jn. 3:5].⁵⁷

Section xliii of Book VII describes how a priest is to pray that Christ and His saving grace will enter the water of baptism and thus regenerate the candidate there:

Moreover, he adores the only begotten God Himself, after His Father, and for Him giving Him thanks that He undertook to die for all men by the cross, the type of which He has appointed to be the **baptism of**

⁵³ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Works of Dionysius—Extant Fragments, Part II—containing Epistles, or Fragments of Epistles [Epistle vi—To Sixtus, Bishop]*, Vol. VI, p. 102.

⁵⁴ This work was edited from the original Greek text in *Text and Studies*, Vol. II, No 3 (1893), by Montague Rhodes James, M.A., from an eleventh century manuscript originating from Paris.

⁵⁵ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Acts Of Xanthippe and Polyxena*, Vol. X, p. 211. This work is a religious novel based upon the belief that St. Paul actually did visit Spain according to the intention expressed by him in Romans 15:24.

⁵⁶ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Methodius: Concerning Chastity* [chaps. VI, VII], Vol. VI, pp. 336, 337.

⁵⁷ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles*, Book VI, Section XV, Vol. VII, pp. 456, 457.

regeneration... Him, therefore, let the priest even now call upon in baptism, and let him say: Look down from heaven, and sanctify this water, and give it grace and power, that so he that is to be baptized, according to the command of Thy Christ, may be crucified with Him and may die with Him, and may be buried with Him, and may rise with Him to the adoption which is in Him, that he may be dead to sin and live to righteousness.⁵⁸ [Emphasis added].

There is within the Pseudo-Clementine Literature no definite conclusion as to who the author is. A passage from the *Recognitions of Clement* is quoted by Origen in his *Commentary on Genesis* [A.D. 231]. Chapter VIII of *Recognitions* states:

For he who is regenerated by water, having filled up the measure of good works, is made heir of Him by whom he has been regenerated in incorruption... And do you suppose that you can have hope towards God, even if you cultivate all piety and all righteousness, but do not receive baptism.

[Also Chapter IX] ...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 at length you shall be able to attain salvation; but otherwise it is impossible.⁵⁹

Again in the *Clementine Homilies*, Chapter VIII we read:

And this is the service He has appointed: To worship Him only, and trust only in the Prophet of truth, and to be baptized for the remission of sins, and thus by this pure baptism to be born again unto God by saving water...⁶⁰

Eusebius of Caesarea [c. 265-c. 339] was famous for his *Ecclesiastical History* [c. 325]. His greatest influence was perhaps his defense of the *Constantinian revolution*. In his *Life of Constantine*, [Chap. LXII.] he quotes Constantine requesting baptism and making his own comment:

“The time is arrived which I have long hoped for, with an earnest desire and prayer that I might obtain the salvation of God. The hour is come in which I too may have the blessing of that seal which confers immortality; the hour in which I may receive the seal of salvation. I had thought to do this in the waters of the river Jordan, wherein our Saviour, for our example, is recorded to have been baptized: But God, who knows what is expedient for us, is pleased that I should receive this blessing here. Be it so, then, without delay.” ...Thus was Constantine the first of all sovereigns who was regenerated and perfected in a church dedicated to the martyrs of Christ.⁶¹

Gregory of Nyssa [C. 335-95] was the youngest of three Cappadocian Fathers and helped to bring about the victory of Nicene orthodoxy over Arianism. Concerning Arians who denied the deity and perfection of Christ, he wrote:

⁵⁸ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles*, Book VII, Section XLIII.

⁵⁹ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Recognitions of Clement*, Vol. VIII, pp. 154-155.

⁶⁰ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Clementine Homilies*, Vol. VIII, p. 269.

⁶¹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Eusebius*, Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D., and Henry Wace, D.D., Editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), Vol. 1, p. 556.

Why are they baptized into Christ, if He has no power of goodness of His own? God forgive me for saying it! Why do they believe in the Holy Ghost if the same account is given of Him? How are they regenerate by baptism from their mortal birth, if the regenerating power does not pass in its own nature infallibility and independence.⁶²

Gregory of Nazainzen [c. 329-390], also known as Gregory the Theologian, was another of the three great Cappadocian Fathers (Basil being the third). His forty-five orations leaves him a legacy of being one of the best orators of antiquity. In his Oration XL, *On Holy Baptism* [Sections ii & iv] he states:

The Word recognizes three Births for us; namely, the natural birth, that of Baptism, and that of the Resurrection...

We call it, the Gift, the Grace, Baptism, Unction, Illumination, the generation, the Seal, and everything that is honourable...⁶³

Ambrose [c. 339-397], Bishop of Milan, was one of the four Latin doctors of the Church. His life became a pattern of the discharge of episcopal duties. In his work entitled *Of The Holy Spirit* [Book III, Chap. XVIII.138] he wrote: *And it is not doubtful that sin is forgiven by means of baptism, but in baptism the operation is that of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*⁶⁴ In *Concerning Repentance* [Book II, Chap. II.8] he wrote: *...we are renewed by means of the laver of baptism...as we being dead to sin are through the Sacrament of Baptism born again to God, and created anew.*⁶⁵

John Chrysostom [347-407] was Patriarch of Constantinople and a renowned preacher and commentator of the Bible. There was a time in his ministry where he appears to affirm that remission of sins is received directly from God to the believer without human mediation of any kind. In his *Two Instructions To Candidates For Baptism* [Second Instruction.4] he writes:

And not only is this the wonderful thing that he remits our sins, but that he not even reveals them nor makes them manifest and patent, nor compels us to come forward into the midst, and to tell out our errors, but bids us make our defense to him alone, and to confess ourselves to him...But one thing alone he seeks, that he who enjoys this remission should learn the greatness of the gift.⁶⁶

Yet, in his *Third Homily On First Corinthians* Chrysostom states: *and without baptism it is impossible to obtain the kingdom.*⁶⁷ In his *Seventh Homily* [19.] he calls baptism the *Laver of regeneration*⁶⁸ and in his *Second Homily On Second Corinthians* [9.], *the regeneration of the laver.*⁶⁹ In the *Sixth Homily* he calls it a life-giving grace⁷⁰ and in the

⁶² Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Gregory of Nyssa: *Dogmatic treatises, etc.* [Book I.23] *Against Eunomius*, Vol. V, p. 62.

⁶³ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Gregory of Nazainzen [Oration XL. 1, 4, *On Holy Baptism*] Vol. VII, p. 360.

⁶⁴ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, St. Ambrose [*Of The Holy Spirit*—Book III, Chap. XVIII.138] Vol. X, p. 154.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Vol. X, p. 346.

⁶⁶ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: The Works Of St. Chrysostom*, Vol. IX, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 43.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 284.

Seventh Homily he taught that baptism confers righteousness upon sinners.⁷¹ His *Commentary on Galatians* states that baptism regenerates, washes and makes us sons of God.⁷² In his *Fourth Homily on Ephesians* he states that *He doeth away iniquity here, both by the laver of Baptism, and by penitence.*⁷³ In his *Second Homily on I Timothy* he calls baptism an anointing and a sweet savor perfume.⁷⁴ In his *Thirty-Fourth Homily on St. John* he affirms that baptism buries sin.⁷⁵ In the *Fifty-Third Homily* this washing is the only cure for sin,⁷⁶ and finally in *Homily LXXIII* it is the *font* that *cleanseth* and wipes off filthiness.⁷⁷

Gregory the Great (c. 540-603), the See of Rome, played an active role in the expansion of the church to England, Spain, Gaul and North Italy. In his *Epistle XLV* he affirmed:

But, if there are any who say that sins are only superficially put away in baptism, what can be more against the faith than such preaching, whereby they would fain undo the very sacrament of faith, wherein principally the soul is bound to the mystery of heavenly cleanliness, that, being completely absolved from all sins, it may cleave to Him alone of Whom the Prophet says, *But it is good for me to cleave to God (Ps. lxxii, 28)?*⁷⁸ ...Whosoever says, then, that sins are not entirely put away in baptism, let him say that the Egyptians did not really die in the Red Sea. But, if he acknowledge that the Egyptians really died, he must needs acknowledge that sins die entirely in baptism...In the Gospel the Lord says, *He that is washed needeth not to wash, but is clean every whit (Joh. xiii.10).* If therefore sins are not entirely put away in baptism, how is he that is washed clean every wit?⁷⁹

The *Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* issued a mass of canons and dogmatic decrees. With these canons, several local synods received ecumenical acceptance. The *Synod of Laodicea*, in the fourth century in Phrygia Pacatiana, called *Laodicea of Lyeum* (not to be confused with *Laodicea in Syria*), established Canon III which stated: *He who has been recently baptized ought not to be promoted to the sacerdotal order.* But a note declaring an exception to this rule was also a statement regarding the belief in baptismal regeneration:

Notwithstanding this provision, that light, Nectarius, just separated from the flock of the catechumens, when he had washed away the sins of his life in the divine font, now pure himself, he put on the most pure dignity of the episcopate, and at the same time became bishop of the Imperial City, and president of the Second Ecumenical Synod.⁸⁰

⁷⁰ Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 307.

⁷¹ Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 310.

⁷² Ibid., Vol. XIII, p. 4.

⁷³ Ibid., Vol. XIII, p. 69.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Vol. XIII, p. 415.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Vol. XIV, p. 121.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Vol. XIV, p. 190.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Vol. XIV, p. 270.

⁷⁸ In *English Bible*, lxxiii.28.

⁷⁹ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Part II, *Epistles Of St. Gregory The Great* [Epistle XLV] Vol. XIII, p. 66.

⁸⁰ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. XIV, p. 126.

