



MAGIC BAPTISM

AND THE
INVENTION
OF ORIGINAL
SIN

BY
RODERICK
GRACIANO

Cover illustration:
Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist,
a mosaic in St. George's Greek Orthodox Church,
Madaba, Jordan.
Photo by Rachel Graciano, 2007.

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MAGIC BAPTISM

AND THE INVENTION OF ORIGINAL SIN

Roderick Graciano

Man looks on the outward appearance,
but the LORD looks at the heart.

1 Samuel 16.7

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE VERSIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS

All scripture quotations given in this book are from *The New American Standard Bible*, © 1995 (NAU), unless otherwise indicated.

Ⲛ	Codex Sinaiticus
A	Codex Alexandrinus
ASV	<i>The Holy Bible, American Standard Version 1901</i>
CSB	<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> , © 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers.
ESV	<i>The Holy Bible, English Standard Version</i> , © 2011 by Good News Publishers.
GNT	<i>Greek New Testament</i> , © 1975 by United Bible Societies.
HCS	<i>The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version</i> , © 2009 Holman Bible Publishers.
KJV	<i>King James Version of the English Bible</i> , © 1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.
LXA	<i>The Septuagint With Apocrypha</i> , ET by Brenton, © 1999-2008 by Ernest C. Marsh.
LXX	The Septuagint (ancient Greek version of the OT)
MT	<i>Masoretic Text</i> , the standard Hebrew Bible text handed down by the early rabbinical textual scholars.
NAS	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1977 by The Lockman Foundation.
NAU	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.
NET	<i>The New English Translation Bible</i> , © 1996-2006 by Biblical Studies Press.

NIV	<i>The Holy Bible: New International Version</i> , © 2011 by International Bible Society.
NIVO	<i>The Holy Bible: New International Version</i> , © 1984 by International Bible Society.
NIRV	<i>Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version</i> , © 1995, 1996, 1998 by International Bible Society.
NKJ	<i>The New King James Version</i> , © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
NLT	<i>Holy Bible, New Living Translation</i> , Second Edition, © 2004 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
PES	The standard version of the Syriac Bible that assumed its final form in the early fifth century, and contained only twenty-two books in the NT (excluding 2Pe, 2Jo, 3Jo, Jude, and Rev).
TNK	<i>The Tanakh (The Jewish Bible)</i> , © 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society.
RG	Not a Bible version, but my own translation from the Greek or Hebrew text.
VUL	The Vulgate (Latin version of the Bible).
WTT	Codex Leningradensis Hebrew Text used in BibleWorks.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE BOOKS & APOCRYPHA

1Ch	1 Chronicles	Hos	Hosea
1Co	1 Corinthians	Isa	Isaiah
1Jo	1 John	Jam	James
1Ki	1 Kings	Jdg	Judges
1Ma	1 Maccabees	Jdt	Judith
1Pe	1 Peter	Jer	Jeremiah
1Sa	1 Samuel	Job	Job
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Joe	Joel
1Ti	1 Timothy	Joh	John
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Jon	Jonah
2Co	2 Corinthians	Jos	Joshua
2Jo	2 John	Jude	Jude
2Ki	2 Kings	Lam	Lamentations
2Ma	2 Maccabees	Lev	Leviticus
2Pe	2 Peter	Luk	Luke
2Sa	2 Samuel	Mal	Malachi
2Th	2 Thessalonians	Mar	Mark
2Ti	2 Timothy	Mat	Matthew
3Jo	3 John	Mic	Micah
3Ma	3 Maccabees	Nah	Nahum
4Ma	4 Maccabees	Neh	Nehemiah
Act	Acts	Num	Numbers
Amos	Amos	Oba	Obadiah
Col	Colossians	Phil	Philippians
Dan	Daniel	Phm	Philemon
Deut	Deuteronomy	Pro	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes	Psa	Psalms
Eph	Ephesians	Rev	Revelation
Est	Esther	Rom	Romans
Ex	Exodus	Rut	Ruth
Eze	Ezekiel	Sir	Sirach or Wisdom of Ben Sira
Ezr	Ezra	Song	The Song of Solomon
Gal	Galatians	Tit	Titus
Gen	Genesis	Tob	Tobit
Hab	Habakkuk	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Hag	Haggai	Zec	Zechariah
Heb	Hebrews	Zep	Zephaniah

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ABBREVIATIONS FOR OTHER WORKS, ANCIENT AND MODERN

NOTE: All quotations from the Ante-Nicene [Church Fathers](#), unless otherwise attributed, are taken from the Roberts, Donaldson and Menzies' English editions. Quotations from the Nicene and Post-Nicene [Fathers](#) are taken from Philip Schaff's English editions. English quotations from the *Summa* of [Thomas Aquinas](#) are taken from the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. In citations of these and other works, I have changed the original editors' chapter and verse designations from Roman numerals to our common Arabic numerals.

<i>1Apo</i>	Justin Martyr , <i>The First Apology</i>
<i>1Cl</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>
<i>1En</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
<i>2Ba</i>	<i>2 Baruch</i>
<i>2Cl</i>	<i>An Early Christian Homily, aka The Second Letter of Clement To The Corinthians</i>
<i>2Com Mat</i>	Origen , <i>Second Book Of Commentary On Matthew</i>
<i>4Es</i>	<i>4 Esdras</i>
ABD	<i>The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary</i>
ACCOS	<i>Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture</i>
<i>Ad Sel</i>	Augustine , <i>Epistle To Seleuciam</i>
<i>Adv Haer</i>	Irenaeus , <i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Adv Iud</i>	John Chrysostom , <i>Homilies Against The Jews</i>
<i>Adv Marc</i>	Tertullian , <i>Against Marcion</i>
<i>Adv Val</i>	Tertullian , <i>Against the Valentinians</i>
<i>Amb Epi</i>	Ambrose of Milan , <i>Letters</i>
<i>Anima</i>	Tertullian , <i>A Treatise On The Soul</i>
<i>Ant</i>	Josephus , <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Apol</i>	Tertullian , <i>Apologeticum (The Apology)</i>
Aris	Aristides , <i>Apology</i>
Aster	Asterius

<i>Aug Epi</i>	Augustine , <i>Letters</i>
<i>Aug Ser</i>	Augustine , <i>Sermons</i>
<i>Auto</i>	Theophilus of Antioch , <i>To Autolycus</i>
<i>Banq</i>	Methodius of Olympus , <i>Symposium or The Banquet Of The Ten Virgins</i>
<i>Bap</i>	Tertullian , <i>On Baptism</i>
<i>Bar</i>	<i>Epistle Of Barnabas</i>
<i>BBCNT</i>	<i>The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament</i>
<i>Brev</i>	Bonaventure , <i>Breviloquium</i>
<i>Cat Aur</i>	Thomas Aquinas , <i>Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers</i>
<i>Cat Lec</i>	Cyril of Jerusalem , <i>Catechetical Lectures</i>
<i>Cat Ora</i>	Gregory of Nyssa , <i>Catechetical Oration (aka The Great Catechism)</i>
<i>CCC</i>	<i>Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Second Edition, 1997</i>
<i>Celsus</i>	Origen , <i>Against Celsus</i>
<i>Chr-Ant</i>	Hippolytus , <i>Treatise on Christ and Antichrist</i>
<i>CNTTH</i>	John Lightfoot , <i>Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica</i>
<i>CNTUOT</i>	<i>Commentary On The New Testament Use Of The Old Testament</i>
<i>Com Apoc</i>	Marius Victorinus , <i>Commentary On The Apocalypse Of The Blessed John</i>
<i>Com Col</i>	Theodore of Mopsuestia , <i>Commentary On Colossians</i>
<i>Com Gen</i>	Origen , <i>Commentary On Genesis</i>
<i>Com Eph</i>	Marius Victorinus , <i>Commentary On The Epistle To The Ephesians</i>
<i>Com Joh</i>	Origen , <i>Commentary On The Gospel Of John</i>
<i>Com Lev</i>	Hesychius of Jerusalem , <i>Commentarius in Leviticum</i>
<i>Com Mat</i>	Origen , <i>Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew</i>
<i>Com Paul</i>	<i>Severian of Gabala, Pauline Commentary From The Greek Church</i>

<i>Com Prov</i>	Hippolytus , <i>On Proverbs</i> (Fragments from the <i>Commentary Of Hippolytus On Proverbs</i>)
<i>Com Rom</i>	Origen , <i>Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans</i>
<i>Con Don</i>	Optatus , <i>Against [Parmenian] The Donatist[s]</i>
<i>Con Dua</i>	Augustine , <i>A Treatise Against Two Letters Of The Pelagians</i>
<i>Con Jul</i>	Augustine , <i>Against Julian</i>
<i>Con Pel</i>	Jerome , <i>Against The Pelagians: Dialogue Between Atticus, A Catholic, And Critobulus, A Heretic</i>
<i>Conf</i>	Augustine , <i>Confessions</i>
<i>Confusion</i>	Philo , <i>De Confusione Linguarum, or On The Confusion Of Tongues</i>
<i>Const</i>	<i>Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles</i>
<i>Crat</i>	Plato , <i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Cyp Epi</i>	Cyprian , <i>Epistles</i>
<i>Cyp Treat</i>	Cyprian , <i>Treatises</i>
<i>Dav Alt</i>	Ambrose of Milan , <i>Apologia David Altera</i>
<i>De Anima</i>	Augustine , <i>De Anima (A Treatise On The Soul And Its Origin)</i>
<i>De Bap</i>	Augustine , <i>On Baptism Against The Donatists</i>
<i>De Civ</i>	Augustine , <i>The City Of God</i>
<i>De Cor</i>	Tertullian , <i>De Corona (The Chaplet)</i>
<i>De Corr</i>	Augustine , <i>A Treatise On Rebuke And Grace</i>
<i>De Doc</i>	Augustine , <i>On Christian Doctrine</i>
<i>De Gestis</i>	Augustine , <i>On The Proceedings [Of The Synod Of Diospolis] Regarding Pelagius</i>
<i>De Grat</i>	Augustine , <i>A Treatise On The Grace Of Christ, And On Original Sin</i>
<i>De Myst</i>	Ambrose , <i>On The Mysteries [Baptism and Eucharist]</i>
<i>De Nup</i>	Augustine , <i>On Marriage And Concupiscence</i>
<i>De Pec</i>	Augustine , <i>A Treatise On The Merits And Forgiveness Of Sins, And On The Baptism Of Infants</i>
<i>De Prin</i>	Origen , <i>De Principiis</i>
<i>De Servo</i>	Martin Luther , <i>The Bondage Of The Will</i>
<i>De Spiritu</i>	Augustine , <i>A Treatise On The Spirit And The Letter</i>

<i>De Trin</i>	Novatian, <i>A Treatise On The Trinity</i>
<i>De Virg</i>	Anselm , <i>De Virginali Conceptu et de Peccato Originali</i> , (The edition used is from <i>Complete Philosophical And Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury: The Virgin Conception and Original Sin</i> , translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson).
<i>Dial</i>	Justin Martyr , <i>Dialogue With Trypho, A Jew</i>
<i>Diat</i>	Tatian , <i>Diatessaron</i>
<i>Did</i>	<i>The Didache: The Lord's Teaching Through The Twelve Apostles To The Nations</i>
<i>Div Inst</i>	Lactantius , <i>Divine Institutes</i>
DJTBP	<i>Dictionary Of Judaism In The Biblical Period</i>
DLGTT	<i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology</i>
DSS	The Dead Sea Scrolls
EBC	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
EDT2	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition</i>
EGT	<i>The Expositor's Greek Testament</i>
<i>Enchi</i>	Augustine , <i>The Enchiridion or On Faith, Hope, And Love</i>
<i>Exh</i>	Clement of Alexandria , <i>Protrepticus, or Exhortation To The Heathen (Greeks)</i>
<i>Expo Apoc</i>	Caesarius of Arles, <i>Exposition On The Apocalypse</i>
<i>Expo Luc</i>	Ambrose of Milan , <i>Exposition Of The Gospel According To Luke</i>
<i>Fab Epi</i>	Pope Fabian, <i>Epistles</i> (Papal Decretals)
<i>Faust</i>	Augustine , <i>Reply To Faustus The Manichaeon</i>
<i>Frag</i>	Irenaeus , <i>Fragments of Lost Writings</i>
<i>Geo</i>	Strabo, <i>Geography</i>
<i>Greece</i>	Pausanias, <i>Description Of Greece</i>
<i>Heir</i>	Philo, <i>Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit, Or Who Is The Heir Of Divine Things</i>
<i>Hermas</i>	<i>The Shepherd [Pastor] Of Hermas</i>
<i>Hil Mat</i>	Hilary Of Poitiers , <i>Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew</i>

<i>Hip Prov</i>	Hippolytus <i>On Proverbs</i>
<i>Hom 1Jo</i>	Augustine , <i>Ten Homilies On The First Epistle Of John</i>
<i>Hom Act</i>	Chrysostom , <i>Homilies On The Acts Of The Apostles</i>
<i>Hom Col</i>	Chrysostom , <i>Homilies On Colossians</i>
<i>Hom Eph</i>	Chrysostom , <i>Homilies On The Epistle Of St. Paul To The Ephesians</i>
<i>Hom Gen</i>	Chrysostom , <i>Homilies On Genesis</i>
<i>Hom Joh</i>	Chrysostom , <i>Homilies On The Gospel Of St. John</i>
<i>Hom Jos</i>	Origen , <i>Homily On Joshua</i>
<i>Hom Lev</i>	Origen , <i>Homily On Leviticus</i>
<i>Hom Luk</i>	Origen , <i>Homilies On The Gospel Of Luke</i>
<i>Ign Eph</i>	Ignatius <i>Epistle To The Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign Mag</i>	Ignatius , <i>Epistle To The Magnesians</i>
<i>Inst</i>	John Calvin , <i>Institutes Of The Christian Religion</i>
<i>Jer Hom</i>	Jerome , <i>Homilies</i>
<i>Jub</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>Laws</i>	Philo , <i>De Specialibus Legibus or The Special Laws</i>
<i>Meno</i>	Plato , <i>Socratic Dialogue With Meno</i>
<i>Mod</i>	Tertullian , <i>On Modesty</i>
<i>Mon</i>	Tertullian , <i>On Monogamy</i>
NIC	<i>The New International Commentary On The New Testament</i>
NIDCC	<i>The New International Dictionary Of The Christian Church</i>
NIEBD	<i>New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties</i>
NT	<i>New Testament</i>
NTUOT	<i>Commentary On The New Testament Use Of The Old Testament</i>
ODCC	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
<i>Ode Sol</i>	<i>Odes Of Solomon</i>
<i>Op Imp</i>	Augustine , <i>Unfinished Work Against Julian</i>
<i>Ora</i>	Gregory Nazianzen , <i>Orations</i>
OT	<i>Old Testament</i>
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>Pæd</i>	Clement of Alexandria , <i>The Instructor (Pædagogus)</i>

<i>Perf</i>	Augustine , <i>A Treatise Concerning Man's Perfection In Righteousness</i>
<i>Peti</i>	Augustine , <i>In Answer To Petilian</i>
<i>Planter</i>	Philo , <i>De Plantatione, or Concerning Noah's Work As A Planter</i>
<i>Pneuma</i>	Basil , <i>On The Spirit</i>
<i>Poly Phil</i>	<i>The Epistle Of Polycarp To The Philippians</i>
<i>Poet</i>	Philo <i>The Epic Poet</i>
<i>Pss</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Q Gen</i>	Philo , <i>Quaestiones In Genesim, or Questions On Genesis</i>
<i>Rec</i>	<i>Recognitions of Clement (Clementine Recognitions)</i>
<i>Res</i>	Tertullian , <i>On Resurrection Of The Flesh</i>
<i>Resur</i>	Methodius Of Olympus , <i>Aglaophon or on the Resurrection</i>
<i>San</i>	<i>The Mishnah</i> , tractate "Sanhedrin"
<i>Sat</i>	Ambrose of Milan , <i>De Excessu Fratris Satyri</i> , aka, <i>Two Books Of St. Ambrose On The Decease Of Satyrus [And The Resurrection Of The Dead]</i>
<i>Ser</i>	<i>Sermon(s)</i>
<i>Scorp</i>	Tertullian , <i>Scorpiace (Antidote For The Scorpion's Sting)</i>
<i>Shem</i>	<i>The Paraphrase Of Shem</i>
<i>Sib</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>Soul</i>	Augustine , <i>On The Soul And Its Origin</i>
<i>Strom</i>	Clement of Alexandria , <i>The Stromata, or Miscellanies</i>
<i>Summa</i>	Thomas Aquinas , <i>Summa Theologica</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament</i>
<i>Test Sol</i>	<i>The Testament Of Solomon</i>
<i>Theo</i>	Hesiod , <i>Theogonia</i>
<i>Theoph</i>	Hippolytus , <i>Discourse on the Holy Theophany</i>
<i>Thomas</i>	<i>The Gospel Of Thomas</i>
<i>Trac Mat</i>	Chromatius , <i>Tractate On Matthew</i>
<i>Trag</i>	<i>Ezekiel The Tragedian</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament</i>
<i>Trin</i>	Augustine , <i>On The Trinity</i>
<i>Truth</i>	<i>The Testimony Of Truth</i>

TynBul

Tyndale Bulletin

Vis

Shepherd of Hermas, *Visions*

Work

[Lactantius](#), *On The Workmanship Of God, Or The Formation
Of Man*

MISCELLANEOUS ABBREVIATIONS

adj.	adjective	Heb	Hebrew (language)
adv.	adverb	Hom	Homily, homilies
aka	also known as	Lat	Latin (language)
ANE	Ancient Near East	LE	Long Ending of Mark, Mar 16.9-20
app.	appendix	lit.	Literal, literally
art.	article	LBS	Logos Bible Software by FaithLife
b.	born	LCMS	Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
BW	BibleWorks Bible Software	ms, mss	manuscript, manuscripts
c.	circa, approximately	n.	note, footnote
cf.	compare with	<i>op cit</i>	in the work previously cited
cen.	century	p., pp.	page, pages
ch., chs.	chapter, chapters	pl.	plural
d.	died	q.	question
ed., eds.	editor, editors	trans.	translation, translator(s)
Eng	English	<i>Treat</i>	<i>Treatise(s)</i>
Epi	Epistle, i.e., Letter	Vis	Vision(s)
ET	English translation	vol.	volume
ff.	and following		
Fig.	figure		
fl.	flourished		
Grk	Greek (language)		

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

For Greek and Hebrew terms in this work I have provided a phonetic pronunciation after the word in its original form. For vowels, follow this key:

ä = a as in Father.

ā = a as in fate.

ǎ = a as in cat.

ē = e as in feet.

ě = e as in bet.

ə = a as in among.

ī = i as in bite.

ĩ = i as in bin.

ō = o as in vote.

ǒ = o as in lot.

ū = u as in cute.

ü = u as in blue.

The sound of consonants in the pronunciations should generally be self-evident, but note that in neither Greek nor Hebrew do we find the sound of *ch* as in *chew*. Rather, when *ch* appears in a pronunciation, it should be sounded as a guttural *k* as in *Bach*. The accented syllable in the pronunciations will be marked with a preceding mark like this: ' .

My apologies to those trained in the Erasmian pronunciation of Koine Greek (as I was). Because of my own preference to pronounce Greek as today's Greeks do, I give all phonetic pronunciations of Greek words in this work according to the rules of Modern Greek.

PREFACE

In this work I unavoidably challenge some long-held doctrinal traditions. Therefore, in the hopes of precluding as much misunderstanding as possible, allow me to affirm some important points at the outset.

First, as an advocate of “[believer’s baptism](#),” I consider Christian baptism an [ordinance](#) that the Church should obediently practice and hold in high honor. I believe that Christian baptism, properly understood, is rich in meaning and that each of us should remember our own baptism with joy.

Second, while I cannot hide my disapproval of infant baptism *as a doctrine*, I assure the reader that ill feelings toward recipients or proponents of infant baptism have never marred the more than forty years of my Christian life and ministry. While I disagree with my Missouri Synod Lutheran brethren, for example, I nevertheless respect their doctrinal heritage, and I consider all who maintain a personal faith in the atoning work of Christ as my true spiritual kin.

Third, while I argue against both the [Augustinian](#) and [Federal](#) understandings of inherited sin and guilt, I do so only to emphasize what I consider the true biblical doctrine of our fallenness. By *fallenness* I mean the bondage to Satan, the corruption of our human nature and our sinfulness from birth, all of which are indeed legacies from Adam. That “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and that therefore all must be born again to “see the kingdom of God,” I consider beyond debate.

Finally, I must mention some practical matters. I have done my best to make this technical work readable and understandable to the layperson. I have provided synopses before each major section, and at the end of the book I have included a [Glossary](#) of terms, along with [Biographical Notes](#) on authors and theologians. Furthermore, where I mention a Greek or Hebrew word, I have provided a phonetic pronunciation (rather than a classic transliteration) alongside.¹ For dates, I use the traditional BC (before Christ) and AD (*anno domini*, “year of the Lord”) designations instead of the secularized BCE (before the common era) and CE (common era). I capitalize the word *Church* when

¹ I have provided the Modern rather than Erasmian pronunciation for Greek words.

speaking of the Body of Christ in its universal, wide-spread or invisible aspect, and leave the word uncapitalized when speaking of a denominational, or local body. Italics in biblical quotations indicate *implied* words not in the original Hebrew or Greek source texts; I have used **bold font** to add emphasis to words in Scripture quotations and *italic font* to add emphasis in all other instances. One last thing: in this work I use the dot rather than the colon in Scripture references, and three-letter abbreviations for Bible book names (as given in the “Abbreviations” section above). I have taken the liberty of converting biblical references embedded in quotations to this system so that all passages in this work can be indexed.

May God bless all who read this book, and give them a renewed commitment to the authority of Scripture, along with a greater fervor to grow in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my dear readers beforehand for their forbearance, and for honoring me with a fair hearing.

Roderick Graciano,
Tacoma, WA, USA
February 1, 2016

DEDICATION

Thousands of Anabaptists in the 1500's sacrificed their lives so that their spiritual heirs might be free to practice Christianity according to their consciences, unconstrained by the edicts of a state church. Their opponents most vehemently persecuted the Anabaptists for their practice of baptizing only those who had made a personal (not by proxy) confession of faith in Christ. In the words of David F. Wright, from his Didsbury Lectures of 2003, "The contemporary church still waits for appropriate acknowledgment by the Vatican and the worldwide Anglican and Reformed communions (the Lutherans of Germany have in good measure led the way and the Swiss Reformed churches have followed more recently) of their forbears' scandalous mistreatment of [the Anabaptists who were] the first significant modern advocates of long-lost dimensions of New Testament baptism."² In the hope that such an acknowledgement will yet come, I gratefully dedicate this work to those 16th century martyrs who made the ultimate sacrifice to advance a more biblical doctrine of baptism among their peers.

² David F. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done To Baptism: An Enquiry At The End Of Christendom*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 4.

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My wife, Kaaren Joy, has patiently endured the varied challenges and sacrifices involved in having a theological writer for a husband, and for that I give her my heartfelt thanks. Kaaren, I love you forever.

My two editors, Mrs. Sally Sternard and Mr. Robert Firman, richly deserve my gratitude — and also the gratitude of those who read this work — because it is a vastly better book than it would have been without their careful attention. I cannot thank you two enough for your labor of love.

I owe a debt of gratitude also to my many students, past and current, young and old, both because I have learned so much from them in our studies together, and because their insightful questions have helped me recognize many of the theological issues that most need to be addressed by pastors and teachers in our time.

If this book helps produce any good spiritual fruit in the Church, then the thanks for that success must go to our Father, our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit of truth. I hope that I have planted or watered well, but I know that “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (1Co 3.7).

SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK

The culture from which the Holy Bible emerged, like living cultures today, made rich use of figurative language, and its lively figures of speech found their way into the biblical texts. Therefore, to read the Bible as if it were void of symbolism and metaphor is to read it with a wooden literalness that turns the Scriptures into the absurd and self-contradictory prattle of fools. This we must not do. The hermeneutical challenge, however, as in any cross-cultural interpretation, is to distinguish the Bible's figures of speech from literal statements, and to interpret its idiomatic expressions correctly. We must recognize and embrace this challenge.

Within a generation after the apostles, baptism became the *Nehushtan* of early Christianity (Num 21.9; 2Ki 18.4). Just as the bronze serpent of Moses became an idol to the Israelites, so the ordinance of baptism, given by God as a New Covenant "copy and shadow," became an end in itself, almost worshipped by the Church.

Christian baptism, properly understood, is a profound blessing to the recipient and a powerful testimony to the observer. The antecedents of Christian baptism are the flood of Noah, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the consecration of the Aaronic priests. All the typology and symbolism of these antecedents came to their climactic application in the baptism of Jesus. Christ's baptism confirmed and deepened the meaning of the baptism that He would command for His followers. While we thus hold biblical baptism in high honor, we must reject a Hellenized understanding of the ordinance along with the idolatrous devotion historically attached to its external features.

The Hellenized understanding of baptism came about after the Second Jewish Revolt, when the Church Fathers distanced themselves from the Jewish community, and thus from worldview of the Apostles. This resulted in Christians coming to understand baptism as a rite that regenerates the recipient, i.e., a rite that gives new birth to the human

soul.³ To this day, consequently, Christians of various stripes believe that baptism confers salvation. The bases for this belief, however, are not biblical but have roots in the magic-drenched worldview of Hellenism and its mystery religions. When one becomes acquainted with the Jewish milieu in which John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles arose, it becomes absurd to believe that any New Testament figure could have taught that a water ritual imparted repentance, faith, forgiveness or new birth. Nevertheless, a Hellenistic understanding of baptism has persisted in the Church, due in part to ecclesiastical exigencies.

