

Believer's Baptism Discussion Presentation
Historical Baptist Position

By

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I am always thankful for opportunities to engage in healthy and robust discussion with believers from other denominations and walks within the Christian tradition. Having been raised in Maryland, the first Catholic colony, many of my dearest friends were themselves raised Roman Catholic or part of another liturgical faith and were baptized as infants. As a result I have much appreciation for the rich faith that is maintained in these other denominations of Christianity. For those of us who identify with the historical Baptist theological position, like myself, there is an abiding desire to confront the text of the Bible and apply it throughout our conversations about theology and matters of faith. As a result, my argumentation approaches the Bible as the sourcebook for all theology and leverages it as the primary set of documents whereby we are informed about all things in matters of faith and practice. While my own high view of Scripture is not always shared by others, it is, ultimately, the starting point for the conversations I enter into with others. My own perspective below is shared in a spirit of fellowship and encouragement. My points are never personal and my argumentation is, prayerfully, taken encouragingly. We, Christians, are stronger because of healthy and robust discussions about our shared theological values. May our next few moments together be encouraging and challenging as we talk about this important topic. However, even if we do disagree may we also remain faithfully fellowshiped together in the bond of Christ that reaches beyond theological positions and unifies us all regardless of position or conclusion.

In arguing for the Baptist view of baptism, I shall attempt to pose four positive arguments to make this case. These four arguments are:

1. The biblical case for baptism is of believers, by immersion, following their conversion.
2. The theological case for baptism only leads to baptism of believers, by immersion, following their conversion.
3. The historical case for baptism shows that the earliest Christians only utilized baptism for believers, by immersion, following their conversion.
4. The archeological case for baptism shows that for the earliest Christians their worship venues and structures provided for baptism of believers, by immersion, following their conversion.

In arguing for these points, I will also note where some pedo-baptism proponents argue differently. As a Baptist theologian, who stands firmly in the historical tradition of my

theological belief, my ultimate argument (which will be obvious from the above points) is that there is no need for pedo-baptism and that a proper New Testament view of baptism leads us to conclude that it is to be practiced for believers, following their conversion to Christianity, and done by immersion in water. Central to my beliefs about baptism, which will be worked out in a point below, is that baptism, along with Lord's Supper (or Communion, or the Table, etc) is an ordinance of all New Testament churches and is viewed non-sacramentally. So, in proceeding let us take up the first point:

1. The biblical case for baptism is of believers, by immersion, following their conversion.

The New Testament is where we see the first instances of baptism arise in the Bible. The first individual associated with baptism is John the Baptist. As noted in all four Gospels (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:4-8; Luke 3:1-17; John 1:19-28) John the Baptist, or Baptizer, was the forerunner of Jesus who brought with him a two-fold ministry: the call to repentance and baptism following that repentance. John's baptism was one of Jewish proselyte baptism associated with Qumran and the Essene communities located there. This baptism was in the same mode as Old Testament ritual cleansing, though with a different purpose. Old Testament cleansing required a full bath (cf. Leviticus 14:5f, 50ff; 15:13; Numbers 19:17; and Deuteronomy 21:4.) In the later appropriation of this practice, the immersion practice remained central to the mode and manner of the outward cleansing that represented the inward cleansing. For Gentiles who were converting to Judaism, three ritualistic practices were required to finalize this conversion: circumcision, a sacrifice, and immersion baptism.¹ As this method is appropriated by John, the ceremonial cleansing is modified as a sign of repentance for sins. Though John was not likely a member of Qumran, his baptismal theology does appear to be influenced by them.²

It was this model of baptism that Jesus upheld when he went to John at the outset of his own ministry and was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11.) This baptism is described as one of immersion. As Jesus went down into the water reflects that he was immersed into water

¹ Joachim Jermias, "Der Ursprung Der Johannestaufe," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 28, no. 1 (1929). 314-315

² John A.T. Robinson, "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community," *Harvard Theological Review* 50, no. 3 (1957). 180

fully and when he came up from that immersion the Spirit descended like a dove and God spoke his blessing. John's baptism of Jesus bears the marks of immersion baptism as John was already "in" the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13; Mark 1:9.) As Jesus identified with the rest of humanity through his specific baptism, those who are believers should follow the mode and manner of his baptism.

