NCCF Statement of Faith

Section 17: Water Baptism

M. Tolbert

Water Baptism is the believer’s response to the Gospel [a] in which he proclaims his trust in Jesus Christ's atoning death alone to wash away his sins, [b] and his adherence to Christ as one united to Him in His death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to newness of a life lived unto God. [c] It also proclaims one's commitment as a disciple to follow Jesus Christ according to His Word and shows that discipleship is not optional but is at the heart of true Christianity. [d]

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17a

Water Baptism is the believer’s response to the Gospel [a] in which he proclaims his trust in Jesus Christ's atoning death alone to wash away his sins, [b] and his adherence to Christ as one united to Him in His death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to newness of a life lived unto God. [c] It also proclaims one's commitment as a disciple to follow Jesus Christ according to His Word and shows that discipleship is not optional but is at the heart of true Christianity. [d]

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17b

Water Baptism is the believer’s response to the Gospel [a] in which he proclaims his trust in Jesus Christ's atoning death alone to wash away his sins, [b] and his adherence to Christ as one united to Him in His death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to newness of a life lived unto God. [c] It also proclaims one's commitment as a disciple to follow Jesus Christ according to His Word and shows that discipleship is not optional but is at the heart of true Christianity. [d]

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17c

Water Baptism is the believer’s response to the Gospel [a] in which he proclaims his trust in Jesus Christ's atoning death alone to wash away his sins, [b] and his adherence to Christ as one united to Him in His death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to newness of a life lived unto God. [c] It also proclaims one's commitment as a disciple to follow Jesus Christ according to His Word and shows that discipleship is not optional but is at the heart of true Christianity. [d]

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17d

Water Baptism

Questions to Answer

I. Who receives it?

II. What is the Method?

III. What is the Meaning?

IV. When does it happen?

V. What are the different interpretations?*

* This topic will be explored more thoroughly in a stand-alone session.

Water Baptism is the believer's response to the Gospel…

1. Acts 2:38
2. Acts 8:36-38
3. Acts 10:47-48
4. Galatians 3:26-27

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17a

Baptism

The Believer's Response

37 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 Peter replied, 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.'

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

-Acts 2:37-38, 41

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

- Those who received his word were baptized.

II. What is the Method?

- Immersion is implied, but not explicitly stated

III. What is the Meaning?

- …in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins

IV. When does it happen?

- Soon after repentance & belief.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "**See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?**"[a]

38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and **they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.**

-Acts 8:36-38

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

- The Ethiopian Eunuch who believed.

II. What is the Method?

- Immersion (they went down into the water)

III. What is the Meaning?

- Forgiveness of sins (the *good news* about Jesus Christ, Acts 8:32, 35)

IV. When does it happen?

- Immediately after believing.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

43 …To him (Jesus) all the prophets bear witness that everyone who
believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. 44 While Peter
was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

47 *"**Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people**, who have
received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"*

48 **And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus
Christ.** Then they asked him to remain for some days.

-Acts 10:43-44, 47-48

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

- The Gentiles who received the Holy Spirit.

II. What is the Method?

- Immersion is implied, but not explicitly stated

III. What is the Meaning?

- …everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name…Baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ.*

IV. When does it happen?

- Soon after believing and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

25 But now that **faith** has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for **in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith**. 27 For as many of you **as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ**.

-Galatians 3:25-27

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

- Those who have faith

II. What is the Method?

- Immersion is implied because of NT practice

III. What is the Meaning?

- For as many of you **as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ**.

IV. When does it happen?

- After having faith.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

   A. Those who repent of their sins (Acts 2)

   B. Those who receive the word (Acts 2)

   C. Those who have faith & believe (Acts 8, Gal 3)

   D. Those who have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10)

II. What is the Method?

III. What is the Meaning?

IV. When does it happen?

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who does NOT receives it?

   A. Those who DO NOT repent of their sins (Acts 2)

   B. Those who DO NOT receive the word (Acts 2)

   C. Those who DO NOT have faith & believe (Acts 8, Gal 3)

II. What is the Method?

III. What is the Meaning?

IV. When does it happen?

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

II. What is the Method?

   A. Immersion is implied by it's relationship to John's Baptism in the Jordan (Luke 3:3)

   B. The Ethiopian Eunuch is immersed in water (Acts 8)

III. What is the Meaning?

IV. When does it happen?

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

II. What is NOT the Method?

   A. Sprinkling, pouring, etc. aren't explicitly found in the text.

   B. The meaning of Baptism in Romans 6 supports immersion, not sprinkling, or pouring*

III. What is the Meaning?

IV. When does it happen?

* This topic will be explored more thoroughly in the next section.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

II. What is the Method?

III. What is the Meaning?*

IV. When does it happen?

   A. Soon after *professing* faith, repentance or belief.

   B. Almost immediately, if possible.

* This topic will be explored more thoroughly in the next section.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. Who receives it?

II. What is the Method?

III. What is the Meaning?*

IV. When does it NOT happen?

   A. Several months, years, etc. after a period of training

   B. Faith (belief), not clarity of understanding is essential for Baptism

      - (Acts 8:13ff, Simon the Magician)

* This topic will be explored more thoroughly in the next session.

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

Speaking of the Baptist position that 'none should be baptized without serious profession,' even though he be born of Christian parents, Baxter put on the mantle of a prophet and descried for his readers a dismal vision of what would happen to the church of God under such an arrangement. **It would produce anarchy, for covenant children become conscious Christians by insensible degrees, and how will ministers and parents ever agree when the child understands and believes sufficiently to received baptism?**

Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace, p 161*

…in which he proclaims his trust in Jesus Christ's atoning death alone to wash away his sins, …

1. Acts 2:38
2. Acts 22:16
3. 1 Peter 3:21

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17b

Baptism

Trusting in Jesus to wash away sins

38 Peter replied, 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.’

-Acts 2:38

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning?

- in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of sins*
  - Forgiveness of sins is built upon the atoning death of Jesus
- And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit
- It is an *act of obedience* taken in the name of Christ

Baptism

Trusting in Jesus to wash away sins

15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and
heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized and wash
away your sins**, calling on his name.’

-Acts 22:16

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning?

- …and wash away your sins, calling on his name.
  - Baptism is a symbol for washing away sins
  - Calling on his name (Jesus) to 'wash away sins'

Baptism

Trusting in Jesus to wash away sins

18 **For Christ also suffered**[b] **once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God**…when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

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

-1 Peter 3:18, 20b-21

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning?

- … now saves you, **not as a removal of dirt from the body** but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ
  - The appeal to God, not the act of Baptism (removing dirt from the body) now saves you
  - The Act of Baptism does not forgive sins
- Christ suffered once *for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God*
  - The suffering of Christ for sins (atonement) brings us to God

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning (pt. 1)?

- Baptism *represents* washing away sins, forgiveness of sins
- It is not the actual act of Baptism (removing of dirt from the body) that saves you
- Baptism must be done *in the name of Jesus, calling on his name, and the atoning work of Jesus saves you*

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is NOT the Meaning (pt 2) ?

- Baptism DOES NOT actually wash away sins
- Baptism DOES NOT cleanse original sin (Catholic Doctrine)

…and his adherence to Christ as one united to Him in His death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to newness of a life lived unto God….

1. Romans 6:1-4
2. Galatians 3:27-29
3. Colossians 2:12

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17c

Baptism

United to Christ in his death and resurrection

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may
abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do
you not know that **all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by
baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the
dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

-Romans 6:1-4 (parallels Ephesians 2:4-6, Col. 2:9-12)

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning?