Nevertheless, a biblical understanding of sin, and particularly of man's congenital fallen condition should disabuse us of the idea that an external rite like baptism could meet our need. Man's sin problem is simply too profound to be addressed by anything less than the direct agency of God's Holy Spirit. The more fully we understand human fallenness, the less we will rely on religious rites and rituals for salvation. When we truly understand our problem, we will know that we have no choice but to put all our hope in the saving power of God Himself — saving power made available to us through the atoning work of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, people throughout history have observed that the recipients of Christian baptism still sin, sometimes flagrantly! Obviously, therefore, baptism does not remove man's inclination to evil. How, then, can anyone continue to claim that baptism saves? In order to maintain the mystical efficacy of baptism in the face of its lack of observable effect, the Church Fathers invented the doctrine of original sin. This doctrine teaches that we have inherited guilt for the sin of one or more of our ancestors, and that it is *this guilt* which baptism expunges. Augustine brought this doctrine to its fully developed form, the medieval Scholastics modified it, and the Reformers reformulated it. However, the doctrine creates more theological problems than it solves. In the final analysis, original sin is a

³ The reader will discover that I, and those quoted in this work, will use the words *soul* and *spirit* interchangeably (even as the Bible does) when referring to **the non-material part of human beings**. While we sometimes use the term *spirit* to emphasize the part of a person that responds (positively or negatively) to God and religion, we should never think of the human spirit as a component of man that is unconnected to the soul's faculties of mind, will and emotion. Thus, when I speak of "spiritual deadness," while I emphasize *the aspect* of our fallen condition that precludes us from responding fruitfully to God, I do not mean to imply that the *soul* is fine while only the *spirit* is dead. For a thorough explanation of what Scripture means by the terms *soul* and *spirit*, I refer the reader to Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Bible Doctrine*, (Zondervan, 2004), ch. 23.

superfluous idea in view of the clear biblical teaching that we all have enough sins of our own to deal with. We all need the salvation proffered in the gospel, regardless of whether or not we have inherited guilt from someone else's sin. Why then has some form of the doctrine of [original sin](#) persisted in a wide variety of Christian denominations? Primarily because it is a necessary component of theological constructs that provide the rationale for [infant baptism](#).

A thorough study of baptism (and of human fallenness) should bring us back to an acknowledgment of the gospel as the only "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Nevertheless, our baptism, rightly understood, should fill us with spiritual boldness for the Kingdom work ahead.

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Robert Lowry, *Nothing But The Blood*

PART I: UNDERSTANDING BAPTISM

Baptismism \ˈbap-ti-zəm-,iz-əm\ **noun** 1 : belief that the rite of water baptism (or consecrated water itself) confers mystical union with Christ, conveys spiritual merit or communicates expiatory, regenerative or otherwise salvific power; 2 : the propensity to find allusions to Christian baptism in any Bible text mentioning or having to do with water or washing⁴; 3 : the inclination to see baptismal formulas and confessions in early Christianity before such things existed; 4 : the impulse to alter or add to Scripture in order to promote the idea of baptismal regeneration.

⁴ Tertullian (c. AD 200) saw the hovering of the Spirit over the waters of creation, the sweetening of the bitter water by Moses, the water from the rock, the turning of water into wine, the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at a well, Jesus walking on water, Jesus washing the disciples' feet, Pilate washing his hands, and the water from Christ's side at the crucifixion as all alluding to baptism (*Bap* 4 and 9). Cyprian (c. AD 253) said, "...as often as water is named alone in the Holy Scriptures, baptism is referred to ..." (*Epi* 62.8 (but in the Oxford edition, 63.8.1)). He interpreted the "stolen waters" metaphor for adultery in Pro 9.17-18 (LXX) as alluding to false or heretical baptism (*Epi* 69.1)! Caesarius of Arles (c. AD 500), interpreted the words of Jesus in Rev 21.6, "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost," as referring to "the remission of sins through the font of baptism" (*Expo Apoc*, Hom 18).

Now these [Berean Jews] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

Act 17.11

SYNOPSIS OF PART I

The NT writings sparkle with metaphor and idiom. When we study these scriptures and their doctrines, therefore, we must take care to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical and idiomatic. Once we recognize an expression as non-literal, we must interpret it from a Hebraic point of view, rather than from our Western perspective that has been so influenced by Hellenistic and Roman categories.

From the mid-second century onward, the Church largely lost touch with its Hebraic heritage and its Jewish understanding of the Scriptures. Accordingly, the early Church Fathers began to interpret Christian baptism from a Hellenistic mindset which viewed such rites as apotropaic or even salvific. Not surprisingly, then, writers like Cyril of Jerusalem began to describe baptism as “a chariot to heaven.” No one can read the NT without recognizing that baptism holds an important place in the Christian life, but is it salvific? To understand what gives baptism its importance — and what does not — , we must examine twenty-one NT passages for what they reveal about this rite.

The NT passages pertaining to Christian baptism teach that baptism commits the baptizee to ongoing relationship with Christ. Indeed, baptism marks the beginning of a person’s new life in Christ and consecrates the baptizee to priestly ministry in God’s Kingdom. Baptism thus marks the first step of obedience in a lifetime of discipleship and sanctification. Baptism not only identifies the baptizee as belonging to Christ, but also as having participated by faith in Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. In fact, in baptism the baptizee dramatically reenacts the judgment upon sin that satisfied God’s justice, and is thus saved *in a figurative sense*. By baptism, therefore, the baptizee gives public testimony that he has repented and been forgiven, that his heart has been spiritually circumcised, that he himself has died to his old life, and he has now become an heir with Christ in the family of God.

Other NT passages pertaining, or *thought* to pertain, to baptism reveal that:

- Jesus did not teach Nicodemus about baptism but pointed him away from external rites that he might be born again.

- When a person is baptized in the name of Jesus, the spiritual power resides not in the baptism (nor in the baptismal waters) but in the Name.
- Christ's word, not baptism, effects the spiritual washing that all sinners need.
- God's Holy Spirit, not baptism, accomplishes the regeneration that we must have in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our contemporaries have many practical questions about baptism. They include questions such as:

- Does infant baptism have any value?
- Who can baptize?
- What is the proper mode of baptism?
- Which baptismal formula is correct?

Upon examining each of these questions and many others, it becomes apparent that while we should hold Christian baptism in high honor, we should never attribute inherent power to it. No religious ritual, nor ecclesiastical pronouncement, nor any other external or human deed accomplishes the salvation of man. Instead, salvation — from beginning to end — belongs to our God.

BLACK AND BLUE

We once hosted an exchange student from Barcelona, named Ernest. At dinner one evening, Ernest, speaking in Spanish, asked me about a conversation he'd had with a couple of his American classmates. "They played soccer yesterday," Ernest said, "and they mentioned going home afterwards with their bodies 'black and blue.' Does that mean they painted themselves with the team colors?" Imagine Ernest's amusement when I explained that "black and blue" is an English figure of speech meaning *bruised*.

Every bilingual person knows (sometimes having learned after personal embarrassment) that all languages make use of idiomatic expressions, i.e., words and phrases whose meanings seem absurd if taken literally. Such idiomatic expressions, though, along with other figures of speech, make a language sparkle, and we certainly see this engaging phenomenon in the biblical languages.⁵ Therefore, to read the Scriptures as if they were void of idiom and metaphor would turn them into the absurd and self-contradictory prattle of fools.⁶ This we must not do. The *hermeneutical* challenge, however, as in any cross-cultural interpretation, is to distinguish the Bible's figures of speech from literal statements, and then to interpret its idiomatic and metaphorical expressions correctly.

I make this point because the apostolic teaching about baptism employs as rich an array of symbol and metaphor as any other *NT* doctrine. Sadly, expositors over the centuries have frequently overlooked — sometimes knowingly, sometimes unwittingly, often selectively — the symbolic and metaphorical content of biblical passages about baptism. This historical tendency to read literally what the apostles intended metaphorically is understandable for two reasons: (1) the influence of paganism upon Christianity in the early centuries made *mystical* readings of the *NT* more

⁵ I refer the reader to my article "Making The Invisible Visible" as a primer on Hebraic thought that will shed some light on idiomatic expressions in Scripture. This article is available as a free download at <http://www.tmin.org/pdfs/invisible.pdf>.

⁶ On balance, see section 12, "The Rule Of The Literal Sense," in my primer, *Polishing Our Hermeneutical Glasses: 21 Principles For Interpreting The Bible*. This document is available as a free download at http://www.tmin.org/pdfs/polishing_2007.pdf.

plausible, and (2) if we once admit that the NT uses symbol and metaphor in its baptismal teaching, then we will have to accept the more difficult task of interpreting that teaching. I will say more about the influence of paganism in [Part II](#) of this book, but the working premise of Part I is that the NT writers *did* employ symbols and metaphors in baptismal texts, and so we must embrace the interpretive challenge of *distinguishing the figurative from the literal* in those texts. That said, let us plunge into the problem.

CHARIOT TO HEAVEN

In his *Catechetical Lectures*, [Cyril of Jerusalem](#) (c. AD 370) could hardly contain himself when he came to the subject of baptism. To the baptismal candidates gathered in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre he said, “Great is the Baptism that lies before you: a ransom to captives; a remission of offences; a death of sin; a new-birth of the soul; a garment of light; a holy indissoluble seal; a chariot to heaven; the delight of Paradise; a welcome into the kingdom; the gift of adoption!”⁷ About 170 years earlier, and with like jubilation, [Clement of Alexandria](#) praised baptism in his manual for Christian living, saying,

Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. ... This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing: washing, by which we cleanse away our sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly.⁸

Many other [Church Fathers](#) of the 3rd and 4th centuries also exalted baptism as the most wonderful and efficacious gift from God. It should not surprise us, then, that the Roman Catholic heirs of the early [Fathers](#) became

⁷ *Cat Lec, Procatechesis* §16. Basil the Great seems to have soon quoted this passage from Cyril in his own *Exhortation to Baptism*. See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 587.

⁸ *Pæd* 1.6.

firmly convinced that one could not be saved without baptism. Today's Roman Catholics affirm that the *Catholic church* is necessary for salvation, and since baptism is the doorway into the church, it too is a requirement for attaining heaven.⁹ In the words of Vatican Council II, Jesus “explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mar 16.16; Joh 3.5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it.”¹⁰ *The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism* affirms the teaching of Vatican II by stating that “baptism is necessary for the salvation of all men.”¹¹

However, we have other contemporaries besides Roman Catholics who give supreme importance to baptism. I remember when my professor of [Heb](#), a beloved Lutheran man, attended a Billy Graham crusade back in the 1980's. The next day this professor commented in class on Billy's preaching: “Just imagine,” he said, “Mr. Graham preached his whole sermon on the topic of being born again, and he didn't say a *single word* about infant baptism the entire evening!”

My professor reacted with this consternation because, as the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod explains,

Lutherans believe that the Bible teaches that a person is saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. [However,] Baptism, we believe, is one of the miraculous means of grace (together with God's written and spoken Word) through which God creates the gift of faith in a person's heart. Although we do not claim to understand how this

⁹ Catholic writers equivocate on this dogma. The brilliant Peter Kreeft, occasionally prejudiced by his Catholicism writes, “The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation’ However, this does not mean that all the unbaptized are unsaved.” See Peter Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism Of Catholic Beliefs* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2001), p. 311.

¹⁰ Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar And Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1975), pp. 365-366.

¹¹ However, the Catechism then explains that for those who cannot be baptized through no fault of their own, martyrdom (the baptism of blood) or simply the desire “to do all that is necessary for ... salvation” (the baptism of desire) will suffice. Nevertheless, “Catholic parents who put off for a long time, or entirely neglect, the Baptism of their children, commit a mortal sin.” Bennet Kelley, *The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism* (New York, NY: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 1962-1969), pp. 153-154.

happens or how it is possible, we believe that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant. We believe (because of what the Bible says about Baptism) that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant. This faith cannot yet, of course, be expressed or articulated, yet it is real and present all the same (see, e.g., 1Pe 3.21; Act 2.38-39; Tit 3.5-6; Mat 18.6; Luk 1.15; 2Ti 3.15; Gal 3.26-27; Rom 6.4; Col 2.11-12; 1Co 12.13).¹²

For the conservative Lutheran, then, salvation is attained by faith, but faith comes by two avenues: the hearing of the Word (as taught in Rom 10.17) and baptism for those too young to understand the Word.

Let's get the full picture of the Lutheran teaching on this matter. Someone who had been exposed to evangelical preaching on the new birth wrote to the [LCMS](#) web site and asked:

Q. I heard a pastor (not LCMS) [say] that in order to be saved you must be "born again" and quoted several scriptural passages. What is the [LCMS](#) position? I thought baptism was good enough!

The answer given by the Lutheran web site explains that *Baptism* is:

"...the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit ... In Baptism, the Holy Spirit works faith and so creates in us new spiritual life with the power to overcome sin. ... Lutherans do not direct people to subjective personal experiences for assurance of salvation, but to God's objective Word and Sacraments. In Baptism, Lutherans believe, we are 'born again' by the power of God's Word and promise, through the 'washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit' made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."¹³

¹² "Doctrinal Issues – Baptism," *LCMS Frequently Asked Questions*, (St. Louis, MO: *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*), p. 2. (Accessed at www.lcms.org/faqs, February 7, 2016.) In this teaching, that "God creates faith in the heart of that infant" when baptized, the LCMS remains faithful to Luther who (according to Köstlin) taught, "Children in baptism have faith of their own, which God Himself effects in them through the petition and presentation of the sponsors in the name of the Christian Church." See Julius Köstlin, *The Theology Of Luther In Its Historical Development And Inner Harmony*, (Philadelphia, PA: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), Vol. 2, p. 49. In this idea, Luther followed Augustine, the true founder of *the doctrine* of infant baptism. Augustine taught that baptism is the sacrament of faith. In the true, Hellenistic sense of *sacrament* (= *mystery*), that meant for Luther that baptism produces faith. See *Aug Epi* 98.9.

¹³ "Born Again," *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, 2003-2009, (accessed November 1, 2009; this article is no longer posted).

From this perspective, then, any teaching on the new birth *should mention* baptism as one way to be born again.

With regard to the importance they place upon baptism, Lutherans ironically mirror Roman Catholics.¹⁴ The two groups differ in other ways, certainly. As the [LCMS](#) web site clarifies,

The [Lutheran Church Missouri Synod] does not believe that Baptism is ABSOLUTELY necessary for salvation. The thief on the cross was saved (apparently without Baptism), as were all true believers in the Old Testament era. Mark 16.16 implies that it is not the absence of Baptism that condemns a person but the absence of faith, and there are clearly other ways of coming to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit (reading or hearing the Word of God). Still, Baptism dare not be despised or willfully neglected, since it is explicitly commanded by God and has His precious promises attached to it. It is not a mere “ritual” or “symbol,” but a powerful means of grace by which God grants faith and the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵

Granted, then, that Lutherans don’t believe that baptism is “ABSOLUTELY necessary for salvation,” they nevertheless, like Catholics, see baptism as conveying faith, remission of sins and [regeneration](#).

This all seems strange to non-mainline [Evangelicals](#). While we believe in the importance of Christian baptism, we don’t find a biblical basis for the idea that baptism has such [salvific](#) power. Have we missed something? If not, where did these ideas about baptism come from? Catholics have a huge body of [patristic](#) support for their doctrine, and Lutherans give an impressive-looking list of [proof texts](#) from the Bible. Do these supporting citations have any merit? We must look more closely and see.

¹⁴ Other groups also teach the supreme importance of baptism. The so called Churches of Christ tell us “Yes! Baptism is essential to salvation!” “QUESTION: Is water baptism necessary to salvation?,” *Truth For The World*, (accessed October 29, 2009; this web domain has since been taken over by another entity).

¹⁵ “Baptism And Its Purpose,” *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, 2003-2009, (accessed November 1, 2009; this article is no longer posted). The same paragraph (minus the reference to the thief on the cross) appears in “Doctrinal Issues – Baptism,” *LCMS Frequently Asked Questions*, (St. Louis, MO: *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*), p. 2.

The Biblical Antecedents & Significance Of Christian Baptism

Noah's survival of the flood (1 Peter 3.20-21) and Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10.1-2) provided historical reference points for the twin biblical motifs in baptism of "judgment upon sin" and of "separation from past life, for divine service." Thus, the Aaronic priests were baptized to separate them *from* private life, and *to* priestly service, i.e, to become those who would reenact God's judgment upon sin by the offering of sacrifices (Exodus 29.4). Likewise, Jesus was baptized to end His private life of preparation, and in consecration to His public life of priestly service as the ultimate recipient of God's judgment upon sin.

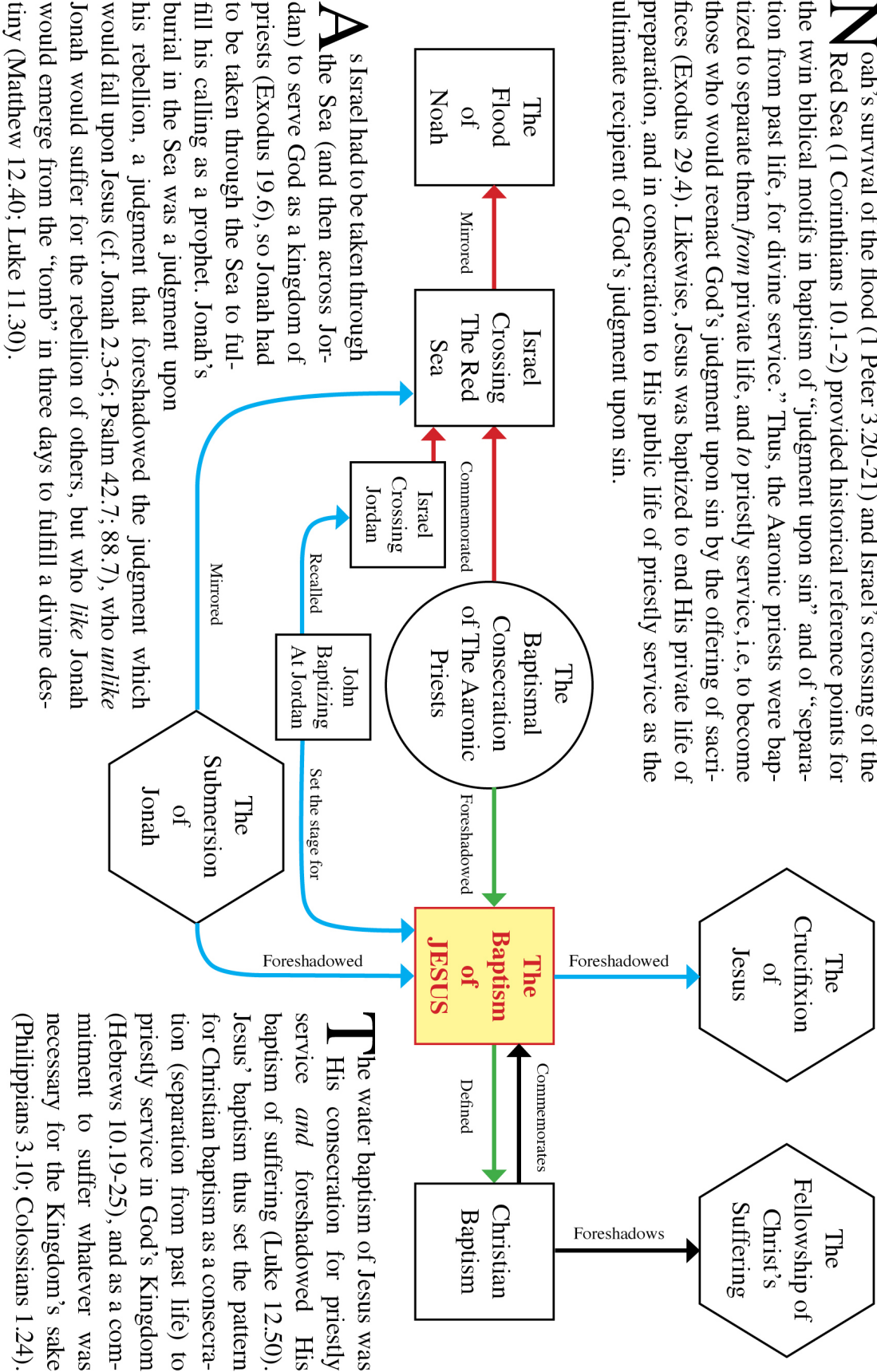


Figure 1

As Israel had to be taken through the Sea (and then across Jordan) to serve God as a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19.6), so Jonah had to be taken through the Sea to fulfill his calling as a prophet. Jonah's burial in the Sea was a judgment upon his rebellion, a judgment that foreshadowed the judgment which would fall upon Jesus (cf. Jonah 2.3-6; Psalm 42.7; 88.7), who *unlike* Jonah would suffer for the rebellion of others, but who *like* Jonah would emerge from the "tomb" in three days to fulfill a divine destiny (Matthew 12.40; Luke 11.30).

The water baptism of Jesus was His consecration for priestly service *and* foreshadowed His baptism of suffering (Luke 12.50). Jesus' baptism thus set the pattern for Christian baptism as a consecration (separation from past life) to priestly service in God's Kingdom (Hebrews 10.19-25), and as a commitment to suffer whatever was necessary for the Kingdom's sake (Philippians 3.10; Colossians 1.24).

KEY PASSAGES FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

MARK 1.4 & ACTS 2.38: CHRISTIAN BAPTISM TESTIFIES TO REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

Mar 1.4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching **a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness** (ἁφεςις, 'ä-phě-sēs) **of sins**.

Act 2.38 And Peter said to them, “**Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness** (ἁφεςις) **of your sins**; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 “For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.” ^(NAS)

SYNOPSIS

Neither John nor Jesus invented baptism; diverse baptisms had been a part of Jewish culture since the time of Moses. The baptism administered to Israelite priests at their consecration provided John, Jesus and the apostles with a fitting template for the baptism of those willing to repent and be consecrated for service in the new phase of God’s Kingdom.

As the Messianic phase of God’s Kingdom began, both John the Baptist and the apostles called people to a baptism of repentance. These baptisms did not confer repentance nor remission of sins. Instead, they testified to an antecedent repentance, and to the forgiveness and reconciliation which that repentance had made possible. While repentance has always been the pathway to divine forgiveness, repentance only has its reconciliatory result because “the lamb of God” provides the judicial basis for remission of sin.

Christian baptism differed from the baptism of John in that it not only testified to repentance, but also testified to faith in Christ’s lordship and atoning work.

THE ANTECEDENTS OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

As we begin our examination of NT passages relevant to Christian baptism and its doctrinal development, let us acknowledge that neither John the Baptist nor Jesus invented ritual immersion. Though many of us have grown up in church assuming that baptism is a uniquely NT phenomenon, it is a misperception to think that immersion rites originated so recently.¹⁶ The truth is that the Egyptians had purificatory rites involving water ablutions before the time of Moses, and Greek pilgrims who participated in the initiation rites at Eleusis were baptizing themselves in the sea by 530 BC.¹⁷ More importantly, the Jewish culture from which Christianity emerged had — since the giving of the Law at Sinai — practiced various immersions for restoring ritual cleanliness (Lev 14, 15, 16),¹⁸ and immersed their priests in a ceremony of consecration that dramatized the recent judgment-deliverance at the Red Sea (Ex 29, 40; Lev 8).¹⁹ Nearer to the Christian era, the Jews had also developed a protocol for proselyte conversion that included full immersion.²⁰

We understand, therefore, that John did not wake up one morning and decide to dunk his fellow Jews in the river as a religious innovation. Far less

¹⁶ The misperception among many Christians that baptism was a NT innovation derives in part from the NT emphasis on the Grk terms βαπτίζω, βάπτισμα, βαπτισμός (bäp-'tē-zō, 'bap-tēs-mä, bāp-tēs-'mōs) in contrast to the OT's use of רָחַץ and לָוָה (rā-'chäts and 'lū-ō = wash), and in part from the erroneous understanding of baptism as an initiation. Were the Johannine or Christian baptisms *initiations*, they would certainly have been innovations in the Jewish community! However, if they were purifications or consecrations, they would have been familiar rites. The DJTBP shows confusion on this point: In its article on *baptism*, it calls baptism a “ritual act of religious initiation ... the earliest certain example of such initiatory immersion appears to be associated with John the Baptist.” However, in its following article on *baptismal sects*, it says, “One of the prime examples seems to have been John the Baptist, who called on all Jews to be baptised as a sign of repentance. This was not clearly an initiation, but more probably purificatory.” The point again is that if John's baptism was an initiation, it was a radical innovation; if it was a purification/consecration, it was nothing new.

¹⁷ Justin Martyr believed that pagans practiced baptismal rites in their temples before the time of Christ, *in imitation of the Christian baptism foreseen by the Hebrew prophets* (1Apo 62).

¹⁸ Heb 9.10 ^{NIVO} refers to the “various ceremonial washings” of the Mosaic worship as *baptisms* (βαπτισμοίς, bāp-tēs-'mēs).

¹⁹ The baptism of priestly consecration and its connection to God's judgments is explored more fully below in connection with the baptism of Jesus (Mat 3.13-17, Mar 1.9-11, Luk 3.21-23 and Joh 1.29-34), as well as in connection with the typology of the flood referenced by Peter (1Pe 3.21).

²⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1896), Appendix 12 “On The Baptism Of Proselytes.”

did Jesus decide to invent a new religion that involved immersing people rather than circumcising them. Instead, both John and Jesus made use of a practice long established in the cultural experience of the Jewish people.²¹ The familiarity of ritual immersion is confirmed by the fact that John's countrymen flocked to him at the Jordan to be baptized (Luk 3.7), not to ask him what baptism was.²² Likewise, when the priests and Levites came from Jerusalem, they did not question John about his having introduced a religious innovation, but about his identity (Joh 1.19-24). In fact, the Jewish priests assumed that the Messiah or a prophet would baptize (Joh 1.25), and so had antecedently known what baptism was. Therefore, since the Jewish culture already had familiarity with the religious phenomenon of baptism, we should realize that NT baptism has its roots in OT ordinances.