Other New Testament texts also speak about the nature of baptism in the earliest days of the Church. Though there is limited notation of baptism in the ministry of Jesus, it is pointed out that part of the work he and his disciples were doing was baptizing those who became his early followers (John 3:22.) Outside of the Gospels, the primary focus of New Testament references to baptism are located in the historical accounts of Acts. Specifically here, we see that the method laid out is individual belief followed by baptism. This method does not deviate through the whole book of Acts. In each of the instances of an individual, and also their household, believes and is then taken to be baptized. Across Acts this occurs eight times, with those believing at Pentecost being individually baptized as noted in Acts 2:41. In Peter's sermon on Pentecost he makes clear this method as he proclaims: "Repent and be baptized" (2:38) which is followed by those present who hear his proclamation of the Gospel and then are baptized (2:41.) Other examples in Acts show this similar process Simon the Magician (8:13), the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40), Paul's conversion (9:18f), Lydia (16:14f), the Philippian Jailer and his family (16:31ff), Crispus and his household (18:8), and Apollos (19:7.) On just this simple survey of baptismal examples from the New Testament the only examples given are baptism following belief, by immersion.

In those two places where Peter is preaching before an audience, he declares this process that they must believe and then be baptized (2:41; 10:44-48.) There are no places in the book of Acts, or in the New Testament, where this process is not reciprocated. Even in the instances where the Apostles may have encountered someone who had a small child or an infant, there is no mention of them being baptized or sprinkled prior to belief. All of the New Testament examples only demonstrate one type of baptism, that is by immersion, following belief. It also becomes a point of interest that where baptism is spoken of as having been performed by an Apostle, the names used are individuals, with a corresponding reference in Acts, that believed and then were baptized (cf 1 Corinthians 1:14f.)

After establishing the pattern of baptism, we also see that the very term of baptism

implies that it is done so by full immersion into water. Corresponding language used in the New Testament demonstrates that the idea here is not one of sprinkling or even affusing, but of immersion. As BDAG lists the interpretive options, the corresponding definitions to the instances listed above fall under the idea of "plunging, dipping,"³ This corresponds to Jesus use of the term *εμβαπτω* in Mark 14:20 (cf. Matthew 26:23) for the one who "dips" their hand in the bowl with him would be his betrayer. In considering the New Testament usage of the term, *βαπτίζω*, one would need to show examples where this idea of full immersion is not used in both the baptism texts and corresponding language. Had any of the writers desired to use a term that reflected sprinkling they could have easily shifted to use *ραντισμος* which means "sprinkling." (cf. Hebrews 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2.) Yet, they consistently chose to use *βαπτίζω* to express the mode and manner of baptism that was given by Jesus to his followers. We see this in our language today; a "baptism by fire" is not a sprinkling of trials or hardships but a full immersion into a difficult way or journey.

Finally, the idea of baptism, as accorded by Paul in Romans 6:3f, is that it is done to identify us with Christ in the symbolism of his death, burial, and resurrection.⁴ The ordinances have been given to us by Jesus to be an ongoing reminder of his Gospel message (the death, burial, and resurrection) and are symbols to attach with these acts. Baptism provides for believers to not only identify with Jesus' own baptism, but also to remember his death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus was not sprinkled into death but was fully immersed in death on the Cross. This is why Paul reminds us in Colossians 2:12 that we are buried with Christ in the manner of baptism. As 1 Peter 3:20ff notes, baptism is a sign of the covenant with God, having been exemplified in Noah's trial through water, that reflects the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ.⁵ So the symbolic aspect of baptism is not just in our identification with Jesus' own method, but our constant reminder of his sacrifice.

³ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). entry *βαπτίζω*

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994). 968 Grudem's discussion concerning baptism is especially helpful at this, the symbolic point.

⁵ Certainly a more nuanced discussion of the implications of 1 Peter 3:21 will be had below.

In summary, there is no place in the New Testament where one is given an example of baptism prior to belief or of a manner other than immersion into water as to dip or immerse fully. As a result the biblical case for baptism, provides a thorough picture of believer's baptism.

2. The theological case for baptism only leads to baptism of believers, by immersion, following their conversion.

After having established the biblical case for believer's baptism by immersion, we turn to the important theological case. As a Baptist, I believe that Jesus gave two ordinances, or practices, to the Church whereby we might remember his death, burial, and resurrection. These ordinances are symbolic and do not add to one's salvation beyond the edifying effect of sanctification. In communion, the bread and juice do not literally become the body and blood of Jesus. A simple scientific study will show us that, even after the elements have been blessed by an ordained minister, they remain, physically, bread and juice. As a result, we end up arriving at a position that the elements, while certainly important, are part of a larger symbolism that Jesus is giving to the Church.

In this same way, baptism is an act which is the public testimony of a private event. That is, baptism stands as the way a converted individual demonstrates, outwardly, the conversion that has taken place within them. As Paul notes in Galatians 3:27, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Paul considers baptism to be a natural next step for someone who has made an inward belief concerning Christ. For Paul, salvation is something that is complete, and finalized at the point of belief. As he notes in Romans 10:9f, justification happens upon belief. For a Baptist, one's salvation is not enhanced or added by baptism. Baptism is, in the pattern of the New Testament, the act of obedience for believers who have already made a decision to follow Christ. In being baptized, one is not granted more salvation, but is simply being obedient to the command of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20.) Just as communion is a symbolic remembrance of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 26:26ff,) so too baptism is an outwardly symbolic act of a believer who has been sealed in their justification through prior belief.

Of course one of the challenges to a Baptist view of baptism on theological grounds is that baptism is part of salvation. However, this often confuses the inward baptism of the Spirit with the outward baptism of the believer. It also moves the understanding of salvation from a

mongeristic view to a synergistic view. As we have already noted in 1 Peter 3:21, there is a statement which has caused confusion about the meaning of baptism. Read out of the larger context, the statement "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you..." This has been the bulwark to defend the baptismal regeneration position of some denominations. However, when read in the larger context, that of 1 Peter 3:18-22, it becomes clear that Peter is not stating that baptism, that is the immersion of an individual, is what saves us, nor is baptism part of salvation in some kind of finalizing act or sealing function. Instead, and Peter makes this point with his parenthetical comment in vs. 21, "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God" to mean that this does not concern water baptism, but it is the demonstration of the Spirit baptism that has occurred inwardly. This is affirmed by Paul in Titus 3:5, where the washing taking place is done by the Spirit. In story of Cornelius' baptism in Acts 10:44-48, Luke points out that the Spirit is given before baptism, but subsequent nor alongside baptism.

So theologically we see that baptism is not something that has any soteriological function in the life of the believer, but is the act of a believer in obedience to God's command, that reflects the inward washing which has taken place inside. A second step is noting that in the scope of salvation, there is no additional act beyond faith which is needed to justify an individual (Romans 8:30; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8.) As a result, once one is justified by faith in Jesus Christ they are secured in their salvation which is not able to be lost (John 6:37; Romans 8:1-8; 11:29; 2 Corinthians 1:22.) Baptism is not part of this justification, for justification is brought about by the imputation of Christ's righteousness into our own life. Sanctification comes after justification and is the development of holiness in the life of the believer (Romans 6:17-18; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Titus 3:5.) Baptism only impacts sanctification in terms of how the believer relates to God's progressive work of holiness and if they have not yet been baptized they might well be hindered in their sanctification. Yet, this does not impact how a believer stands in their justification before God. Justification is a punctiliar act that, once accomplished, seals the believer in salvation with God through the redemption of Jesus Christ.