Jerome [c. 347-420] was the author of the Vulgate Translation of the Bible into Latin. His writings portray the general, as well as the ecclesiastical, life of his time. It was the age of Ambrose and Augustine in the West, of Basil, the Gregories, and Chrysostom in the East. In his *Letter XVII* he repeats his own profession of faith to Marcus the presbyter saying: *Every day I am asked for my confession of faith, as though when I was regenerated in baptism I had made none.*⁸¹ In his *Letter LXXIX* to Salvina [a lady of the imperial court] he spoke of sins being done away in baptism and of the *old man* being eradicated in Baptism. In this same letter he calls salvation the *grace of baptism.*⁸² In *Letter CVII*, to a woman named Laeta who had written to Jerome regarding how she ought to bring up her infant daughter, he writes in return: *The truth is that, as baptism ensures the salvation of the child, this in turn brings advantage to the parents. Whether you would offer your child or not lay within your choice, but now that you have offered her, you neglect her at your peril.*⁸³ In *Letter CXXIII* to a woman named Ageruchia he affirms that regeneration is *through the baptismal laver.*⁸⁴ And in his *Letter CXLIV* to Optatus, regarding the origin of the soul, he affirmed that *it is necessary even for babies to be born anew in Christ by the grace of regeneration.*⁸⁵

Augustine was born *Aurelius Augustinus* on Nov. 13, A.D. 354; began the study of rhetoric at Carthage in 371; converted to Christianity in 386; was baptized by Ambrose at Milan in 387; was ordained a priest at Hippo, North Africa in 391; and became the bishop of Hippo in 396. He was the intellectual head of the North African as well as the entire Western church of his time. R.C. Sproul says of Augustine:

The influence of Augustine's thought on Luther is a matter of record. In Luther's account of his famous "tower experience," when he was awakened to the gospel of Justification by faith alone, He said this experience was triggered by reading a comment Augustine had written centuries earlier regarding the righteousness of God in Romans 1. The person John Calvin quoted more frequently than any other extra-biblical writer was Augustine. His teaching on grace fueled the Reformation and shaped Protestant theology for centuries. Augustine is generally regarded as the greatest theologian of the first millennium of Christian history, if not of all time.⁸⁶

The Reformers would claim to be the true interpreters of Augustinianism which was to become the heart of the Protestant gospel. He was their theological champion. Perhaps this is why *baptismal regeneration* is the heart of many Protestant versions of the gospel of Christ. Even those who deny that they teach *baptismal regeneration* find in Augustine a champion for their faith. The *New Dictionary of Theology* says of Benjamin Warfield:

⁸¹ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Vol. VI, p. 21.

⁸² Ibid., *Jerome*, Vol. VI, pp. 163-168.

⁸³ Ibid., *Jerome*, Vol. VI, p. 192.

⁸⁴ Ibid., *Jerome*, Vol. VI, p. 234.

⁸⁵ Ibid., *Jerome*, Vol. VI, p. 287.

⁸⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), p. 50.

When at the end of the century American Presbyterians debated whether to amend the Westminster Confession, ... Warfield responded with a series of careful studies on the meaning of that document. His own opinion never wavered: the Reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries had provided sound guidelines for the church... Warfield penned several careful monographs on the Confession, many penetrating studies of Calvin's thought, and a number of academic treatises on figures in the early church (**especially Augustine**). All testified to his belief that the theological principles of these earlier periods were fully sufficient for the present. In 1904 he summed up the burden of these historical exercises: "Calvinism is just religion in its purity. We have only, therefore, to conceive of religion in its purity, and that is Calvinism" (*Selected Shorter Writings, I, p. 389*).⁸⁷

Warfield wrote a lengthy introduction to Augustine's *Anti-Pelagian writings* wherein he strongly identifies with the fourth century theologian. He noted in his introduction that:

Late in 417, or early in 418, the African bishops assembled at Carthage, in number more than two hundred... The synod's nine canons part naturally into three triads. The first of these deals with the relation of mankind to original sin, and anathematizes in turn those who assert that physical death is a necessity of nature, and not a result of Adam's sin; those who assert that new-born children derive nothing of original sin from Adam to be expiated by the laver of regeneration;⁸⁸ and those who assert a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and eternal life, for entrance into the former of which alone baptism is necessary.⁸⁹

Of the Pelagian debate Warfield said: *Both by nature and by grace, Augustin was formed to be the champion of truth in this controversy.*⁹⁰ Warfield analyses Augustine's treatise *On the Merits and Remission of Sins and on the Baptism of Infants*, consisting of two books written in 412.⁹¹ He does not consider Augustine's *baptismal regenerationist* view as an offensive obstacle to his version of the gospel of grace. However, this does not imply that Warfield is to be associated with every minute view of Augustine's theology, even as Warfield himself writes:

The saddest corollary that flowed from this doctrine was that by which Augustin was forced to assert that all those who died unbaptized, including infants, are finally lost and depart into eternal punishment. He did not shrink from the inference, although he assigned the place of lightest punishment in hell to those who were guilty of no sin but original sin, but who had departed this life without having washed this away in the "laver of regeneration." This is the dark side of his

⁸⁷ *New Dictionary Of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, Editors; J. I. Packer, Consulting Editor (Downers Grove, Illinois; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 717.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, In the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [series I] Augustine refers to ritual baptism as the *laver of regeneration* some fifty-five times. Perhaps to inspire a research paper on this concept, we will list the citations as follows: Vol. II, 18, 246, 429, 436, 464, 487; III, 386, 499; V, 24, 48, 195, 211, 237, 238, 244 253, 263, 268, 272, 273, 279, 284, 318, 329, 336, 339, 349, 350, 351, 361, 385, 386, 396, 404, 415, 417, 420, 432, 439, 449, 476, 513, 532, ; VI, 277, 320; VIII, 367, 573, 630. A laver is a container for water. In the OT it was a large copper vessel used in the tabernacle and the temple for priestly ablutions (Ex. 30:17-21). Solomon's Temple had 10 lavers made by Hiram of Tyre (I Ki. 7:30, 38).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [Series I], Vol. V, p. xx.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

soteriology; but it should be remembered that it was not his theology of grace, but the universal and traditional belief in the necessity of baptism for remission of sins, which he inherited in common with all of his time, that forced it upon him.⁹²

Although he considers Augustine his partner in the gospel of grace, Warfield takes a different view of the eternal destiny of unbaptized infants. He contrasts himself with Augustine on this point as follows:

...he believed that baptism and incorporation into the visible Church were necessary for salvation. And it is only because of Augustin's theology of grace, which places man in the hands of an all-merciful Saviour and not in the grasp of a human institution, that men can see that in the salvation of all who die in infancy, the invisible Church of God embraces the vast majority of the human race,—saved not by the washing of water administered by the Church, but by the blood of Christ administered by God's own hand outside of the ordinary channels of his grace. We are indeed born in sin, and those that die in infancy are, in Adam, children of wrath even as others; but God's hand is not shortened by the limits of his Church on earth, that it cannot save. In Christ Jesus, all souls are the Lord's, and only the soul that itself sinneth shall die (Ezek. xviii. 1-4).⁹³

However, Warfield does not see a gospel conflict in this contrast of views but instead gives Augustine his highest endorsement when he wrote:

No other of the fathers so conscientiously wrought out his theology from the revealed Word; no other of them so sternly excluded human additions... “We just first bend our necks to the authority of Scripture,” he [Augustine] insists, “in order that we may arrive at knowledge and understanding through faith.” And this was not merely his theory, but his practice. No theology was ever, it may be more broadly asserted, more conscientiously wrought out from the Scriptures.⁹⁴

In Warfield's work on *Augustine and His “Confessions,”* he writes:

But his doctrine of the Church and Sacraments had not yet given way before his doctrine of grace when he was called away from this world of partial attainment to the realms of perfect thought and life above...he touched on the problem raised by the notions of baptismal regeneration and the necessity of the intermediation of the Church for salvation in the face of his passionately held doctrine of the free grace of God, and worked out a sort of compromise between them. In one way or another he found a measure of contentment for his double mind. But this could not last. We may say with decision that it was due only to the shortness of human life; to the distraction of his mind with multifarious cares; to the slowness of his solid advance in doctrinal development—that the two elements of his thought did not come to their fatal conflict before his death. Had they done so there can be no question what the issue would have been.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., p. lxx.

⁹³ Ibid., p. lxxi.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. lxxi.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Warfield, *The Works of: Studies In Tertullian And Augustine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), Vol. IV, p. 284.

So, Warfield felt that if Augustine had lived one more decade he would no longer have held to baptismal regeneration:

Had he been granted, perhaps, ten years longer of vigorous life, he might have thought his way through this problem also. He bequeathed it to the Church for solution, and the Church required a thousand years for the task. But even so, it is Augustine who gave us the Reformation.⁹⁶

In his work entitled *Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy*, Warfield writes:

When Augustine comes to speak of the *means of grace*, i.e., of the channels and circumstances of its conference to men, he approaches the meeting point of two very dissimilar streams of his theology—his doctrine of grace and his doctrine of the Church... But he teaches that those who are thus lost out of the visible Church are lost because of some fatal flaw in their baptism, or on account of post-baptismal sins; and that those who are of the “called according to the purpose” are predestinated not only to salvation, but to salvation by baptism. Grace is not tied to the means in the sense that it is not conferred save in the means; but it is tied to the means in the sense that it is not conferred without the means. Baptism, for instance, is absolutely necessary for salvation: no exception is allowed except such as save the principle—baptism of blood (martyrdom), and, somewhat grudgingly, baptism of intention. And baptism, when worthily received, is absolutely efficacious: “if a man were to die immediately after baptism, he would have nothing at all left to hold him liable to punishment.” In a word, while there are many baptized who will not be saved, there are none saved who have not been baptized;⁹⁷ it is the grace of God that saves, but baptism is a channel of grace without which none receive it...but it should be remembered that it was not his theology of grace, but the universal and traditional belief in the necessity of baptism for remission of sins, which he inherited in common with all of his time, that forced it upon him...he believed that baptism and incorporation into the visible Church were necessary for salvation.⁹⁸

In contrast to Warfield, Augustine believed that the unbaptized infants of believers and unbelievers alike, who died in infancy, would spend eternity in hell because only baptism could remove original sin. In his *Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* [Book I, Chapter 33] he states: *Let*

⁹⁶ Ibid., *Augustine And His “Confessions”*, Vol. IV, p. 285.