We need not concern ourselves here with all the "various ceremonial washings" of the Jews (Heb 9.10 ^{NIVO}), for many of them were washings of things rather than of persons, and the majority of those washings involving persons were self-administered. However, one great exception to the rule was the baptism of priestly consecration just mentioned above (Ex 29 and 40; Lev 8). This baptism (referred to as an act of "washing...with water" in our English versions), was administered by another person, and had the essential function of ceremonially marking the baptizee's *change in status* in relation to God's program: for the male descendant of Aaron, it marked the end of his private life and beginning of his public service as a priest to God and to God's people.

²¹ "Rites of immersion were not uncommon in the world in which early Christianity developed." Lars Hartman, "Baptism," David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992). Indeed, the Qumran community had been practicing rituals of immersion for perhaps a hundred years before John the Baptist appeared. We should also note the long anticipation of the Jews that the Messiah, or Elijah returned, would baptize. The Jews based this belief upon passages like Eze 36.25 and Zec 13.1. See John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew-1 Corinthians*, Vol. 3: *Luke-John*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), comment on Joh 1.25.

²² Ralph Allan Smith, *The Baptism Of Jesus The Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), p. 29. That the Jewish purification rituals were the practices from which Christian baptism naturally derived is also evidenced by the dispute about purification ("ceremonial washing" in the NIV) in connection with John's and Jesus' "competing" baptisms in Joh 3.25.

NT baptism emerged from this priestly rite of consecration.²³ I will say more below about the Levitical rite in connection with the baptism of Jesus,²⁴ but here I must point out that the priestly consecration was first received by the entire Israelite nation at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Ex 19.1-11). When the Israelites agreed to keep God's covenant, and become "a kingdom of priests" for Him, Moses consecrated them with a bathing of themselves and their garments (Ex 19.10).²⁵ Thus, when John the Baptist announced the dawn of the messianic phase of God's Kingdom (Mat 3.1-12), and called Israel back to her divine mandate as "a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19.6), it was fitting that he baptize all those who would repent and be consecrated to service in the Kingdom, even as their forefathers had been so consecrated at Sinai.

With this background in mind, let us look more closely at the NT baptisms of repentance.

BAPTISMS OF REPENTANCE

A comparison of Mar 1.4 and Act 2.38 should help us see a relationship between John's baptism and the baptism "in the name of Jesus" that came later. The two baptisms were not equivalent, as Luke makes clear in his story about Paul and the Ephesus "disciples" (Act 19.1-5). In that narrative, persons who had already received John's baptism were then baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus" after they had received further instruction. Apparently the Baptism of John did not suffice for those who wished to become followers of

²³ Some see the Jewish baptism of proselytes as an antecedent to Christian baptism, but (1) the Jews would never have submitted to John's baptism if it had a connotation of "becoming a true Jew," and (2) even proselyte baptism must ultimately hark back to the rite of priestly consecration for its rationale.

²⁴ See under the heading, "[Fulfilling All Righteousness](#)."

²⁵ Oskar Skarsaune explains that,

...since the people were asked to wash their clothes, the rabbis concluded that they also washed themselves, since the latter would be included (as a duty) in the former (concluding from the less to the more obvious, the so-called light and heavy principle, in Hebrew *qal wahomer*). The same could be concluded from the fact that they were (later) sprinkled with blood from their sacrifice (Ex 24:8), "and we have a tradition that there must be no sprinkling without ritual ablution" (*TB Yevamot* 46b).

In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 357, n. 12.

Jesus. Nevertheless, the baptism of John and the later Christian baptism overlap in their meaning and purpose, as we shall see.

“John’s baptism was a baptism of **repentance**” (Act 19.4 ^{NIVO}). Indeed, the gospels record that John’s message began with the call to **repent** (Mat 3.1). Furthermore, John himself said, “I baptize you with water for **repentance**” (Mat 3.11). Both Mark and Luke summarize John’s ministry saying, “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of **repentance** for the forgiveness of sins” (Mar 1.4; Luk 3.3). So what was the purpose of a “baptism of repentance”?

We can best answer that question by first observing what the purpose of John’s baptism *was not*. No exegete has ever thought that a “baptism of repentance” *conferred* repentance.²⁶ It’s true that in Mat 3.11, John the Baptist says, “I baptize you with water **for** **repentance**.” However, the preposition *for* in this verse translates a general and very flexible **Grk** term. The **Grk** word is εἰς (ēś) which can mean at least three different things in this context:

- “in order to get, have, keep, etc.”
- “because of, as the result of.”
- or simply the generalized idea of “with reference to.”

Our English preposition *for* is just as flexible. When a doctor says, “Take two aspirin for a headache,” he obviously does not mean “take two aspirin *in order to get* a headache.” Instead, he means to “take two aspirin for relief when you (already) have a headache.” Likewise, when John said, “I baptize you ... for **repentance**,” he did not mean “I baptize you so you can get repentance,” but, “I baptize you *because of*, or, *as a result of* your **repentance**.”

We know that baptism does not confer **repentance** because no one does anything about **repentance** until they are already **repentant**. **Repentance** begins in the heart and mind and then progresses to outward expression. The unrepentant do not normally seek a “baptism of **repentance**.” Instead, *God*

²⁶ Although Cyril of Jerusalem (c. AD 350) thought that John’s baptism conferred remission of sins! See *Cat Lec* 20.6.

gives [repentance](#) directly to the human heart (Act 5.31; cf. 1Ki 18.37; Joh 6.44; Wis 12.19).²⁷

Some unrepentant Pharisees and Sadducees attempting a hypocritical show of religiosity *did* come to John for baptism. John rebuked them for trying to put the cart before the horse, and turned them away. He insisted that they first “bear fruit in keeping with [repentance](#),” and warned them that they couldn’t escape God’s wrath by being baptized or by pleading their descent from Abraham (Mat 3.7-9). This incident confirms that John’s “baptism of [repentance](#)” was for those *already repentant*. The Jewish historian [Josephus](#), born about seven years after John’s ministry, confirmed that the public understanding of John’s baptism was that it pertained to those who had already purified their souls beforehand:

Ant 18.116 Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; *supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness*.²⁸

So, John’s “baptism of [repentance](#)” was a baptism for the already [repentant](#), allowing them to enact a public confession and testimony of their [repentance](#). A “baptism of [repentance](#)” was a baptism by which the [baptizee](#) announced his or her [repentance](#).²⁹

²⁷ Also, Poly Phil 11.4: “I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance!” Also, *Sib* 4.162: “God will grant repentance.”

²⁸ Emphasis added. “Josephus’ knowledge about John was definitely second-hand since he was born at least ten years after the beheading in AD 37 or 38 (*Vita* 5). The passage [about John] in Josephus is very important because it probably represents the general view that existed in first-century Palestine about the uniqueness of John’s baptism procedure as opposed to the normal Jewish ritual cleansing practices of the time.” Shimon Gibson, *The Cave Of John The Baptist* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004), p. 129

²⁹ “The most natural way to interpret this phrase [‘a baptism of repentance,’ in Mar 1.4] is ‘a baptism which marked repentance.’” Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle To The Romans, Vol. 1; Chapters 1-8*, (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2005), p. 136.

FORGIVENESS FLOWS FROM REPENTANCE

John's "baptism of [repentance](#)" did not confer [repentance](#), but did it confer forgiveness? After all, John preached "a baptism of [repentance](#) *for the forgiveness of sins*" (Mar 1.4). To answer this question, we must realize that the forgiveness of sins (synonymous with [remission](#)) was not a new phenomenon in John's day. The Jews of the first century weren't waiting around for the divine inauguration of some way to get their sins forgiven. God had long before revealed Himself on Sinai as the One "who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin" (Ex 34.7). The whole Levitical system of sin offerings promised forgiveness of sins to the repentant who demonstrated their contrition by their participation in the prescribed rituals (Lev 4-5). Solomon trusted that God would forgive the sins of His people who turned away from their sin, and supplicated the Lord in or toward His holy temple, i.e., His people who [repented](#) (1Ki 8.33-50). God assured Solomon that He would indeed forgive the sins of those who humbled themselves, prayed, sought God's face and turned from their wicked ways, i.e., those who [repented](#) (2Ch 7.12-14). David famously described his own spiritual journey of [repentance](#) and forgiveness:

Psa 32.1 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! 2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! 3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah. ^(NAS)

In Psa 51, David recorded his very supplication to God:

Psa 51.1 ^(NAS) Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge....

7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. 9 Hide Thy face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me....

16 For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. 18 By Thy favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then Thou wilt delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Thine altar.

The final verses of the Psalm are important for this study because they record David's understanding that his forgiveness did not depend upon external rituals but upon internal contrition. In fact, the temple sacrifices had to be "righteous sacrifices," i.e., sacrifices offered in true repentance, before they could in any way delight God.

Often one of the first verses new Christians memorize, 1Jo 1.9 ^(NIVO), states: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." This promise of receiving God's forgiveness upon the **repentant** confession of our sins is not new, but is the same offer of forgiveness that God had previously extended to His people through Moses and the prophets (see for example Isa 1.18). If people would **repent**, God would graciously forgive them.³⁰

This understanding of **repentance**-based forgiveness continued from the **OT** era into the intertestamental period. The book of Jubilees, dated to the second century BC, describes Judah's **repentance** for his sin with Tamar:

Jub 41.23 And Judah acknowledged that the deed which he had done was evil, for he had lain with his daughter-in-law, and he esteemed it hateful in his eyes, and he acknowledged that he had transgressed and gone astray, for he had uncovered the skirt of his son, and he began to lament and to supplicate before the Lord because of his transgression. 24 And we told him in a dream that it was forgiven him because he supplicated earnestly, and lamented, and did not again commit it. 25 And he received forgiveness because he turned from his sin and from his ignorance...

³⁰ The Christian elders of Jerusalem had this understanding, though they were surprised that it could happen even with Gentiles (Act 11.18).

The final verse in this passage assures us that Judah's sin was forgiven because of his sincere [repentance](#).

The Psalms Of Solomon, probably written just decades before the birth of Christ, likewise tell us,

Pss 9.14 (7) And to whom doth He forgive sins, except to them that have sinned? Thou blessest the righteous, and dost not reprove them for the sins that they have committed; And Thy goodness is upon them that sin, when they [repent](#).

Again we see that the Jewish mind expected forgiveness of sins from a gracious God *upon* [repentance](#). Nowhere in the scriptures or in other ancient Jewish writings do we find God offering forgiveness of sins in response to meritorious conduct or the performance of religious rituals. External acts are important when seeking God's forgiveness, but only insofar as they express an inward turning away from sin, and a return of the heart to God.

This Jewish priority upon [repentance](#) pervades the so-called *Community Rule* (1QS) of Qumran discovered among the [DSS](#). The Qumran sectarians, contemporaries of John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles, taught that "it is impossible to be purified without first repenting of evil" (1QS 5.13-14). In fact, for the unrepentant,

...ceremonies of atonement cannot restore his innocence, neither cultic waters his purity. He cannot be sanctified by baptism in oceans and rivers, nor purified by mere ritual bathing. Unclean, unclean shall he be all the days that he rejects the laws of God ... (1QS 3.4-6).³¹

Clearly, therefore, the people streaming down to the Jordan to be baptized by John did not expect his baptism to confer forgiveness. It was well ingrained in the Jewish psyche that God forgave sins in response to [repentance](#), *and that only God could forgive sins* (Mar 2.7; Luk 5.21). We must conclude that John did not offer his baptism as a new way to receive forgiveness of sins. Instead, his "baptism of [repentance](#)" provided a way for the

³¹ Michael Wise, Martin Jr. Abegg and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

people to testify to an antecedent inner turnabout, *upon the basis of which* they had already received forgiveness of sins.

Of course, the justice of God could not have forgiven sins if those sins had not been atoned for by “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Joh 1.29). As the Bible says, “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9.22), and “*through Jesus* the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Act 13.38 ^{NIVO}). Still, while the accomplishment of Christ’s atoning work in history sealed the judicial basis for forgiveness from God, it did not change the practical process for being reconciled to God. **Repentance** had always been the experiential basis for reconciliation between God and man, just as Christ’s atoning work had always been the judicial basis for the divine forgiveness of sins (cf. 2Ti 1.9; 1Pe 1.18-21; Rev 13.8). Therefore, we see again that people’s **repentance** never earned forgiveness, but God — having provided for sins’ atonement and having purposed to extend His grace — made it known from ages past that His forgiveness could only be appropriated by those in a **repentant** state (cf. Mat 6.14-15). Furthermore, the only difference between the **OT** and the **NT** eras, with regard to receiving forgiveness, is that now, rather than enacting the basis of our forgiveness with symbolic sacrifices, we testify — by word and commemorative acts — to the accomplished reality foreshadowed by those sacrifices, namely, “the [shed] blood of Jesus” which “cleanses us from all sin” (1Jo 1.7).

The fact that nothing fundamental changed about *the experiential process* for receiving forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God, explains why Peter, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, still offered assurance of forgiveness in almost the same words that John the Baptist had used. In both cases, and in both times, forgiveness was vouchsafed to the **repentant**. In both cases, and in both times, the **repentant** were invited to be baptized to testify to their **repentance**. Both John’s baptism, *and* Christian baptism were baptisms “of **repentance**.” *The great difference was that the latter “baptism of repentance” also expressed faith in the Lordship and atoning work of Jesus Christ.* The

Christian “baptism of *repentance*” was a baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Act 19.4-5).³²

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GRAMMAR

From our review of the biblical perspective on “forgiveness of sin,” we understand that Mar 1.4 does not speak of a “*baptism* ... for the forgiveness of sins,” but rather a baptism having to do with “*repentance* for the forgiveness of sins.” Likewise, in Act 2.38 Peter did not command the people, “be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins,” but rather “*Repent* ... for the forgiveness of your sins.” We can clarify Peter’s instruction with a diagram of the GNT wording. Sadly the Greek text has often been diagramed like this:

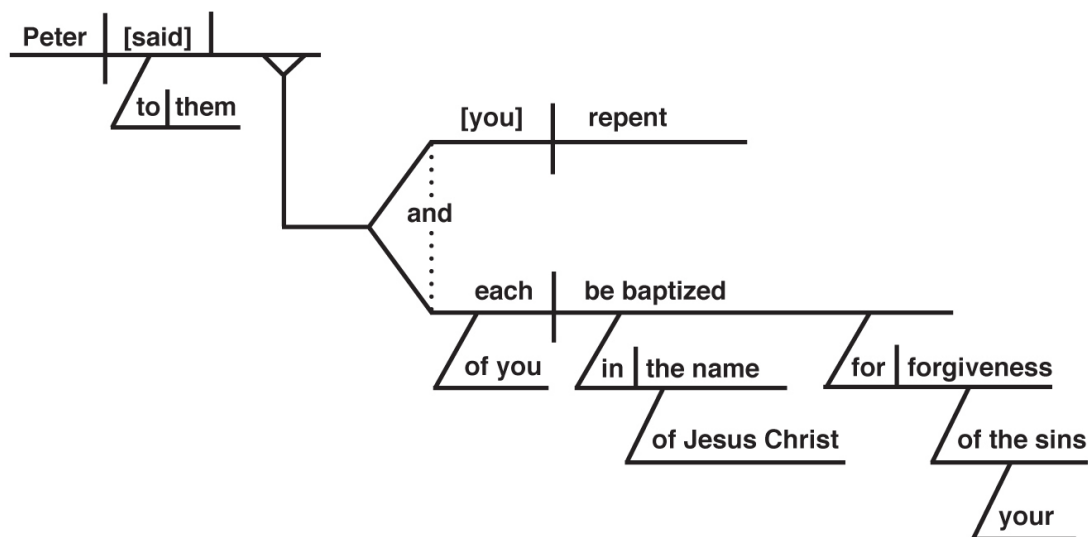
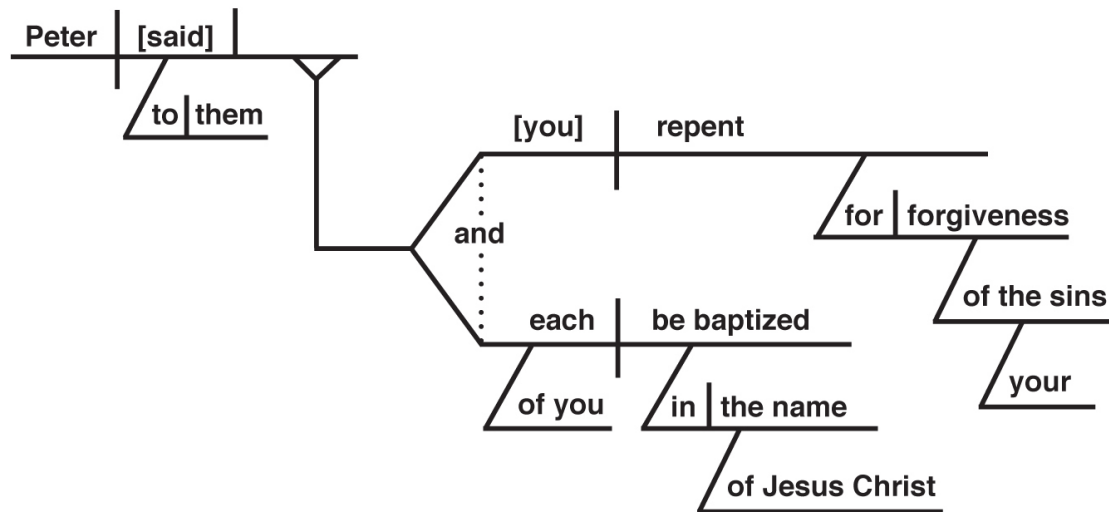


Figure 2

Notice that in this traditional diagram the prepositional phrase, “for forgiveness / of the sins / your,” is attached to the imperative, “be baptized,” implying that the forgiveness proceeds from the baptism.³³ However, the phrase in question should be attached to the imperative “repent” like this:

³² In Act 19.5, the NAU uses the preposition *in*, but notes the more literal rendering *into*.

³³ This way of construing Peter’s words began with the early Fathers. By the end of the fourth century, John Chrysostom, while expounding upon Act 2.38, assumed that “baptism conveys remission” (*Hom Act 7*).



Technically, the prepositional phrase, “for forgiveness / of the sins / your,” could be attached to *either* the imperative “repent” or the imperative “be baptized.”³⁴ However, there is no grammatical reason why the phrase must be connected to “be baptized,” and, as explained above under the heading, “[Forgiveness Flows From Repentance](#),” there is every biblical reason why it should be attached to the command *repent*. The Jews had always understood forgiveness to flow from [repentance](#), and *not from the ritual expression of repentance*. One chapter later in the book of Acts, Peter restated this principle:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...”
(Act 3.19 ^{NIV})

Peter did not mention baptism in this context, but only **repentance** “that your sins may be wiped out.” In Scripture, only **repentance** consistently appears as the prerequisite for forgiveness of sin. “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that **repentance** for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name...” (Luk 24.46-47). “The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead ... that he might give **repentance** and forgiveness of sins to Israel” (Act 5.30-31 ^{NIVO}).

³⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts Of The Apostles: The Greek Text With Introduction And Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951-1975), p. 98.

The foregoing examination of the repentance-forgiveness connection, both in Scripture and in extra-biblical Jewish writings, allows us to conclude the analysis of Act 2.38 with the following paraphrase of Peter's exhortation to his conscience-stricken audience:

“Repent for the forgiveness of your sins, and (as an expression of that repentance and of your commitment to the Savior) be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.”

This is how the Day-of-Pentecost celebrants would have understood Peter's words.

COLOSSIANS 2.11-12 & 3.1: CHRISTIAN BAPTISM ATTESTS TO THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR HEART AND THE BEGINNING OF OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

Col 2.11 and **in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism**, in which **you were also raised up with [συνηγέρθητε] Him** through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Col 3.1 Therefore **if you have been raised up with [συνηγέρθητε] Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For **you have died** and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

SYNOPSIS

Heretics insinuated that the Colossian Christians were spiritually deficient because they neglected certain traditions like circumcision. Paul assured the Colossians that they had all of God's fullness in Christ Himself, regardless of external observances. In fact, Paul declared that the Colossian believers had received the spiritual "substance" which physical circumcision had always prefigured, namely, the spiritual excision of "the flesh" from the heart. Paul characterizes this inner circumcision as "the circumcision of Christ." Furthermore, the Colossian believers had not only been spiritually circumcised, having the tyranny of the flesh stripped away "without hands" by the supernatural working of God, but they had also been symbolically buried and raised with Christ in baptism. By this they had attested not only to their death to sin, but also to the beginning of their new life in the Spirit.

Theologians of the Middle Ages, and later [Reformers](#) and [Reformed theologians](#), misread Col 2.11-12 as teaching that baptism is Christian circumcision. This faulty exegesis was motivated by the desire to justify infant baptism as the continuity of a "sign of the covenant." Baptism is not Christian circumcision, however, but rather a symbolic ritual that attests to our antecedent spiritual circumcision in Christ, i.e., the putting to death of the flesh, and to our having risen to new life in the Spirit.

We must examine Col 2.11-12 carefully, because it is *the one scripture* that links baptism with the idea of circumcision. Medieval and [Reformed](#) theologians have used this linkage in Col 2.12 to teach that baptism is the Christian counterpart to [OT](#) circumcision, and that therefore it is appropriate to baptize infants.

THE MEANING OF OT CIRCUMCISION

In Col 2.11-12, Paul undeniably makes a connection between the Colossians having been circumcised and their having been baptized. A sentence diagram of Col 2.11-12a makes this evident:

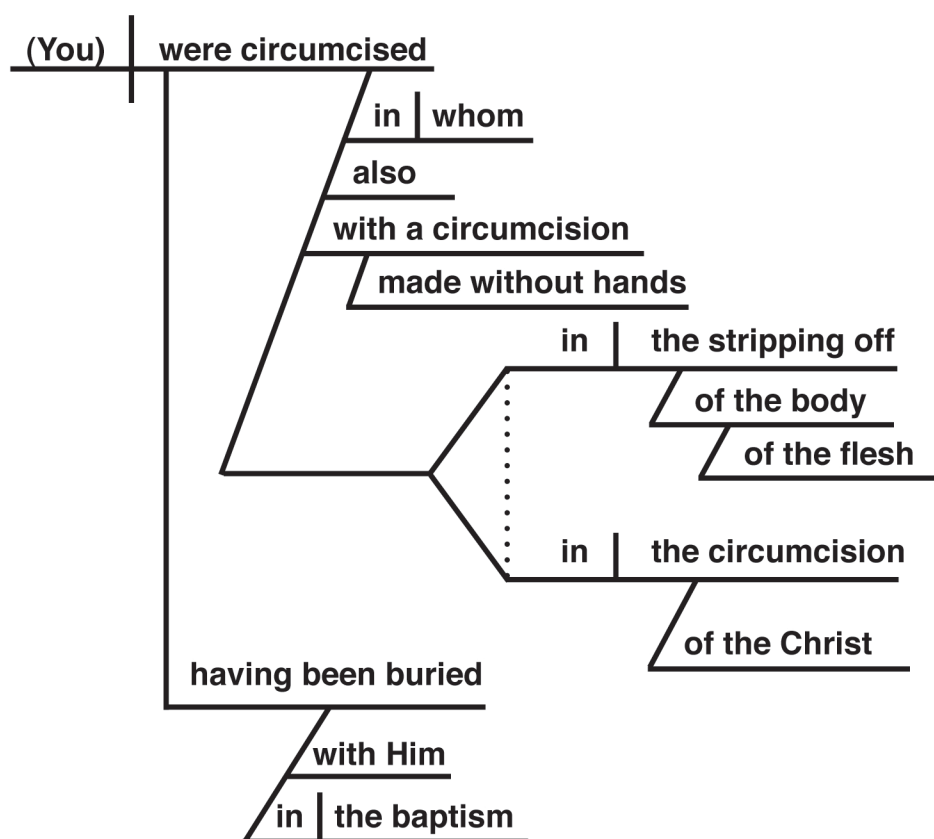


Figure 4

If we clear away all the sub-points, Paul says, "You were circumcised ... having been buried with Him in baptism." Let us note, however, that the circumcision Paul had in view was a **"circumcision made without hands,"** i.e., a spiritual circumcision. Therefore, Paul makes no direct correlation here between baptism and the *physical* circumcision of the Abrahamic and Mosaic

covenants, but between baptism and a *spiritual* circumcision. Nevertheless, to understand the spiritual circumcision that the apostle had in mind, we must understand the physical rite that typified it.

The Unique Meaning Of Circumcision For Abraham

Theologians have sometimes erred in their understanding of circumcision because they have taken Paul's teaching about Abraham's circumcision in Rom 4.9-12 as if it applied to circumcision in general. In fact, Paul's argument in Rom 4 is not even about circumcision, but about the relationship between faith and law. The apostle mentions Abraham's circumcision only to note that Abraham's justification occurred *before it*. Because of this unique temporal sequence, circumcision *for Abraham* became "a seal of ... righteousness" (Rom 4.11), that is, the act of circumcision and its lasting mark confirmed (i.e. *sealed*) the faith transaction that had occurred beforehand between Abraham and God.³⁵ Circumcision for Abraham's posterity, on the other hand, was no such "seal," because their faith-righteousness, if they had any, came well after their circumcision as infants.