All of this relates to baptism insofar as it reminds us that baptism is not salvific. Baptism, for all its importance, does not add to, nor does it maintain, one's salvation. Theologically, once one has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved, their next step, and first step of obedience, is to be baptized. Baptism is an important part of one's spiritual growth following

salvation. Why it would be given to those who have no cognitive ability to believe, such as infants, is beyond a comprehensive New Testament theology. Baptism does well to fellowship the believer with all other believers in the Church (Ephesians 4:5) while also identifying us with the mode and manner that Jesus took on himself at the outset of his own ministry. Theologically, baptism is an important act for the believer and no instances are given in the New Testament to show that someone should be baptized prior to salvation. Though baptism corresponds to circumcision symbolically (Colossians 2:11f) it rests in the new covenant alongside the principal act of faithfulness, that is belief in Jesus Christ.

Another theological point which should to be developed concerns the integration of the model of circumcision from the Old Testament with baptism. Though this line of argumentation does not arise until several centuries after the resurrection of Christ, it is an important one to address. Given that, as a Baptist, we hold that baptism is chiefly a symbolic act, it is not efficacious to provide any imputation of grace. For those seek to advance a pedo-baptist position, they often link the New Testament form of baptism with circumcision from the Old Testament. Since regular New Testament texts that are used to support infant baptism fail to adequately demonstrate that infant baptism is ever portrayed in the New Testament, a normal second course of argumentation is to tie baptism as the initiatory rite of circumcision. This line generally begins by Paul's comment in Colossians 2:11-12, leverages Romans 6:1-11, and then casts back to Genesis 17:10-14 and Deuteronomy 29:10-13. One of the first challenges here is that the covenants of Israel are neither efficacious nor binding for the Church. When Jesus incarnated in flesh on earth his mission was not to set up the new Israel but the *true* Israel. The Church is the *true* Israel and stands in unique covenantal basis with God through the inauguration of the New Covenant at the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf Hebrews 8:6-13.) As a result, circumcision is not binding for Christians nor is the sign of circumcision the same. This means there is a new covenantal stance that means circumcision has been put away (Acts 15:1f; 21:21; Galatians 2:3ff; 5:2-6; 6:12-15.) George Beasley-Murray has commented that there is no indication that baptism is still linked to covenantal circumcision. In his words, "A lesser circumcision has been replaced by a greater; the spiritual circumcision promised under the old covenant has become a reality under the new through baptism."⁶ Colossians 2:11f does not

⁶ George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1962). 315

link baptism and circumcision in a continuation of the covenant. Instead, when properly interpreted, this passage speaks of the fulfillment of circumcision in the New Covenant. This is more obvious given Paul's subsequent discussion in 2:13 about uncircumcision.

One final point is that while circumcision existed as a sign of ethnic identity for those in Israel, the covenants were not initiated through circumcision but through the faithfulness of individuals within corporate Israel. Just because one was born an Israelite, did not mean they were granted salvation in the Old Testament covenantal system. There were still practices of faithfulness which needed to be accomplished in order for the covenants to be efficacious for the individual (Genesis 17:14; Exodus 19:3-5; Leviticus 26:14-18; Deuteronomy 17:2-7.) In the Old Testament there were some who were born Israelites but ended up being cut off from the covenant because of their unfaithfulness (Esau, Genesis 27:38ff; sons of Korah, Numbers 16:31-35; etc.) The covenants are not given to the Israelites simply through circumcision, but, principally, through faithfulness. As this applies to baptism, we see how the difference between baptism and circumcision exists. They are not the same. Baptism follows belief and is not a precursor to belief. Circumcision is a precursor to faithfulness. The two are unique acts.