⁹⁷ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), pp. 207, 208. Although MacArthur affirms that baptism is not a condition of salvation but an act of obedience, he quotes C.H. Spurgeon thusly in defense of his position: “If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord’s will, but does not mean to tend to it, you are not to pamper his presumptions, but it is your duty to assure him that he is lost.” MacArthur makes this same point again when he writes: “Nevertheless, one can hardly read the New Testament without noticing the heavy stress the early church placed on baptism. They simply *assumed* that every genuine believer would embark on a life of obedience and discipleship. That was nonnegotiable. Therefore they viewed baptism as the turning point. Only those who were baptized were considered Christians. That is why the Ethiopian eunuch was so eager to be baptized (Acts 8:36-39). Unfortunately, the church today takes baptism more casually. It is not unusual to meet people who have been professing Christians for years but have never been baptized. That was unheard of in the New Testament church. Unfortunately, we have lost the focus on initial obedience.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., Warfield, *Augustine And The Pelagian Controversy*, Vol. IV, p. 409-411.

*there be then no eternal salvation promised to infants out of our own opinion, without Christ's baptism.*⁹⁹ [Book III, Chapters 21, 22] states:

That there is no other valid means of making Christians and remitting sins, except by men becoming believers through the sacrament according to the institution of Christ and the Church...[22] But if we are taught to render help to orphans, how much more ought we to labour in behalf of those children who, though under the protection of parents, will still be left more destitute and wretched than orphans, should that grace of Christ be denied them, which they are all unable to demand for themselves?¹⁰⁰

In fact, Augustine would have considered Warfield a heretic for believing that unbaptized infants would go to heaven upon death. In his treatise *On Marriage And Concupiscence* [Chapter 22] he wrote:

Now the Christian faith unflinchingly declares, what our new heretics have begun to deny, both that they who are cleansed in the laver of regeneration are redeemed from the power of the devil, and that those who have not yet been redeemed by such regeneration are still captive in the power of the devil, even if they be infant children of the redeemed, unless they be themselves redeemed by the self-same grace of Christ...until they are redeemed therefrom by the laver of regeneration and the blood of Christ, and pass into their Redeemer's kingdom.¹⁰¹

In his work *On The Soul And Its Origin* [Chapter 12] Augustine says, *If you wish to be a catholic, refrain from believing, or saying, or teaching that 'infants which are forestalled by death before they are baptized may yet attain to forgiveness of their original sins.'*¹⁰² In refuting the errors of Victor [Chapter 20] he says:

You, on the contrary, acknowledge that infants have original sin, and yet you absolve them from it without the laver of regeneration, and send them for a temporary residence in paradise, and subsequently permit them to enter even into the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰³

Augustine was probably the most aggressive defender of *baptismal regeneration* in the ancient church. He calls baptism the *bath of regeneration*¹⁰⁴; *baptismal regeneration*¹⁰⁵; the *Sacrament of our regeneration*¹⁰⁶; *The font of regeneration*¹⁰⁷; and the *washing of regeneration*.¹⁰⁸ He insists that baptism is essential to salvation.¹⁰⁹ In *On The Soul And Its Origin* [Chapter 17] he states: *It is enough to find that no one can enter*

⁹⁹ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. V, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 78.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 273. See also *On the Soul and its Origin* [Chap. 10], p. 319.

¹⁰² Ibid., Vol. V, p. 348.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 351. See also *Against Two Letters Of The Pelagians* [Chaps. 6, 7, 11] Vol. V, pp. 394, 396.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 122, 124.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 131, 407, 408; Vol. IV, pp. 419, 497; Vol. V, pp. 47, 371, 394.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 189, 461; Vol. V, pp. 62, 63, 274, 322.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 487.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 181; Vol. V, pp. 27, 320, 382, 392, 394, 404, 414, 426, 427, 432.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 78, 337.

into the kingdom of God, except he be washed in the laver of regeneration¹¹⁰; and that ...regeneration makes Christians.¹¹¹

Augustine is so certain of the efficacy of baptism that he affirmed the regeneration of one who was baptized for the wrong reason altogether:

Some, indeed, bring their little ones for baptism, not in the believing expectation that they shall be regenerated unto life eternal by spiritual grace, but because they think that by this as a remedy the children may recover or retain bodily health; but let not this disquiet your mind, because their regeneration is not prevented by the fact that this blessing has no place in the intention of those by whom they are presented for baptism.¹¹²

However, according to Augustine, one can lose the grace of baptism by his own impiety—

And thus, when the grace of Christ has been once received, the child does not lose it otherwise than by his own impiety, if when he becomes older, he turn out so ill. For by that time he will begin to have sins of his own, which cannot be removed by regeneration, but must be healed by other remedial measures.¹¹³

This view is based on his belief in mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin must be avoided in order to guard one's baptism—

When ye have been baptized, hold fast a good life in the commandments of God, that ye may guard your Baptism even unto the end. I do not tell you that ye will live here without sin; but they are venial, without which this life is not.¹¹⁴

Actually, for Augustine, there were three ways to remit sins—

In three ways then are sins remitted in the Church; by Baptism, by prayer, by the greater humility of penance; yet God doth not remit sins but to the baptized. The very sins which He remits first, he remits not but to the baptized. When? When they are baptized. The sins which are after remitted upon prayer, upon penance, to whom He remits, it is to the baptized that He remitteth.¹¹⁵

Augustine believed that there was one other way to obtain remission of sins—i.e.the public confession of Christ by someone being martyred prior to the opportunity to be baptized, would wash away sin the same as baptism could have done.¹¹⁶ In his sermon to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 350.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 75.

¹¹² Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Letters of St. Augustin* [Letter xcvi.5] Vol. I, p. 408.

¹¹³ Ibid., *Letters of St. Augustin* [Letter xcvi.2], Vol. I, p. 407.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, On The Creed: A Sermon to the Catechumens*, [Section 15] Vol. III, p. 374.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., *On The Creed: A Sermon to the Catechumens*, [Section 16] Vol. III, p. 375.

¹¹⁶ "For whatever unbaptized persons die confessing Christ, this confession is of the same efficacy for the remission of sins as if they were washed in the sacred font of baptism." *St Augustin's City Of God*, Translated by Rev. Marcus Dods, D.D., of Glasgow in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [First Series], Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D., Editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), Vol. II, p.248.

the catechumens entitled *On The Creed* he could say: *Be baptized, and ye will be His temple and “forgiveness of sins.” Ye have [this article of] the Creed perfectly in you when ye receive Baptism.*¹¹⁷

Calvin favored Augustine partially because of his strong views on predestination. Augustine believed that all whom God elected in eternity past were also predestined to be baptized. In his work *On The Soul And Its Origin* [Chapter 38] he rebukes Victor for saying in effect that, *“They whom the Lord has predestinated to be baptized can be taken away from His predestination, or die before that has been accomplished in them which the Almighty had predetermined.”*¹¹⁸

Describing the deathbed experience of a man named Curma, who had been having dream-like visions of Paradise, Augustine recorded his testimony as follows:

He narrated how he had, moreover, been led into Paradise, and how it was there said to him, when he was thence dismissed to return to his own family, “Go, be baptized, if thou wilt be in this place of the blessed.” Thereupon, being admonished to be baptized by me, he said it was done already. He who was talking with him replied, “Go, be truly baptized; for that thou didst but see in the vision.” After this he recovered, went his way to Hippo.¹¹⁹

But what about the thief on the cross? He was not baptized, yet he was promised Paradise by the Lord Himself. Augustine will not let us use this argument because, he says it is credible to assume that when Christ was pierced in the side, some of the bodily fluid splashed onto the thief, thus baptizing him. Again, in his argument against Victor he wrote:

Besides all this, there is the circumstance, which is not incredibly reported, that the thief who then believed as he hung by the side of the crucified Lord was sprinkled, as in a most sacred baptism, with the water which issued from the wound of the Saviour’s side...only let no rule about baptism affecting the Saviour’s own precept be taken from this example of the thief; and let no one promise for the case of unbaptized infants, between damnation and the kingdom of heaven, some middle place of rest and happiness, such as he pleases and where he pleases [*On The Soul And Its Origin*, Chapter 11].¹²⁰

As for the thief, although in God’s judgment he might be reckoned among those who are purified by the confession of martyrdom, yet you cannot tell whether he was not baptized. For, to say nothing of the opinion that he might have been sprinkled with the water which gushed at the same time with the blood out of the Lord’s side, as he hung on the cross next to Him, and thus have been washed with a baptism of the most sacred kind [Chapter 12].¹²¹

These were Augustine’s arguments against Victor who had assured parents of dead children that their infants were with God—

¹¹⁷ Ibid., *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers* [First Series], Vol. III, p. 374.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 371.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., *On Care To Be Had For The Dead*, Vol. III, pp. 546, 547.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 319.

¹²¹ Ibid., Vol. V, p. 348.