So, circumcision was "a seal of ... righteousness" only for Abraham, not for his posterity.³⁶ As such, circumcision for Abraham meant, "I have trusted God; He has reckoned me righteous and given me a seal that testifies to our covenant relationship." To reiterate, though, *circumcision had no such meaning for Abraham's posterity*, nor even for Ishmael and the other men of Abraham's household who were circumcised on the same day as Abraham (Gen 17.23-27). For the others of Abraham's household, circumcision served as the

³⁵ In a theological leap, Reformed theologians have taken the "sign and seal" language that applies to Abraham's circumcision in Rom 4.11, and transferred it to baptism, making baptism "the sign and seal of union with [Christ]" and "the sign and seal of membership in [Christ's body]," (Murray quoted by Schreiner and Wright in *Believer's Baptism*, p. 215); the "sign and seal of the covenant of grace," (Westminster Confession); etc.

³⁶ Though the nature of a seal is to certify an antecedent statement or condition, such a certification may indeed hold the promise of future benefit (Eph 1.13-14). However, the future benefit is based upon what the seal certifies, not upon the seal itself. Therefore, though baptism *can serve as a seal* (albeit the NT never speaks of baptism in this way), baptism is worthless as a seal if there is no preceding spiritual transaction for it to certify. A seal on a closed container (or on a tomb) is worthless if the container is empty to begin with; the seal only has meaning when there is already something of substance in the document, the container or the life being sealed.

“sign of the covenant between [God] and [them]” (Gen 17.11), but it did not testify to their antecedent righteousness. Therefore, Paul applies none of his argument about the “seal of the righteousness that he had by faith” (Rom 4.11 ^{NIVO}) to those others, but only to Abraham. Circumcision testified to antecedent righteousness by faith only for Abraham, but even for Abraham it spoke of something even more fundamental.

The General Meaning Of Circumcision For Israel

The most fundamental meaning of circumcision for Abraham *and* his posterity emerged from the general significance of the ancient Middle-Eastern rituals of blood-covenanting. H. Clay Trumbull documented the many forms that these rites could take; circumcision was one of them.³⁷ Any covenant agreement involving the blood of the covenanting parties implied the uniting of the parties in an irrevocable familial bond. In the context of God’s covenantal declarations to Abraham, then, circumcision became “the sign” (Gen 17.11) that God had now obligated Himself — as a kinsman — to keep His promises to Abraham and to his posterity forever, and that Abraham had obligated himself and his family to relate to this God and no other. That this covenantal sign of circumcision only applied to Abraham’s posterity (biological and naturalized, Gen 17.12-13) is implied in the covenant promise of inheriting a specific land (Gen 17.8), and in the establishment of the covenant only with a specific lineage (i.e., with Isaac’s line, not Ishmael’s, Gen 17.18-21).

In short, circumcision is fundamentally the mark of “the chosen people,” the sign of God’s specific and irrevocable promises and agenda for *national Israel*. As such, for the Israelite, circumcision means, “I am a member of that nation that God has particularly chosen, I can hope to benefit from the promises made to Abraham, and I must responsibly fulfill my covenant obligations to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Circumcision, then, had a personal meaning for Abraham and has a corporate meaning for the Jewish nation. However, circumcision’s personal and national meanings do not exhaust its significance. If so, Paul would not

³⁷ H. Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite And Its Bearing On Scripture* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1975), see especially p. 215 ff.

have used the idea of circumcision in his argument against the Colossian heretics.

The Spiritual Meaning Of Circumcision For All

From Abraham to the Apostles, the Hebrew people knew that circumcision was [typological](#). It had always pointed beyond its personal and national meanings to a universal, redemptive truth, namely, the truth that the dominance of the “flesh” (σάρξ, *sārx*; as in Rom 8.7)³⁸ must be stripped from the human heart, so that the heart may be freed to live “by the spirit.”³⁹ The metaphor is graphic and powerful, conveying the insight that the liberation of the heart can only be realized through the shedding of blood. Circumcision, then, proclaims a message to all mankind: “those who are in the flesh cannot please God ... but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8.8-13). Part of the message is that the excision of “the flesh,” and subsequent life in the Spirit, are only made possible through the atoning blood of the Lamb.⁴⁰

To put it in more familiar biblical terms, physical circumcision always signified the need to “circumcise your heart” (Deut 30.6; Jer 4.4; Rom 2.29; cf. Act 7.51).⁴¹ That the Hebrews always saw physical circumcision as pointing to heart circumcision is evident from how constantly the one idea is paired with the other in extra-canonical Jewish and Jewish-Christian literature. [Philo](#), for example, in commenting on Gen 17.10, wrote:

I see here a twofold circumcision, one of the male creature, and the other of the flesh; that which is of the flesh takes place in the genitals, but that which is of the male creature takes place, as it seems to me, in respect to his thoughts. ... This therefore is what is designated by the

³⁸ We will explore the matter of the “flesh” more fully below in Part III.

³⁹ Paul uses the idea of “stripping off” (ἀπέκδυσις, ἀπεκδύομαι; ä-’pëk-thē-sēs, ä-pëk-’thē-ō-mě) repeatedly in Col 2.11,15; 3.9.

⁴⁰ Rabbinical Judaism associates the blood of circumcision with the blood of the Passover lamb and finds allusion to it in Eze 16.6. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Circumcision*, Vol. I, in *The Encyclopedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck and William Scott Green, 89-95 (Brill, 2000).

⁴¹ “Physical circumcision made one a member of Israel as God’s theocratic people, but it did not ensure that one was regenerate. Hence, the need for the spiritual circumcision of the heart.” Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), p. 78.

second circumcision, where God says by an express law, “Circumcise the hardness of your hearts,” that is to say, your hard and rebellious thoughts and ambition, which when they are cut away and removed from you, your most important part will be rendered free.⁴²

Nor was the biblical call to circumcise the heart the only basis for making the connection between physical circumcision and heart circumcision. The people of God saw a similarity in shape between the physical heart and the *glans penis*. As Philo put it, “there is a resemblance of the part that is circumcised to the heart ...”⁴³ Likewise, the Christian apologist Lactantius (c. 250-325) wrote with exceptional insight that,

...circumcision of the flesh is plainly irrational; since, if God had so willed it, He might so have formed man from the beginning, that he should be without a foreskin. But it was a figure of this second circumcision, signifying that the breast is to be laid bare; that is, that we ought to live with an open and simple heart, since that part of the body which is circumcised has a kind of resemblance to the heart, and is to be treated with reverence. ... This is the circumcision of the heart of which the prophets speak, which God transferred from the mortal flesh to the soul, which alone is about to endure.⁴⁴

For the Hebrews and early Christians, then, circumcision provided a vivid picture of the stripping away of the flesh’s dominance of the heart. We must understand, however, that by “heart,” Scripture refers to the whole soul: mind, will and emotions. Circumcision pictures the radical event of the freeing of a person’s very nature from the grip of that fleshly drive that courses through the whole body of *unregenerate* man. Thus the *Community Rule* in the DSS (1QS 5.3-5) can speak of circumcising one’s “lower nature”:

1QS 5.3 They are to practice truth together with humility, 4 charity, justice, lovingkindness and modesty in all their ways. Accordingly, none will continue in a willful heart and thus be seduced, not by his heart, 5 neither by his eyes nor yet by his lower nature. Together they shall circumcise the foreskin of this nature, this stiff neck, and so establish a foundation of truth....⁴⁵

⁴² Q Gen 3.46. *The Works Of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

⁴³ Laws 1.6. *The Works Of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

⁴⁴ Div Inst 4.17. In other words, Lactantius understood that physical circumcision was a sign pointing to the need for heart-circumcision. This heart-circumcision has only ever been available in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 2.29).

⁴⁵ Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Jr. and Edward M. Cook, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New English Translation*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996). Cf. David H. Stern’s comment on Col 2.11: “Using graphic language, Sha’ul explains that this spiritual

Clearly, “circumcision of the heart” is a metaphor for the complete liberation and restoration of human nature, and thus a circumcision of the heart is also a circumcision of the ears and lips. In other words, heart circumcision makes it possible for the heart to hear truth and express it (cf. Jer 6.10). While the *Epistle Of Barnabas* strikes many false notes, it does express this understanding of heart circumcision when it says at the end of ch. 10, “For this purpose He circumcised our ears and our hearts, that we might understand these things.”

Of particular interest to us, in our larger discussion about baptism and how it relates to [regeneration](#), is the fact that circumcision of the heart was understood very early on as the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus we read in *The Odes Of Solomon*, a Jewish-Christian composition of c. AD 100:

Ode Sol 11.1 My heart was pruned [lit. circumcised] and its flower appeared; grace in it sprouted, and it bore fruit to God. 2 The Most High circumcised me with his Holy Spirit, and laid bare to himself my inner parts and filled me with his love. 3 His circumcision became salvation for me; I have run the way of truth in peace.⁴⁶

Similarly, in the much earlier book of *Jubilees* (c. 100 BC), God tells Moses on Mt. Sinai,

Jub 1.23 And after this they will turn to Me in all uprightness and with all (their) heart and with all (their) soul, and I will circumcise the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their seed, and I will create in them a holy spirit, and I will cleanse them so that they shall not turn away from Me from that day unto eternity.⁴⁷

Apparently, heart circumcision was understood as not only originating from the Holy Spirit, but also as making it possible for man’s spirit within him to become holy.

So, heart circumcision is the Holy Spirit freeing the human heart from the flesh, and allowing the heart (i.e., the whole man) to become spirit-directed. From the beginning, the [type](#) of physical circumcision had always

circumcision consisted in the Messiah’s stripping away not the literal foreskin but what it stands for, the old nature’s control over the body...” David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996).

⁴⁶ OTP, BW.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

pointed to this fulfillment in heart-circumcision. Apart from spiritual fulfillment in “the circumcision of Christ,” the external rite never had any ultimate value (Deut 10.16; Jer 4.4; Rom 2.29).⁴⁸ In fact, the chief value of the external and physical rite had always been to point to the spiritual and greater realities in Christ that we can summarize in the following manner:

**Jewish Circumcision Contrasted With
“The Circumcision Of Christ”**

<u>Jewish Circumcision</u>	<u>“The Circumcision of Christ”</u>
For males	For males and females
For the Jewish nation	For all nations
Done by hand (i.e., physical)	Done without hands (i.e., spiritual)
Performed upon believers and unbelievers	Performed only upon believers
Not all circumcised inherit the land	All circumcised inherit the Kingdom
External sign to be internalized by faith	Internal event to be externalized by faithfulness
Piece of flesh removed	The whole “body of flesh” dethroned
One organ uncovered	Whole nature (heart) freed
Blood of the recipient	Blood of the Circumciser
Typological	Fulfilled reality

Figure 5

From the biblical standpoint, then, the universal meaning and message of physical circumcision, with application beyond Abraham and Israel, was and is: *The tyranny of the flesh must be overthrown, and this victory is possible by the blood of Christ.* With this most important meaning of the physical rite in

⁴⁸ Cf. *Thomas*, 53.

mind, and by seeing its fulfillment in “*the circumcision of Christ*,” we can now interpret Paul’s circumcision-baptism connection in Colossians.

PAUL’S ARGUMENT

Col 2.8-15 expresses the climax of Paul’s argument against heretics who had judged the Colossian Christians as spiritually deficient. The content of Paul’s argument implies that the heretics’ belief system involved a mixture of [Hellenistic mysticism](#) with Jewish legalism.⁴⁹ These troublemakers apparently regarded the Colossian believers as lacking the fullness of God, due to their neglect of certain traditions and ascetic practices. In answer, Paul assured the Colossians that they had all God’s fullness in Christ Himself, regardless of external observances (Col 2.16-17).

We infer that the heretics harassing the Colossian church criticized the Gentile Christians for their lack of circumcision, because at the apex of his argument Paul assures the believers that in Christ they “were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands ... [that is] in the circumcision of Christ.”⁵⁰ The Colossian Christians, then, need not have been intimidated by their critics. As believers they were circumcised with a superior circumcision, a *spiritual circumcision*, a circumcision that Paul calls “the circumcision of Christ.”

“The circumcision of Christ” is a unique and perplexing phrase. Does it refer to a circumcision experienced by Christ (i.e., the stripping away of His mortal body when He died on the cross), or to a circumcision performed by Christ, or to a circumcision accomplished on the basis of Christ’s atoning work (i.e., the spiritual circumcision that the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer)? Paul did not explain his phrase, and so expositors and Bible translators interpret it in various ways, some explaining “the circumcision of

⁴⁹ Craig S. Keener explains that “A great number of backgrounds have been proposed for the error at Colossae: mystery cults, broader Hellenistic mysticism, Hellenistic Judaism, Qumran-type Judaism and so on.” *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), “Colossians,” Intro.

⁵⁰ David H. Stern understands Paul to argue here against those who insisted on the traditional rites of proselyte initiation. Paul brings up the idea of circumcision to argue that “spiritually, all three of the Gentile proselyte initiation requirements — circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice — are fulfilled when one trusts in and is united with Yeshua.” *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996).

Christ” as referring to His death, others presenting it as the circumcision “done by Christ” (NIVO, NLT). In the final analysis, both interpretations point to Christ’s conquest of the flesh in the life of the believer. Either “the circumcision of Christ” refers to Christ’s own death which became the basis for the believers death to the reign of sin (Rom 6.6),⁵¹ or “the circumcision of Christ” points to the direct agency of Christ’s Spirit “putting to death the deeds of [our] body” (Rom 8.13).

In neither case does the phrase “the circumcision of Christ” refer to baptism. As stated above (in the section, “[The Meaning Of OT Circumcision](#)”), Paul does makes a connection between the Colossian’s spiritual circumcision and baptism, but his other epistles confirm that the connection is not one of equivalence. Paul elsewhere speaks of spiritual circumcision, but nowhere identifies it as baptism or the result of baptism. Instead, those who have received this spiritual circumcision now “worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3.3). They constitute “the *true* circumcision” (as opposed to those who represent only physical circumcision). Their circumcision is “of the heart,” and is effected “by the Spirit,” not by baptism (Rom 2.29).

However, if “the circumcision of Christ” which the Colossians had received is not baptism, how does it relate to baptism? This is the key exegetical question. As already explained, if we clear away all the sub-points in Col 2.11-12, Paul says, “You were circumcised ... having been buried with Him in baptism.” However, the phrase, “having been buried,” translates a single aorist participle (συνταφέντες, sēn-dā-’phēn-dēs) in the GNT, and as part of

⁵¹ Thus *New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson *et al* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994):

The Circumcision done by Christ is a figurative way of referring to his crucifixion, while ‘the putting off of the body of flesh’ is best understood as describing his violent death (though some take it as a reference to putting off the Christian’s old nature). The Colossians *were also circumcised in him*, that is, they died with Christ in his death.

Likewise, William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995):

The circumcision of Christ refers to His death on the cross of Calvary. The thought is that when the Lord Jesus died, the believer died also.

an adverbial clause admits of various interpretations.⁵² Added to Paul's preceding statement in which the main verb *you were circumcised* (περιετμήθητε, pĕ-rē-ēt-'mē-thē-tě) appears, the phrase "having been buried with Him in baptism" can imply:

1. "You were circumcised, *meaning*, you were buried with Him in baptism," thus equating spiritual circumcision and baptism.
2. "You were circumcised *when* you were buried with Him in baptism," making baptism the temporal occasion of the spiritual circumcision.
3. "You were circumcised, and *therefore* you were buried with him in baptism," making spiritual circumcision the reason for being baptized.
4. "You were circumcised *because* you were baptized," making baptism the condition upon which they received spiritual circumcision.⁵³
5. "You have assurance that you were circumcised *because* you were buried with Him in baptism," making baptism the evidence of a prior spiritual circumcision.
6. "You were circumcised, and *in a related action* you were also buried with Him in baptism," making baptism an event distinct from but related to spiritual circumcision.

The [Fathers](#) of the third to fifth centuries, along with their doctrinal heirs in the [Reformation](#) era, gravitated to the first interpretation of "having been buried with Him in baptism," and read Col 2.11-12 as equating the spiritual circumcision of the Colossians with their baptism.⁵⁴ This in turn allowed the

⁵² Cf. the valuable analysis in Martha King, *An Exegetical Summary Of Colossians*, 2nd Edition (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008). On the many uses of the Aorist Participle see Ernest D. Burton, *Syntax Of The Moods And Tenses In New Testament Greek*, 3rd Edition (Chicago, IL, 1898), "The Aorist Participle."

⁵³ This interpretation reflects the most common use of the aorist participle as expressing action that is antecedent to the main verb: "You were circumcised ... having antecedently been baptized" However, as Mounce says, "When the aorist participle is used adverbially, it ... can be used to indicate almost any type of adverbial clause" Because of the flexibility of the aorist participle, "theological concerns usually determine which interpretation is chosen" for aorist adverbial clauses in some passages. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*, Edited by Verlyn D. Verbrugge, Third Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), p. 257.

⁵⁴ It may be better to say they "correlated" rather than that they "equated" baptism with circumcision, because many statements on this subject by theologians from the Middle

Fathers and Reformers to infer that NT baptism correlates to and replaces OT circumcision. Such an inference is reasonable, but was the initial interpretation justified? We all know that when the grammar of a text admits of more than one interpretation, we must pay special attention to the literary, cultural and theological context of the passage, or else our own biases and presuppositions will decide the matter. Decision by doctrinal bias is exactly what happened in this case. Only after infant baptism had become a dogma did expositors incline to the baptism-equals-circumcision interpretation of Col 2.11-12.⁵⁵ Since this interpretation has such a suspect history, we must examine it more closely!

Baptism As Christian Circumcision: The Delayed Development Of The Idea

It's telling that this idea of NT baptism subsuming OT circumcision didn't begin to catch on until the third century. By that time the Hellenistic template for interpreting the GNT had long supplanted the Hebraic one. I will say more about this paradigm shift below (in [Part II: How Baptism Became Enchanted](#)), but for now, suffice it to say that no Israelite who put his faith in Jesus during the apostolic era would have dreamed that his Christian baptism made his Jewish circumcision irrelevant!⁵⁶ Nor would any ethnic son of Abraham have imagined that his Christian faith rendered it inappropriate for him to

Ages onward lack precision. See Ferguson's observation regarding Origen's thinking on this matter in the discussion below.

⁵⁵ Hunt argues that the earliest patristic evidence does not support the notion that infant baptism was defended from the analogy with circumcision. Instead, the analogy with circumcision was first made *after* infant baptism was introduced and practiced on other grounds. J. P. T. Hunt, "Colossians 2:11-12, The Circumcision/Baptism Analogy, and Infant Baptism," *TynBul* 41 (1990): 227-44. Hunt also suggests that the analogy between infant baptism and circumcision was first "advanced as an argument for infant baptism in Italy or North Africa sometime in the second quarter of the third century" (p. 232). Tyndale House, 1990.

http://www.tyndalehouse.com/TynBul/Library/00_TyndaleBulletin_ByDate.htm (accessed March 23, 2010).

⁵⁶ Had that been the case, the Church council in Jerusalem might not have occurred (Act 15), nor would the Christian elders have counseled Paul to demonstrate the falsity of the perception by some that Paul discouraged Jews from circumcising their children (Act 21.19-24). As Ben Witherington III observes, "In view of such texts as Acts 15:1ff. and 21:20ff., it is evident that among Jewish Christians circumcision and water baptism were being practiced side by side, and the latter was not seen as the replacement of the former. So much was this the case that Paul had to write to the Galatians to fight off the attempt to circumcise even the Gentiles who were converting and being baptized." Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 120.

circumcise his infant sons. Circumcision was instituted for Abraham as a sign of his nation's covenant with God, and God commanded Abraham to maintain this sign "throughout your generations ... in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen 17.12-13). Nothing in the NT, including Paul's censure of those who sought justification by law-keeping (Gal 5.1-12), has rescinded the "everlasting" covenant sign of circumcision for Jewish people (cf. Act 21.21).⁵⁷ Furthermore, every first-century Jew knew that the conversion of a Gentile to Judaism involved both circumcision *and* baptism (and sacrifice) because each rite had a distinct meaning. Therefore, when some Jews learned that "conversion" to faith in Jesus, involved baptism, they naturally inferred that it also required circumcision (for Gentiles). The Jewish heretics in Colossae apparently made this assumption. It's no wonder, then, that the conflation of circumcision and baptism developed *only later* in Christian theology.⁵⁸ The earliest believers and their Jewish forefathers recognized circumcision and baptism as two distinct rituals in meaning and application, and would never have made the mistake of letting one take the place of both.

Baptism As Christian Circumcision: Further Light From History

The first Christians certainly did not believe that baptism had supplanted circumcision. As Beasley-Murray wrote, "Since baptism was administered in Jerusalem as in all other Christian communities [of Paul's time], the two rites were clearly maintained side by side in Palestinian churches and there was no possibility for baptism being regarded by them as in any sense a replacement of circumcision."⁵⁹ Ferguson explains that for the earliest patristic writers "the Christian equivalent to circumcision [was] not baptism but spiritual heart surgery, and the multiple Jewish washings for ceremonial purity are distinguished from the single Christian baptism for forgiveness of sins."⁶⁰ In

⁵⁷ Contra Bar 9.

⁵⁸ See footnote 54 above, and see also the next section that explains what the earliest Fathers equated with circumcision.

⁵⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism In The New Testament* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1963), p. 159.

⁶⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 274. Also J. P. T. Hunt in *op cit*, "For Tertullian the counterpart to carnal circumcision is a spiritual one involving an

other words, for the earliest Christians the circumcision of the heart fulfilled the [typology](#) of physical circumcision, while Christian baptism mirrored something else.⁶¹ Even [Cyprian of Carthage](#) (c. AD 250), an early proponent of infant baptism, saw no correlation between circumcision and baptism, though some of his contemporaries had begun to do so.⁶² One of those contemporaries, [Origen](#) the allegorical exegete of Alexandria, began to blur the line between circumcision and baptism by often associating the two. [Origen](#) wrote, for example, “as it is with him who is a Jew outwardly and circumcised in the flesh, so it is with the Christian and with baptism.”⁶³ And in his *Commentary On Romans*:

If anyone in the church who is circumcised by means of the grace of baptism should afterwards become a transgressor of Christ’s law, his baptismal circumcision shall be reckoned to him as the uncircumcision of unbelief.... We might say that the catechumens are the ones who are still uncircumcised, or even Gentiles, and those who are believers by means of the grace of baptism are the circumcised. (2.12.4; 2.13.2)⁶⁴

In this same connection, [Ferguson](#) quotes from [Origen’s Homilies On Joshua](#) 5.5-6, where [Origen](#) says, “Christ came and gave to us the second circumcision through ‘the baptism of regeneration’ and purified our souls.” With appropriate caution, [Ferguson](#) observes that for [Origen](#), “spiritual circumcision is not baptism but is through baptism.” [Origen](#) may well have made this mental distinction, but we still see in his writings the onset of correlating [NT](#) baptism with [OT](#) circumcision.⁶⁵

ethical transformation and change that is characterise [sic] of one’s life as a whole, and which is expressed in love, modesty and obedience.”

⁶¹ The consciousness that Christian baptism mirrored the consecration rite of Jewish priests was lost to the NT Church early on.

⁶² Cyprian, *Epi* 58. See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 370.

⁶³ Origen, *Com Joh* 1.9.

⁶⁴ From Scheck, *Origen: Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans*, p. 143. Cited by Daniélou and referenced by Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 416.

⁶⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 416.

Sure enough, by the fourth century the belief had firmly taken root that “the baptism of Christians had been foreshadowed in the circumcision of the Hebrews.”⁶⁶ Indeed, from [Augustine’s](#) time onward, Catholics and Protestant have understood baptism as corresponding to the preceding “sign and seal” of circumcision. Once assumed, this correspondence was immediately employed as a rationale for the practice of infant baptism.⁶⁷ We see this in [Augustine’s](#) treatise *On Baptism*:

And as in Isaac, who was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, the seal of this righteousness of faith was given first, and afterwards, as he imitated the faith of this father, the righteousness itself followed as he grew up, of which the seal had been given before when he was an infant; so in infants, who are baptized, the sacrament of regeneration is given first, and if they maintain a Christian piety, conversion also in the heart will follow, of which the mysterious sign had gone before in the outward body.⁶⁸

[Augustine](#) thus argued that, by analogy with the earlier practice of circumcision, infants should be baptized even though they “certainly are as yet unable ‘with the heart to believe unto righteousness, and with the mouth to make confession unto salvation.’”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Thus Optatus quoted Parmenian (c. AD 384), *Con Don* 5. Optatus, *Against The Donatists*, translated and edited by Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), p. 96. Likewise, Augustine, while not explicitly equating baptism with circumcision, spoke of “the substitution of baptism for circumcision,” Augustine, *Reply To Faustus The Manichaeon*, 19.9.

⁶⁷ H. F. Stander and J. P. Louw, in their *Baptism In The Early Church* (Pretoria: Didaskalia, 1988), observe that “the link between baptism and circumcision became relevant only when the issue of the age of the one to be baptized became crucial” (p. 168), quoted in Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 21.

⁶⁸ *De Bap*, 4.24. Note that Augustine here makes a distinction between regeneration and “conversion also in the heart.” Apparently in his thinking one can be born again without being converted!

⁶⁹ *De Bap* 4.23. To Augustine’s credit he knew that infants were “certainly ... unable” to believe, in contrast to current Lutheran theologians who think that “when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant, [which though it cannot] be expressed or articulated, yet ... is real and present all the same”! By way of supplying “divine authority” for his thinking, however, Augustine did not cite Scripture but rather the “invariable custom” of the “whole Church” which is “rightly held to have been handed down by apostolic authority....” See Ferguson’s comments, Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 803.