Some sacramentalists will object that baptism is not itself salvific, but a means of according grace and maintaining one's connection with the Church. The sacraments function by means of communicating grace through an outward sign which, though they are not initially salvific, do maintain that grace in the life of the faithful believer. Baptism is both an initiatory rite and an accordance of grace from the Church for believers. For infants who are baptized, confirmation once they reach an appropriate age is an important step to begin taking the Eucharist, or Communion. Ultimately, however, in approaching the practices of baptism and communion as ordinances and not sacraments, we take up the proper view of them as given by Christ to his Church. They are symbols of God's faithfulness through his Son's sacrifice and his resurrection as they remind us of our eventual resurrection.

3. The historical case for baptism shows that the earliest Christians only utilized baptism for believers, by immersion, following their conversion.

In continuing in our discussion of baptism, we then move to consider how it was used in the earliest believers and Christian communities. If other modes of baptism were recognized within early Christianity they should be present in these earliest communities, prior to the

Constantinization of Christianity, and would be informative for our discussion. However, in recapturing the essential practice and forms of the earliest Christian communities, one is able to see how the faith was originally delivered and understood in its closest proximity to the biblical times. In considering the patterns of the earliest Christian communities, the understanding and method of baptism accords with the New Testament example of being for believers following conversion by immersion in water.

From the *Didache*,⁷ a document dating to the later quarter of the first century, the preferred mode of baptism is done in a river, or "living" water, followed by other water. Distinguishing between the two forms, the preferred method is to baptize in a river, or stream, in accordance with the manner and mode which Jesus was baptized by John, and if that is not possible to baptize in a useful receptacle that permits the same mode, that is baptism by immersion. It would have been odd for the early communities utilizing the *Didache* to see baptism explicitly qualified as immersion, since the word "baptize" itself connotes immersion. The nature of water is preferred to be cold, but warm water is acceptable. Central to the baptismal practice here, outside of the mode, is the utilization of the Trinitarian formula. Arising in such a prominent place in an early document of Christian communities, this formula is important to many functions in the early churches and demonstrates that early Trinitarianism flourished in these communities, even if underdeveloped. As the text goes on to demonstrate, if these preferred methods are not available and immersion is not possible, effusion is the next possible solution.⁸ However, it is notable that the words used here do not indicate this is sprinkling. Also, the individual being baptized is understood to be someone who has already become a believer, thus having the ability to believe, and is able to fast and prepare for their baptism.⁹ Since the earlier exhortation concerning those in the household does not include infants (4:1-20) it is unlikely that infants were included in these baptismal ceremonies.

Other documents from this period also give indications that the earliest Christian communities continued to practice believer's baptism by immersion. In Ignatius' epistles there is

⁷ See specific *Didache* 7:1-7

⁸ *Didache* 7:5

⁹ For a more detailed discussion see Aaron Milavec, *The Didache : Faith, Hope, & Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50-70 C.E* (New York: Newman Press, 2003). 229-286

a requirement that baptism, and Eucharist, be administered by the bishop.¹⁰ The pseudonymous *Epistle of Barnabas* deals with baptism in its eleventh chapter, ascribing it to the Old Testament symbolism of Israel. Most helpful to our situation is that *Barnabas* notes how baptism is to practiced by going down in the water (11:11) and is administered after belief (11:8, 11.) Following this, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, presents the model of baptism as following belief and in the same mode as Jesus Christ, that is through immersion.¹¹ Finally, in 2 Clement, depending on one's dating, there is a mention of baptism as being essential to the purity of the believer (6.9.) This accords to the statement in 7.6 and 8.6 that it is a "seal" on the life of the believer. This seal corresponds act of water being the sign of acceptance of one's commission at baptism and participation in fellowship of the church (14.3f.) In the Apostolic Fathers, the texts described above show that baptism was still considered to be in the manner and mode of the New Testament. With the primary document, *The Didache*, being a manual on church order it should be important to note that the earliest Christian communities were upholding this form of baptism through the transition of the centuries.