But when he wished to answer with respect, however, to those infants who are prevented by death from being first baptized in Christ, he was so bold as to promise them not only paradise, but also the kingdom of heaven,—finding no way else of avoiding the necessity of saying that God condemns to eternal death innocent souls, which, without any previous desert of sin, He introduces into sinful flesh. He saw, however, to some extent what evil he was giving utterance to, in implying that without any grace of Christ the souls of infants are redeemed to everlasting life, and the kingdom of heaven, and that in their case original sin may be cancelled without Christ's baptism, in which is effected the forgiveness of sins...no one becomes a member of Christ except it be either by baptism in Christ, or death for Christ [Chapter 10].¹²²

It was not that ordinary water had the power to save. Augustine believed that when the priest consecrated the water, Christ and His Word entered the laver of liquid, thus waiting to regenerate the unwilling infant. He writes: “*This is the word of faith which we preach,*” whereby baptism, doubtless, is also consecrated, in order to its possession of the power to cleanse [On The Gospel Of John, Tractate LXXX.3].¹²³

Many theologians throughout church history were correct in their doctrines of election and predestination. However, it seems that some would interpret their own election as placing them above the laws of logic, enabling them to pontificate with totally contradictory premises and conclusions. When anyone pointed out the inconsistencies, they were informed of the smallness of their minds and addressed with degrading pejorative language. In the *Prolegomena* of the first of the eight volumes of Augustine's works,¹²⁴ we have this unique illustration:

In great men, and only in great men, great opposites and apparently antagonistic truths, live together. Small minds cannot hold them. The catholic, churchly, sacramental, and sacerdotal system stands in conflict with the evangelical Protestant Christianity of subjective, personal experience. The doctrine of universal baptismal regeneration, in particular, which presupposes a universal call (at least within the church), can on principles of logic hardly be united with the doctrine of an absolute predestination, which limits the decree of redemption to a portion of the baptized. Augustine supposes, on the one hand, that every baptized person, through the inward operation of the Holy Ghost, which accompanies the outward act of the sacrament, receives the forgiveness of sins, and is translated from the state of nature into the state of grace, and thus, *qua baptizatus*, is also a child of God and an heir of eternal life; and yet, on the other hand, he makes all these benefits dependent on the absolute will of God, who saves only a certain number out of the “mass of perdition,” and preserves these to the end. Regeneration and election, with him, do not, as with Calvin, coincide. The former may exist without the latter, but the latter cannot exist without the former. Augustine assumes that many are actually born into the kingdom of grace only to perish again; Calvin holds that in the case of the non-elect baptism is an unmeaning ceremony.¹²⁵

¹²² Ibid., Vol. V, p. 319.

¹²³ Ibid., Vol. VII, 345.

¹²⁴ Taken from Schaff's Church History, Revised Edition, New York 1884. Vol. III, pp. 988-1028.

¹²⁵ Ibid., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [First Series], Vol. I, p. 23.

One can easily see that the evidence for *baptismal regeneration* is overwhelming in the writings of almost all the Church Fathers of the second through the fifth centuries. This provides cause for great confidence to those current advocates of ritual salvation as they see themselves as mainstream insiders while labeling advocates of *believer's baptism* as radical fringe groups. It is often assumed that these fringe sects are spin-offs of the mainstream and that their arguments are unsophisticated and based on inadequate biblical scholarship. Therefore, at this point of our study, we will evaluate some of the theological questions that advocates of *believer's baptism* ask as they search the Scriptures regarding this issue. But first, if regeneration can only take place in baptism or in martyrdom, then let us examine what biblical regeneration is in actuality.

We know from the Bible that regeneration is a point of translation from a state of nature to a state of grace (Eph. 2:1-6; Rom. 11:24; I Cor. 2:14,15). This translation occurs when one becomes born again and born from above (John 3:3, 7; I Pet. 1:3, 23). It is the moment when we are begotten of God (James 1:17, 18; I Pet. 1:3; I Jn. 5:1). It is the moment we receive the grace of God (Jn. 3:27; Eph. 2:8, 9). It is the moment when one partakes of the heavenly and high calling of God in Christ Jesus (II Pet. 1:3, 4; Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14). It is when one becomes a new creation, a new man, and a new born babe (Titus 3:5; II Cor. 5:17; Eph 4:24; I Pet. 2:2). It is when one receives a new heart (Jer. 24:7; Ez. 11:19; Acts 2:37; 4:32; 16:14; Rom. 10:10; Heb. 10:22). It is when one is *quickened* (Eph. 2:1; I Cor. 15:45; Jn. 6:63; Ps. 119:50, 93; I Pet. 3:18; Col. 2:13), previous to which one is spiritually dead while he yet lives. It is passing from death to life (Jn. 5:24). Prayer is the spiritual breath of a regenerate man. When Paul was regenerated it was observed, *Behold he prayeth* (Acts 9:11), who just before had been breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ (Acts 9:1). Regeneration is when Christ is imprinted in the heart wherein the image of the second Adam is stamped (I Cor. 15:47-49). This is a conforming which takes place in regeneration (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10). It is when one becomes a partaker of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). It is when faith occurs (Acts 15:9). Without regeneration, no man can be translated into the kingdom of God. It is when the heart is circumcised (Rom. 2:29). It is God's gift of grace wherein He gives us life (Eph. 2:4, 5). It happens by the sovereign will of God (James 1:18). It is the result of God's abundant mercy (I Tim. 1:14). The instrumental cause of regeneration is the presentation of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; I Pet. 1:23; James 1:18; I Cor. 4:15; Gal. 3:2). Three thousand were regenerated on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37). The Samaritans were regenerated at the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:6). The Ethiopian Eunuch was regenerated in a chariot (Acts 8:36). The Philippian jailer was regenerated in the prison (Acts 16:29-31). The house of Cornelius was regenerated during the beginning of Peter's sermon (Acts 10:44-47).

Regeneration is an instantaneous event. It is not like progressive sanctification which is a work that carries on gradually. Faith grows, hope and love abound more and more, and spiritual light and knowledge increase by increments, till they come to the perfect day. But regeneration is an instantaneous event. Just as a natural infant is generated at an instance and is born on a particular day, so it is in spiritual regeneration. One man cannot be more regenerated than another, though he may be more experientially sanctified. One cannot be more regenerated at one time than at another.

The whole old man is unregenerate and remains the same even after regeneration takes place. However, the old man loses his right to dominion (Rom. 6:9, 14). The new man is wholly regenerate and remains the same. There is no sin in the new man, nor committed by him (I Jn. 3:9).

The grace of regeneration can never be lost, just as one born in the physical sense cannot return to his mother's womb and become unborn (Jn. 3:4), neither can one born again become un-born again for he is born of an incorruptible and immortal seed (I Pet. 1:23). And all such who are begotten again unto a lively hope of a glorious inheritance, are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation (I Pet. 1:3, 4, 5, 23; Jn. 10:27-29; Heb. 10:10-14).

If, as the majority of the Fathers of the second through the fifth centuries agree, regeneration cannot exist prior to baptism, then we should not expect anyone to be

acting regenerated prior to that event.¹²⁶ We should never see the words *faith*, *believe*, or *repentance* applied to anyone in the NT prior to the *laver of regeneration*. Then why were all candidates for baptism in the NT required to believe and show signs of regeneration before the ritual would be administered? If Fathers of the second through the fifth centuries represent the true gospel of Christ, then why was not the NT adjusted to accommodate their view?

How could Jesus have said of the unbaptized centurion in Capernaum, *I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel* (Matt. 8:10)? Why did He forgive the sins of the sick of the palsy without his baptism (9:6; Mk. 2:5)? Why did He say to the woman with the diseased issue, as she touched the hem of His garment, *thy faith hath made thee whole* (9:22)? How could He have touched the two blind men saying, *According to your faith be it unto you* (9:29)? When the woman of Canaan asked Him for mercy, how could he have said, *O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt* (15:28)? How can these things be if it is so that no one can respond to Jesus in regeneration prior to baptism?

How could Simon and Andrew have forsaken all to become fishers of men prior to a "baptismal regeneration" (Mk. 1:15-18)? How could James and John have left their

¹²⁶ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993)...(p. 61) "But by transforming the heart, grace makes the believer wholly willing to trust and obey." (p. 62) "Furthermore, because of human depravity, there is nothing in a fallen, reprobate sinner that desires God or is capable of responding in faith." (Footnote 8, p. 62) "From the viewpoint of reason, regeneration logically must initiate faith and repentance. But the saving transaction is all a single, instantaneous event." (p. 65) "Unregenerate sinners have no life by which they can respond to spiritual stimuli. No amount of love, beseeching, or spiritual truth can summon a response. People apart from God are the ungrateful dead, spiritual zombies, death-walkers, unable to understand the gravity of their situation. They are lifeless."

See also: MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 33: "Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As a part of His saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, yieldedness, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since He is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God."

Note: These statements accurately portray the positions of many, but not all, contemporary Reformed theologians.

ship, nets, hired servants, and father to go after Jesus prior to their “baptismal regeneration” (1:19, 20)? Why did Jesus heal the son with the foul deaf and dumb spirit when the father cried, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief* (Mk. 9:24)? How could Jesus have placed belief before baptism in Mk. 16:16 if so be that regeneration cannot take place until baptism? How could Jesus have said *believe only* to the parents of the dead daughter when He raised her from the dead (Lk. 8:50)? Shouldn’t the regeneration of baptism have factored somewhere into these faith experiences rather than afterwards?

Why does John equate *received* with *believe* if so be that one can only receive Christ in ritual baptism (John 1:12)? Why did John say that belief results in not perishing and in taking possession of eternal life (3:15, 16)? Why is condemnation the result of not believing rather than the result of not being baptized (3:18; Mk. 16:17)? Why does the wrath of God abide on those who believe not rather than on those who are baptized not (3:36)? Why did Jesus offer the gift of the living water of everlasting life to the Samaritan woman at the well and how could she have accepted it without being baptized (4:10-15); and how could she have won others to Christ prior to her own “baptismal regeneration” (vs. 39)? How can it be said that those who hear the Word and believe on Christ have everlasting life; have escaped condemnation, and have passed from death unto life if this can only happen in baptism (5:24)? How can belief alone partake of the bread of life and the water of life (6:35)? How could Christ guarantee the glorious resurrection of those who believed on Him (5:40)? How could He have promised that to believe is to possess eternal life (6:47)? How could *many people* have *believed on Him* without a “baptismal regeneration” (7:31)? How can rivers of living water flow from the belly of one who simply believes on Christ (7:38)? How could Jesus tell the Jews that the truth would make them free without mentioning baptism (8:31, 32)? Why did He accept the faith and worship of the man born blind without him first being baptized (9:38)? How could He have said to Martha: *Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die* without mentioning baptism (11:25, 26)? How could Jesus have promised that believing the written Word of God would bring life through His name if eternal life requires belief and literal water (20:30, 31)? How could so many Jews become believers on Him at the raising of Lazarus without their becoming baptized first (11:45; 12:11)? How could Jesus tell people that they had the Light, could believe the Light, and become children of the Light without mentioning baptism (12:36)?