The perceived correlation between baptism and circumcision quickly became popular among Catholic theologians and preachers, not only as an argument for practicing infant baptism, but as a basis for exalting the rite of baptism in general. For example, [Asterius the Homilist](#) (c. AD 385-410) used the correlation in reference to Col 2.11-12, saying,

If the circumcision of the Jew was given early and quickly, immediately after swaddling clothes, to the infant, how much more ought the circumcision of Christ, which is by baptism, be given more quickly to the infant for safety.⁷⁰

Likewise, [John Chrysostom](#), whose ministry flourished between AD 386 and 407, preached from the epistle to the Colossians, and said,

No longer, he saith, is the circumcision with the knife, but in Christ Himself; for no hand imparts this circumcision, as is the case there, but the Spirit. It circumciseth not a part, but the whole man. It is the body both in the one and the other case, but in the one it is carnally, in the other it is spiritually circumcised; but not as the Jews, for ye have not put off flesh, but sins. When and where? In Baptism. And what he calls circumcision, he again calls burial.⁷¹

Again in his *Homilies On Genesis* [Chrysostom](#) spoke of the painfulness of the ancient circumcision, and then said,

Our circumcision, on the contrary — I mean the grace of baptism — involves a painless medicine and is the means of countless good things for us filling us with the grace of the Spirit.⁷²

[Chrysostom's](#) friend to the west, [Theodore of Mopsuestia](#) (c. 350-428), commented also on Colossians 2.12, and wrote,

“Circumcision” refers to the life of immortality embraced through baptism, just as “uncircumcision” is the old life of mortality.⁷³

⁷⁰ Asterius, *Hom 12, In Ps. 6* in Marcel, Richard, *Asterii Sophistae commentariorum in psalmos* (Oslo, 1956), cited by Ferguson in *Baptism In The Early Church*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 577.

⁷¹ Chrysostom, *Hom Col 6*.

⁷² Chrysostom, *Hom Gen 40.16*, quoted in ACCOS, OT II.

⁷³ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Com Col*, quoted in ACCOS, NT IX.

Then [Chrysostom's](#) opponent, [Severian of Gabala](#), a preacher with influence in Constantinople (c. AD 400), wrote,

Through baptism comes the stripping away and circumcision of sins.⁷⁴

While these fourth and fifth-century authors leave us wondering whether they saw baptism as constituting our spiritual circumcision or only as providing the occasion for our spiritual circumcision, they clearly believed that Christian baptism had fulfilled and replaced Jewish circumcision as the effective induction into covenant relationship with God. The *only* scripture they could cite for this supposed supplanting of circumcision by baptism was Col 2.11-12.

The paucity of biblical support, however, did not discourage succeeding generations of theologians from thinking of baptism as the new circumcision. Indeed, by the time of the later [Reformers](#), the correlation between baptism and circumcision hardly required a [proof text](#), because it had become an axiom within larger theological constructs. [John Calvin](#) (1509-1564), for example, began his defense of infant baptism with the argument that “prior to the institution of baptism, the people of God had circumcision *in its stead*.”⁷⁵ He based his assumption — that circumcision stood in the stead of baptism (and vice versa) — primarily on the doctrine of “covenantal continuity,” i.e., the belief that the principles of the old covenant are subsumed in the new “covenant of grace.”⁷⁶ [Calvin](#) did not enlist Col 2.12 to support his argument for infant baptism (and for the correlation between baptism and circumcision) until eight paragraphs later, but then stated frankly that Paul’s object in the Colossians passage “is to show that baptism is the same thing to Christians that circumcision formerly was to the Jews.”⁷⁷ Near the end of Calvin’s life, the Protestant *Heidelberg Catechism* (1562), a work largely following [Calvin’s](#)

⁷⁴ Severian of Gabala, *Pauline Commentary From The Greek Church*, quoted in ACCOS, NT IX.

⁷⁵ *Inst* 4.16.3, italics added.

⁷⁶ See Shawn D. Wright’s helpful analysis of “Baptism And The Logic Of Reformed Paedobaptists” in Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006).

⁷⁷ *Inst* 4.16.11.

theology, codified the idea that “baptism is instituted in the new covenant” instead of circumcision.⁷⁸

In his *Systematic Theology*, Robert L. Reymond shows that the spiritual equation of baptism with circumcision remains the standard position of Reformed theology:

Clearly, for Paul the spiritual import of the New Testament sacrament of baptism — the outward sign and seal of the Spirit’s inner baptismal work — is tantamount to that of the Old Testament circumcision. By the authority of Christ and his apostles, the church in this age administers baptism in lieu of circumcision. But it does so with the understanding that the spiritual significance of baptism as a sign is essentially the same as the former Old Testament ceremony, namely, a covenantal sign of the Spirit’s act of cleansing from sin’s defilement.⁷⁹

Without a doubt, Col 2.11-12 has been a key passage in the development of baptismal theology, particularly with regard to the doctrine of infant baptism.⁸⁰ However, we have seen above (in the section, “[Baptism As Christian Circumcision: Further Light On The Question From History](#)”), that the first generations of Christians *did not* correlate NT baptism with OT circumcision,⁸¹ *did not* equate NT baptism with spiritual circumcision, and certainly *did not* use a correlation between OT circumcision and NT baptism to justify the as yet unknown practice of [infant baptism](#). In spite of centuries of Catholic and

⁷⁸ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Article 74, in David Lang, *Creeds, Confessions, And Catechisms* (Oak Tree Software, 1997).

⁷⁹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology Of The Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998) pp. 929-930.

⁸⁰ Stephen J. Wellum, in “Baptism And The Relationship Between The Covenants,” thoroughly explains how the ideas of a continuity of covenants and of covenant signs are still used to defend infant baptism. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), p. 97 ff.

⁸¹ How absurd for Paul to argue against the necessity of circumcision if baptism were its equivalent, and baptism was clearly obligatory. “In [Wright’s] opinion, the polemic against circumcision must initially have militated against this analogy being used as an argument for infant baptism.” J. P. T. Hunt, “Colossians 2:11-12, The Circumcision/Baptism Analogy, And Infant Baptism,” *Tyndale House*, 1990, http://www.tyndalehouse.com/TynBul/Library/00_TyndaleBulletin_ByDate.htm (accessed March 23, 2010).

Conversely, if baptism and circumcision were equivalent, why did Paul not use baptism as the ready answer for the heretics who demanded that Gentile Christian be circumcised? Had the apostles believed that baptism was the equivalent or counterpart to circumcision, they would have said it plainly, “circumcision is unnecessary for those who have been ‘circumcised’ through baptism.”

Reformed theology, therefore, we must repudiate that interpretation (among many alternatives) of Col 2.11-12 which posits an unwarranted correlation between OT circumcision and NT baptism.⁸² We must consider the other alternative interpretations of this passage to discover what Paul really meant.

The Connection Between The “Circumcision Of Christ” And Baptism

At length, then, we return to the question of what Paul meant when he wrote to the Colossians, “[You] were circumcised ... having been buried with Him in baptism.” We now understand the first part of the statement. In writing to the Colossians that they were “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ,” Paul assured them that they need not be intimidated by those demanding their *physical* circumcision: they already possessed the vital spiritual reality (“the substance,” Col 2.17) to which physical circumcision only pointed.⁸³ In Christ they had already had their hearts, their very natures, freed from the tyranny of the flesh, and this spiritual circumcision had been accomplished supernaturally (without hands) by the power of God.⁸⁴

⁸² We can reject the idea that NT baptism has subsumed OT circumcision because: (a) The external rites of baptism and circumcision testify to different truths, (b) The covenant sign of OT circumcision has never been rescinded, and therefore baptism cannot have replaced it, and (c) The only basis for equating circumcision and baptism, Col 2.11-12, does not directly mention physical circumcision.

With regard to the second point (b), since the covenant sign of OT circumcision has never been rescinded, only circumcision, not baptism, will meet the obligation upon those for whom circumcision is still obligatory. Of course this fact is tied up with the purpose of OT circumcision as marking out God’s chosen nation of Israel. Had God rescinded His promises to national Israel (an idea which Reformed theologians are too ready to accept), then circumcision would thereby be nullified, and baptism might conceivably replace it. It’s ironic that Reformed theologians argue for the baptism-circumcision equation on the basis of covenantal continuity between the OT and the NT. In reality, Reformed theology tends to chop off and rescind God’s covenant with national Israel and teach that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s agenda. In the Reformed view, baptism does not continue OT circumcision, but in fact replaces it, making the circumcision of today’s Jew meaningless.

⁸³ “...they have found in [Christ] the reality symbolized by Mosaic circumcision.” Curtis Vaughan, “Colossians,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

⁸⁴ Cf. Arthur G. Patzia, “Colossians,” *New International Biblical Commentary, New Testament Series*, vols. 1-18, ed. W. Ward Gasque, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988-1999), Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc., Version 1.8:

What connection, then, did Paul make between this spiritual “circumcision of Christ” and the Colossian believers’ baptisms? The most plausible interpretation of the key phrase in Col 2.11-12, in light of the [NT’s](#) overall teaching that justification is solely by faith and regeneration is wholly a work of the Spirit (principles which will be reinforced as we study other baptismal passages below), is a combination of choices 3 and 5 in the list above (in the section, “[Paul’s Argument](#)”). The Colossians had been spiritually circumcised in Christ and *therefore* they were “buried with him in baptism.” Reciprocally, they could *have assurance* that they had been spiritually circumcised because that inner transformation had emboldened them to be “buried with him in baptism.” We might paraphrase the passage in this manner:

In Christ you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision that has dethroned the tyranny of the flesh over your heart. Because of this circumcision of Christ you were baptized. In fact, you have assurance of your inner circumcision because it is what emboldened you to receive Christian baptism, a baptism by which you have [symbolically] been buried with Him, and (more than that) also raised up with Him (to begin your new Spirit-led life) through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

According to this interpretation, the spiritual “circumcision of Christ” was an event of [regeneration](#) that occurred prior to the Colossians’ baptisms. As [Vine](#) put it:

The time when this spiritual circumcision takes place in the experience of believers is not at their baptism, but when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby become children of God, that is to say, when they are converted (Joh 1.12; Gal 3.26). Their new life, their spiritual circumcision, their spiritual burial and resurrection, all took place then, their baptism in water being a confession and confirmation of the preceding spiritual experience....⁸⁵

The essence of this spiritual circumcision consists of **the putting off of the sinful nature** (lit., “the body of flesh”). Christ, in other words, liberates individuals from their unregenerate nature (“body of sin,” Rom. 6:6; “body of death,” Rom. 7:24).

⁸⁵ W. E. Vine commenting on Col 2.11 in *The Collected Writings Of W. E. Vine* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

The plausibility of Vine's explanation that the Colossians' spiritual circumcision was attested to by their subsequent baptism is supported by the complementariness of the symbolic content of circumcision and baptism. Though we must maintain the distinction between the two rites, we must nevertheless understand how the meaning of baptism builds upon and complements the meaning of circumcision. Physical circumcision had pointed to the stripping away of the fleshly tyranny over the heart, accomplished by the shedding of blood. This symbolism had been fulfilled in the spiritual lives of the Colossians when they experienced [regeneration](#), and by faith appropriated the virtue of Christ's death. Their subsequent baptism, then, had symbolically attested that they had been buried with Christ. It testified that their "old man" really had been crucified with Christ, i.e., that the rule of the flesh had been stripped away by union with Jesus, and that they were currently dead to sin (Rom 6.3-7). In a wonderful way, the symbolism of baptism takes the testimony one step further. Whereas the Colossian's spiritual circumcision (prefigured by physical circumcision) dethroned the flesh, their spiritual resurrection in Christ (commemorated in baptism) began their new life of righteousness with Him (Rom 6.8-11; Col 2.13). Circumcision speaks of the death of the flesh; baptism speaks of both the death of the old self and the coming to life of the new (Rom 6.4-6). Thus, the symbolism of the latter builds upon the symbolism of the former. Baptism is not the counterpart of [OT](#) circumcision; instead it is a dramatization of spiritual realities *beyond those that were symbolized by circumcision*. The spiritual blessings symbolized by baptism are acquired by faith, and they include what Paul referred to as "the circumcision of Christ."

The Baptismal Incentive For Holy Living

In a final reference to the Colossians' spiritual death and resurrection through faith, Paul wrote in Col 3.1-3:

Therefore if **you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For **you have died** and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

He then went on to admonish the Colossians to consider themselves dead to immorality, etc. (v.5), to put aside anger, etc. (v.8), and to put on a heart of compassion, etc. (v.12). While Paul based these admonitions on the Colossians having actually died to sin and having been raised to new life, the verb *raised with* (συνηγέρθητε, sē-nē-'yēr-thē-tě) in Col 3.1, repeated from the preceding verse 2.12, alludes as well to the symbolism of their baptism. Thus, the *double impetus* for them to live holy lives was that they had both died and risen with Christ, *and* had publically symbolized these spiritual realities in their baptism. Again we see that for Paul baptism attests to the believers' true spiritual circumcision in Christ, and powerfully marks his or her beginning of a "resurrected" life.

1 CORINTHIANS 10.1-2: CHRISTIAN BAPTISM COMMITTS US TO CHRIST.

1Co 10.1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 and **all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea**; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

SYNOPSIS

The **typology** of the Exodus helps us understand what baptism is and what it is not. Baptism is not a magical ritual that brings us into a “mystical union” with Christ. It is an act that creates a barrier to returning to our old life, and an experience that should undergird our commitment to going forward with Christ and His agenda.

The Exodus of the twelve tribes of Israel from Egypt, under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, foreshadowed a much greater redemption, namely, the redemption of people from every tribe and nation that will occur at the return of the second Joshua. It also wonderfully typified the redemption of individuals that already occurs by faith in the second Moses (i.e., Jesus, the Moses-like Prophet and new lawgiver). Furthermore, it illustrated the radical, relational commitment that Christian baptism would entail. When we consider the parallels between the Exodus and the Christian life, we see that:

1. The Passover foreshadowed the appropriation of Christ's atoning sacrifice.
2. Leaving Egypt pictured repentance.
3. Crossing the sea typified baptism.
4. Travels in the wilderness illustrated the process of sanctification.
5. Entering the Promised Land foreshadowed the attainment of sufficient maturity to engage in the battles of the Lord.

Of these parallels, Paul made use of number three, the baptism parallel, in 1Co 10.2.

As with the reference to baptism in Col 2.11-12, however, Paul's reference to baptism in 1Co 10 occurs in a passage *not primarily about baptism*. Instead, it appears in the midst of Paul's practical warning to “him

who thinks he stands,” and his admonishment that the overconfident person should “take heed that he does not fall” (1Co 10.12). Paul grounds his warning upon a description of the favorable circumstances enjoyed by his ancestors in the time of the Exodus: *God’s manifest presence accompanied them, they were baptized “into Moses,” and they communed with Christ*. Paul points out that in spite of these benefits most of them “were laid low in the wilderness” because they displeased God (1Co 10.5). The application for the Corinthian Christians was that they should not think that the manifest presence of God in their congregation, or the fact of their baptism, or their sense of communion with Christ, would cause God to wink at their immorality and idolatry.

The mention of baptism, then, is quite ancillary to Paul’s main point, but it nevertheless affords us some good insights for our present study. For example, consider what it meant to have been “baptized into Moses.” It did *not* mean that the Israelites entered into some kind of [mystical](#) union with their leader. As H. A. A. Kennedy wrote, “we cannot conceive the implication of some [mystic](#) relationship established between the people and Moses by these events in their history.”⁸⁶ Rather, as a baptism, the crossing of the sea signified a break with the past, a change of status (no longer subjects of Egypt), and *a commitment* to Moses and his agenda. Before this baptism, any Israelite could have deserted Moses and returned to Egypt without too much trouble. However, after the waters of the sea returned to their normal place, all the Israelites who had crossed over were committed to Moses. So should Christian baptism commit us to Christ. Not only should our baptism signify a real departure from the old life, but it should also present us with a real barrier against returning to that old life. Thus, baptism should constitute a vital component in our commitment to Christ and His agenda.

Now, let us return to Kennedy’s point: the fact that the crossing of the sea by the Israelites typified Christian baptism, undercuts any suggestion that baptism effects a [mystical](#) union. “All that can be properly asserted is that, as the crossing of the Red Sea definitely committed the people to follow Moses as their divinely appointed head, so [Christian] baptism is a definite committal

⁸⁶ H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions*, (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), p. 159.

and consecration to following Christ.”⁸⁷ Christian baptism no more effects a [mystical](#) union with Christ, than crossing the sea brought about a [mystical](#) union with Moses. In fact, “the whole point of Paul’s argument lies in the uselessness of the [sacraments](#) apart from that ethical obedience to which believers have pledged themselves in these sacred [ordinances](#).”⁸⁸ For those Israelites who rebelled against Moses’ leadership in the Sinai wilderness, their baptism in the cloud and in the sea availed them nothing (1Co 10.5-10).

With this in mind, let us consider why the Corinthians might have thought that their baptism made them immune from God’s displeasure; Paul’s argument seems to have anticipated such thinking. Had some of the Corinthian Christians been influenced by the ubiquitous [mystery religions](#)? (See more about these secretive cults below, in the section, [Mystery Religions And The Fathers](#).) Had they come to think of their baptism as an effectual [initiation](#) into God’s favor and protection? Possibly. It’s just as likely, though, that the high personal cost of their public baptism had just made them cocky. Think of Peter’s exclamation before Christ’s arrest: “Even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away” (Mat 26.33). Perhaps some in the Corinthian church had boasted, “I sacrificed my livelihood and risked my life by my baptism, so I’ve proven that I will never fall away from Jesus!” In response, Paul warned them that no ritual nor any other aspect of their Christian experience had made them immune to potentially fatal temptations, and so they must actively “flee from idolatry” (1Co 10.14).

Baptism cannot guarantee that the [baptizee](#) will nevermore stumble. Still, we learn from 1Co 10 that baptism should create a barrier to our returning to the old life,⁸⁹ and should thus undergird our commitment to going forward with Christ and His agenda.

⁸⁷ H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions*, (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), pp. 236-237, quoting Lambert, *The Sacraments in the New Testament*, p. 159.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Lambert uses *sacrament* and *ordinance* synonymously here, but see these terms in the glossary. Lambert and Kennedy use the terms to refer to baptism and the Lord’s supper, which Paul refers to in his argument to the Corinthians (1Co 10.2-4, 16-17, 21; 11.20-34).

⁸⁹ See more on this point in the exposition of Mar 16.16 and Mat 28.18-20, and of Rom 6.1-11 and Col 2.12 below.

GALATIANS 3.27: CHRISTIAN BAPTISM IDENTIFIES US AS CHRIST'S, AND THEREFORE AS HEIRS.

Gal 3.27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

SYNOPSIS

Identity in Christ supersedes all other social distinctions and renders all believers heirs by grace of salvation's blessings. Baptism makes this unifying and religiously-leveling identity public, in that baptism is a primary occasion when the believer "clothes himself," i.e., publicly associates himself, with Christ (Gal 3.27). However, baptism is not the only time, nor necessarily the first time, that the believer "puts on Christ"; the Christian constantly identifies with Christ publicly, by word and deed (Rom 13.14).

When we understand the biblical imagery of "clothing oneself," we realize that Gal 3.27 is neither about salvation nor about the moment when God bestows salvation's blessings. Both salvation and its blessings result from faith alone, so God only awaits the moment when a person comes to authentic faith to bestow these gifts.

Once we understand 1Co 10.1-2 and Col 2.12, it becomes easier to understand Paul's related statement in Gal 3.27: by their baptism, the Galatians identified themselves with Jesus and embraced a new life in Him. Indeed, in the apostolic era, so far as a baptizee's neighbors were concerned, the Christian believer by his baptism had so identified himself with Christ that he may as well have clothed himself in Jesus.⁹⁰ Paul argued further, however, that so far as fellow Christians are concerned, baptizees have taken on an identity that transcends ethnicity, social class, and gender, such that all are "one in Christ Jesus, and ... are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3.27-29). Just as in his arguments of 1Co 10.1-2 and Col 2, Paul's doctrinal focus in Gal 3 is not upon baptism *per se* but upon the implications of identifying with Christ. The Galatians had been baptized "into Christ" (i.e., in

⁹⁰ If we Americans were persecuted for wearing Christian tee-shirts, we would thereby understand something of what the first-century Christian risked for his or her baptism.

the name of Christ), and should recognize the religious leveling implied by that public identification.

Nothing in Gal 3.27 refers directly to salvation, or to [mystical](#) union with Christ. Nevertheless, the [Church of Christ](#) writers for the *Truth For The World Question And Answer Booklet* use this passage in their answer to the question, “Is water baptism necessary to salvation?” They write:

When one is baptized into Christ, he or she puts Christ on! Christ is not put on before baptism!⁹¹

With this statement, these [Church of Christ](#) writers equate “salvation” with Paul’s words “you ... clothed yourselves with Christ.” They interpret clothing oneself in Christ as referring to the [baptizee’s](#) entrance into a [mystical](#) union with Christ that saves (or is prerequisite to salvation), but by this interpretation they commit a serious exegetical error. They seem to not understand the biblical imagery of “clothing oneself.” Throughout Scripture, the idea of putting something on as a garment serves as a versatile *metaphor*. People and things can be clothed with strength (Isa 52.1), with salvation (Isa 61.10), with despair (Eze 7.27), with terror (Eze 26.16), with power (Luk 24.49), with humility (1Pe 5.5), and so on. The metaphor always has to do with the outward demonstration of an intangible, usually inner, reality. As people put on certain clothing to outwardly express either inner mourning or celebration, so Scripture uses clothing as a metaphor for the behavioral expression of an inward experience. To “put on Christ,” or clothe oneself in Christ, therefore, is to express outwardly the inner experience of receiving Christ as Lord. The act of baptism allows us to *publicly* put on Christ in this way.⁹²

Sadly, the [Church of Christ](#) writers did not notice that, for Paul, “putting on Christ” was something already-saved believers do constantly as part of their lifestyle (Rom 13.14). Christians continue to “put on Christ,” even as they constantly clothe themselves in the character qualities of Jesus (Col 3.12). While Gal 3.27 points to the occasion of baptism as a key moment when

⁹¹ “QUESTION: Is water baptism necessary to salvation?,” [Truth For The World Question And Answer Booklet, Compiled by David Amos](#), (accessed May 3, 2016).

⁹² The metaphor of putting on Christ in baptism militates against the practice of infant baptism, for to put on Christ is to outwardly express a changed life.

baptizees publicly “clothed themselves with Christ,” Paul’s wording does not support the interpretation that the moment of baptism is *the first time* or the *only time* that the Galatians or other believers “put on Christ.” Believers constantly “clothe themselves in Christ” from the moment they first profess faith in Him (Rom 13.14).

Therefore, Gal 3.27 provides no support for the Church of Christ contention that baptism is necessary for salvation. Neither does it support the idea that God withholds the blessings of salvation until the moment of baptism, and only then confers them upon the baptizee. Sadly, even so great a scholar as Everett Ferguson has been misled by His Church of Christ affiliation in this regard. In connection with Gal 3.27 and its context, he writes:

If a distinction is to be made between the relation of faith and baptism to the blessings described, one might say that baptism is the time at which and faith is the reason why.⁹³

However, *if* — as Ferguson points out — faith is “the reason why” we were made “sons of God” (Gal 3.26), “the reason why” we became “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3.7), and “the reason why” we were justified and receive “the blessing of Abraham” (Gal 2.16; 3.6-9, 11, 22), then “the time at which” we receive all these blessings cannot be constrained to the moment of baptism, but only to the moment of faith. How ironic that some would exposit *Galatians* in a way that adds baptism to faith as prerequisite to God’s blessings, even as the heretics among the Galatians sought to add circumcision!

People can receive baptism *immediately* upon believing in Christ (as in Acts 2, 8, etc.), such that the events of their coming to faith and their reception of baptism can be thought of as having occurred concurrently. However, we know that throughout Christian history people’s saving faith has preceded their baptism by widely varying amounts of time. In fact, countless Christians have died for their faith before they had the opportunity to receive water baptism at all.⁹⁴

⁹³ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 147.

⁹⁴ This historical reality engendered the Roman Catholic doctrine of a “baptism of blood” in order to preserve their belief in baptism’s necessity for salvation. See Peter Kreeft,

If God withholds the blessings of salvation until the moment of baptism, not only would countless martyrs have died never having experienced those blessings, but it would present us with the unfathomable [mystery](#) as to why neither Jesus nor any of His apostles explained such a vital fact. If God withholds salvation's blessings until a person is baptized, the [NT](#) authors missed abundant opportunities to give us this *essential* teaching. If baptism were the key to receiving the gospel's blessings (let alone the key to salvation), Paul was surely misguided to stress the point — without some caveat — that “Christ did not send me to baptize” (1Co 1.17)!

No, if baptism were the key to salvation or salvation's blessings, our [NT](#) would have recorded this truth repeatedly and explicitly. Christian baptism is very important, but its importance pales next to the believer's faith and even more in comparison to the objects of that faith.

Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism Of Catholic Beliefs (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2001), p. 311.

MARK 16.16 AND MATTHEW 28.18-20: BY BAPTISM WE TAKE OUR FIRST STEP IN DISCIPLESHIP.

Mar 16.9 [Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. 10 She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that He was alive, and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

12 After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them, while they were walking along on their way to the country. 13 They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.

14 Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 **And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.** 17 “These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

19 So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]

Mat 28.18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,** 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

SYNOPSIS

Someone other than Mark may have added Mark 16.16 to Mark's Gospel. Nevertheless, working on the assumption that this verse forms part of the inspired text, a faithful exegesis tells us that Jesus cannot possibly have intended His words in Mark 16.16 to mean that baptism saves or is a second prerequisite of salvation. Instead, like the Great Commission in Matthew 28.19-20, Mark 16.16 teaches us that baptism serves as a vital public testimony to authentic faith. As a public act that commits the believer to following Christ without turning back, baptism launches the life of Christian discipleship.