- **It symbolizes our Union with Christ (pt. 1)**
  - …all of us who have been baptized **into Christ Jesus** were baptized **into** his death?
  - See parallels in Ephesians 2:4-6, Colossians 2:9-12
- **It symbolizes death and burial (pt. 2)**
  - …How can we who ***died to sin*** still live in it?
  - *…all of you who were baptized into Christ Jesus were* ***baptized into his death…***
  - *… We were* ***buried*** *therefore with him by baptism into death…*
- **It symbolizes being 'risen from the dead' (pt. 3)**
  - Just as Christ was ***raised from the dead***…we too might walk in newness of life.

Baptism

United to Christ in his death and resurrection

12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

-Colossians 2:12

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning?

- **It symbolizes burial (pt. 1)**
  - *…having been buried with him in baptism…*
- **It symbolizes being 'raised from the dead' (pt. 2)**
  - *… you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Baptism

United to Christ in his death and resurrection

For as many of you as **were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**

-Galatians 3:27

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning?

- *…were baptized into Christ* ***have put on Christ.***
  - Union with Christ
    - Sons of God, through faith (3:26)
    - Heirs according to promise (3:29)
    - And because you are sons, God has **sent the spirit of his Son** into our hearts, crying *Abba, Father!'* (4:6)
- Baptism is a symbol of Union with Christ (and receiving all the promises because of it)
  - Christ is the heir and the Son, we become heirs and Sons through *putting on Christ* and *Baptism into Christ* is the symbol of us putting on Christ

Water Baptism

The Believer's Response

I. What is the Meaning (pt. 2)?

- Baptism is symbolic of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ
  - We died with him, we were buried with him, and we are raised with him
  - This supports the immersion view of Baptism
    - Sprinkling is indirectly implied through the 'sprinkling of atonement' (Lev. 16:14, Heb. 9:13-14), but the NT does not connect sprinkling with Baptism
- Baptism is symbolic of our union with Christ

…It also proclaims one's commitment as a disciple to follow Jesus Christ according to His Word and shows that discipleship is not optional but is at the heart of true Christianity.

1. Matthew 28:19-20

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17d

Baptism

Following Christ as a disciple

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in[b] the
name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching
them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with
you always, to the end of the age.”

-Matthew 28:19-20

Water Baptism

Questions to Answer

I. Who receives it?
   - Disciples, those who are taught to observe all that I command you

II. What is the Method?

III. What is the Meaning?
   - in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
   - A Public declaration of ‘allegiance’ to the Triune God
   - A commitment to being a disciple

IV. When does it happen?
   - It happens ‘when you become a disciple’, it’s the beginning of being a disciple

Water Baptism is the believer’s response to the Gospel [a] in which he proclaims his trust in Jesus Christ's atoning death alone to wash away his sins, [b] and his adherence to Christ as one united to Him in His death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to newness of a life lived unto God. [c] It also proclaims one's commitment as a disciple to follow Jesus Christ according to His Word and shows that discipleship is not optional but is at the heart of true Christianity. [d]

NCCF Statement of Faith, Section 17

A Summary of Baptism

New Testament Summary:

- in response to a profession of faith (after faith, not before)
- **Symbolic** of washing away sin
- **Symbolic** of death, burial and resurrection
- An act of obedience & discipleship

*Principles on the next page.

Church History Summary:

- **(2nd-3rd centuries)** Infant baptism shifts from NT, practice, becomes an *act of grace*, not a profession of faith
- **(4th-5th centuries)** Augustine makes infant baptism a ‘sacrament’, while Constantinian influence ties baptism to the state
- (**5th-9th centuries)** Baptism is linked to citizenship and is punishable by death
- **(13th Century)** Thomas Aquinas cements sacramental infant baptism
- **(12th-15th centuries)** Pre-Reformers promote NT Baptism and are persecuted
- **(16th Century)** Luther, Calvin, Zwingli retain infant baptism, Anabaptists revive infant baptism
  - Anglicans and Puritans pave the way for American culture and Baptist Growth

Reflections on Baptism
Principles to Remember

1. **God's word is the final authority**
    - God's word, not tradition, should guide faith and practice
    - God's word should *override* convenience and pragmatism
    - Believer's Baptism aligns with God's Word
2. **God is active in History**
    - History preserves and strengthens God's Word
    - Freedoms enable obedience to God's Word
    - A focus on Evangelism spreads God's Word
    - Culture was shaped to support God's Word



*Continue the discussion on slide 105 with J. Smythe

From Faith to Font

Changes in Baptism throughout Church History



Baptism began as a **believer's response to repentance and faith** in the New Testament. By the 9th century, it became a mandatory **infant baptism**.

Causes include:

- **theological innovations**
- **social pressures**
- **political enforcement**
- **practical realities**

How and why did the church diverge from apostolic practice?

The New Testament Foundation

Believer's Baptism

- Baptism follows belief
  - 'Repent and be baptized…' *Peter's Sermon in Acts 2*
  - 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?' *Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8*



Continuity in the Apostolic Legacy

~100 AD *The Didache*

- Baptism follows the New Testament model
- Baptism was made by professing believers (those who could fast) and immersion was the preferred method
- Baptism was required to participate in the Eucharist (The Lord's Supper)



“But concerning baptism, thus shall ye baptize. Having first recited all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (running) water. But if thou hast not living water, then baptize in other water; and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let him that baptizeth and him that is baptized fast, and any others also who are able; and thou shalt order him that is baptized to fast a day or two before.”

Didache 7 (~100 AD)

"*But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.'*”

Didache 9 (~100 AD)

The Meaning of Baptism is changing

~150 AD *Justin Martyr*

- Baptism is for those who are ‘persuaded and believe’
- Baptism is equated with ‘washing’ and ‘regeneration’
  - ‘Real’, not symbolic or representative, regeneration is spoken of
  - The language of death, burial, and resurrection is obscured