Beyond the Apostolic Fathers, there continues to be a recognition of this basic form of believer's baptism in other documents of the early church. In Justin Martyr's *Apology I* there is a description of baptismal practice that takes up an sixty-first chapter of his discourse. Justin notes that it is done so in accordance to the teaching of the Apostles and is done for those who have become believers (61.2.) It done in immersion and with the Trinitarian formula (61.11.) As he later notes, 65.1, baptism is required for entrance into the other ordinance of the church, that is communion, and is performed only on one who wishes to be fellowshipped with that local community of believers. In *Dialogues with Trypho*, Justin also makes the public testimony of baptism analogous to spiritual circumcision in 43.2 and similar to Christ's own baptism in death 86.6.

Other works¹² continue to show the early church form of baptism including Melito of

¹⁰ *To the Smyrnaeans* 8.2

¹¹ Specifically here *Visions* 3.3.3, 5; 3.5.4. 3.6.1, 5; *Similitudes* 8.6.2; 9.12.4 This is not without difficulty though as *The Shepherd* appears to conflate baptism with the remission of sins. However, for our purposes, the point that baptism is done by immersion for believers is what should remain central.

¹² One could also utilize discussions in pseudepigraphal works as well as Gnostic and heterodox Christian texts to also support the conclusions of the historical form and mode of

Sardis *On Baptism*¹³ and the Pseudo-Clementines.¹⁴ Irenaeus bolsters this case throughout his works in first noting the basic Trinitarian formula that accompanies the early baptismal ceremonies.¹⁵ For Irenaeus, baptism is a dual work of water and the Spirit where the water demonstrates the physical cleansing of the Spirit's inner work.¹⁶ Though he does not see circumcision as analogous to baptism, there is a function of the spiritual circumcision by the work of the Holy Spirit that precedes baptism for Irenaeus.¹⁷ Irenaeus appears to carry through that the mode and manner of baptism in his day, and in his theology, continues to be the Trinitarian believer's baptism by immersion. However, there is a note in *Against Heresies* 2.22.4 that indicates Irenaeus was aware of infant baptism in his day. In assessing this passage, we are wise to note Ferguson's reticence that this is referring to a baptism formula.¹⁸ Since Irenaeus elsewhere posits that infants are unable to receive the Holy Spirit¹⁹ it might be unlikely that he accepts or recognizes infant baptism in this previous passage. Finally, in this period, Clement of Alexandria provides some information about the views and descriptions of baptism ceremonies in the late second century. In *Miscellanies* 4.22, Clement notes that baptism is for those who are of genuine faith and willing to repent. When Clement quotes from *The Shepherd of Hermas* in *Miscellanies* 2.9, the focus is how the apostles preached faithfully and baptized many who were repenting of their sins. Again, the emphasis is on baptism that comes following repentance.

By the end of the second century we see that there is still a consistent trend in the early church of believers baptism by immersion. Infant baptism is not part of the standard liturgy of the day and it is nearly non-existent in the writings of these early fathers. During the times of Hippolytus and Tertullian, there is a rising sense of a liturgical change to the baptismal

baptism, however, for our purposes it is best to focus on orthodox and accepted church theologians to demonstrate the mode and manner of baptism in this age.

¹³ For a thorough discussion see Robert M Grant, "Melito of Sardis on Baptism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 4, no. 1 (1950). 33-36

¹⁴ Specifically here *Homilies* 7.5; 11.35; 13.4; 17.7; *Recognitions* 3.67-68; 7.32-34

¹⁵ *Against Heresies* 1.10.1 and *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* 3

¹⁶ *Against Heresies* 3.17.2

¹⁷ *ibid* 4.16.1

¹⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church : History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009). 308

¹⁹ *Against Heresies* 4.38.2

ceremony. In Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, there is an explanation of the early third century baptismal liturgy.²⁰ Here the candidate for baptism is given specific instructions about how they should proceed. At the heart of Hippolytus' summation of the baptismal liturgy is that it is for believers and done by immersion.²¹ Hippolytus follows this by noting the practice of laying on of hands for those who have been baptized²² and welcoming the candidates into the fellowship.²³ In another of Hippolytus' works, *On the Holy Theophany*, we see similar formulas used in its second chapter.