A FORCED CHOICE: INTERPRETING MARK 16.16

At first glance, Mar 16.16 seems quite clear. The language is not complex. The statement, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved," implies that baptism is one of two conditions for salvation. As [Ferguson](#) writes, "the passage is notable for its testimony to the early Christian conviction of the importance of baptism as a condition for salvation...."⁹⁵

However, if we interpret Mar 16.16 in this way, making baptism a second prerequisite for salvation, then it contradicts all the passages in the Bible that make faith *the only* condition for salvation (e.g., Luk 8.12; Act 16.31; Rom 1.16; 1Co 1.21; Eph 2.8; 2Ti 3.15). This forces us to make one of two interpretive choices. We must conclude either that the meaning of Mar 16.16 is not so obvious as it first appears, or that *this verse doesn't belong in our Bible*.

Mark's Long Ending As A Spurious Addition

Should we set Mar 16.16 aside as not truly part of Mark's inspired Gospel? Maybe. At least since the time of [Eusebius of Caesarea](#) (c. AD 300), Mar 16.9-20, known as the long ending ([LE](#)) of Mark, has been suspected of being a spurious addition to Mark's gospel.⁹⁶ However, because it appears in the vast majority of ancient [mss](#), the [LE](#) tenaciously held its place in the English Bible

⁹⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 141.

⁹⁶ David Alan Black, ed., *Perspectives On The Ending Of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008), p. 21.

until the publication of the Revised Version in 1881.⁹⁷ Since that time, undoubtedly prompted by the general skepticism of the age, but also by the burgeoning discipline of textual criticism, the **LE** has been bracketed as suspect in many English versions, and has remained the subject of lively debate among Bible scholars.⁹⁸ The **LE** has four things against it:

1. Manuscript Evidence: It does not appear in the oldest **Grk mss** of the **NT** nor in the ancient Sinaitic Syriac version (**mss** ranging in time of origin from AD 325 to AD 400).
2. Style: Roughly a third of its significant vocabulary is either used differently elsewhere in Mark or does not appear in the rest of Mark at all. Additionally, many have sensed a change of diction in the **LE** (as compared to the style in the rest of Mark), by which the narrative becomes hurried, or abbreviated, “barren of details.”⁹⁹
3. Discontinuity: The transition from Mar 16.8 to v. 9 is grammatically awkward. The masculine participle that begins v. 9, *having risen*, (Ἀναστὰς, ä-nä-'stäs), demands a masculine antecedent, but the subject of the last sentence of v. 8 is the women who had visited the tomb. Grammatically, the subject of *having risen* could be mistaken for the “young man” of v. 5. The reader has to think back to the young man’s

⁹⁷ See the Introduction of *Counterfeit Or Genuine: Mark 16? John 8?*, ed. David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1978).

⁹⁸ For excellent perspective on all sides of the current debate, I refer the reader to David Alan Black, ed., *Perspectives On The Ending Of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008).

⁹⁹ For example, Mar 16.19 describes the ascension of Jesus in strikingly few words:

He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

However, as Maurice A. Robinson notes in “The Long Ending Of Mark As Canonical Verity,” in *Perspectives On The Ending Of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008), p. 64, Mar 1.13 describes the temptation of Jesus in the same “abbreviated” style:

And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

See J. Scott Porter, *Principles of Textual Criticism*, (London: Simms and M’Intyre, 1848), p. 461, as an example of authors who raise the issue of style. For a summary of all the LE’s internal problems, see the end of Walter W. Wessel’s commentary, *Mark*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

words in v. 6 to realize who rose (the [NIVO](#) provides the word *Jesus* in v. 9, but that word does not appear in the [Grk](#) text). Also, v. 9 provides identifying information about Mary Magdalene as if she hadn't already been mentioned three times in the immediately preceding context. Finally, the "young man" at the tomb announces a Galilee appearance of Jesus (v. 7) that never materializes in the [LE](#) as it does in Matthew's post-resurrection narrative.

4. Content: The specificity of the enumerated signs seems odd, almost implying that the Holy Spirit would limit Himself to these signs *only*. The mention of "speak[ing] with new tongues" is particularly strange since no hint of this sign (or gift) appears previously in any of the gospels. And then there's the seemingly unorthodox pairing of baptism with belief as a prerequisite of salvation.

Some Perspective On The Problems Of The [LE](#)

These complaints against the [LE](#) do not all have equal weight. For example, the manuscript evidence against the [LE](#) is an argument from silence. It proves very little because the Christian [Fathers](#) quoted from or alluded to the [LE](#) by c. AD 150 to 200, long before the [NT mss](#) appeared which lack the [LE](#) (between AD 325 and 400).¹⁰⁰ The absence of the [LE](#) from a few [mss](#), therefore, does not prove its nonexistence at the time those [mss](#) were produced, but only tells us that the scribes of those [mss](#) omitted the [LE](#) for unknown reasons. Those reasons could have included certain knowledge that the [LE](#) of Mark was spurious, but we don't know that. We can only speculate about the reasoning of those scribes who omitted the [LE](#); we can't draw conclusions from positive evidence. Therefore, on the basis of the [ms](#) evidence, we cannot say dogmatically that Mark did not write the [LE](#).

However, the style and continuity issues of the [LE](#) strongly suggest that it is an addendum to Mark's gospel. This does not preclude Mark's authorship of the [LE](#) — theoretically Mark could have written the [LE](#) earlier than the rest of his gospel (as part of an "outline"), or later (as a hurried conclusion). Mark

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, in c. AD 180 to 200, quotes Mar 16.19 in *Adv Haer* 3.10.5. Tatian, in c. AD 160 to 175, included elements of the [LE](#) in his *Diatessaron*, §55. Justin Martyr, in c. AD 148 to 155, may have alluded to Mar 16.20.

also could have borrowed material from another source to conclude his own work. Nevertheless, the [LE](#) does not flow directly from the preceding narrative as its organic conclusion, and this disjunction necessarily raises the question of whether there is a discontinuity of authorship between the main body of Mark's gospel and the [LE](#).¹⁰¹

Regarding the content of the [LE](#), the signs passage (Mar 16.17-18) is strange, but not fatal. The declaration about accompanying signs need not be interpreted as limiting the possible kinds of signs, nor as dictating that these specific signs have to occur at specific times, nor as teaching that believers must intentionally handle snakes and drink poison. We can reasonably understand the signs passage as giving examples of the kinds of signs (including immunity to snakebite as in Act 28.3-6) that will, from time to time, corroborate the gospel message. Although speaking in tongues is a previously unheard of gift or sign in the narrative of the gospels, we must not forget that Jesus taught for forty days after His resurrection, and we only have a fraction of that teaching recorded in the gospels and in the first chapter of Acts. We can reasonably assume that Jesus taught the disciples about spiritual gifts, including the gift of tongues, in the *Evangelium Dierum Quadraginta*.¹⁰² If Jesus gave detailed teaching about spiritual gifts during the forty days, then it's plausible that He named some of the gifts as examples of corroborating signs, and that He did so when giving the final commission to His disciples. This rationale for the sudden mention of speaking in "new tongues" is admittedly speculative, but shows that there are ways to make sense of the enumeration of signs in Mar 16.17-18.

¹⁰¹ Maurice A. Robinson provides a most persuasive defense for Mark's authorship of the LE, including an example of earlier "abbreviated style" in Mar 1.12-13, an "Elijah motif" running throughout the gospel and into the LE, and even a list of chiasmic parallels between the first half of Mark and Mark 16. See "The Long Ending Of Mark As Canonical Verity," in *Perspectives On The Ending Of Mark*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008). The most elaborate hypothesis about who, other than Mark, might have produced the LE is recounted in Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 455.

¹⁰² The patristic Church thus referred to that special teaching given by Christ after His resurrection and before His ascension, calling it the "Gospel of the Forty Days."

The Ultimate Case of Baptismism?

It's harder to make sense of Mar 16.16. Let's look at it again:

“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”

Many expositors have insisted that this verse does *not* teach baptism as necessary for salvation.¹⁰³ They are right if we resort to the strict rules of logic. In a conditional statement, after the *necessary condition* for something is given, an endless list of *attendant circumstances* can be added without negating the sense that only the first circumstance is required to produce the result in view. Consider this example:

He who wins the lottery and quits his job, will be richer than 90% of his fellow Americans.

Obviously, quitting one's job is not a necessary condition for becoming wealthy once a person has won the lottery. Rather, the above statement expresses the fact that the condition of wealth will prevail when a person wins the lottery, *even if* that person quits his or her job. By the same logic applied to Mar 16.16, a person who has believed will be saved *regardless of* whether or not they are subsequently baptized.¹⁰⁴

Of course, baptismal regenerationists will deny that the clause “has been baptized” describes an “attendant circumstance” in Mar 16.16. Instead,

¹⁰³ Those who have taken Mar 16.16 as authoritative, but *not* as teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation include: Joseph Alleine and Richard Baxter (*Alarm to Unconverted*, 1639); James Montgomery Boice (*Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 1986); John A. Broadus (*Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 1905); John Calvin and William Pringle (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*); David Clarkson (*Works* Vol. 1, 1864); William Cunningham, (*Historical Theology*, 1864); John Flavel, *The Ax Laid to the Root*, 1693); Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes (*When Cultists Ask*, 1997); John D. Grassmick (“Mark” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1985); John Hepburn and Thomas Lowry (*American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule*, 1639); Charles Hodge, (*Systematic Theology*); Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown (*Commentary*, 1997); John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff and William G. T. Shedd (*Commentary on Mark*); William MacDonald (*Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1995); Larry Richards, Dan Pegoda, and Paul Gross (*Every Teaching of Jesus*, 2001); Henry J. Ripley (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 1843); Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (*Believer's Baptism*, 2006); C. H. Spurgeon (“Baptismal Regeneration,” 1864). Generally, these authorities have affirmed that baptism *presupposes* regeneration, and is incumbent upon those who *have been* saved.

¹⁰⁴ Though this is logically true, it surely does not express the attitude of the Mar 16.16 statement; Mar 16.16 in no way minimizes the importance of baptism even if it does not declare baptism a requisite of salvation.

they assume that the clause presents a second *necessary condition* for salvation. Strictly speaking, however, for Christ to teach the necessity of baptism for salvation in Mar 16.16, He would have had to conclude His sentence with the warning, “but he who has disbelieved *and he who is not baptized* shall be condemned.”¹⁰⁵ Such a follow-up to the first clause would have clarified that there are indeed *two necessary conditions* for salvation, and made the requirement of baptism explicit.¹⁰⁶ It is the lack of any mention of baptism in the second clause that makes it unprovable *logically* that the phrase “has been baptized” describes a second *necessary condition*, and thus unprovable that Mar 16.16 presents baptism as a requisite for salvation.¹⁰⁷

However, in everyday conversation we often state multiple *necessary conditions* for something without bothering to make our language airtight. For example, a teacher might say to his students, “If you complete all your

¹⁰⁵ “It is worthy of note, that the words, *is not baptized*, are not found in this second clause, as would have been the case, had it been a saving rite, or essential to salvation.” John J. Owen, *A Commentary Critical, Expository, And Practical On The Gospels Of Matthew And Mark* (New York, NY: Leavitt & Allen, 1864). Cf. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review Of The Principal Discussions In The Christian Church Since The Apostolic Age*, 2nd Edition, Vol. II (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1864), p. 138. See also Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. I, VI vols. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930) on Mar 16.16.

¹⁰⁶ It also would have taught that neither faith nor baptism were *sufficient conditions* for salvation, since either one without the other would not save. For a discussion of “Necessary And Sufficient Conditions,” see for example, Evelyn M. Barker, *Everyday Reasoning*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 173 ff.

¹⁰⁷ As the *Got Questions?* web site explains:

Clearly, the determining factor regarding whether one is saved or condemned is whether or not he believes. In interpreting this passage correctly, it is important to realize that while it tells us something about believers who have been baptized (they are saved), it does not say anything about believers who have not been baptized. In order for this verse to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, a third statement would have had to be included, that statement being: “He who believes and is not baptized will be condemned” or “He who is not baptized will be condemned.” But, of course, neither of these statements is found in the verse.

Those who try to use [Mark 16:16](#) to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation commit a common but serious logical fallacy that is sometimes called the Negative Inference Fallacy. [The rebuttal of this] fallacy can be stated as follows: “If a statement is true, we cannot assume that all negations (or opposites) of that statement are also true.” In other words, just because [Mark 16:16](#) says that “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” it does not mean that if one believes, but is not baptized, he will not be saved. Yet, this is exactly what is assumed by those that look to this verse to support the view that baptism is necessary for salvation. “Does Mark 16:16 teach that baptism is necessary for salvation?”

Got Questions? 2002-2009, <http://www.gotquestions.org/baptism-Mark-16-16.html> (accessed October 29, 2009).

assignments, and score at least 90 on your final, you'll get an A for this course; whoever doesn't complete all assignments will get a lower grade." A smart aleck might later argue that the teacher only promised lower grades to those who failed to complete all assignments, not to those who scored less than 90 on the final. The teacher's intent was clear, though: "If you meet *both* conditions, you'll get an A; if not, you'll get a lower grade." So, I suspect that the author of Mar 16.16 *did* intend to promote the idea that baptism was necessary for salvation, and that he just failed to make the wording airtight for later exegetes. However, if my suspicion is correct, then Jesus could not have said what Mar 16.16 reports that He did, and Mark could never have recorded it.

I'm suspicious of Mar 16.16, and by extension of the whole [LE](#), because even though [Fathers](#) attested to the [LE](#) perhaps as early as AD 150, we cannot verify its existence before AD 135, and by AD 135 the Church's understanding of baptism had *radically departed from the teaching of the apostles*. I will say more about this [below](#), but let us note here that by the time we get the first hints of a [patristic](#) awareness of the [LE](#), the [Fathers](#) had already begun to embrace the idea of [baptismal regeneration](#). I fear, therefore, that Mar 16.16 may represent the ultimate case of [Baptismism](#), namely, *an addition to the sacred text in order to promote a non-apostolic baptismal doctrine*. I'm not the first to think this might have happened. As Alexander Bruce writes, Mar 16.16 "is a poor equivalent for M[atthew]'s reference to baptism, insisting as it does, in an ecclesiastical spirit, on the necessity of baptism rather than on its significance as an expression of the Christian faith in God the Father, Son, and Spirit.... the words put into [Jesus'] mouth by the first evangelist are far more worthy of the Lord than those here ascribed to Him."¹⁰⁸ In other words, Mar 16.16 sounds more like the saying of a later [ecclesiastic](#) than of Jesus.

Mark's Long Ending As Legitimately Canonical

I'm suspicious of Mar 16.16, but if I dismissed it from our discussion as non-Markan and non-inspired, some might accuse me of throwing out any Bible

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 456.

passage that didn't fit my view of baptism. So let's examine Mar 16.16 further, under the working hypothesis that it is legitimately canonical.¹⁰⁹

Necessity Of Baptism A Postscript?

Before we continue, though, let's observe that so far as the gospel narratives tell us, Jesus *never taught* on the topic of baptism. As we will see below in [the study of John 3.5](#), the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, though interpreted by the post-apostolic [Fathers](#) and their doctrinal heirs as referring to [baptismal regeneration](#), does not in fact refer to baptism at all. The only two times in the gospel record that Jesus used the word *baptism* before His resurrection were to query His enemies about the legitimacy of John the Baptist's ministry (Mat 21.25; Mar 11.30; Luk 20.4), and to refer metaphorically to His approaching passion (Mar 10.38-39; Luk 12.50). Jesus taught *nothing* about what we think of as Christian baptism.¹¹⁰

Only after His death and resurrection did Jesus give a single directive concerning baptism. That directive appears in the commission to baptize disciples "in the Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Mat 28.19). Jesus also reiterated the pronouncement of John the Baptist, about the baptism in the Spirit (Act 1.5), but that does not bear directly upon our present discussion of water baptism. If we don't count Mar 16.16, Jesus taught *nothing* about water baptism, but only commanded that it be done in His Name.

It is ludicrous, therefore, to think that Jesus would *suddenly*, in a single post-resurrection declaration, uncorroborated in any other Gospel, announce that baptism is required for salvation. Instead, we should realize that Christ's complete lack of teaching about baptism, before giving His directive in the Great Commission, implies that *He assumed his disciples would understand baptism in the same way they had understood it in the Jewish milieu of His*

¹⁰⁹ There are those who believe that the LE of Mark is non-Markan in origin but that we should still accept the LE as inspired by virtue of its inclusion in the canon at an early date.

¹¹⁰ Unless we make the indirect connection between Jesus' own baptism of judgment (Luk 12.50) and the commemorative aspect of Christian baptism that points back to the death of Jesus and to the antecedent judgment of Noah's flood (see the exposition of 1Pe 3.21 below). We might say that by speaking of His crucifixion as a "baptism" (Luk 12.50), Jesus was proleptically teaching His followers that their own baptisms would commemorate God's judgment upon sin.

preceding ministry. That Hebraic milieu most certainly *did not* think of baptism as requisite for salvation.¹¹¹

A Rationale For The Extra Phrase

If, then, we interpret Mar 16.16 as legitimately canonical, we must conclude that it does not teach [baptismal regeneration](#), nor does it teach baptism as “the time at which” God bestows salvation’s blessings.¹¹² If Mar 16.16 does not teach such things, however, why does Jesus mention baptism at all in this verse? If not to teach the necessity of baptism, why would Jesus have inserted “and has been baptized” into the statement, “He who has believed ... shall be saved.” Jesus never wasted words. If Jesus really said what Mar 16.16 records, He surely had a rationale for the extra phrase, “*and has been baptized*”. Why is it there?

We can begin to answer this question by comparing Mar 16.16 to grammatically similar passages elsewhere in Scripture.¹¹³ Sadly, an exact parallel to Mar 16.16 does not exist, but the [NT](#) does include a passage that seems to similarly state a double condition for salvation. That *near* parallel appears in Rom 10:

Rom 10.8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that **if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

¹¹¹ Working from the Gospel of Matthew alone (without reference to the OT antecedents for baptism), and arriving at Mat 28.19, we would understand baptism as connoting two things: repentance and commitment to Jesus. If we add Mar 10.38-39 and Luk 12.50, we *might* just begin to piece together the idea that the symbolism of water baptism somehow connects to Christ’s suffering and death. See the comments below on Rom 6.1-11.

¹¹² Contrary to Cottrell who writes “baptism is the *time during which* God graciously bestows upon the sinner the double cure of salvation. As such it is a divinely appointed condition for salvation during this New Covenant era.” Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once For All: Bible Doctrine For Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), p. 362. Cf. Ferguson’s comment above, in the section on Gal 3.27.

¹¹³ There is no exact parallel to Mar 16.16 in the rest of the Bible. The grammatical construction (a definite article followed by two aorist participles joined by a conjunction) only appears in 3 other places, all in the LXX (Num 15.28; Dan 8.22; 7.20), and never to state a double condition for something. Nor is there a similar conditional statement regarding salvation in the Apocrypha, OTP, or Apostolic Fathers.

Rom 10.9 parallels Mar 16.16 closely enough that those who insist on baptism as necessary for salvation (based on Mar 16.16), sometimes add “confession of faith” as also a condition for salvation (based on Rom 10.9).¹¹⁴

So how should we understand Rom 10.9-10? It clearly speaks of that salvation which occurs upon a person’s being received as righteous by God. We cannot dismiss this passage as speaking only of the subsequent process of sanctification. Does it, then, teach that confession of Jesus as Lord *is* another condition of salvation along with faith?

Not really, because the confession in view is simply the oral expression of faith, and as such it is equivalent to faith itself. As the [TDNT](#) puts it:

... ὁμολογεῖν [ō-mō-lō-‘yēn, to confess] and πιστεύειν [pē-‘stēv-ēn, to believe] are obvious equivalents in the synonymous parallelism [of Rom 10.9] ... it is apparent that acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord is intrinsic to Christian faith along with the acknowledgement of the miracle of His resurrection ...¹¹⁵

Or as Eric W. Adams puts it, “It is not the confession that redeems a person, but the belief of the heart, where the confession originates.”¹¹⁶ The words of Jesus support what Adams says. Jesus warned,

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.... Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, ...’ And then I will declare to them, I never knew you... (Mat 7.21-23).

Clearly, entering the Kingdom (and being saved) pivots on a deeper act than verbal confession. If the confession does not proceed from authentic faith committed to doing the will of the Father, the confession is meaningless with regard to entering the Kingdom. Furthermore, if faith in the heart is the essential factor, then the confession (or profession) is not; the confession only

¹¹⁴ Along with “faith” and “repentance,” as in Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once For All: Bible Doctrine For Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), p. 358. Cottrell believes that while faith is “the sole *means* by which salvation is received, ... this does not rule out the addition of other conditions [of salvation] that serve other purposes.” This is an intriguing idea but calls into question whether his other “conditions” should really be called “conditions.”

¹¹⁵ *TDNT*, Vol. VI, p. 209.

¹¹⁶ Eric W. Adams, “Mouth,” in *Evangelical Dictionary Of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996).

provides an outward indication of the inner faith. For this reason, when most [Evangelicals](#) read Rom 10.9, the only condition for salvation they see there is faith, i.e., they see the confession as simply the verbal expression of “the sole condition ... faith.”¹¹⁷ It’s like the relationship between your grocery money and the sales receipt that documents your transaction; the sales receipt is not essential for buying your groceries, but only gives evidence that you really did *buy* them.

Mind you, this evidence is critical in certain circumstances. Just as your grocery receipt is essential when the store security guard at the exit confronts you, so the oral confession of Christ’s Lordship is essential when someone confronts you about your faith. As Jesus said in Mat 10.32-33:

Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

This teaching of Jesus does not mean that we must constantly confess our faith in Christ as we pick up a latte at Starbucks or walk our dog in the park (though it can’t hurt). The context of Christ’s warning to His disciples is His anticipation that they will be confronted and persecuted because of their relationship to Him. When *we* are confronted about our faith, then we will confess Jesus if our faith is real. If we fail to confess Christ’s Lordship when confronted about our beliefs, then we have no true faith and can expect Him to deny us before the Father.

Still, let us understand: neither Christ’s requirement to confess Him before men, nor Paul’s statement that “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation,”^(KJV) precludes the salvation of people who physically cannot talk. The person with permanently incapacitated vocal chords can still be saved! The thing demanded by Jesus and referenced by Paul is not that we use our mouths to fulfill some kind of [mystical](#) requirement for salvation, but rather that we live in a way that evinces our faith.

¹¹⁷ “The sole condition of salvation stressed in scores of Scriptures is faith in Christ (Joh 3.16, 36; Act 16.31; Rom 10.9, etc.).” Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), p. 500.

Based upon these truths we realize that if Jesus really said, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved,” then *He added the phrase about baptism, because baptism was as an act that would evince true faith* (assuming the believer was not physically incapacitated from being baptized, like the thief on the cross). We could then paraphrase Mar 16.16 in this (admittedly cumbersome) way:

He who has believed, and *I mean ‘believed’ in such a way that unless he is physically incapacitated he* has been baptized, shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

The one condition for salvation is faith. Aside from physical incapacitation, baptism becomes a vital expression of that saving faith.

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH BAPTISM

As I will reiterate below in [the section on Rom 6.1-11](#), we cannot fully appreciate the force of the NT’s baptismal teaching apart from the milieu of persecution. It’s plausible that Jesus mentioned the act of baptism in Mar 16.16 rather than some other evidence of true faith (like loving our brothers, 1Jo 3.14), because baptism unambiguously demonstrated *Christian* faith very publicly. A Christ-follower of the first century would not have drawn fire for his or her inward faith, nor for external acts of kindness, but did risk a public backlash for declaring faith in Jesus’ lordship by so overt and explicit an act as baptism in Jesus’ name.

Of course, any act that entailed such risk for the name of Jesus served to solidify one’s commitment to Christ. Jesus intended exactly this when He mandated baptism “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mat 28.19). The fact that baptism is an act of commitment is nowhere so vividly illustrated as in the [typology](#) of the Exodus mentioned above in [the section on 1 Corinthians 10.1-2](#). Remember that in 1Co 10.1-2, Paul wrote:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea...

We do not have to explain the context of Paul's teaching in this passage to get the point: the Israelites were "baptized into Moses" when they crossed the Red Sea, in the sense that when the waters closed behind them, *they were committed to Moses*. Likewise, Christian baptism should preclude the renunciation of one's relationship to Jesus. A baptized believer should not find it possible to return to the Egypt of his or her old life.

As a radical step of commitment to Christ, Christian baptism powerfully launches the believer's life of discipleship. Jesus commanded very purposefully,

"make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them..." (Mat 28.19).

A life of discipleship involves active imitation of a Master, and when the disciplines of that master become difficult, the disciple must have a definite, initial commitment to the relationship that fortifies him or her to persevere. The commitment supports perseverance, and the perseverance in discipleship allows the master adequate time to shape the skills and character of the disciple. In Christian discipleship we call this process — the process of being shaped into the image of our Master — "sanctification." Baptism launches us into this life of discipleship and sanctification.

MATTHEW 3.13-17, MARK 1.9-11, LUKE 3.21-23 & JOHN 1.29-34: BAPTISM CONSECRATES US FOR PRIESTLY MINISTRY IN GOD'S KINGDOM.

Mat 3.13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit *it* at this time; for **in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**" Then he permitted Him.

16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and **he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him**, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "**This is My beloved Son**, in whom I am well-pleased."

Mar 1.9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and **the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him**; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are **My beloved Son**, in You I am well-pleased." 12 **Immediately the Spirit impelled Him** *to go* out into the wilderness.

Luk 3.21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and **the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove**, and a voice came out of heaven, "**You are My beloved Son**, in You I am well-pleased."