How did the three thousand souls on the Day of Pentecost gladly receive God’s word before they were baptized (Acts 2:41)? How did the lame man find wholeness on the Temple steps through faith without first being baptized (3:16)? How did thousands believe on Jesus when Peter and John, the preachers through whom they believed, were in jail and could not immediately baptize them (4:4)? How could the Samaritans have responded in belief to Philip’s preaching without first being baptized (Acts 8:12)? How could so many people believe on the Lord upon hearing that Peter had raised Dorcus from the dead (9:36-42)? How could the house of Cornelius respond to Peter’s gospel message and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit before ritual baptism is even mentioned (10:43-48; 11:15, 16; 15:7-9)? How could they have been saved under Peter’s preaching if they could only be saved under water? How did deputy Sergius Paulus of Paphos believe the doctrine of the Lord simply upon seeing Paul pronounce blindness upon the evil sorcerer, Bar-jesus (13:6-12)? How could Paul promise justification to all believers without mentioning baptism (13:39)? How could Paul describe Gentiles who

gladly heard the Word as believers who were ordained to eternal life without mentioning baptism (13:48)? How could a multitude of Jews and Greeks become believers inside the Iconium synagogue without a baptismal service being held there (14:1)? Where did Paul get the perception that the crippled man in Lystra had the faith to be made whole (14:8-10)? How could Paul promise the Philippian jailer that he and his house could be saved if they only believed (16:30, 31)? How could a great multitude of devout Greeks and chief women, in a Thessalonian synagogue, have become believers upon simply responding to Paul's and Silas' preaching of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus (17:1-4)? How could the noble Bereans (honorable Greek women and many men) receive the word with readiness of mind in a synagogue, search the Scriptures to verify Paul's preaching and become believers before being baptized (17:10-12)? How could Dionysius the Areopagite and the woman Damaris and others become believers in Athens under Paul's Mars' Hill sermon rather than under the water of baptism (17:34)? When Paul preached in the house of Justus, which was joined to the synagogue in Corinth, how did Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, become a believer with many other Corinthians before they were baptized (18:8)? How could so many in Ephesus have believed, confessed, showed their deeds and burned their magic books before being baptized (19:18, 19)? How could Paul testify to Agrippa that he was obedient to his heavenly vision before he was baptized (26:15-19)? When Paul was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting his trial, he preached the gospel and people became believers, yet there was no baptistry in the house (26:23, 24). Baptismal regenerationists seem to lay all these questions aside by reminding us that all of these aforementioned examples were baptized shortly thereafter. So, are we supposed to assume that they all became believers, received Christ, and took possession of eternal life without experiencing the regeneration of baptism, if so be that regeneration only takes place in baptism? Can we see the contradiction here?

If circumcision is part of the Law and baptism replaces circumcision (as the reformers insisted), then baptism is law. So, how could Paul affirm that the righteousness of God by faith is upon all who believe (Rom. 3:22, 28)? How could he affirm that propitiation, the righteousness of Christ and remission of sins past are imputed upon faith in Christ's blood (3:25)? Why does God justify through faith (3:31) if faith and baptism are two separate acts (Mk. 16:16)? How can the gospel of Christ be the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (1:16)? Why is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith rather than from baptism to faith (1:17)? If baptism is circumcision, it is works and it is law. How then could Paul speak of justification by faith without works (4:2, 3, 5, 16)? How could Paul call *Christ the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth* (10:4)? Why does Paul call *faith* our access into the grace of God and His justification (5:1, 2)? And how can a man believe *unto righteousness* with his heart prior to his baptism, if so be that the righteousness of Christ is imputed only at the laver of regeneration (10:10, 11)?

Why did God ordain that men would become saved believers under the preaching of the gospel rather than under the water of baptism (I Cor. 1:21)? How can an unbeliever walk into the Corinthian church, hear the forthtelling of the Word of God, become convinced of all, fall down on his face, and worship God, if regeneration transpires only in the laver of baptism (14:24, 25)? If baptism saves, then the devil would know it. But his chief task on earth is not to stop infants from being baptized but

to blind unbelievers lest they should see the gospel light (II Cor. 4:4). But if baptism is illumination, why does Satan not know this and make prevention of infant baptism his chief objective?

How could the Galatians have received the Spirit by the hearing of faith if the baptism of the Spirit and ritual baptism are one and the same (Gal. 3:2)? How could God have preached the gospel of Christ to Abraham without mentioning baptism or circumcision (3:6-9)?

If ritual baptism is the seal of salvation and the promise of eternal life, how did the Ephesians become sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise after they believed the gospel and trusted Christ (Eph. 1:13)? How were the Ephesians saved by grace through faith and not by grace through baptism (Eph. 2:8, 9)?

Why did Paul tell the Thessalonians that people would be damned for not believing the truth of the Gospel when he could have mentioned that they would be damned for not being regenerated in baptism (II Thess. 2:12)? Why did Paul tell Timothy that hereafter people should believe on Christ to life everlasting (I Tim. 1:16)?

How could the writer of *Hebrews* declare that we have entered into God's rest by simply believing the preaching of the gospel (Heb. 4:3)? How could he speak of *them that believe to the saving of the soul* if no soul is saved through belief apart from *baptismal regeneration* (Heb. 10:39)?

How could the Apostle Peter affirm that we are *kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation* if it is our baptism wherein lies the power of God to save us (I Pet. 1:5)? How could he affirm that one who believes in the chief corner stone [Jesus Christ] *shall not be confounded* (2:6)?

It was John the Evangelist who recorded the words of Jesus: *except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* (Jn. 3:5). Who is more qualified to interpret those words than John himself? Then how could he say that *whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God* (I Jn. 5:1)? How could he proclaim that we have overcome the world by believing that Jesus is the son of God (5:5)?

Of course we have belabored our point by these sweeping questions, but the fundamental question is: does the belief that salvation can only take place in the visible church and in the *sacred* water of baptism constitute a saving gospel? To help answer this question, let us consider some graphic parallels as illustrations. Suppose you attended church this Sunday where the minister explained perfectly the sovereign grace of God and justification by faith in the finished work of Christ but then added one point: *that this gift is only for those who will stand up in this Baptist church and confess that he too is a Baptist and that no one is saved until he makes this confession that he is a Baptist*. Is this a saving Gospel? If you attended the church of Jerusalem and the preacher explained the Gospel perfectly but added that no one is saved until he is circumcised and keeps the whole law, would this still be the saving gospel (Gal. 1:6-9)? Then, if you attended the Augustinian church at Hippo and heard the sovereign grace of God explained perfectly with the addition that no one on earth can receive this by grace through faith but only through the laver of regeneration followed by faith, would this still be the saving gospel of Jesus Christ?

Paul calls the gospel of circumcision *another gospel* (Gal. 1:6, 7). And if baptism is circumcision under another form, it is law and we need to ask ourselves: is baptism our

profession of faith in the completed gospel or is it the gospel itself? And if it is proclaimed as the gospel itself, is it not another gospel the same as the gospel of circumcision? Especially is this question relevant if baptism is circumcision under a different form. There is a difference between believing in Jesus Christ and believing that His finished work was only the down payment for your salvation to be paid in full by your baptism and your personal post-baptismal righteousness (Heb. 12:2; Rom. 3:28; 4:5).

Yet the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration* dominated the Roman Catholic Church throughout medieval history. Perhaps the most influential theologian of the medieval church was Thomas Aquinas [1225-74]. This thirteenth-century scholastic theologian embraced what was true in Aristotle and revised what he could not accept as reasonable. He correctly believed that there could be no conflict between faith and reason. When addressing issues he would consistently quote the works of the Church Fathers and ancient philosophers, just as the Apostle Paul quoted the Greek poets Aratas and Epiminides. He became the doctor of the Dominican order. He was canonized in 1323 and by the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century Thomism became the leading school of thought in Catholicism. The Jesuits [approved in 1540] became Thomists, and we can see the words of Thomas in the pronouncements of the Council of Trent.

In Volume III of his *Summa Theologica* [Question LXVI], Aquinas writes: *Therefore Baptism is not the mere washing; but rather is it the regeneration, the seal, the safeguarding, the enlightenment.*¹²⁷ He agrees with and quotes Augustine as having said: *As soon as Christ was plunged into the waters, the waters washed away the sins of all.*¹²⁸ In his work *Of God And His Creatvres* [Chapter LIX—*Of Baptism*], he states his clear position on *baptismal regeneration* as follows:

The generation of a living thing is a change from not living to life. Now a man is deprived of spiritual life by original sin; and whatever sins are added thereto go still further to withdraw him from life. Baptism therefore, or spiritual generation, was needed to serve the purpose of taking away original sin and all actual sins. And because the sensible sign of a Sacrament must be suited to represent the spiritual effect of the Sacrament, and the washing away of filth is done by water, therefore Baptism is fittingly conferred in water sanctified by the word of God. And because what is brought into being by generation loses its previous form and the properties consequent upon that form, therefore Baptism, as being a spiritual generation, not only takes away sins, but also all the liabilities contracted by sins,—All guilt and debt of punishment: therefore no satisfaction for sins is enjoined on the baptized.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1914), Vol. III, p. 93.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, *The Summa Theologica*, Vol. III, p. 95.