From Hippolytus we turn to Tertullian who had an independent work, *On Baptism*, which conveys the context of his views of baptism. Within this treatise, Tertullian helpfully notes how, in his context, many were linking the present practice of baptism with pagan rituals.²⁴ He also demonstrates how much of the developing theology around baptism was approaching Old Testament passages from a widely allegorical nature to draw conclusions from them.²⁵ In developing this treatise, Tertullian does not describe the baptismal ceremonies outright, but he does provide details that coincide with *Apostolic Tradition* formula for baptismal liturgies in this work.²⁶ Other works by Tertullian fill out this picture where he affirms that baptism is for believers and done by immersion.²⁷ Though Tertullian, following the development of some before him, takes a sacramental view of baptism, he does note that the mode and manner are consistent with the New Testament example. In *The Chaplet 3*, Tertullian makes a reference to coming to baptism as "new-born children." The reference here is not speaking of infant baptism, but of the state of spiritual being. Then in *On Baptism 18*, he makes mention of a trend that will

²⁰ *Apostolic Tradition* 20.1-10

²¹ *ibid* 21.1-5

²² *ibid* 21.21

²³ *ibid* 26

²⁴ *On Baptism* 5.1-3

²⁵ For instance the use of creation as the first baptizing of humanity (3.1); Noah's ark symbolized the cleansing of the earth and giving of the Holy Spirit (8.1); Israel's crossing the Red Sea as liberation from bondage (9.1; 20.4) and other allegorical passages.

²⁶ One specific example comes from 4.3 where Tertullian notes the immersive quality of baptism.

²⁷ *The Shows 4*; *The Chaplet 3*; *Against Marcion* 1.28.3; *Against Praxeas* 26 are several specific places where Tertullian works out these points explicitly.

soon encompass these early churches, namely "emergency baptisms." While Tertullian prefers to adults and older children to be baptized at appropriate times²⁸ but conditions might exist by which infants should need to be baptized in order to preserve their souls.

Origen takes note of this trend in *Homilies on Luke* 14.5. In Origen, one begins to see the development of the practice of infant baptism in the early churches. Through his homilies and commentaries on various biblical books, Origen develops how infant baptism came about. Initially concerned with the spiritual state of infants, and young children, during times of persecution and rising pestilence, this practice was essential to ensuring the soul of child. Cyprian adds to this development by growing the theological basis for pedo-baptism.²⁹ Locating the administering function in the office of the bishop, Cyprian noted that infants should be baptized within eight days of birth, symbolic of circumcision.³⁰ One of the consummating episodes that moves the early church closer to acceptance of infant baptism as a more standard practice occurred in AD 252 when a local bishop, Fidus, approached the bishops' college at Carthage about the developing practice of baptizing infants. Fidus was requesting that baptism be held until at least eight days after the birth of an infant. After some deliberation, the college of bishops rejected Fidus' position and allowed for baptism immediately following birth.³¹ While this decision concerning infant baptism did not entirely tie the practice to circumcision, it did begin the move away from believer's baptism to infant baptism in the history of the church. Soon the doctrine began developing to support the practice, most specifically in the hands of Augustine. So until the early part of the third century, the overwhelming practice of the early churches across the Mediterranean region was believer's baptism by immersion. As part of our larger point, the earliest practice of the early churches until about the mid-third century reflects the New Testament practice of believer's baptism by immersion.