23 **When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age...**

Joh 1.29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 I did not recognize Him, but **so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.**" 32 John testified saying, "**I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.**" 33 I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, **this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.**' 34 I myself have seen, and have testified that **this is the Son of God.**"

SYNOPSIS

The baptism of Jesus proves that baptism in the Jewish milieu, though referred to as a *washing* (with the verb λούω, 'lū-ō, and more rarely with the noun λουτρόν, 'lū-trōn¹¹⁸), was not about the cleansing of sin. Israelites never thought baptism conveyed *mystical* grace, remission from sin, or salvation. Instead, they saw baptism as a bodily washing that marked a change of religious or ministerial status. The baptism of Jesus marked such a change as it fulfilled a ritual of priestly ordination like that commanded in Ex 29.¹¹⁹ Jesus' baptism marked the end of His preparation and the beginning of His public role as Messiah.

John's baptism was a baptism of *repentance*, i.e., a baptism testifying to an antecedent *repentance* of the recipient, but it was more fundamentally a baptism of *consecration* for the about-to-be-inaugurated new phase of God's Kingdom.¹²⁰ Thus, in being baptized by John, Jesus was *consecrated* to officiate over that new phase of the Kingdom as God's Son, God's anointed representative, the Messiah. Correspondingly, baptism consecrates Christ's disciples also to the work of the *NT* phase of the Kingdom.

Looking closely at the baptism of Jesus helps us understand that baptism is neither the means by which, nor the moment at which, God adopts us as His sons.¹²¹ Though the voice from heaven affirmed Jesus' Sonship, the Father did not adopt Him as His Son at that moment.¹²² Rather, Jesus' baptism provided the opportunity for a public affirmation of His pre-existent Sonship. Likewise, baptism for the followers of Jesus testifies to their adoption into God's family by antecedent faith.

Nor should we think of baptism as the means for receiving the empowering of the Spirit. If John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb" (Luk 1.15^{NKJ}), Jesus was more so. The manifestation of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism was not an initial coming of

¹¹⁸ Sir 34.25.

¹¹⁹ Tim Hegg, *Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), p. 111.

¹²⁰ Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1896), vol. 1, pp. 279-281.

¹²¹ Contra Hilary, see Saint Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers, Volume 1: St. Matthew*, (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841), pp. 114-115.

¹²² Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness : The Spirit in Luke-Acts*. London (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 138.

the Spirit to Him, but only a visible confirmation of an already existing and enduring reality: Jesus is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit (Joh 1.33). Correspondingly, baptism for Jesus' followers is neither the means, nor necessarily the occasion for receiving the empowering gift of the Spirit (Act 8.14-16). Still, baptism provides an *appropriate* occasion for receiving the Spirit's empowering (Act 2.38; 19.1-6), since baptism marks one's *consecration* for ministry in God's Kingdom.

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist has puzzled Christians through the centuries, and interpreters have offered diverse explanations of the event. All pious interpreters of Christ's baptism have agreed, though, that the event had profound significance in God's redemptive plan, *and* that it was in some way paradigmatic for those who would afterward be baptized in Jesus' name.¹²³ It's appropriate, therefore, to give particular attention to the record of our Lord's baptism as we pursue an understanding of Christian baptism in general.

Through the centuries, most of the *false* interpretations of Jesus' baptism have emerged from the persistent presupposition of *baptismism*, namely, from the idea that baptism has *mystical* power to *regenerate* people or to remit their sins. This ancient presupposition appeared in the apocryphal "Gospel According To The Hebrews," as related in *Jerome's Dialogue Against The Pelagians*. *Jerome* wrote that according to that Gospel,

¹²³ Christ's baptism was unique in that:

1. Jesus had never sinned and so had not needed to repent before His baptism.
2. The Holy Spirit appeared to identify Jesus as the Messiah (Joh 1.33-34).
3. The Father spoke audibly in commendation of His Son (Luk 3.22).

Nevertheless, that Christian believers are baptized both in obedience to Christ and also *in imitation of Christ* is implied by:

1. Christ's all inclusive command to follow Him (Luk 9.23; Joh 12.26).
2. The apostolic commands to imitate Christ (1Co 11.1; 1Jo 2.6).
3. The apostolic commendation of believers who imitated the Lord (1Th 1.6; cf. Rev 14.4, "They follow the Lamb **wherever he goes**").
4. Paul's statement that "We were buried **with Him** through baptism ..." (Rom 6.4; Col 2.12).
5. The fact that both Christ and believers are called to serve God as priests (Rom 15.16; Heb 2.17; 1Pe 2.5,9; Rev 1.6; 5.10; 20.6), thus the like consecration by baptism.
6. The identification with Christ that occurs at Christian baptism; our baptism hardly identifies us with Christ if it does not identify us with Him in His baptism.

...the mother of our Lord and His brethren said to Him, John Baptist [sic] baptizes for the remission of sins; let us go and be baptized by him. But He said to them, what sin have I committed that I should go and be baptized by him?¹²⁴

This excerpt illustrates not only the early belief that baptism had [mystical](#) power to remit sin, but also the fact that early interpreters struggled with the question of why Jesus submitted to a baptism of remission. To reconcile the belief that baptism effected a redemptive change with the fact that Jesus received baptism while not needing any such change, the Christian fathers produced various explanations as to what happened *differently* when Jesus was baptized.¹²⁵

[Remigius of Auxerre](#), for example, wrote that Jesus received baptism, “not baptism to the remission of sins, but to leave the water sanctified for those after to be baptized.”¹²⁶ This belief, that Christ’s baptism communicated [mystical](#) power to baptismal water, had circulated since the earliest centuries. At the beginning of the second century, [Ignatius](#) had written that Christ was “baptized, that by His passion He might purify the water.”¹²⁷ Around the beginning of the fifth century, [Augustine](#) made similar affirmations, writing:

The Saviour willed to be baptized not that He might Himself be cleansed, but to cleanse the water for us. From the time that Himself was dipped in the water, from that time has He washed away all our sins in water. And let none wonder that water, itself corporeal substance, is said to be effectual to the purification of the soul; it is so effectual, reaching to and searching out the hidden recesses of the conscience. Subtle and penetrating in its own nature, made yet more so by Christ’s blessing, it touches the hidden springs of life, the secret places of the soul, by virtue of its all-pervading dew. The course of blessing is even yet more penetrating than the flow of waters. Thus the blessing which like a spiritual river flows on from the Saviour’s baptism, hath filled the basins of all pools, and the courses of all fountains.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ *Con Pel* 3.2.

¹²⁵ The question of why Jesus submitted to a baptism for repentance for the remission of sins was not a problem for heretics who disbelieved in Christ’s sinlessness. See Robin M. Jensen’s *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), “Jesus’s [sic] Baptism as a Cleansing Rite in Early Christian Writings,” in ch. 1.

¹²⁶ *Cat Aur Volume 1: St. Matthew*, p. 108.

¹²⁷ *Ign Eph* 18.

¹²⁸ *Cat Aur Volume 1: St. Matthew*, pp. 108-09. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus describing Jesus as “submitting to be purified in the River Jordan for my Purification, or rather, sanctifying the waters by His Purification,” and as coming to John “to sanctify Jordan” (*Ora* 38.16; 39.15).

While the fathers correctly said that Jesus did not seek baptism for the remission of sins, they quite mistakenly taught that Jesus transformed the water. By His baptism, Jesus [mystically](#) transformed neither the waters of the Jordan in particular, nor baptismal waters in general.¹²⁹ Jesus did not create “holy water,” nor did the idea of it come from the Scriptures; Christianity absorbed the idea of [magically](#) effectual water directly from the paganism of the surrounding [Hellenistic](#) culture.

Regrettably, false interpretations of Jesus’ baptism did not end with ideas about the water, but also extended to the other phenomena associated with the drama at the Jordan. [Bede](#), for example, wrote that, “This event also, in which the Holy Ghost was seen to come down upon baptism, was a sign of spiritual grace to be given to us in baptism.”¹³⁰ Regarding the voice from heaven, [Bede](#) wrote, “The same voice has taught us, that we also, by the water of cleansing, and by the Spirit of sanctification, may be made the sons of God.”¹³¹ [Augustine](#) also connected the manifestation of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism to a mystical effect upon the water:

Christ after He had been once born among men, is born a second time in the sacraments, that as we adore Him then born of a pure mother, so we may now receive Him immersed in pure water. His mother brought forth her Son, and is yet virgin; the wave washed Christ, and is holy. Lastly, that Holy Spirit which was present to Him in the womb, now shone round Him in the water, He who then made Mary pure, now sanctifies the waters.¹³²

Before [Augustine](#), [Hilary of Poitiers](#) (c. AD 354), in connection with Jesus’ baptism had said,

...from these things thus fulfilled upon Christ, we might learn that after the washing of water the Holy Spirit also descends on us from the heavenly gates, on us also is shed an unction of heavenly glory, and an adoption to be the sons of God, pronounced by the Father’s voice.¹³³

¹²⁹ The pronoun *us* (“it is fitting for **us** to fulfill all righteousness”) means that Jesus and John would “fulfill all righteousness” together, and this detail militates against any idea that Jesus alone would accomplish some mystical effect upon the water by his baptism.

¹³⁰ *Cat Aur, Volume 2: St. Mark*, p. 15.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³² *Cat Aur, Volume 1: St. Matthew*, pp. 112-13.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

From the baptism of Jesus, then, these [fathers](#) taught not only that baptism washed away sin, but that it was the necessary antecedent to (or occasion for) receiving both the Spirit and our adoption as sons of God. None of these ideas agree with the Jewish understanding of baptism in the first century, nor with the apostolic teaching regarding Christian baptism, but sadly they represent but a few of the false beliefs that have been drawn from the story of Jesus' baptism.

To avoid such errors and to arrive at a more biblical understanding of our Lord's baptism, it is important that we observe all the details about it handed down to us by the [evangelists](#). We discover from the combined testimony of the Gospels that the narrative of John's baptism of Jesus consists of multiple components. Since the Holy Spirit prompted the [evangelists](#) to mention these different details, each one deserves exposition. Let us note, then, that:

1. John felt that Jesus should baptize him, rather than vice versa.
2. Jesus understood His baptism as appropriate in order "to fulfill all righteousness."
3. An explicit purpose for John's baptizing ministry was to manifest God's Messiah to Israel.
4. Jesus prayed as he emerged from his baptism.
5. As Jesus prayed, He and John perceived the heavens opening.
6. Jesus and John saw the Holy Spirit manifested, coming out of heaven with a fluttering descent.
7. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and visibly remained upon Him.
8. The visible descent of the Spirit upon Jesus signified to John that Jesus "is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."
9. A voice came from heaven addressing Jesus directly, and apparently also addressing John, affirming Jesus as the beloved Son in whom the heavenly Speaker is well-pleased.
10. The baptism of Jesus marked the end of His private life of preparation and the beginning of His public ministry and active role as Israel's priestly Messiah.

JOHN'S RESISTANCE

In the analysis of our Lord's baptism, we must first ask, "*Why did John resist Jesus' request for baptism?*" The mind conditioned by [baptismism](#) quickly responds, "Well, baptism washes away sin and Jesus had no sin; that is why

John thought it improper to baptize Jesus.”¹³⁴ Such a hypothesis fails utterly, however, by the power it ascribes to baptism. The more biblical thinker will say, “John’s baptism was about [repentance](#), and Jesus never had occasion to [repent](#), so John didn’t think Jesus needed baptism.” This statement could explain John’s hesitation to baptize Jesus, but it doesn’t explain John’s subsequent compliance with our Lord’s request. To better answer our question, we must set aside all thoughts of [sacramental](#) power attributed to baptism by the [Fathers](#), and — for the moment — even the matter of [repentance](#), and recognize two fundamental truths: (a) baptism is a religious ceremony, and (b) in religious ceremonies it is generally fitting that the greater should minister to the lesser (cf. Heb 7.7). John recognized his unworthiness to even untie Jesus’ sandals, and so he knew that rather than baptize one of greater spiritual authority than himself, he instead should be baptized by this greatest of all persons.

This interaction between John and Jesus, underscoring the presence of a greater and a lesser in the drama, helps the Gospel reader see that the greatness of Jesus *preceded* His baptism, and was not derived from it. Indeed, *this antecedent greatness was confirmed by the heavenly voice*: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” As [George E. Ladd](#) observed, “the Greek word *agapētos*, translated ‘beloved,’ is sometimes a synonym for *monogenēs*: ‘only.’”¹³⁵ Thus, we may understand the heavenly voice as saying, “This is my only Son.....”¹³⁶ Therefore, even though “Son of God” is sometimes a designation for God’s regent, i.e., God’s Messiah (as in Mat 26.63), the heavenly reference to “My beloved Son” at Jesus’ baptism does not refer to messiahship, but to the unique and eternal Sonship of Jesus. Not that Jesus’

¹³⁴ Thus erroneously Chromatius:

It is as if [John] were saying, “I am a man. You are God. I am a sinner because I am a man. You are sinless because you are God. Why do you want to be baptized by me? I do not refuse the respect you pay me, but I am ignorant of the mystery. I baptize sinners in repentance. But you have no taint of sin. So why do you want to be baptized? Why do you want to be baptized as a sinner, who came to forgive sins?” This is what John in effect was saying to the Lord.

Tractate on Matthew 12.1, referenced in *ACCOS NT 1a*, pp. 51-52

¹³⁵ In Gen. 22:2; [22:16]; Amos 8:10; Jer. 6:26, *agapētos* appears in the Septuagint for Hebrew *yāhîd*, “only.” [This footnote Ladd’s.]

¹³⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, Rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 163.

messiahship is excluded by the heavenly voice. On the contrary, the second statement, “in whom I am well-pleased,” alludes to Jesus’ role as God’s messianic servant spoken of in Isa 42.1:

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations.

We must keep in view, however, that the messiahship of Jesus, like the pleasure of the Heavenly Father, flows from Jesus’ eternal Sonship. Therefore, while the heavenly voice heard at Christ’s baptism affirmed both the Father’s pleasure and Jesus’ messianic office, neither the Father’s delight nor the Son’s office *began* on that occasion.¹³⁷

Contrary to the impulse of [baptismism](#), then, the resistance of John to baptize Jesus (together with the heavenly affirmation) helps us understand that a [baptizee](#) should have relationship with God *prior to*, not upon or subsequently to, his or her baptism. Even as the Israelites who flocked to John were baptized in recognition of prior [repentance](#), so Jesus came to John for the public recognition of His prior divine Sonship and messianic office. Likewise, followers of Jesus should come to baptism to mark their prior [repentance](#) and prior entrance by faith into relationship with God.

FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

We must now ask the question, “What did Jesus mean when He encouraged John to baptize Him ‘**to fulfill all righteousness**’?” Again, the mind conditioned by [baptismism](#) will incline to the [mystical](#) and [salvific](#), and suggest that Jesus “fulfilled all righteousness” by setting the example of *how to obtain* righteousness (or justification). [Remigius](#), for example, said, Jesus gave “an example of perfect justification in baptism, without which the gate of the

¹³⁷ As Ladd notes, “if this [baptismal] declaration [of Mar 1.11] means inauguration into messianic office expressed in terms of sonship, we would expect different language. The verse is an allusion to Psalm 2.7, which reads, ‘You are my son, **today I have begotten you.**’ These words [in bold] would be much more suitable to designate installation into the messianic office of sonship.” George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Edited by Donald A. Hagner, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 163, emphasis added.

kingdom of heaven is not opened.”¹³⁸ Commenting on the same matter, [Theodore of Mopsuestia](#) said, “He was baptized that he might hallow the waters and bestow upon us, through the basin, regeneration and adoption and remission of sins and all the other blessings that came to us through baptism, prefiguring them in himself.”¹³⁹ [Bede](#) likewise said, Jesus “did not turn away from the remedy by which sinful flesh was ordinarily made clean.... Not from necessity but by way of example he submitted to the water of baptism, by which he wanted the people of the new law of grace to be washed from the stain of sin.”¹⁴⁰ Such statements by diverse [Fathers](#), however, fail to rightly understand and explain the biblical narrative. The objective reader will recognize that since Jesus needed no salvation nor additional righteousness, and since John’s baptism — like all Jewish baptisms — never signified nor promised cleansing from sin nor the [sacramental](#) bestowal of righteousness, the idea of exemplifying justification by baptism is utterly foreign to the messianic drama at the Jordan.

Instead, by saying that “in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness,” Jesus meant that His baptism was appropriate in order for Himself, together with John, to fulfill *a righteous requirement of the Law*, in this case a ceremonial, prophetic or [typological](#) requirement rather than a moral one.¹⁴¹ Such a fulfillment, of course, belonged to a category of phenomena with which Jesus and the [evangelists](#) frequently concerned themselves. As we zero in on the meaning of this particular fulfillment, let’s note that the biblically unique phrase *fulfill all righteousness* pushes Jesus’ meaning more toward the keeping of a command or [ordinance](#), i.e., something that can be practiced (cf. *to practice ... righteousness*, in Mat 6.1), rather than toward the accomplishing of a prophetic prediction. If Jesus had referred to a prophetic prediction, He (or Matthew) would probably have cited the Scriptures or a prophet (cf. Mat 26.54-56). So, instead of looking for a prediction relating to Messiah’s baptism in the prophets, we should look in the

¹³⁸ *Cat Aur, Volume 1: St. Matthew*, p. 110.

¹³⁹ *ACCOS NT 1a*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁰ *ACCOS NT 6*, p. 205.

¹⁴¹ John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, Volume IV*. Edited by John Rogers Pitman (London: J. F. Dove, 1822), p. 298.

Law for a command or [ordinance](#) that involves the immersion of a servant of God. When we do, we find such an [ordinance](#) in Ex 29 and 40: the prescribed ritual of priestly consecration (carried out in Lev 8).¹⁴² Luke purposely mentions the age of Jesus at His baptism, because thirty years was the age at which the Levites entered into their public ministries (Num 4.46-47).¹⁴³ Now, in order to fulfill this [ordinance](#) of consecration to public ministry, Jesus with John's help received His baptismal consecration to priestly service in the new phase of God's Kingdom.

Let's examine this priestly consecration rite more closely. God had commanded Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons to "minister as priests to me." He then instructed in Ex 29.4, "you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water" (cf. Ex 40.12-15).

[Tim Hegg](#) comments on this priestly consecration, writing,

Interestingly, the washing with water would have been understood as a [mikveh](#),^[144] but it is Moses who is instructed to do the washing. In other words, like the [mikveh](#) of Yochanan [i.e., John the Baptist], the [mikveh](#) of the priests included Moses as a necessary attendant.... It seems very possible, then, that Yeshua, recognizing His role as the Suffering

¹⁴² So Lightfoot, "Now the ceremony, to which our Saviour looketh in these words, was the washing of the priests in water, when they entered into their function; the equity of which appeared in him, when he was baptized at his entrance into his ministry. And this, indeed, was the manifest and properest end and reason of Christ's being baptized; namely, that, by baptism, he might be installed into his ministerial office." John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, Volume IV*, edited by John Rogers Pitman (London: J. F. Dove, 1822), p. 299. The idea of baptism having to do with an ordination to priesthood is foreign to most evangelicals, and even repugnant to particularly anti-sacerdotal Protestants. Nevertheless, as Peter J. Leithart comments, "typological connections between Old Testament priestly ordination and Christian baptism have been recognized since patristic times" He goes on to contend that "priestly typology illumines many issues, including the form and historical origin of Christian baptism, [and] New Testament baptismal imagery" Peter J. Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), p. xx.

¹⁴³ Contrary to Peter J. Leithart, priestly consecration as an antecedent of Christian baptism argues against the doctrine of infant baptism. As David F. Wright, a member of the Church of Scotland who was greatly concerned about the detrimental aspects of the practice of infant baptism in his church, commented in 2003, "It is something of a commonplace nowadays to talk about baptism as the ordination of the laity, the action in which all Christians are commissioned for witness and service. Again it is difficult to make that meaningful in an infant-baptizing community." David F. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done To Baptism*, (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), pp. 32-33.

¹⁴⁴ As noted at Ex 29.4 in the *Faithlife Study Bible*, "The mode of the washing is not specified here, but Jewish tradition considered it to be in the form of immersion." Also, the LXX adds the clarification "all" to the Heb phrase "he shall wash his body" in Lev 16.4.

Servant, and thus as a priest who would bear the sins of Israel and atone for them (cf. Num 18.23; Isa 53.6,11), likewise recognized that at the initiation of His priestly work it was necessary to undergo a *mikveh*.^[145]

This insight prompts us to dig deeper, for we must ask: If Jesus was baptized because God had ordained that priests be immersed, what was the original significance of that priestly immersion? Expositor A. W. Pink had a ready answer, writing that the immersion of the priests “was a figure of *regeneration*,” even as their subsequent washing of hands and feet (Ex 30.19) “typified the Christian’s need of daily cleansing.”¹⁴⁶ Apparently for Pink, the point of the priestly immersion was to symbolize *new birth*. Unfortunately, his explanation rescues the flea and leaves the donkey to languish in the pit. What I mean is that Pink’s exposition obscured the immediate *typology* of the priestly baptism (a *typology* which the Israelites in the wilderness would have instantly recognized) in favor of a remote and questionable *resonant* meaning for the rite.¹⁴⁷ In Pink’s mind, the washing of the priests resonated with Joh 3.5 and Tit 3.5, which passages he cites. However, while these two passages refer to *regeneration* (*new birth*), neither discuss baptism (as I will explain more fully below) but rather speak of the gracious agency of the Holy Spirit in raising people spiritually from their deadness in sin. With these passages, Pink fastened his attention on a faint echo of meaning when he should have concentrated on the thundering significance of the immediate context of Exodus: he should have focused on the deliverance of the Israelite nation from Egypt. The immersion of the priests should have reminded Mr. Pink of Israel’s departure from Egypt, because that priestly rite would certainly have reminded the people in the wilderness of the baptism they had just experienced “*in the cloud and in the sea*” (1Co 10.2).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Tim Hegg, *Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), pp. 110-111.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 296.

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix 4: “The Levels Of Meaning In Biblical Interpretation.”

¹⁴⁸ The baptism of Israelites “in the cloud and in the sea,” separated them from the old life in Egypt and consecrated them to a new life in a new land where they could fulfill their calling to be a kingdom of priests. This consecration was reenacted in the crossing of the Jordan under the leadership of Joshua (Jos 3.15-17), even as it was reenacted by Elijah and Elisha (2Ki 2.8-14), and even Naaman the Syrian (2Ki 5.14-17).

We must realize, though, that the baptism of Israel “in the cloud and in the sea,” with its concurrent destruction of the Egyptian army, was itself a divine reenactment of the “baptism” of Noah and his family in the flood of global destruction. Therefore, a secondary purpose of the priestly baptismal consecration was to dramatize before the people the enduring fact that God must judge sin.¹⁴⁹ This being so, the symbolic act of baptism was profoundly fitting for priests whose duty it would be to daily enact the [typological](#) atonement of sin. Obviously, then, the same symbolic act was also supremely fitting for Him who would *actually* atone for sin. The baptism of Jesus not only commemorated God’s past judgments upon sin, but also foreshadowed that most distressing of all baptisms, the divine judgment upon sin that Jesus would endure on the cross (Luk 12.50)!¹⁵⁰ Therefore, if we can set aside our mental conditioning by [baptismism](#), we’ll see that the priestly baptism of Ex 29.4 has nothing to do *directly* with [regeneration](#), but everything to do with reenacting God’s judgment upon sin, *and* thereby consecrating God’s servants for the ministry of pointing others to the way of escape from that judgment.

God ordained the immersion of priests to commemorate His judgments, but also to mark the priests’ change of status from private life to public ministry in the divine program of redemption. This latter purpose for the baptism of the Aaronic priests coincides with God’s own characterization of the nation’s separation from Egypt through the sea as having *set apart* (*ἀφορίσας* from *ἀφορίζω*, ä-fō-’rē-zō) the sons of Israel “from the nations to be Mine” (Lev 20.26^{LXX}; cf. 1Co 10.1-2). Just as Israel could not adequately serve God and fulfill the Lord’s redemptive agenda without separation from the Egyptian milieu, so the sons of Aaron could not wholly fulfill their duties as priests without leaving behind whatever private agendas (*good* or *bad*) they had entertained in their pre-ordination lives.

This *breaking* from the previous life in order to fully devote oneself to a new calling has been part of God’s program for His people since the time of

¹⁴⁹ In our infatuation with the idea of baptism *washing away* sin, we have lost sight of how baptism reenacts God’s *judgment upon* sin.

¹⁵⁰ In fact, the flood of Noah, the crossing of the Red Sea, Jonah’s submersion, and all antecedent “baptisms” *foreshadowed* the judgment upon sin that would finally fall upon Jesus, even as our baptisms *commemorate* it.

Abraham. What God did for the nation of Israel by bringing them out of Egypt (Lev 20.26), He subsequently did with more specific purpose for the sons of Aaron (Ex 29.4). Correspondingly, though God calls the whole Church *to be set apart*, He called Paul and Barnabas to more specific missions (2Co 6.17; Act 13.2; Rom 1.1: note the use of forms of ἀφορίζω, “to set apart,” in all these NT passages). Therefore, while it makes no sense for Jesus, the Holy One of God, to have submitted to a rite symbolizing personal **regeneration** (as implied by **Pink’s** exposition of Ex 29.4), it was deeply consistent with God’s program that Jesus enact a symbolic “breaking” from His private life in order to begin His public ministry of redemption.

For any who might object that John’s baptism was about **repentance**, rather than about both **repentance** and inaugurating ministry, let us remember that John the Baptist preached two things: **Repentance** and **Kingdom**. John’s baptism was generally a baptism of **repentance**, but **repentance**, though essential, is not an end in itself. Biblically speaking, one **repents** in order to restore (or begin) relationship with God, which is tantamount to entering into obedient service in God’s Kingdom. John’s preaching of **repentance** in reference to the Kingdom, therefore, called the people to prepare for receiving the privileges and embracing the responsibilities of that Kingdom.

