

Academy: The Ordinances pt. 8 notes

History of Baptism (A Brief Survey)

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History of Baptism

1. Acts

a. Apostles baptized believers

i. Acts 2

- ii. “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for **you** and for **your children** and for **all who are far off**, **everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.**” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

2. Early church records

a. Didache (49-150 AD)

i. Earliest practical teachings of the church

1. “And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19 in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you can not in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before.”

b. Apostolic traditions (~215 AD)

i. “When they are chosen who are to receive baptism, **let their lives be examined...**

- ii. “... **The children shall be baptized first. All of the children who can answer for themselves, let them answer. If there are any children who cannot answer for themselves, let their parents answer for them, or someone else from their family.**

iii. ...**asking, "Do you believe** in God the Father Almighty?"...

c. Mosheim (1850 AD)

i. Comment on the early practice of Baptism

1. “The Sacrament of baptism was administered publicly twice every year, at the festivals of Easter and Pentecost, or Whitsuntide, either by the bishop or presbyters, in consequence of his authorization and appointment. The persons that were to be baptized, after they had repeated the creed, confessed and renounced their sins, and particularly the devil, and his pompous allurements, were immersed underwater, and received into Christ’s kingdom, by a solemn invocation of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, according to the express command of our blessed Lord...Adult persons were prepared for baptism by abstinence, prayer, and other pious exercises. It was to answer for them, that sponsors or godparents were first instituted, though they were afterward admitted in the baptism of infants.” ~ Institutes of Ecclesiastical history: Dr. John Mosheim 1850

d. Justin Martyr (150 AD)

- i. Early-stage of baptismal regeneration, but faith precedes baptism
 1. “And for this [rite] 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, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone.” ~ First Apology

e. Irenaeus (189 AD)

- i. Argues for the recapitulation theory
 1. ““He [Jesus] came to save all through himself; all, I say, who through him are reborn in God: infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age” (Against Heresies 2:22:4 [A.D. 189]).

f. Tertullian (204 AD)

- i. Strongly denied Infant Baptism
 1. “And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary — if (baptism itself) is not so necessary — that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both

themselves, by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfill their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, in those for whom they stood? The Lord does indeed say, Forbid them not to come unto me. Let them come, then, while they are growing up; let them come while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the remission of sins? More caution will be exercised in worldly matters: so that one who is not trusted with earthly substance is trusted with the divine! Let them know how to ask for salvation, that you may seem (at least) to have given to him that asks." Chapter 18, "On Baptism"

- ii. Reasserts the faith of the recipient necessary.
 - 1. "If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay: sound faith is secure of salvation."
- g. Origen (248 AD)
 - i. Baptismal Regeneration
 - 1. "Every soul that is born into flesh is soiled by the filth of wickedness and sin. . . . In the Church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous" (Homilies on Leviticus 8:3 [A.D. 248]).
- h. Cyprian (253 AD)
 - i. An argument for Infant Baptism
 - 1. "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 anyone born of man. For as the Lord says in His Gospel, The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them, Luke 4:56 as far as we Can, We must strive that, if possible, no soul be lost." ~ 58 Epistle
 - ii. Baptismal Regeneration
 - 1. "But again, if even to the greatest sinners, and to those who had sinned much against God, when they subsequently believed, remission of sins is granted — and nobody is hindered from baptism and from grace— how much rather ought we to shrink from hindering an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam, he

has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth, who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins— that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another.” ~ 58 Epistle