¹²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Of God And His Creatvres: An Annotated Translation of the SVMMA Contra Gentiles*, Translated by Joseph Rickaby S.J. (Westminister, Maryland: The Carroll Press, 1950), p. 385.

We sometimes hear an objection in his defense, arguing that he calls baptism a *sign* and, therefore, he does not mean that it really remits sins. This objection is resolved by the footnote in this same chapter, which reads as follows:

Hence the axiom, a cardinal principle in the theology of the Sacraments: “The sacraments effect what they signify,” *sacramenta efficiunt quod significant*. It bears upon the Edwardine Ordinal. To spoil the significance is to spoil the effect.¹³⁰

Thus, Aquinas could say: *And therefore the baptised, if they die fresh from baptism, are immediately caught up into bliss: hence it is said that baptism opens the gate of heaven.*¹³¹

Aquinas was no doubt responding to Anabaptists [*rebaptizers*] when he wrote:

One and the same thing can be generated only once: therefore, as Baptism is a spiritual generation, one man is to be baptised only once. The infection that came through Adam defiles a man only once: hence Baptism, which is directed mainly against that infection, ought not to be repeated.¹³²

With the exception of some scattered Anabaptist testimonies throughout the world, the dominant position held by Christendom throughout the Dark Ages regarding baptism was that of the sacramental view of baptismal regeneration. And, with the exception of Zwingli and many Anabaptists, the Protestant Reformation continued a thousand years of tradition which had held to baptismal regeneration.¹³³ These Anabaptists, who held that there was never any saving efficacy in ordinances, were known as the *Radical Reformation*.

Without repeating the ground we have already covered in the works of Luther, let us focus on his view of baptism by quoting his *Small Catechism* [A.D. 1529]—

Part IV. II

What does Baptism give, or of what use is it? Answer:

It worketh forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare.

III. How can water do such great things? Answer:

It is not water, indeed, that does it, but the Word of God which is with and in the water, and faith which trusts in the Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is nothing but water, and no baptism; but with the Word of God it is a baptism—that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St Paul says, Titus, third chapter [iii.5-7]: *by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us*

¹³⁰ Ibid., *Of God and His Creatvres*, p. 385.

¹³¹ Ibid., *Of God and His Creatvres*, p. 385.

¹³² Ibid., *Of God and His Creatvres*, p. 385.

¹³³ *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry II*, Conrad Bergendoff, Editor; Helmut T Lehmann, General Editor (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), Vol. 40, p. 147. "...If the first, or child, baptism were not right it would follow that for more than a thousand years there was no baptism or any Christendom, which is impossible...For over a thousand years there were hardly any other but child baptisms."

*abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*¹³⁴

And again, without repeating all that we have discussed regarding the works of Calvin, let us reiterate his view that the baptismal symbol and that which is symbolized are one and the same thing and indistinguishable. In arguing the equivocation of OT circumcision with NT baptism he states:

The promise, in which we have shown that the power of the signs consists, is one in both—viz. The promise of the paternal favour of God, of forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. And the thing figured is one and the same—viz. Regeneration. The foundation on which the completion of these things depends is one in both. Wherefore, there is no difference in the internal meaning, from which the whole power and peculiar nature of the sacrament is to be estimated.¹³⁵

We began this chapter with an alleged quotation from Cardinal Hosius who presided over the Council of Trent [1545-1563] wherein he allegedly antedated the Anabaptist movement by twelve hundred years. Regarding the doctrine of baptism, we can observe that *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent, A.D. 1563* were as much a response to the Radical Reformation (*Anabaptists*) as they were to Lutheranism and Calvinism. The *Fifth Session* held June 8, 1546 was a response to a movement that denied the efficacy of baptism to remove original sin—

If any one denies, that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even asserts that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away; but says that it is only rased, or not imputed; let him be anathema. For in those who are born again, there is nothing that God hates; because, *There is no condemnation to those who are truly buried together with Christ by baptism into death; who walk not according to the flesh, but, putting off the old man, and putting on the new who is created according to God, are made innocent, immaculate, pure, harmless, and beloved of God, heirs indeed of God, but joint heirs with Christ; so that there is nothing whatever to retard their entrance into heaven...*And if any one is of a contrary sentiment, let him be anathema.¹³⁶

On The Sacraments In General, Canon VI is more of a response to the Anabaptists than to Lutheranism and Calvinism—

If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or, that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto; as though they were merely outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession, whereby believers are distinguished amongst men from unbelievers: let him be anathema.

¹³⁴ *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Philip Schaff, Editor; Revised by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1983) Vol. III *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, pp. 85, 86.

¹³⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 531.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, pp. 87, 88.

Canon VIII.—If any one saith, that by the said sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred through the act performed, but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace; let him be anathema.

Canon IX.—If any one saith that, in the three sacraments, to wit, Baptism, Confirmation, and Order, there is not imprinted in the soul a character, that is, a certain spiritual and indelible sign, on account of which they can not be repeated: let him be anathema.¹³⁷

On Baptism, Canon V was again a response to the Anabaptist position—

If anyone saith, that baptism is free, that is, not necessary unto salvation: let him be anathema.

Canon XIII.—If any one saith, that little children, for that they have not actual faith, are not, after having received baptism, to be reckoned amongst the faithful; and that for this cause, they are to be rebaptized when they have attained to years of discretion; or, that it is better that the baptism of such be omitted, than that, while not believing by their own act, they should be baptized in the faith alone of the Church: let him be anathema.¹³⁸

During the *Fourteenth Session* held November 25, 1551, the Council professed that it was responding to an ancient Anabaptist conviction that the Church does not have the power to forgive sins—

Chapter I: ...And the Catholic Church with great reason repudiated and condemned as heretics the Novations, who of old obstinately denied that power of forgiving. Wherefore, this holy Synod, approving of and receiving as most true this meaning of those words of our Lord, condemns the fanciful interpretations of those who, in opposition to the institution of this sacrament, falsely wrest those words to the power of preaching the Word of God, and of announcing the Gospel of Christ.¹³⁹

Meanwhile, the Anglican Church published its “39 Articles” [1563] where we see a reformed view of baptism with even stronger sacramental language. Puritans held more to a Calvinist view of baptism. Baptists rejected child Baptism, while Quakers rejected ritual baptism completely in favor of inward Spirit-baptism.

Now we will move forward in time to the early colonial period of American history. We know much of Roger Williams and the Rhode Island experiment with its *freedom of religion* and *separation of church and state*, but we know much less of his associate, John Clarke. It was Clarke who petitioned Charles II in 1662 to grant a charter for Rhode Island, stating: *A most flourishing Civil State may stand, yea, and best be maintained...with full liberty in religious concernments.*¹⁴⁰ The charter was obtained in 1663 and provided that *no person within the said colony...shall be in any way molested,*

¹³⁷ Ibid., *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, pp. 120, 121.

¹³⁸ Ibid., *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, pp. 123-125.

¹³⁹ Ibid., *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. II, p. 141.

¹⁴⁰ William Warren Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 130.

*punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion...*¹⁴¹ The controversy over baptism was highlighted in [John Clarke: *Ill Newes from New England: or A Narrative of New England's Persecution* (London: 1652)]. The narrative describes Clarke, Obadian Holmes and John Crandall visiting Massachusetts Bay on May 16, 1651. On the 19th they came into the town of Lynn and lodged with William Witter. While discussing religion, two constables entered the house, arrested them, and took them to Boston for sentencing. Holmes was to pay a thirty pounds fine or be well

whipped and Crandall was to pay five pounds or be well whipped. When Clark asked what law they had transgressed, Governor John Endecott—*stepped up, and told us we had denied Infant Baptism, and being somewhat transported, broke forth and told me I had deserved death, and said, he "would not have such trash brought into their jurisdiction."*¹⁴²

Clark included in his book a letter by Obadiah Holmes giving his version of what happened on that occasion. Holmes reported that Mr. Cotton gave a sermon before the court just before the sentencing, affirming that *denying Infant Baptism would overthrow all; and this was a capital offense, and, therefore, they were foul murderers*. Holmes also reported that Governor Endecott told them: *"You deserve to die, but this we agreed upon, that Mr. Clark shall pay twenty pounds fine, and Obadiah Holmes thirty pounds fine, and John Crandall five pounds fine, and to remain in prison until their fines be either paid, or security given for them, or else they are all of them to be well whipped..."*¹⁴³

Moving forward still to the seventeenth century, we must consider the works of John Wesley [1703-1791] who was a leader in the evangelical revival of that time. He sent Methodist preachers to North America from 1769 through the post-revolutionary war with Britain. Studying his works is a difficult exercise in semantics and logical consistency. In his work: *The Principles Of A Methodist*, he defines *Justification by faith* as follows:

2. First. That I believe Justification by faith alone. This I allow. For I am firmly persuaded, that every man of the offspring of Adam is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil; that this corruption of our nature, in every person born into the world, deserves God's wrath and damnation; that therefore, if ever we receive the remission of our sins, and are accounted righteous before God, it must be only for the merit of Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings of any kind. Nay, I am persuaded, that all works done before justification, have in them the nature of sin; and that, consequently, till he is justified, a man has no power to do any work which is pleasing and acceptable to God.

¹⁴¹ Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 205.

¹⁴² Irwin H. Polishook, Roger Williams, John Cotton and Religious Freedom: *A Controversy in New and Old England* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 111, 112. Polishook records for us the actual wording of this narrative.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, Polishook, p. 112. Again, the author records the actual wording of the narrative. This work contains the actual exchanges in the debates between John Cotton and Roger Williams as well as excerpts from Governor John Winthrop's Diary.

