

Baptism, the Next Generation

Baptism According to the Second-Century Christians

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All of the extra-biblical evidence, from the time of the Apostles until the close of the second century, is consistent with our findings from Scripture. The early Christians unanimously understood water baptism as the point in time when the remission of sins and regeneration takes place. The following quotations are from second century writers. The authors represented here lived contiguous to the time of the Apostles. The first was a personal disciple of John the Apostle.

Ignatius:

*"Wherefore also, ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, in order that, by believing in His death, **ye may by baptism be made partakers of His resurrection.**"¹*

*"For if there is one God of the universe, the Father of Christ, 'of whom are all things;' and one Lord Jesus Christ, our [Lord], 'by whom are all things;' and also one Holy Spirit, who wrought in Moses, and in the prophets and apostles; and also **one baptism, which is administered that we should have fellowship with the death of the Lord;** and also one elect Church; there ought likewise to be but one faith in respect to Christ. For 'there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is through all, and in all.'"²*

Barnabas:

*"Let us further inquire whether the Lord took any care to foreshadow the water [of baptism] and the cross. Concerning the water, indeed, it is written, in reference to the Israelites, that they should not receive **that baptism which leads to the remission of sins,** but should procure another for themselves. The prophet therefore declares, 'Be astonished, O heaven, and let the earth tremble at this, because this people hath committed two great evils: they have forsaken Me, a living fountain, and have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns.'"³*

¹ Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians, II

² Ignatius, Epistle to the Philippians, I

³ Epistle of Barnabas, XI

Justin Martyr:

*“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 into the kingdom of heaven.’ Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers’ wombs, is manifest to all. ... And for this [baptism] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and **may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed,** ...”⁴*

*“And this food is called among us ‘eucharist,’ of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and **who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins and unto regeneration,** and who is so living as Christ has enjoined.”⁵*

Irenaeus:

*“It happens that their [the Gnostics] tradition respecting redemption is invisible and incomprehensible, as being the mother of things which are incomprehensible and invisible; and on this account, since it is fluctuating, it is impossible simply and all at once to make known its nature, for every one of them hands it down just as his own inclination prompts. Thus there are as many schemes of ‘redemption’ as there are teachers of these mystical opinions. 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.”⁶*

“‘And [Naaman] dipped himself,’ says [the Scripture], ‘seven times in Jordan.’ It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his

⁴ Justin, First Apology, LXI

⁵ Justin, First Apology, LXVI

⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. I, ch xxi

*being baptized, but [it served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"*⁷

These are only a small sampling of the earliest quotes. We could produce many more from later writers. What is apparent in any survey of the early Church's view of baptism is its unanimous opinion. No writer suggested that baptism takes place after the remission of sins or the new birth. Baptism was universally considered to be the point where the remission of sins is given and regeneration occurs.

⁷ Irenaeus, Frag. XXXIV