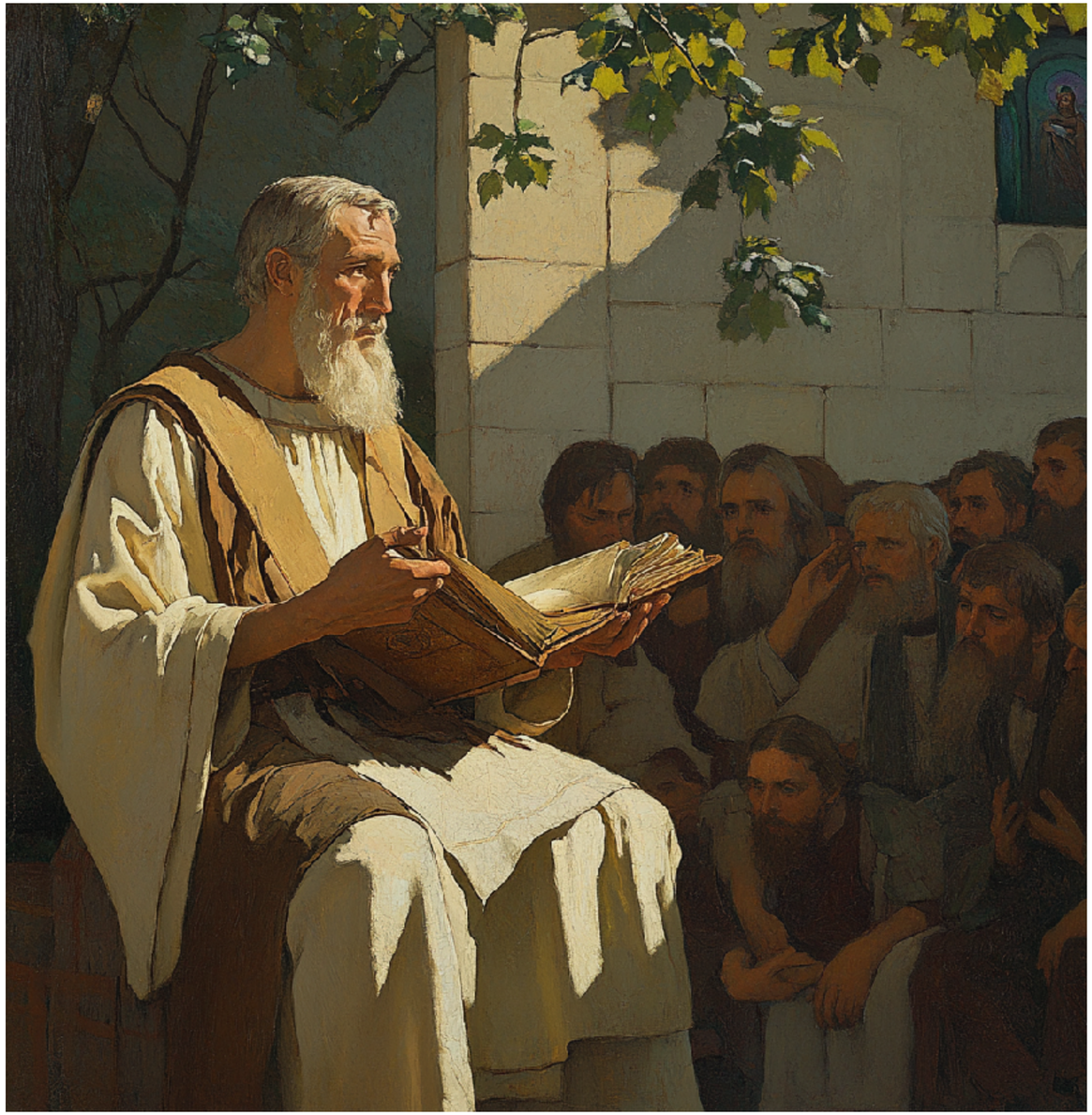
"Those who are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their past sins, while we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water."

Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61 (150 AD)

Irenaus and Salvation

~180 AD *Irenaeus of Lyon*

- ‘Born Again’ and ‘saved’ is tied to infants and children
- Irenaeus’ language shows the breadth of salvation, giving validation to the idea of baptizing infants



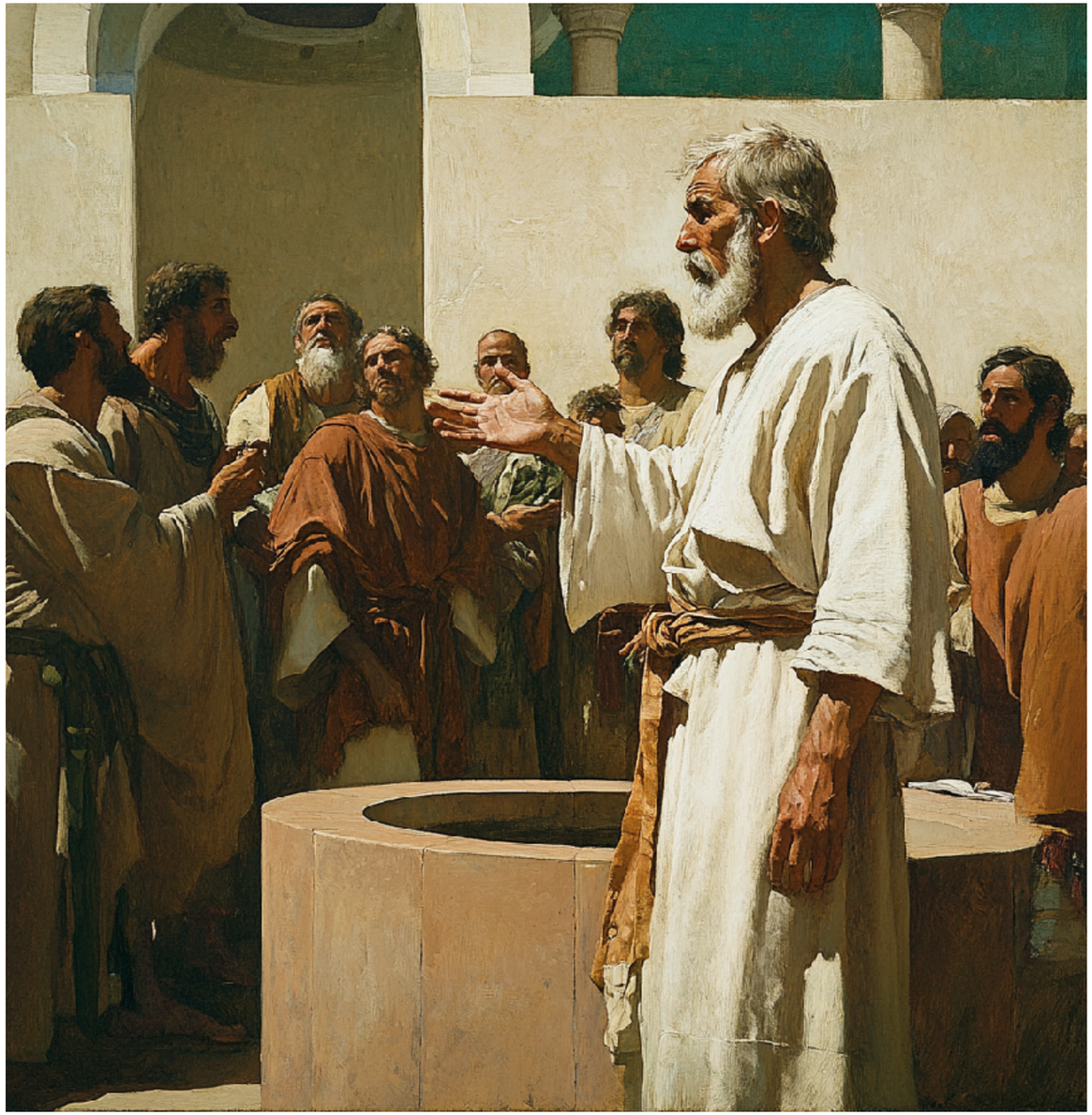
“For He came to save all through means of Himself—all, I say, who through Him are born again to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men…”

Irenaeus, Against Heresies 2.22.4

Debate & Divergence

~200 AD Tertullian

- Tertullian argues against the practice of baptizing infants
  - This suggests it is a common practice
  - Sponsors are mentioned, suggesting that they will incur judgement on the basis of the life of the ‘baptized’
- Tertullian advises them to wait to become Christians until they are able to ‘know Christ’.



“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 sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? … 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? … If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay: sound faith is secure of salvation.”