3. To express my meaning a little more at large: I believe three things must go together in our justification: Upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, the satisfaction of God's justice, by the offering his body, and shedding his blood; and upon our part, true and living faith in the merits of Jesus Christ. So that in our justification there is not only God's mercy and grace, but his justice also. And so the grace of God does not shut out the righteousness of God in our justification; but only shuts out the righteousness of man, that is, the righteousness of our works.¹⁴⁴

Such a definition of justification is most commendable if taken at face value. But here is the exercise in semantics. Wesley meant by these words that one cannot front-load the gospel with human works of righteousness. However, his position holds that if one does not back-load *justification by faith alone* with absolute personal holiness, then the said justification ceases to exist in his life and he is again in need of a born again experience—*But it should also be observed, what that faith is whereby we are Justified. Now, that faith which brings not forth good works, is not a living faith, but a dead and devilish one.*¹⁴⁵ ...*No ungodly man hath or can have this 'sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God. This is what I believe (and have believed for some years) concerning justification by faith alone).*¹⁴⁶

But when some accused Wesley of teaching sinless perfection in this life he would forthrightly deny the charge.¹⁴⁷ But what did Wesley mean by the term *a perfect man*? He wrote:

(4.) “‘But whom then do you mean by *one that is perfect*?’ We mean one in whom ‘is the mind which was in Christ,’ and who so ‘walketh as Christ walks;’ a ‘man that hath clean hands and a pure heart,’ or that is ‘cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;’ one in whom ‘is no occasion of stumbling, and who accordingly ‘doth not commit sin.’ To declare a little more particularly: We understand by that scriptural expression, ‘a perfect man,’ one in whom God hath fulfilled his faithful word, ‘From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you: I will also save you from all your uncleannesses.’ We understand hereby one whom God hath ‘sanctified throughout, in body, soul, and spirit;’ one who ‘walketh in the light as he is in the light, in whom is no darkness at all; the blood of Jesus Christ his Son having cleansed him from all sin.’

(6.) “‘This it is to be ‘a perfect man,’ to be sanctified throughout: Even ‘to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God,’ to use Archbishop Usher’s words, ‘as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.’ In every thought of our hearts, in every word of our tongues, in every

¹⁴⁴ *The Works of Wesley* (Grandrapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978), Vol. VIII, pp. 361, 362.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, *Works of Wesley*, Vol. VIII, p. 363. In chapter nine of this present work we will have a lengthy discussion regarding the back-loading of the gospel with human righteousness and whether this alters the saving grace nature of the plan of salvation.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, *Works of Wesley*, Vol. VIII, p. 363.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *Works of Wesley*, Vol. VIII, p. 364.

work of our hands, to 'show forth his praise, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.' O that both we, and all who seek the Lord Jesus in sincerity, may thus be made perfect in one?"¹⁴⁸

Though Wesley correctly distinguished between baptism and regeneration, he clearly believed that regeneration and salvation began at baptism. In his sermon, *Awake, Thou That Sleepest* he states:

Now, "they that sleep, sleep in the night." The state of nature is a state of utter darkness; a state wherein "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." The poor unawakened sinner, how much knowledge soever he may have as to other things, has no knowledge of himself: In this respect "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." He knows not that he is a fallen spirit, whose only business in the present world is, to recover from his fall, to regain that image of God wherein he was created. He sees *no necessity* for the *one thing needful*, even that inward universal change, that "birth from above," figured out by baptism, which is the beginning of that total renovation, that sanctification of spirit, soul, and body, "without which no man shall see the Lord."¹⁴⁹

Though he believed that an infant was born again at his baptism, he affirmed that an adult who is not demonstrating an entire change of heart has lost that born again experience and is in need again of a salvation experience—

It is certain our Church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again; and it is allowed that the whole Office for the Baptism of Infants proceeds upon this supposition.¹⁵⁰

I tell a sinner, "You must be born again." "No," say you: "He was born again in baptism. Therefore he cannot be born again now." Alas, what trifling is this! What, if he was *then* a child of God? He is *now* manifestly a child of the devil; for the works of his father he doeth. Therefore, do not play upon words. He must go through an entire change of heart.¹⁵¹

Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore ye must be born again.... And if ye have been baptized, your only hope is this,—that those who were made the children of God by baptism, but are now the children of the devil, may yet again receive "power to become the sons of God;"¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., *Works of Wesley*, Vol. VIII, pp. 364, 365.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., *Works of Wesley* [Sermon III, First Series of Sermons 1-39] (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), Vol. V, p. 25.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., *Works of Wesley* [Sermon XLV: *The New Birth*], Vol. VI, p. 74.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., *Works of Wesley: Addresses and Essays*, "A Partial Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion", Vol. VIII, p. 48.

¹⁵² Ibid., *Works of Wesley* [Sermon XVIII: *The Marks of the New Birth*], Vol. V, pp. 222, 223.

But the question of quantification always arises: At what point does one lose his born again state and become lost? According to Wesley, that point is at the moment of any willful sin—

What must one who loves the souls of men, and is grieved that any of them should perish, say to one whom he sees living in sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, or any other willful sin? What can he say, if the foregoing observations are true but, “You must be born again?”

And do you glory in this, that you once belonged to God? O be ashamed! Blush! Hide yourself in the earth!...I answer, Secondly, You have already denied your baptism; and that in the most effectual manner. You have denied it a thousand and a thousand times; and you do so still, day by day. For in your baptism you renounced the devil and all his works. Whenever, therefore, you give place to him again, whenever you do any of the works of the devil, then you deny your baptism. Therefore you deny it by every willful sin; by every act of uncleanness, drunkenness, or revenge: by every obscene or profane word; by every oath that comes out of your mouth. Every time you profane the day of the Lord, you thereby deny your baptism; yea, every time you do anything to another which you would not he should do to you...Without inward as well as outward holiness, you cannot be happy, even in this world, much less in the world to come.¹⁵³

Can a Christian live in perfect obedience to the commandments of God? Can it be said that he cannot be saved unless he does? Regarding the sacrament of the Lord’s table Wesley states:

For all that you profess at the Lord’s table, you must both profess and keep, or you cannot be saved. For you profess nothing there but this, --that you will diligently keep his commandments. And cannot you keep up to this profession? Then you cannot enter into life.

Think then what you say, before you say you cannot live up to what is required of constant communicants. This is no more than is required of any communicants; yea, of every one that has a soul to be saved. So that to say, you cannot live up to this, is neither better nor worse than renouncing Christianity. It is in effect renouncing your baptism, wherein you solemnly promised to keep all his commandments. You now fly from that profession. You willfully break one of his commandments, and, to excuse yourself, say, you cannot keep his commandments; Then you cannot expect to receive the promises, which are made only to those that keep them.

What has been said on this pretence against constant communion, is applicable to those who say the same thing in other words: “We dare not do it, because it requires so perfect an obedience afterwards as we cannot promise to perform.” Nay, it requires neither more nor less perfect obedience than you promised in your baptism. You then undertook to keep the commandments of God by his help; and you promise no more when you communicate.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ibid., *Works of Wesley: The New Birth*, Vol. VI, pp. 75, 76.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., *Works of Wesley* [Sermon CI: *The Duty of Constant Communion*], Vol. III, pp. 253, 254. Wesley is here addressing those who were baptized as adults.

Regarding baptism as a means or channel of God's saving grace into the human soul, Wesley identifies with the position held in ages past—

Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any *means ordained* of God, as the usual channels of his grace? This question could never have been proposed in the apostolical church, unless by one who openly avowed himself to be a heathen; the whole body of Christians being agreed, that Christ had ordained certain outward means, for conveying his grace into the souls of men.¹⁵⁵

By "means of grace" I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.

I use this expression, means of grace, because I know none better; and because it has been generally used in the Christian Church for many ages,—in particular by our own Church, which directs us to bless God both for the means of grace, and hope of glory; and teaches us, that a sacrament is "an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same."¹⁵⁶

Yet once more: we allow, though it is a melancholy truth, that a large proportion of those who are called Christians, do to this day abuse the means of grace to the destruction of their souls.

But the main question remains: "We know this salvation is the gift and the work of God; but how (may one say who is convinced he hath it not) may I attain thereto?" If you say, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved! He answers, "True: but how shall I believe?" You reply, "Wait upon God." "Well; but how am I to wait? In the means of grace, or out of them? Am I to wait for the grace of God which bringeth salvation, by using these means, or by laying them aside?"

It cannot possibly be conceived, that the word of God should give no directions in so important a point; or, that the Son of God, who came down from heaven for us men and for our salvation, should have left us undetermined with regard to a question wherein our salvation is so nearly concerned.

And, in fact, he hath not left us undetermined; he hath shown us the way wherein we should go. We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and, if we simply abide by their decision, there can no possible doubt remain.

According to this, according to the decision of holy writ, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained; in using, not in laying them aside.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., *Works of Wesley* [Sermon XVI: *The Means of Grace*], Vol. V, p. 185.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., *The Means of Grace*, Vol. V, pp. 187, 188.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., *The Means of Grace*, Vol. V, pp. 189, 190. By *Means of Grace* Wesley enumerates constant prayer; searching the Scriptures; partaking of the Lord's supper.

Noted previously was the fact that Wesley insisted upon complete obedience to the commandments of God in order to commune at the Lord's Table. But then he tells us that we may experience the saving grace of God in the Lord's Table—

Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means, whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let us all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.¹⁵⁸

And thus he continues in God's way, in hearing, reading, meditating, praying, and partaking of the Lord's supper, till God, in the manner that pleases him, speaks to his heart, "Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace."¹⁵⁹

Whenever opportunity serves, use all the means which God has ordained; for who knows in which God will meet thee with the grace that bringeth salvation.¹⁶⁰

The next large movement to emerge in North America was that of the *Disciples of Christ*. Thomas Campbell of the Seceder Presbyterian Church in northern Ireland was assigned to work as a minister in the Presbytery of Cartiers, Western Pennsylvania and arrived in America in 1807. Splitting with the Church, he formed the *Christian Association of Washington, Pa.*

His minister-son, Alexander, joined him after having been trained for the ministry at Glasgow, Ireland. Their goal was the restoration of the primitive Christian church in order to create Christian oneness. They rejected infant baptism and affusion [*pouring*] and established their first congregation [1811] at Brush Run, Pa.