²⁸ The pattern of baptism in the early had, by this point, shifted the practice to being observed on Pentecost or Easter if possible.

²⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York,: Harper, 1959). 176

³⁰ *Letters* 64.4

³¹ *Letter* 64.2-6

4. The archeological case for baptism shows that for the earliest Christians their worship venues and structures provided for baptism of believers, by immersion, following their conversion.

Adding to the development of the doctrine of baptism, one of the ways to evaluate how the earliest Christian communities were practicing baptism is seeing what was found in archeological data from this era. Though many Christians had no access to formal meeting spaces or dedicated buildings for their normal practice and worship, there are some which have been discovered that shed light on the nature of practice. One of the earliest Christian baptisteries is found in Syria at Dura Europos and is dated to the third century.³² Here the baptismal pool is found in a private room and is adequate for immersion. Around the baptistery, images of Jesus' resurrection, healing miracles, and an illustration of the Good Shepherd decorated the walls. Also located in Syria, Qal'at Sim'an provides a baptistery from the late 400s that provided room for immersion. In Lebanon, the earliest baptistery is dated to about 389 is found in Zahrani with pools adequate for immersion. In Switzerland an old baptistery from about 370 is located in the Cathedral of St. Peter in Geneva where the pool for immersion, though no longer usable, demonstrates the use of these pools well into the fourth century. Other existing baptisteries from an earlier period are located in Abu Mina, in the Menas Church that dates to 400 that has a depth of a meter and a half with several stairs descending into the pool.

As Christianity continued to develop and establish itself, more baptisteries like these were able to be found.³³ Essentially the point here, and not to be overly focused, is that the mode of believer's baptism by immersion developed early and remained an important part of the baptismal liturgies of the earliest churches through fifth and sixth centuries. Often the baptismal pools which have been discovered have enough room for immersion of an individual. Since the largest part of the era in which believer's baptism by immersion is prior to the development of established buildings, it is difficult finding such structures alone in these regions. Also, with the pattern baptism in the earliest communities being performed in rivers and streams, the need to develop baptismal pools would not have been as pressing as other matters of liturgical function. However, when additional fonts are discovered alongside the baptismal pools they appear to be

³² Carl H Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europo: The Christian Building*, Dura-Europos Publication: Final Report Viii Part 2 (Locust Valley, NJ: Augustin, 1967).

³³ Ferguson. 819-852 provides some excellent resources and analysis.

additions from the sixth century and afterwards. Though infant baptism would be the primary mode moving forward after the seventh century, there still remains remnants of the practice in the oldest Christian buildings.

In summation, the four points above hopefully begin to construct a positive case for believer's baptism by immersion as the New Testament manner and mode that is normative for Christians since Pentecost until today and through to the eschaton. Built on the foundation of the explicit New Testament practice being solely given to a baptism by immersion for those who have already believed, the practice is a symbolic practice given to the Church to be practiced in the local churches as one of two ways of remembering what Jesus Christ has done for all believers in his death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is established theologically through a proper understanding of its role in relation to the soteriological function of justification and is a first act of obedience for all new believers. In the history of Christianity since the earliest days of the Church, the pattern established by the end of the first century was believer's baptism of older children and adults by immersion. This pattern continued in the history of the Church, supported by the remaining archeological data available, until the mid-third century. Believer's baptism by immersion was still the primary means of baptism for another several generations beyond this, though it was later replaced by infant baptism after the establishment of the Roman Church and a robust theology fortified by the writings of Augustine and others who championed infant baptism. As Baptists have recovered the New Testament practice of baptism, they reach back to the authentic manner and mode by which Jesus Christ himself was baptized and through which we give an outward demonstration of the inward belief that has taken place in each of our own conversions. Not linked directly to circumcision of the Old Testament Israelite nation, baptism is a vital symbolic act of obedience that continues to fellowship the individual believer to the Church universally and locally while edifying them in their sanctification.

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