Tertullian, On Baptism 18

Debate & Divergence

~215 AD, Hippolytus

- The argument of waiting extends to a three year period according to Hippolytus
  - This implies adults who can know and understand the weight of their belief (not infants) are baptized
- A *catechumen* should be examined and found worthy and then baptized



Catechumens shall continue to be under instruction for three years. But if a man is earnest and perseveres well in the work, it is not the time that is judged but the character. When the teacher finishes instructing, let the catechumens pray by themselves, apart from the faithful… And when they have been examined and found worthy, let them be baptized.

Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition 17*

Baptism is profitable to infants?

~245 AD, Origen

- Origen gives an affirmative statement of the benefits of baptism for infants
  - It’s profitable for infants to be baptized
  - They are subject to the ‘contagion of the ancient death by their birth’, which is the effect of sin (original sin)
  - Faith is not mentioned



The baptism of the Church we know to be profitable even to infants… because it is certain that they are subject to the contagion of the ancient death by their birth…

Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus 8.3, (245 AD)*

Infant Baptism is Widespread

~253 AD, Cyprian

- In the midst of an empire wide persecution (under Emperor Decius)
  - Cyprian holds a council of 66 bishops
  - There is no discussion on the theological merits
    - There should be no delay in baptism
    - Baptism in infants addresses the issue of sin, unrelated to faith



“As to what pertains to the case of infants: You said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth… But we all judged that the mercy and grace of God are not to be denied to anyone born of man… If then nothing should hinder infants from being baptized, how much less should the eighth day be waited for?”

Cyprian, *Epistle 64.2–4, c. 253 AD*

The Constantinian Shift

~313 AD, The Edict of Milan

- After Constantine came to power, he gave Christians (and others) freedom of their religion
  - The dangerous nature of Baptism changes
    - It is no longer a ‘tenuous’ decision that may affect your life or death
    - Public baptisms are ‘safe’ and sometimes prestigious
- Constantine’s Soldier’s are baptized post-Milvian Bridge (312-313)



“After the great victory… many of the soldiers who had fought under his standard, seeing the hand of God in his triumph, sought the sacred rite of baptism, and with great fervor they were washed in the waters of salvation.”

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book I, Ch. 39

“When we saw that… Christians were not allowed the freedom of their religion… we thought it fit to grant to the Christians and all others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; whence any Divinity whatsoever… may be able to manifest its favor…”

Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 48.2–3 (quoting the Edict of Milan)

Practical considerations

~325 AD, The Council of Nicaea

- The statement on Baptism is aimed at adults delaying baptism
    - The purpose of delayed baptism was ‘fuller understanding’ -the catechumens who waited 3 years
    - Baptism is also understood as a ‘real’ washing of sin
        - If they are sick (and might die), they need to get baptized regardless of whether they finished their ‘catechetical period’
        - Some delays in baptism were to get ‘more sins’ washed away
- It loses it’s focus as an obedient act of initiation into the faith



‘Concerning those who have fallen sick, whether catechumens or believers, let them be baptized if they desire it, even if they are at the point of death, provided they have been instructed…’

Council of Nicaea, *Canon 13*

The Emperor's Baptism

~337 AD, Constantine

- Constantine waits until his deathbed to get baptized
- He professed to be a Christian, preached, taught, and oversaw the Council of Nicaea
- He misunderstood the nature of Baptism
  - It was delayed (fearing post-baptismal sin) until the very end



“He thought it necessary to be cleansed by the sacred rite… Then, laying aside his purple robes, he entered the baptistery… and came up from the font cleansed…”

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine 4.61-62*

The Imperial Decree

~380 AD, Emperor Theodosius

- Christianity becomes the state religion under Theodosius I
  - Christianity is no longer only a personal choice of faith and conscience
  - It is now a matter of loyalty to the Roman Empire (the state)
    - It is a societal expectation to become a Christian



“We desire that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle is known to have delivered to the Romans… Those who do not obey this law shall be punished as heretics…”

Codex Theodosianus 16.5.6

Augustine's Definition

~412 AD, Augustine of Hippo

- The Western Roman Empire is falling, Rome was sacked in 410
  - Christian Practices need doctrinal clarity to reinforce it and define it
- Augustine's doctrine of original sin (built on Paul's argument in Romans)
  - Original sin is connected with the 'need for baptism'
  - Baptism is the *washing of regeneration, the forgiveness of sins*
- Baptism is not an act of faith, but *necessary for salvation*



By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned… Hence it is that infants, too, since they are involved in the original sin through the condition of their birth, require to be delivered by the grace of Christ, that is, by His baptism.

Augustine, *On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins*, 1.10

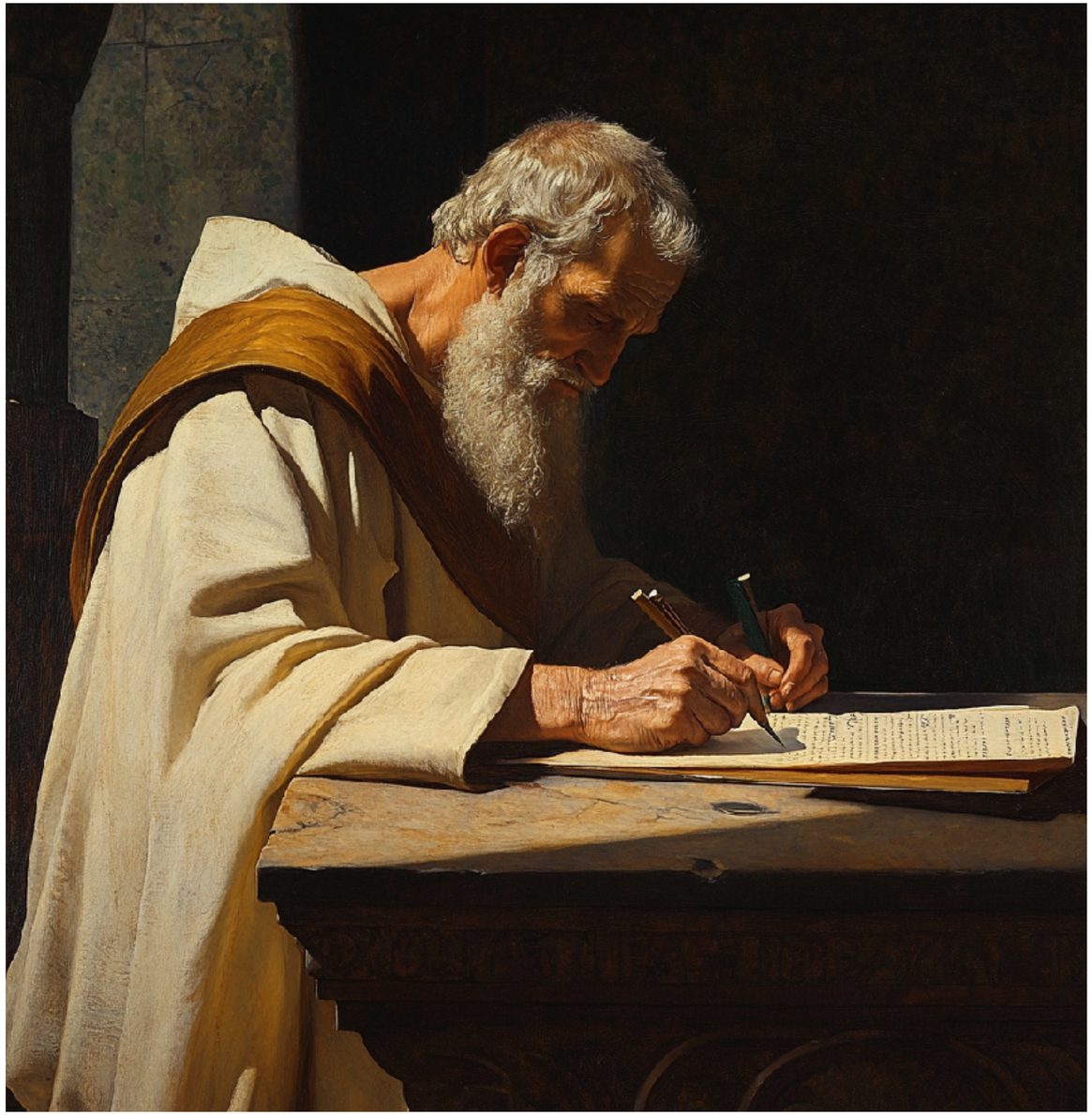
“For from the infant newly born to the old man bent with age, as there is none shut out from baptism, so there is none who in baptism does not die to sin. But infants die only to original sin; those who are older die also to all the sins which by evil living they have added to that which they derived from their birth.”