- i. Novatian (251 AD)
 - i. Baptized on “death” bed.
 - ii. Became bishop and rejected for his baptism
- j. Gregory of Nazianzus (388 AD)
 - i. Baptismal Regeneration
 - 1. ““Well enough,’ some will say, ‘for those who ask for baptism, but what do you have to say about those who are still children, and aware neither of loss nor of grace? Shall we baptize them too?’ Certainly [I respond], if there is any pressing danger. Better that they be sanctified unaware, than that they depart unsealed and uninitiated” (Oration on Holy Baptism 40:28 [A.D. 388])
- k. Augustine (412 AD)
 - i. Baptismal Regeneration
 - 1. “By this grace baptized infants too are ingrafted into his [Christ’s] body, infants who certainly are not yet able to imitate anyone. Christ, in whom all are made alive . . . gives also the most hidden grace of his Spirit to believers, grace which he secretly infuses even into infants. . . . It is an excellent thing that the Punic [North African] Christians call baptism salvation and the sacrament of Christ’s Body nothing else than life. Whence does this derive, except from an ancient and, as I suppose, apostolic tradition, by which the churches of Christ hold inherently that without baptism and participation at the table of the Lord it is impossible for any man to attain either to the kingdom of God or to salvation and life eternal? This is the witness of Scripture, too. . . . If anyone wonders why children born of the baptized should themselves be baptized, let him attend briefly to this. . . . The sacrament of baptism is most assuredly the sacrament of regeneration” (Forgiveness and the Just Deserts of Sin, and the Baptism of Infants 1:9:10; 1:24:34; 2:27:43 [A.D. 412]).
 - ii. Augustine himself rejected Baptism until he truly believed the gospel.
- l. Waldenses (1120 AD)
 - i. Credo Baptist in their early days
 - 1. "The third work of Anti-christ consists in this, that he attributes the regeneration of the Holy Spirit unto the dead outward work, baptizing children in that faith, and teaching that thereby baptism and regeneration must be had, and therein he confers and bestows orders and other sacraments, and groundeth therein all his Christianity, which is against the Holy Spirit" [Perrin, p. 245].

3. Reformers

- a. Martin Luther
 - i. Baptismal Regeneration (remix)
 - 1. “Although you only receive the sacrament of baptism once, you are continually baptized anew by faith, always dying and yet ever living. When you were baptized, your whole body was submerged and then came forth again out of the water. Similarly, the essence of the rite was that grace permeated your whole life, in both body and soul; and that it will bring you forth, at the last day, clothed in the white robe of immortality. It follows that we never lose the sign of baptism nor its force; indeed we are continually being rebaptized until we attain to the completion of the sign at the last day.”
 - b. Calvin
 - i. No regeneration in Baptism, but was a sign of the covenant of grace
 - 1. “When we cannot receive them from the church, the grace of God is not so inseparably annexed to them that we cannot obtain it by faith, according to his word.”
 - 2. “We have, therefore, a spiritual promise given to the fathers in circumcision, similar to that which is given to us in baptism, since it figured to them both the forgiveness of sins and the mortification of the flesh. Besides, as we have shown that Christ, in whom both of these reside, is the foundation of baptism, so must he also be the foundation of circumcision. For he promised to Abraham, and in him, all nations are blessed.”
 - c. Anabaptist beginnings
 - i. First Anabaptist baptism (Jan 21, 1525)
 - ii. Events at Munster (1534-1535 AD)
4. General Baptists
- a. John Smyth (1607 AD)
 - i. Baptized himself
5. Particular Baptists
- a. Henry Jacob (1616 AD)
 - i. A sympathizer with congregations in the church of England
 - ii. A Calvinistic Separatist who fled persecution to Virginia in 1622
 - b. John Lathrop (1622 AD)
 - i. Jacob’s successor. Of the same convictions as Jacob
 - ii. Samuel Eton led a split of the congregation to become more “separatist”
 - iii. Flees persecution from William Laud in 1637
 - c. Henry Jesse (1637 AD)
 - d. John Spilsbury (1670 AD)
 - i. The very first documented Particular Baptist congregation may have come out of the JLJ church
6. Covenant theology guided their baptism
- a. Benjamin Keach

- i. “1. It was first decreed in past eternity, 2. It was secondly revealed to man after the Fall of Adam and Eve, 3. It was executed and confirmed by Christ in his death and resurrection, 4. It becomes effective for its members when they are joined to Christ through faith.”
 - ii. “Those who were saved before Christ were saved because of an oath; those who were saved after Him were saved because of a covenant.”
 - b. John Owen
 - i. “Indeed this is the excellence of this covenant, and so it is here declared, that it does effectually communicate all the grace and mercy contained in it to all and everyone with whom it is made; with whomsoever, it is made, his sins are pardoned.”
 - c. Nehemiah Coxe
 - i. Saw the Covenant of Grace as the New Covenant.
 - 1. “The sum of all gospel blessings is comprised in this promise [God’s promise to Abraham]. Therefore it will follow that the proper heirs of this blessing of Abraham have a right (not only in some, but) in all the promises of the New Covenant...Therefore, I conceive the limiting of a New Covenant interest to the grant of an external and temporary privilege only, to be utterly inconsistent with the promises of the covenant itself. Neither will these texts admit of another notion lately insisted on for the commendation of paedobaptism.”
 - d. Edward Hutchinson