The Campbells, Barton W. Stone, and Walter Scott were the chief advocates of the new message. Their belief in immersion brought them into relationships with Baptists. In 1823, Alexander began publishing *The Christian Baptist*. In the first seven years he issued 46,000 volumes of his works. The Redstone Baptist Association and the Mahoning Association received them into fellowship. These were Baptist organizations in Western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Their separation from Baptists eventually took place primarily over the Campbellite insistence that baptism by immersion was essential to salvation.

Consequently, the Disciples of Christ became a separate body. It was taught that only the immersed should be admitted to the churches. Their assemblies are known as *Christian Churches* or *Churches of Christ*. In 1829, Alexander began publication of the *Millennial Harbinger* magazine, which continued until his death. Currently, the descendants of the Campbellite influence exists in the denomination called the *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*; in the non-instrumental *Churches of Christ*; and in

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., *The Means of Grace*, Vol. V, p. 195.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., *The Means of Grace*, Vol. V, p. 199.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., *The Means of Grace*, Vol. V, p. 200. Wesley cautions everyone not to confuse the means of grace with the grace itself. He argues throughout the remainder of this sermon that there is no merit in using the means of grace: "Remember also, to use all means, *as means*; as ordained, not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness", p. 201.

independent Christian churches. A main point of contention still being the essentiality of baptism in salvation.

We conclude this historical overview of *baptismal regeneration* with a discussion of *Fundamentalism* as a movement. The *fundamentals* were considered to be the bare essentials which would serve as a collective common denominator for traditional denominations to distinguish themselves as truly Christian as opposed to rationalism, modernism, and theological liberalism. This movement can be traced to the academic renaissance which occurred in the last half of the 19th century. It was believed that Imanuel Kant, G. F. Hegel, F. C. Baur, Albrecht Ritschl, and G. F. Schleiermacher were responsible for launching German philosophy and theology onto the North American continent. Several within the scientific revolution developed a view of quantum physics and materialism which denied the existence of any metaphysical reality in the universe. Anyone denying the proposition that *time multiplied by space multiplied by motion multiplied by matter multiplied by chance = existence* was perceived by many to be *anti-education, anti-intellectual, and irrational*. Many universities and seminaries cowered to this intimidation and sought to develop a secularized theology that discounted much of the supernatural contained within traditional Christian beliefs.

Such thinking was in direct contradiction to what had previously been affirmed by traditional Christianity within both Catholic and Protestant traditions. The result was such a challenge to the authority of the sacred Scriptures that orthodoxy itself seemed to collapse as many traditional theological institutions failed to react in defense of historic Christian beliefs.

Fundamentalism was therefore a semi-ecumenical movement that led to a partial return to orthodoxy. The term *fundamental* can be explained by using an automobile as an analogy. The motor is fundamental to its operation, whereas the mirrors are important, yet not essential. One can drive home without mirrors, but not without a motor. Although the modern media has applied the term *fundamentalist* to anything considered radically extreme in Christianity, the original usage meant that there are five doctrines which are fundamental to being considered a part of true Christianity: (1) the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures; (2) the virgin birth and deity of Christ; (3) the substitutionary nature of His atoning death; (4) His bodily resurrection; and (5) His literal, physical return to establish His kingdom on earth.

Contrary to contemporary media perceptions, not only are these five affirmations not radical or extreme, they predate fundamentalism beyond the beginning of Roman Catholicism and remained principles of orthodoxy throughout the establishment of all mainline Protestant denominations. It was a semantic maneuver for the academic community to classify those who believed these five affirmations as *fringe* while portraying the denial of these affirmations as *mainstream*.

The difficulty in understanding fundamentalism as a movement is in the fact that a large variety of gospel traditions can fit within the framework of the five affirmations. Although the five fundamentals affirm the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures, they do not affirm the sole authority of the Bible. Therefore, just as Catholicism affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture and proclaimed *tradition* to be of equal authority, so also many fundamentalists could affirm inerrancy while proclaiming experience and the *inner voice of God* to be equally reliable. This would leave room for heterodox, extra-biblical concepts to be proclaimed as the inerrant mind of God. Also, just as Roman Catholicism

has always affirmed the substitutionary nature of Christ's atoning death while insisting that works, penance and other sacraments are essential to salvation, so also a fundamentalist can subscribe to the substitutionary atonement of Christ while front-loading or back-loading Christ's finished work with sacraments and/or personal righteousness. The common denominator in Fundamentalism was more *anti-modernism* than a precise understanding of God's terms for granting eternal life.

Although many within *fundamentalism* have held to a pure grace view of the gospel, a precise definition of the gospel was not listed as one of the fundamentals. This is why we have called *fundamentalism* a semi-ecumenical movement. To illustrate this weakness let us use a NT illustration. The gospel of circumcision was prompt to profess belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ; otherwise, its advocates could never have participated in or have had a voice at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). And yet the gospel of circumcision is called *soul perverting* (Acts 15:24) and *another gospel* which is *accursed* (Gal. 1:6-9), of which the advocates thereunto (*who subvert whole households*) must have their *mouths stopped* by the truth (Titus 1:9-11).

They of the Circumcision were not denying any of the five *fundamentals*. Their error was that they added personal righteousness and ritual to the gospel apart from which they said no soul could be saved (Acts 15:1, 5). The writer of *Hebrews* saw the distinction between believing in the atoning death of Christ as a portion of the price of salvation in contrast to faith in Christ's finished work on the cross as the total price, saying: *looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...* (Heb. 12:2). Thus, Paul could proclaim that if the righteousness that saves the soul is personal, rather than the imputed righteousness of Christ, then the death of Christ was nothing more than an act of suicide, saying: *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain* (Gal. 2:21).

So, *fundamentalism* was a broad, separatist, anti-modernist coalition which began to fragment again into two variant directions in the 1940s. One major group softened its position in order to retain contact with mainline denominations, and thus made sacramentalism and works salvation *nonessential* issues in the mass evangelism of the world. At first they called themselves *neo-evangelicals*, but from the 1950s they were known simply as *evangelicals*. Some within this category would preach a pure grace only view of the gospel apart from ritual or human righteousness. However, their broader testimony was that the gospel of sacraments and personal righteousness was a saving plan of salvation as well. Liberals often refer to them as the *inclusivist wing* of ex-fundamentalists.

Other groups separated in the opposite direction on the basis of legalistic standards of personal holiness. These standards often became annexed to the definition of what a *true fundamentalist* really is.

Still others separated on the basis of a clear definition of the terms of the NT gospel. These went further than the original five affirmations and believed also that the foremost fundamental of the faith should be a clear affirmation of a gospel of grace totally distinct from sacraments and personal righteousness. It was not, as they were almost universally accused, that ordinances and personal holiness were insignificant, it is just that they were not an integral part of the saving gospel of Christ. In the early part of the twentieth century when a number of great conservative scholars published a set of tracts entitled *THE FUNDAMENTALS*, most of the contributors would have insisted that

baptism is not a part of the gospel or a *means/channel* of saving grace. Rev. George W. Lasher, D.D., LL.D., of Cincinnati, delivered the paper on *Regeneration—Conversion—Reformation*. Herein he described how many stumble over John 3:5 in that—
 they accept the doctrine of regeneration, but couple it with an external act without which, in their view, the regeneration is not and cannot be completed. In their rituals they distinctly declare that water baptism is essential to and is productive of the regeneration which Jesus declares

must be from heaven. They stumble over, or pervert the words used, and make “born of water” to be baptism, of which nothing is said in the verse in the chapter, and which the whole tenor of Scripture denied.¹⁶¹

Lasher referred to the Apostle Paul as the best interpreter of Jesus in the N.T. and noted that: *never once, in all his discussions of the way of salvation, does Paul intimate that the new creation is effected by a ritual observance. He always and everywhere regarded and treated it as a spiritual experience wrought by the Spirit of God.*¹⁶²

Today, the terms *fundamentalist* and *evangelical* are painted with such a broad spectrum of descriptions that they almost defy definition. This is why we must affirm the Bible itself to be the final arbiter in any debate regarding the clarity of the Gospel.

Throughout this entire overview, the Scriptural passage that emerges most often in defense of *baptismal regeneration* is John 3:5—*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Baptismal regenerationists insist that the water in this verse means *born of baptism*, apart from which no one will enter the kingdom of God.

The first question that must be considered before interpreting this verse is: *Does the phrase born of water appear anywhere else in the New Testament?* The answer is unmistakably in the negative. This makes our job slightly more difficult.

Can we take any reference to *water* in the NT and authoritatively use it to teach baptism? The swine that perished in the waters of the sea did not perish in baptism

¹⁶¹ *The Fundamentals For Today*, Charles L. Feinberg, Editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1964), pp. 396, 397. Rev. Lasher wrote: “The lexicographers, the grammarians and evangelical theologians are all pronounced against the interpretation put upon the words of Jesus when he said: ‘Except a man [any one] be born of water *kai* spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ The lexicographers tell us that the conjunction *kai* (Greek) may have an exegetical meaning and may be (as it frequently is) used to amplify what has gone before; that it may have the sense of ‘even,’ or ‘namely.’ And thus they justify the reading: ‘Except a man be born of water, even [or namely] spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ The grammarians tell us the same thing, and innumerable instances of such usage can be cited from both classic and New Testament Greek. The theologians are explicit in their denial that regeneration can be effected by baptism. They hold to a purely spiritual experience, either before baptism, or after it, and deny that the spiritual birth is effected by the water, no matter how applied. And yet some who take this position in discussions of the ‘new birth’ fall away to the ritualistic idea when they come to treat of baptism, its significance and place in the Christian system.”

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, *The Fundamentals For Today*, pp. 397, 398.