Augustine, On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, 1.21

Official Perspectives

~411 Council of Carthage

- At the Council of Carthage, Augustine argued against the Donatists that baptism is valid regardless of the merit of the minister
  - The Donatist's argued that a morally impure clergy would invalidate baptism
  - Baptism is elevated to a divine act, or sacrament, that has merit apart from the person administering it
- Baptism is not about faith, but rather about grace



The baptism of Christ, therefore, whether administered by the just or the unjust, is the same; for it is Christ's baptism, not the baptism of him who administers it… It is not the personal merit of the minister, but the grace of Christ, that makes the sacrament valid.

Augustine, On Baptism, against the Donatists 5.21

Official Perspectives

~416 Council of Milevis

- A council convened by Augustine against Pelagius
  - The argument from Pelagius is that we do not inherit original sin
    - Therefore, infants do not need to be baptized
- Augustine argues for the need for infant baptism on the basis of cleansing original sin
  - The issue is the ‘meaning of baptism’
    - The sacrament of baptism is established doctrinally as a ‘washing and cleansing of sin’
    - Infant baptism is about inferring grace, rather than the obedience of faith

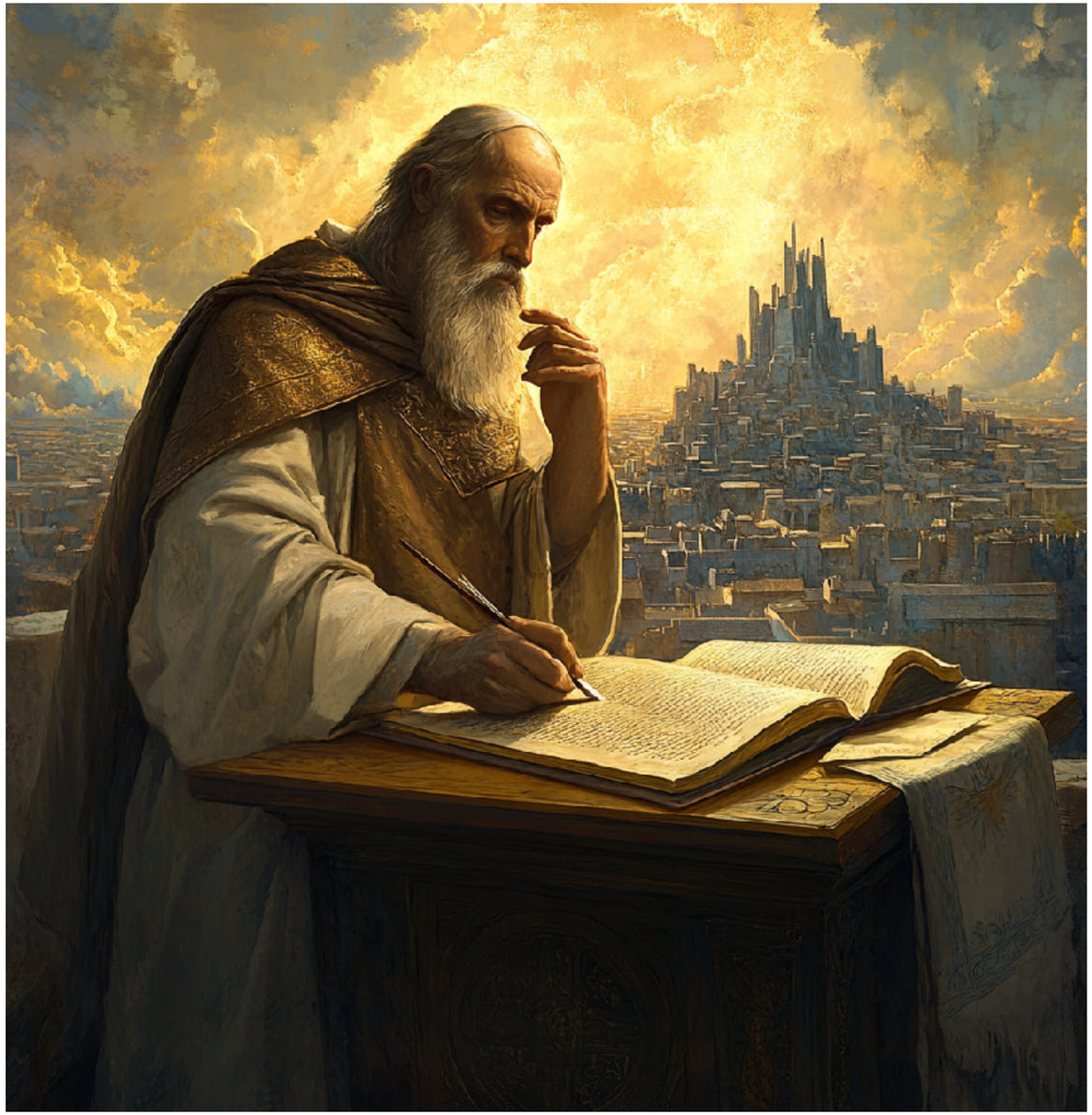


Whoever asserts that infants newly born need not be baptized, or that they are baptized for the remission of sins but have no original sin from Adam… let him be anathema…

Augustine, *Canon 2, Letter to Pope Innocent I*

Augustine’s Lasting Impact
~412-430 AD

- Original sin doctrine is fully articulated
- Infants require baptism for salvation
- ‘Infants die only to original sin’
- The Church adopts Augustine’s theology
- Baptism is no longer an ‘act of obedience,’ but rather a requirement
- Augustine’s theology becomes the foundation for Medieval Sacramentalism



The sacrament of baptism is most certainly the sacrament of regeneration, and this is not accomplished in us by our own will or power, but by the mercy of God alone, which is given even to infants who cannot yet believe.

Augustine, *On the Baptism of Infants against the Donatists, Book I, Ch 25*

Conversion of the Barbarian Tribes

~430-500 AD

- When Rome Falls (476), a power vacuum is filled by the barbarian tribes
    - Franks, Visigoths
- Missionary activity focused on tribal leaders
    - Clovis (King of the Franks)
    - Leaders were converted, and thus converted their people by decree
    - Baptism was a ‘collective rite’ not a ‘personal act’
- King Clovis’ baptism at Reims (496 AD) with 3000+ Frankish warriors
    - After a military victory, declared ’A New Constantine’



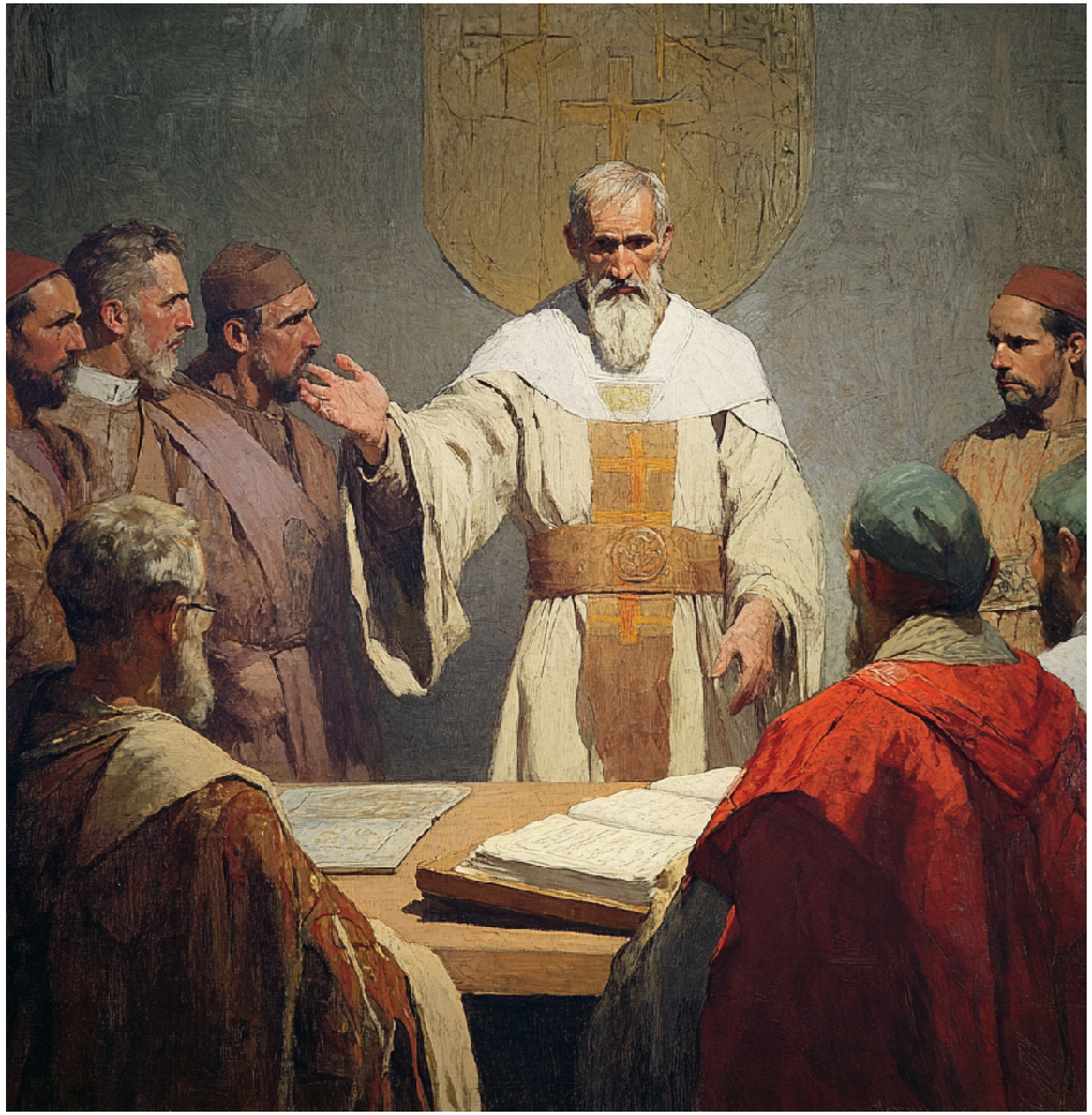
“The king bent his neck to the font… and more than three thousand of his army followed him into the water; the streets were adorned with white, and the people cried out with joy, for the mortal gods were cast away, and the immortal God was embraced.”

Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks,* Book II, Ch. 31

The Church grows in prominence

~529 AD, Council of Orange

- Reaffirms Augustine against Semi-Pelagianism
  - “Children… baptized for remission of sins”
- Post-Rome fall: Church’s authority
  - Infant baptism becomes universal norm
  - State begins to support Church decrees
- Sacramental Theology is entrenched



“Even children who of themselves cannot have yet committed any sin are truly baptized for the remission of sins, so that by regeneration they may be cleansed from what they contracted through generation.”

Council of Orange, Canon on Baptism (529AD), summarized by Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*

Baptism & Citizenship
6th-9th Centuries

- Code of Justinian, the Easter Roman Emperor (527-565)
    - Baptism and adherence to Christianity is mandated for all citizens of Rome
- Charlemagne’s Saxon Policy (785)
    - Baptism is forced on conquered Saxons, death upon refusal
- Baptism is now tied to legal standing
- Infant Baptism is automatic in the 9th century
- Church-State Alliance is strengthened
    - The Rulers and Bishops collaborate, with baptism as a key ‘legal’ unifier
- The end of the catechumen corresponds with the rise of infant baptism
    - Adult instruction declines as infant baptism dominates



“If any one of the race of the Saxons, having been baptized, shall return to the rites of the pagans, and refuse to come to baptism again, let him die.”

Charlemagne, *Capitulary for Saxony* (785 AD), from Richard Fletcher’s *The Barbarian Conversion*

Scholastic Theology

Thomas Aquinas (13th century)

- Aquinas: Baptism works *ex opere operato*
  - Grace is conferred by the act itself, not the faith of the participants
- Infants are saved by the faith of the Church
  - The Church believes on behalf of the infant, ensuring their salvation
- Limbo is the realm of unbaptized infants
  - The unbaptized infants lack the vision of heaven, but suffer no torment
- Theology is defined to support the practice
  - Scholasticism gives a logical, rational defense for medieval norms
- Continuity with Augustine is confirmed
  - Aquinas builds on the doctrine of original sin, linking baptism to salvation.



“…As to the objection that children cannot receive Baptism because they cannot have the intention, it must be replied that, in this matter, they are baptized in the faith of the Church, which is applied to them, and by the act of the Church they are incorporated into Christ and His members… Thus children believe, not by their own act, but by the faith of the Church, which is applied to them; and by this faith they are incorporated into the Church, and through the sacrament they obtain the remission of sins.”

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, III, Q.68, Art. 9*

The Pre-Reformers

Waldensians & Lollards (12th-15th Centuries)

- After Aquinas, infant baptism is universal
  - It is salvific for original sin
  - It is entrenched by the Church and the State
- The Waldensians (~1170s) deny infant baptism
  - They cite the New Testament requirements of repentance and faith
- Waldensian Persecution
  - The Roman Catholic Church excommunicates them (Lateran IV) arguing that infants need baptism for grade
- The Lollards (followers of Wycliffe -late 14th century)
  - They cite the New Testament, insisting on faith preceding Baptism and that ‘parental proxy’ lacks the support of the Scriptures
- The English persecute the Lollards
  - They argue that Infant baptism is a societal glue, necessary for Salvation, attested to by the Fathers, and should be maintained
- Wycliffe’s Bible (1380) and the printing press (1450) spread the New Testament, giving more access to the text



“Also they deny that infants ought to be baptized, saying that no child should be baptized until he come to years of discretion and can choose his belief and make his own profession, because Christ’s gospel showeth plainly that baptism belongeth only to them that can repent and believe.”

John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of Matters Most Special and Memorable Happening in the Church*, Book 5

“These Waldensian heretics, denying the baptism of infants, do err grievously against the doctrine of Christ and His Church, for it is manifest that the little ones, born in sin, must be cleansed by the sacred waters, as the Lord hath said, ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ Their error is condemned by the universal consent of the faithful from the Apostles’ time.”

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon against the Heresy of the Waldensians*, Sermon 65

The Reformation

Martin Luther & Baptism (1517-1520)

- The 95 Theses sparks a Reformation
    - The 95 theses against indulgences sparks a reform in the Roman Catholic Church
        - The focus is on indulgences, penance, and papal authority over forgiveness and it’s relation to personal responsibility
- God’s Promise empowers Baptism
        - The power of baptism is found in the promise of God, and it is effective for infants
            - Faith is the fruit, not the condition required, of Baptism
- Rejects Rebaptism, upholding one baptism only
- The Mode of Baptism is flexible
- Infant Baptism is understood in light of ‘faith alone-sola fide’
    - God’s grace is delivered and received by faith
        - Either vicarious faith through another, or through personal faith later



“For this reason we should see to it that infants are baptized, because through baptism they are committed to God and become pleasing to Him; and we should rejoice that God has instituted such a thing in His Church whereby infants are snatched from the power of Satan and made members of Christ.”

Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, part IV; Baptism

The Anabaptists

Believer’s Baptism (1525-1530s)

- Believer’s Baptism begins again (1525)
    - Conrad Grebel baptizes adults in Zurich following Zwingli’s reformation
        - Infant baptism is rejected as unscriptural
- Faith is now a requirement
    - They insist Baptism must follow repentance and belief, not birth
- Infant Baptism is denounced in the *Schleitheim Confession*
    - It is a papal error without NT basis
- Anabaptists are persecuted because they are threats to the church-state order
    - Rebaptism undermines the societal role and challenges Catholic & protestant unity
- Felix Manz was drowned in 1527 for heresy and sedition
    - He was threatening a societal collapse



“First, concerning baptism. Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him, and to all those who with this significance request it of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the pope.”

Schleitheim Confession, Article I

“These Anabaptists are a pestilent brood, who, under pretense of piety, overthrow all order and godliness in the Church. They deny the baptism of infants, which has been received from the Apostles and practiced by the Church universal, and they rebaptize those who have already been rightly baptized, as if the sacrament were of no effect. This is not only an error against the truth, but a seditious act against the peace of Christ’s flock, deserving the severest punishment, as the magistrate bears not the sword in vain.”

Ulrich Zwingli, Refutation of the Tricks of the Anabaptists

Calvin's Covenant Theology
Believer's Baptism (1540s-1560s)

- Infant Baptism is a covenant sign that includes the infants of believers
    - Abraham's covenant sign, circumcision, is related to the sign of Baptism (references Gen. 17:7)
- Infants belong to God's people
    - Baptism signifies inclusion, does not initiate faith
- The efficacy of Baptism is linked to God's election, it is not automatic, refuting Aquinas
- Anabaptists are denounced
    - Credobaptists (Anabaptists) are stubborn, divisive, seditous



“The children of believers are baptized not in order that they may thereby become children of God, as if they were previously strangers to the church, but rather that by this solemn sign they may be received into the church and numbered among the people of God, because they were already included in the covenant of God by virtue of the promise.”

John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV, Ch. 16, section 9

“The Anabaptists err most dangerously when they deny baptism to infants, asserting that it must follow faith and confession, which infants cannot make. This is to misunderstand the nature of God’s covenant, which embraces the seed of the faithful, as circumcision did under the old law. Their stubborn rejection of this truth, and their seditious rebaptizing, rend the Church asunder and merit the condemnation they receive, for they oppose both Scripture and the ancient practice of Christ’s people.”

John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV, Ch. 16, section 32

The Church in England

Anglicans & Puritans (16th-17th Centuries)

- The Anglican Church was established (1534) by Henry VIII
  - The Middle Way, *Via Media*, between Catholicism & reformed doctrine and practice
- Puritans seek Reform (1560s) under Elizabeth I
  - *Purify* the church of Catholic practices (vestments, Sacraments, etc.)
  - Mainstream Puritans stay Anglican
- A Puritan Spectrum emerges
  - Presbyterians favor an elder-led national church (Scottish Reform Model)
  - Separatists seek independent congregations of ‘visible saints’ (committed believers),
  - Congregationalists balance autonomy with maintaining ties to broader Puritan or Anglican churches



“The Church of England is not a true church, as it stands, in respect of the corruptions retained in doctrine, discipline, and worship; and therefore reformation is necessary, to remove all superstitious ceremonies, to establish a godly ministry, and to advance the preaching of the Word.”

Thomas Cartwright, *A Second Admonition to the Parliament,* 1572, in *Puritan Manifestos, p. 87.*

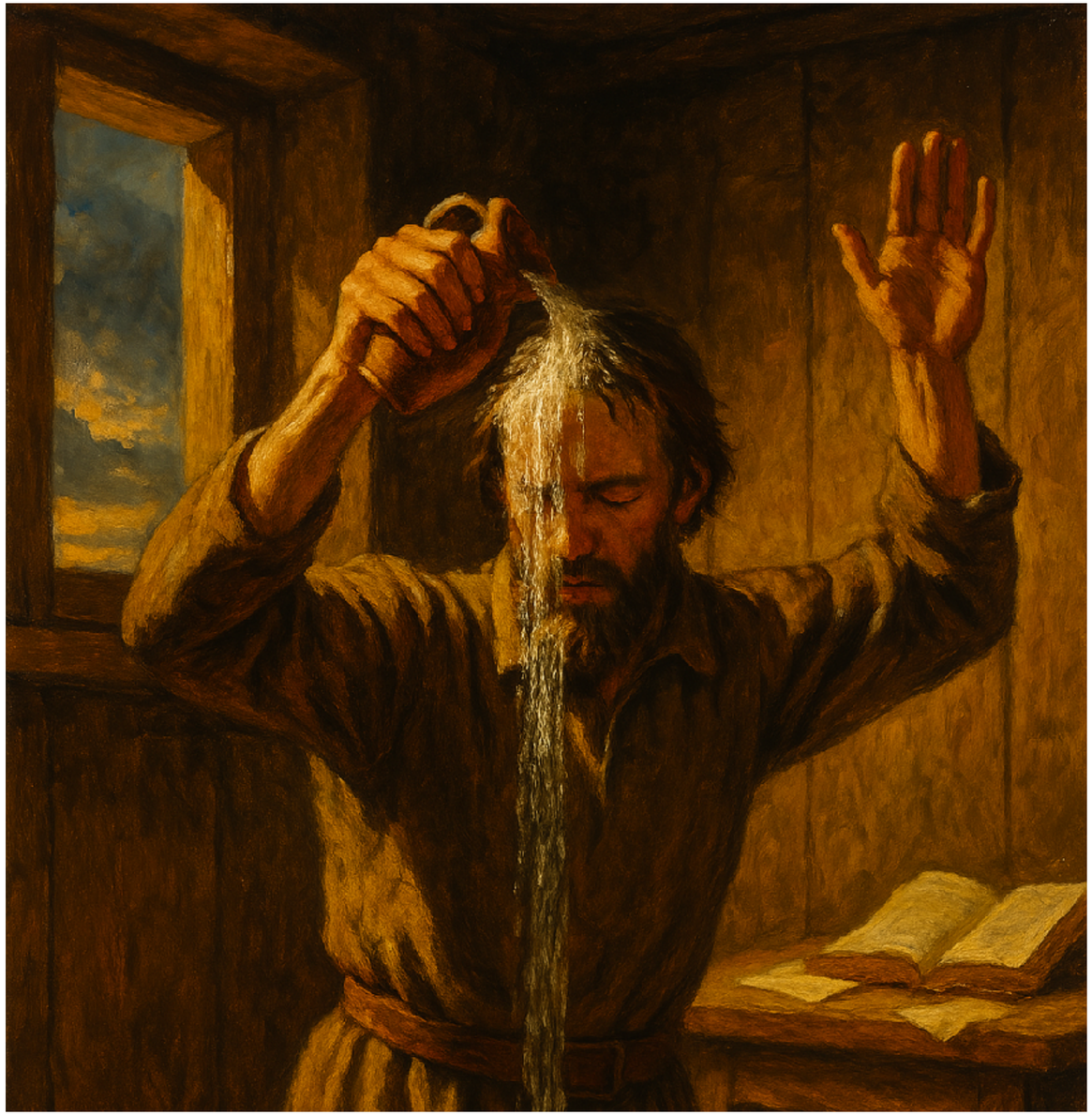
“Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed.”

Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, 1571, Article 27 (from Phillip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, Vol. 3)*

Puritan Divisions

Presbyterians & Baptists (17th Century)

- John Smyth (1609) baptizes himself in Amsterdam, adopting Believer's baptism and founding the English Baptists
- Baptists Reject Infant Baptism
    - Baptism by Immersion for believers is mandated in the *First London Baptist Confession (1644)*
- Presbyterians gain power in the English Civil War, and dominate the *Westminster Assembly*
    - The *Westminster Confession* (1646) codifies infant baptism as it relates to the Covenant of Grace and Covenant Theology
- The Anglican Restoration (1662) forces all 'puritans' to either conform to Anglican practice or become 'non-conformists'
    - Non-conformists (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Separatists, Baptists) were ejected from their churches
        - The Great Ejection happened at the same time as the Restoration



“That the right subjects of Baptism are such as make a credible profession of their faith in Christ, and obedience to Him; that the outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized by dipping or plunging in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel lawfully called thereunto.”

First London Baptist Confession, 1644, Article 39

“Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world. Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated. … The infants of one, or both, parents professing faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.”

Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646, Ch. 28, Sections 1,2, & 4.

Baptist Growth & Influence

Waning Presbyterian power (17th-18th Centuries)

- Baptists Endure Persecution (1662-1689)
  - Baptist Non-Conformists face imprisonment for believer's baptism
  - John Bunyan, a Puritan-turned-Nonconformist, preaches during imprisonment, rejecting Anglican conformity and infant baptism (1660-1672)
- Credobaptism codified
  - The *Second London Baptist Confession* (1677) reaffirms believer's baptism by immersion
- Presbyterians (Non-Conformists also) lose national influence after the Anglican Restoration (1662)



“I will not let the fear of man’s chains keep me from preaching the truth of Christ, for baptism is a sign of faith, not a rite for infants”

John Bunyan, excerpt in letter written from Bedford Jail, 1665

“These Anabaptists do undermine the very foundations of the church by denying the baptism of infants, a practice ordained by Christ’s apostles, and thus they lead souls astray from the covenant of grace.”

Richard Baxter, Presbyterian, *The Non-Conformists Plea for Peace,* 1679.

Baptists in America

Colonial Beginnings (17th-18th Centuries)

- Roger Williams founds a baptist church in Providence, RI (1638)
    - He was banished from MA for his rejection of infant baptism and toleration advocacy
- He secured a charter for Rhode Island (1644), enabling religious freedom for all settlers
    - Persecution (fines, whipping, banishment) came from Puritan and Anglican congregations in VA, MA
- John Clarke founded another baptist church in Newport, RI (1644)
    - He was arrested in MA (1651) for preaching baptist beliefs
- American Individualism (personal freedom and choice) resonated with the Baptist rejection of state control
- By 1700, there were
    - 24 baptist churches
    - 130 congregationalist (Puritan)
    - 40 Anglican churches



“In 1638, I sought God’s truth in Scripture, finding no warrant for infant baptism. At Providence, we baptized only those who confessed Christ, a testimony to His gospel.”

Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution,* 1644

“In 1651, three Baptists were whipped in Boston for refusing infant baptism, yet their preaching drew some of our flock to their unlawful meetings.”

John Cotton, *Letter to Massachusetts General Court,* 1651.

Revivalist Surge in America

Great Awakenings (18th-19th Centuries)

- 1st Great Awakening (1740-1780), led by Whitefield and Edwards, saw a growth in Baptist churches from around ~33 to ~500 churches
    - Isaac Backus (MA) and Shubal Stearns (NC) held outdoor revivals where converts were baptized in rivers
- Philadelphia Confession (1742) codified believer's Baptism (based on the 1689 London)
- Presbyterians, Anglicans lose converts to Baptist churches (see quote)
- Disestablishment (1786, VA) and Religious Liberty appeals (1773) separates the state from the church and allows Baptist churches to grow, free from additional taxes, fines, legal threats
- John Mason Peck preached and evangelized the midwest (1811ff), & established the *Baptist Home Mission Society* (1832)
    - In his 40 year ministry, he contributed to 900 churches, 600 ordained pastors, 32,000 New Members



“In 1771, I preached Christ’s gospel by the Concord River; sinners repented, and we baptized them before a weeping crowd, their immersion a sign of new life.”

Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Baptists, 1777.*

“In 1759, our Virginia churches lost members to Baptist revivals, as their river baptisms drew crowds who sought a faith they could publicly profess.”

Samuel Davies, *Letters on the State of Religion in Virginia,* 1759

Baptist Growth through Missions

Missions and Revival (18th-19th Centuries)

- 2nd Great awakening (1800-1830s) in America changed the face of the country
    - 100k baptized annually, Methodists and Baptists were key groups (~3 million over 30 years)
- The Revivals caused the modern missionary movement to grow
    - American Baptist Missionary Union (1814)
        - Adoniram Judson to Burma (1812), 7k baptisms
        - Lottie Moon to China (1873), 1.5k baptisms
        - 2500 churches established worldwide by 1900
    - American Baptist Home Mission Society (1832), SBC foreign and domestic missions focus (1845)
    - Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ all focus on missions, but Baptist growth outpaces them
- ~1900, Baptists have grown to 4.5 million members and 35K churches (in the US)
    - Their growth outpaces all other groups



“The noise was like the roar of Niagara, and the vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm.”

Barton W. Stone, *A presbyterian Minister reflecting on the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801*, (20k attendees, 3k baptisms)

“I am resolved to preach the gospel, and to baptize those who believe, according to the command of Christ, regardless of the traditions of men.”

Adoniram Judson, letter to the American Baptist Missionary Union, 1817.

Reflections on Baptism

Scripture triumphs over Tradition

1. **God's word is the final authority**
    - God's word, not tradition, should guide faith and practice
    - God's word should *override* convenience and pragmatism
    - Believer's Baptism aligns with God's Word
2. **God is active in History**
    - History preserves and strengthens God's Word
    - Freedoms enable obedience to God's Word
    - A focus on Evangelism spreads God's Word
    - Culture was shaped to support God's Word