Furthermore, an explicit purpose for John’s baptism was “**so that [the Messiah] might be manifested to Israel**” (Joh 1.31).¹⁵¹ John called people to **repentance**, and baptized them (in testimony of their repentance and forgiveness of sins) to prepare the nation for recognizing and receiving their Messiah (cf. Act 19.4). This was necessary, because the truth about the Messiah, like other vital truths, would be spiritually discerned. That Messiah would not throw off the Roman yoke from Israel, but die as a criminal, would seem absurd to the unrepentant mind (1Co 2.14). Even as Jesus would later teach, only a person submitted to God “will know of the teaching, whether it is

¹⁵¹ Morris comments that repentance was not the “final purpose” of John’s baptism, but rather “so that Messiah should be ‘revealed’ (‘made manifest’) to Israel.” He further notes that in Joh 1.31, “ἵνα has its full telic force, and it is reinforced by διὰ τοῦτο. The importance of making Christ manifest to Israel is given prominence by putting the ἵνα clause first.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To John, Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 132.

of God or whether I speak from Myself” (Joh 7.17). Only people whose hearts had inclined to do God’s will would be able to recognize that Jesus and His teaching had come from God.¹⁵² Thus, John called the Israelites to a baptism of **repentance** (Mar 1.4; Luk 3.3), and those who received this baptism testified that they were ready to do God’s will and be consecrated to serve in Messiah’s Kingdom.

THE HEAVENS OPENED

We must not forget the Kingdom context for Christian baptism. Let us remember that Jesus emerged from His baptism praying. The text does not tell us what He prayed, but Edersheim plausibly surmised that it was a prayer similar in its Kingdom orientation to the prayer Jesus taught His disciples: “Father in heaven, let your name be sanctified, let your Kingdom come and will be done on earth.”¹⁵³ Jesus was baptized to mark the beginning of His public work for the Kingdom, consecrating Himself for a new phase of officiating over and establishing that Kingdom as God’s Son, God’s anointed Priest, the Messiah, all to advance the Father’s will on earth. Don’t we, therefore, please the Father if we imitate Jesus and receive baptism as a consecration for priestly service, and give ourselves to advancing God’s Kingdom and God’s will on earth?

It certainly pleased the Father when Jesus received the priestly consecration of John’s baptism. Upon Jesus’ willing consecration to the Father’s Kingdom purposes, the aerial heavens opened, allowing a communication between earth and the ethereal Heaven.¹⁵⁴ This opening of the heavens revealed that as Moses had consecrated the Aaronic priests at the doorway of the tabernacle (Ex 29.4), John was consecrating Jesus as the Priest of a higher order, “the order of Melchizedek” (Psa 110.4; Heb 5.6-10, etc.), at the very doorway of Heaven. This development in the messianic drama at the Jordan held out great promise for the people of God: the “prophet like me”

¹⁵² John’s ministry was effective, because the people who had received his baptism also received Christ’s teaching (Luk 7.29).

¹⁵³ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1896), vol. 1, p. 283.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, Volume IV*, Edited by John Rogers Pitman (London: J. F. Dove, 1822), p. 308.

whom Moses had promised (Deut 18.15), *a Prophet with whom God would speak face to face* (Ex 33.1; Num 12.6-8), had finally come (cf. Act 3.22-26). Surely this boded renewed blessings from Heaven for God's people. Indeed it did, for whereas Adam and Eve by their sin were shut out of Eden and away from God's special presence there, whereas the heavens had been shut between Israel and God's blessing in Elijah's time, whereas God had separated His special presence from mankind by a thick veil closing off the holy of holies in the Temple, whereas the Presence had departed from the Temple and Jerusalem in Ezekiel's time, and whereas there had been no major prophetic voice since Malachi until John, *now the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven, and a heavenly voice spoke!* All of this expressed the pleasure of the Father, and transpired on the basis of Jesus' obedient consecration to the Father's Kingdom agenda.

THE ABIDING OF THE SPIRIT

Among the wonderful manifestations of the Father's pleasure at Jesus' baptism, we mustn't fail to recognize the significance of the descent of the Spirit. This occurrence had immediate importance in Jesus' ministry. It also foreshadowed the great outpouring of the Spirit upon Christ's disciples that would occur soon after.

Remember that John's baptism was "from heaven" (Mat 21.25) in that God had commissioned John and his work (Joh 1.6). As a prophet, John had embraced the signs given before his own birth, and had himself heard God's voice¹⁵⁵ instructing him along these lines:

You are the forerunner of My Messiah.¹⁵⁶ In the spirit of Elijah, you must go into the wilderness to preach and make ready the way of the LORD.¹⁵⁷ You shall make the way ready by turning the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God,¹⁵⁸ because judgment is about to begin in My house.¹⁵⁹ You must prepare the people to receive My Messiah, and you

¹⁵⁵ "The word of God came to John ... in the wilderness" (Luk 3.2), and undoubtedly also on other occasions.

¹⁵⁶ Luk 1.17; Joh 3.28.

¹⁵⁷ Mat 3.3.

¹⁵⁸ Luk 1.16; Joh 1.23.

¹⁵⁹ Mat 3.10.

must make Him manifest to Israel.¹⁶⁰ Israel is familiar with the *mikvehs* that consecrate the Levites to serve Me in the temple ceremonies; you shall thus immerse in water¹⁶¹ the *repentant* from among the people, to consecrate them for priestly service in My Kingdom. Immersing the people in water will give you the opportunity to announce the One coming after you, namely, the One who will take away the sin of the world.¹⁶² When the time comes to make the Messiah manifest to the people, you will recognize Him, for the Holy Spirit will descend and abide upon Him, marking Him as the Son of God Who will immerse the people in the Holy Spirit.¹⁶³

Contemplating this summary of John the Baptist's commission helps us realize that the Baptist's remarks about the coming One who would baptize "in the Holy Spirit" were not just spontaneous responses to the queries about his own identity, but instead were integral to a premeditated message that was central to John's divine mandate to manifest the Messiah to Israel.

John the Baptist knew that God had spoken about Messiah, saying, "I will put my Spirit on him" (Isa 42.1-4). John further knew that Isaiah the prophet had described the coming Messiah as One on whom the Spirit would abide in a special way, as "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isa 11.1-5). John also knew the prophetic characterization of Messiah given through Isaiah that said,

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...¹⁶⁴

Isaiah had foreseen that a powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit would characterize the ministry of Israel's Messiah, and Isaiah's prophecies provided a basis for John and his generation to identify the Messiah. How would Israel

¹⁶⁰ Joh 1.31-34.

¹⁶¹ Joh 1.33.

¹⁶² Joh 1.29-31.

¹⁶³ Joh 1.33-34.

¹⁶⁴ Isa 61.1-3 ^{NIVO} and Mat 11.2-6. This is why Jesus was able to reassure the disciples of John the Baptist in the Forerunner's hour of doubt by saying, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

recognize the Christ when He came, how would they know He was not just another pretender or imposter? *By the charismatic power of the Spirit that would characterize His words and His works.*

Therefore, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit descending and abiding upon Jesus was the sign that John had watched for. When the sign finally came, John faithfully affirmed to the crowd, “He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God” (Joh 1.33-34). The manifestation of the Spirit following Jesus’ baptism, then, was not unexpected, but a looked-for, scriptural corroboration of Messiah’s identity. The other John, son of Zebedee, alluded to this in 1Jo 5.6 when he wrote, “This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies...” With these words, the apostle John referred to the bookends of our Lord’s earthly ministry, namely, Christ’s baptism and His death. At both of these events, the Holy Spirit attested to the messiahship of Jesus: with the descent of the Spirit at the former, and the resurrection power of the Spirit at the latter (1Ti 3.16; 1Pe 3.18). The manifest and abiding presence of the Spirit upon Jesus, from His baptism to His resurrection, vindicated Christ’s identity and earthly ministry from its beginning to its end. Additionally, though, the manifestation of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism indicated that *His messianic work had begun.*

The iconic symbol of the Spirit’s descent upon Jesus is, of course, the dove. It’s important to note, however, that the phrase “like a dove” in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ baptism is adverbial, not characterizing the form the Spirit but rather the manner of the Spirit’s descent. The Spirit descended upon Jesus in a manner that, to the human eye, had a fluttering quality to it. I propose that John did not see a dove, nor the Spirit manifest in the form of a dove,¹⁶⁵ but instead he saw the *Shekinah*, a manifestation of Spirit as that pillar of fire that guided Israel in Sinai, seen on this occasion by Jesus and

¹⁶⁵ Smith valiantly defends the idea that the Spirit appeared *in the form of* a dove. Ralph Allan Smith, *The Baptism Of Jesus The Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), pp. 48-52.

John as a cluster of flames fluttering down upon Jesus, and then *remaining* glowing upon His head and shoulders.¹⁶⁶ I don't wish to undermine a favorite bit of Christian iconography, but we must see the parallel between the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism, and the descent of the Spirit upon Christ's disciples on the day of Pentecost. In both cases, the Spirit revealed Himself as the empowering agent for the work of the Kingdom.

The manifestation of the Spirit at the Jordan in no way implies that Jesus lacked the Spirit before His baptism. Instead, as we have already noted, the descent of the Spirit provided a long-anticipated messianic sign. Although Jesus, far more than John the Baptist, was "filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb" (cf. Mat 1.20 and Luk 1.15), it was nevertheless necessary for the Spirit to appear in order that John might identify the Messiah, the One who would "baptize...with the Holy Spirit." Additionally, the Spirit's visible descent was vital for signifying that Jesus would now embark upon His messianic mission, *and that* He would accomplish His messianic work in the Holy Spirit's power. This was the fulfillment of that part of the Aaronic ordination in which anointing oil was poured upon the head of the priest being consecrated (Ex 29.7). The sons of Aaron had *the symbol* of the Holy Spirit poured on their heads to signify their reliance on the Spirit in executing their ministries; the Messiah was anointed with *the substance*, the Holy Spirit Himself, to mark the beginning of His Spirit-empowered mission.

BAPTISM AND THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

From the apostolic era to the present, God's people have seen a connection between baptism and the gift of the Spirit. After all, on the day of Pentecost Peter said, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Act 2.38). Furthermore, when people of Samaria received the gospel, it seems to have surprised the apostles that the Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit at the same time that they were baptized:

¹⁶⁶ The English translations, "lighting upon Him," are misleading in that the Grk text implies no such birdlike landing, but speaks more generally of the Spirit "coming" upon Him and remaining.

Act 8.14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Also, Peter seemed to make a connection between baptism and receiving the Spirit when he asked at the house of Cornelius (Act 10.47), “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?” Again, when Paul met some disciples in Ephesus and perceived that they had not received the Holy Spirit, he immediately asked about their baptism:

Act 19.1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they *said* to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” 4 Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying.

Then, in 1Co 12.13, Paul seems to connect baptism and the gift of the Spirit, saying, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Furthermore, various exegetes have seen simultaneous references to baptism and the gift of the Spirit in Joh 3.5, 1Co 6.11 and Tit 3.5.

As we shall see below, the passages just mentioned from the gospel of John and the epistles of Paul have nothing directly to do with water baptism, though they do speak of the working of the Holy Spirit. Also, the focus of Peter’s statement in Act 2.38, as we saw in [the section about that passage](#) above, is not baptism but repentance; repentance was the primary prerequisite to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. This becomes quite apparent in the subsequent Acts passages where we read of the gift of the Holy Spirit being

given both *before* and at a significant interval *after* reception of water baptism. Clearly, water baptism is neither the essential prerequisite, nor necessarily the moment at which the gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred. Still, the Holy Spirit *did* descend upon Jesus immediately upon His baptism, and various ones in the book of Acts *did* receive the gift of the Spirit in close conjunction with the event of their water baptism. What then is the connection between baptism and the gift of the Spirit?

Because of the repeated textual proximity between mentions of baptism and references to the Spirit in [NT](#) narratives, many expositors over the centuries have regrettably concluded that baptism is, effects, or occurs concurrently with, the *regenerating* gift of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they have concluded that baptism is concurrent with or equivalent to the [new birth](#). As I already mentioned above, in the section entitled “[Chariot To Heaven](#),” [Cyril of Jerusalem](#) called baptism, “a new birth of the soul.”¹⁶⁷ We will see other similar patristic statements in [the section on John 3.5](#) below. However, we also saw that today’s Lutheran Church (LCMS) still calls baptism “...the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶⁸

The irony in most of the theological associations made throughout the centuries between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit is that they involve a misunderstanding of the gift. There *is* a connection between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the gospels and the book of Acts, but it is not the *regenerating* gift of the Spirit, but rather the *charismatically-empowering* gift of the Spirit that is in view. This distinction is vital though easily missed, and so I take it up at length in my forthcoming book entitled *The Pentecost Twist*. For now, suffice it to say that what Peter promised his hearers on the day of Pentecost with the phrase, “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” was not [regeneration](#) (though many undoubtedly experienced the [new birth](#) that day), but rather the charismatic empowering that his hearers were witnessing in the apostles’ tongues-speaking, and that Peter had just finished expounding upon from the prophecy of Joel, namely that same empowering gift of the Spirit that Jesus

¹⁶⁷ *Cat Lec, Pro* §16.

¹⁶⁸ “Born Again,” *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, 2003-2009, (accessed November 1, 2009; this article is no longer posted).

had promised just prior to His ascension (Act 1.8).¹⁶⁹ This fact is born out by the report from Samaria, that the Holy Spirit “had not yet **fallen upon** any,” given in words that connect the anticipated gift of the Spirit to the empowering of the OT judges and prophets (Eze 11.5; cf. Jdg 3.10; 14.6; etc.; 1Sa 10.10; 19.20; etc.; 2Ch 20.14). It is further confirmed by the fact that when “the Holy Spirit **fell upon** all those who were listening to [Peter’s] message” in Caesarea (Act 10.44), i.e., when “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was poured out on the household of Cornelius (Act 10.45), the gift was manifested by the recipients “speaking with tongues and exalting God” (Act 10.46), just as when the Holy Spirit “**came upon**” the Ephesian disciples, and they also spoke in tongues and prophesied (Act 19.6). The gift of the Holy Spirit described in all these passages is not the *regenerating* gift but the *empowering* gift, even as the manifestation of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus was not a sign of Jesus’ *regeneration*, but of His empowering for ministry.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, rather than effecting *regeneration* (or even directly symbolizing it), Christian baptism, *since it marks one’s consecration to Kingdom ministry*, should ideally be the occasion before, upon, or soon after which, one receives the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit for that Kingdom ministry.¹⁷¹

THE BAPTIZED MUST MINISTER

All of this has important application for followers of Christ. Since the call to repentance by John and by Jesus had reference to the Kingdom of God, and since the baptism of Jesus is paradigmatic for His followers, then Christian

¹⁶⁹ A careful analysis of Act 2.38 reveals that Peter promises “the gift of the Holy Spirit” as something to be received *subsequently* to new birth, in that repentance and baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” imply antecedent faith and regeneration. The expected biblical order implied in Peter’s statement is: regeneration (new birth) → faith and repentance → baptism in Jesus’ name, *then* → reception of “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The anticipated subsequence of the gift negates its equivalence with regeneration.

¹⁷⁰ Some of the Fathers, in spite of understanding baptism sacramentally, saw in the NT that a *spiritual empowering for ministry* should accompany baptism. Remigius, for example, wrote that “As to all those who by baptism are born again, the door of the kingdom of heaven is opened, so all in baptism receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” *Cat Aur, Volume 1: St. Matthew*, p. 112.

¹⁷¹ This empowering gift of the Holy Spirit is received by faith, a truth I will also enlarge upon in the forthcoming book, *The Pentecost Twist*. Let no one conclude that baptism *conveys* the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit; thinking that baptism conveys the power is like thinking that the diploma itself or the graduation ceremony infuses the graduate with the knowledge to be an engineer.

baptism for us, in imitation of what baptism was for Jesus, should mark the beginning of our Spirit-empowered, priestly service for the Kingdom.¹⁷² Clearly then, our baptism should follow rather than precede both our repentance and our adoption as sons into God's family, and therefore baptism does not cleanse us from sin, but instead marks our change of status in relationship to God and His Kingdom. If we desire to live consistently with that change of status, we must serve as ministers in God's Kingdom, each of us according to our unique calling and gifting (1Pe 4.10-11).

¹⁷² The Baptism of Naaman the Syrian provided an early template for the baptism of Gentiles (2Ki 5.13-17): Naaman was baptized *after* repenting of his pride, and upon his baptism committed himself to making offerings and sacrifices to the LORD.

1 PETER 3.21: BAPTISM SAVES US FIGURATIVELY.

1Pe 3.20 ... when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also **an antitype** [ἀντίτυπον] which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. (NKJ)

SYNOPSIS

Correctly interpreting 1Pe 3.20-21 requires a careful examination of the key adjective in verse 21: **antitypical**. This word is translated **an antitype** in the NKJ, and with various words and phrases in other versions. Part of the difficulty is that the Greek adjective can be used as a normal adjective, as a **substantive**, or as an adverb. Once we have analyzed the three different ways to translate the word in its context, we will see that all three translations express essentially the same idea. The NKJ is on the right track: Christian baptism is an **antitype**.

Therefore, we must understand the biblical meaning of the term **antitype**. One might assume that an **antitype** is the fulfillment of an antecedent **type**, but this is not the case. Instead, an **antitype** is itself a kind of **type**, distinguished by the fact that it *corresponds to* an antecedent **type**, while still foreshadowing or commemorating the same important reality. The relationship between **type** and **antitype** is like the relationship between the big “Next Exit” billboard on the freeway and the smaller but *corresponding* directional sign where the exit ramp meets the arterial.

So, when Peter says in 1Pe 3.20-21, that Christian baptism is **antitypical**, this does not mean that baptism *fulfills* a **type** from the OT, but that baptism is itself a *corresponding type*, still symbolizing a reality previously foreshadowed. The earlier **type** is the water of judgment in the flood of Noah. Baptism does not *fulfill* the flood (as if the flood was a prophecy of Christian baptism). Instead, as an **antitype**, baptism corresponds to the earlier **type** of the flood, and together they point to God’s judgment upon sin. An **antitype** doesn’t just repeat the symbolism of the earlier **type**, though, it illuminates it. The Noahic flood revealed God’s holiness and expressed a severe judgment upon sin, but did anyone in Noah’s day realize that the flood foreshadowed the atoning suffering of

Christ? Christian baptism illuminates this truth, revealing that the Noahic flood had foreshadowed the most severe punishment ever meted out, namely, the wrath of God poured out upon Jesus. The flood also foreshadowed the resurrection of Jesus: the waters receded from around Noah, allowing him to come forth into a new life, even as the tomb receded from around Jesus, as He came forth into immortal life. That the flood foreshadowed the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus was not made clear to us in Noah's story; it is revealed through the wonderful, symbolic [antitype](#) of Christian baptism.

Once we understand the nature of a biblical [antitype](#), we realize that Peter's words, "an antitype ... now saves us," mean that baptism saves *in its character as an antitype*. In other words, baptism saves us *figuratively*, just as the [OT](#) sacrifices atoned for sin *figuratively* (or as we say, *ceremonially*). Baptism thus serves as an [exemplar cause](#) of our salvation, i.e., as a pattern for how God saves by judging sin.

If baptism saves us *figuratively*, then it cannot (at the same time) save us *actually* since the two ideas are mutually exclusive. Peter's words help us understand that baptism, rather than serving as the [instrumental cause](#) of our salvation, is *a reenactment* of both God's judgment upon the antediluvian world, and of the outpouring of His wrath upon Christ. Thus, our participation in baptism illustrates our relational union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and testifies to our trust in Christ, the Ark, who was baptized in our judgment waters (Luk 12.50) and carried us to safety. As [Walter L. Wilson](#) said, "We are saved by baptism, but it is Jesus' baptism, and not ours."¹⁷³

By affirming a [typological](#) correspondence between the Noahic flood and baptism, Peter reminded his readers of both God's patience with wrongdoers and the certainty of His judgment upon persecutors. At the same time, Peter taught his readers that *they* have clear consciences before God's throne only because they have identified by faith with the judgment that fell upon Jesus — not because they have participated in an external washing, "the removal of dirt from the flesh." Baptism has saved them *typically*, and, in a sense, made them into new "Noahs," called to be preachers of righteousness in an evil generation.

¹⁷³ Walter L. Wilson, *A Dictionary Of Biblical Types* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 18.

A KEY ADJECTIVE AND ITS TYPOLOGICAL CONTEXT

1Pe 3.21 provides a key for the NT doctrine of baptism because it reveals the apostolic understanding of baptism's relationship to salvation. Understanding this verse requires that we delve into some technicalities of its translation, but the reward will justify the labor. We will particularly have to examine the verse's key word, *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος ān-'dē-tē-pōs).¹⁷⁴ This word is an adjective, but it can also be used as a *substantive* (i.e., as the noun, *antitype*, as in the NKJ) or as an adverb (*antitypally*).¹⁷⁵

Before we delve more deeply into the meaning of *antitypical*, it will help us to review the context in which Peter used this word. Peter's first epistle in general, and his baptism passage in particular, calls believers to keep a clear conscience while enduring mistreatment from persecutors. Craig Keener lays out the *chiastic* structure for part of Peter's message this way (with my alterations in brackets):

- A Your slanderers will be ashamed (1Pe 3.16)
- B Suffer though innocent, in God's will (3.17)
- C For Christ suffered for the unjust (3.18)
- D He [warned disobedient] spirits (3.19)
- E Noah was saved through water (3.20)
- E' You are saved [by] water (3.21)
- D' [All spirits now subjected to Christ] (3.22)
- C' For Christ suffered [in his body] (4.1a)
- B' Suffer [and live for] God's will (4.1b-2)
- A' Your slanderers will [give account to Him] (4.3-5)¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ 1Pe 3.21 uses the nominative neuter form ἀντίτυπον (ān-'dē-tē-pōn).

¹⁷⁵ The NAU translates ἀντίτυπον in 1Pe 3.21 with the rather ambiguous phrase, *corresponding to that*.

¹⁷⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993). For an explanation of the "disobedient spirits" and how Christ preached to them, see *A Biblical Theology Of The New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), p. 449.

In a **chiasm**, the author repeats or echoes important points in inverse order. Clearly then, the overarching message of this **chiasm** (1Pe 3.16 to 1Pe 4.5) is *bear up patiently under persecution*. Believers can do this since Christ their example has already endured similar treatment, and since they have assurance that Christ will finally triumph over those entities hostile to God, and will bring them to account.

However, a **chiastic** passage expresses its emphasis with its central couplet, in this case,

E Noah was saved through water (3.20)

E' You are saved [by] water (3.21).

So let us focus again upon Peter's reference to Noah's flood. Peter recognized the events of the flood as **typological**, i.e., he understood elements of the flood story as *types*. A biblical **type** is a person, thing or event that foreshadows (or commemorates) "a reality of a higher order than itself."¹⁷⁷ In this case, Peter understood the events of the flood as foreshadowing a greater judgment and deliverance which had finally occurred, long after Noah's time, namely, the divine judgment that fell upon Christ and the deliverance of all who endure suffering with Him.¹⁷⁸

We can summarize the **typological** symbolism of the flood this way:

Flood Waters	The judgment upon sin that was required by God's holiness, and that allowed Him to extend grace and <i>save</i> those who believed and put their trust in His Ark.
The Ark	Jesus Christ who, by enduring the overwhelming seas of judgment (on the wooden cross), carries His people to safety and new life. ¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle Of St. Peter*, 2nd Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1946), p. 298.

¹⁷⁸ This is not to the exclusion of faithful believers who have never endured persecution, but cf. Rom 8.16-17.

¹⁷⁹ Cyprian, *Epi* 75, makes the ark represent "the Church to which alone baptism is granted," but it is Christ not the Church who carries us through the judgment. The ark painted on

Noah's Family

The Church, i.e., those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, the One who endured God's battering judgment on their behalf.

In the context of his epistle, Peter's climactic reference to the flood and to his readers' baptism is a reminder that persecution continues only because of God's patience toward their persecutors. Peter's words also remind his readers that God's judgment will finally fall upon persistent wrongdoers, as surely as the flood waters crashed down upon Noah's world.¹⁸⁰ Most importantly, Peter reminds believers that God's judgment would have also fallen upon them if they had not been *saved* by receiving a "good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Thankfully they were saved, and (as we shall see), *they were saved in the manner pictured by their baptism*.¹⁸¹

THE REFERENT AND MEANING OF ANTITYPICAL

Now, as we return to Peter's word *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, äñ-'dē-tē-pōs), we must answer two questions: (1) What is its *referent* in 1Pe 3.21 (what *substantive* does it connect to), and (2) what does the word itself mean in this passage? The *Grk* text of Peter's sentence provides the answer to the first question. The coordinated grammatical forms of the words show that *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπον (äñ-'dē-tē-pōñ) serves as the connecting bridge between the *water* (ὕδατος, 'ē-thē-tōs) of verse 20 and the *baptism* (βάπτισμα, 'vāp-tēz-mä) of verse 21.¹⁸² In other words, the term *antitypical* connects to, and — in one way or another — qualifies, the word *baptism*.¹⁸³ The word *baptism* is the *referent* of *antitypical*.

the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is in the exact shape of the Sistine Chapel, hinting that the Vatican itself is the only true ark of salvation.

¹⁸⁰ John's baptism also pointed to coming judgment (Mat 3.10-12), and like Christian baptism marked those who chose to repent and receive Messiah's kingdom and its suffering (Mat 3.2; cf. Act 14.22) rather than face a more severe suffering of judgment in the eschaton.

¹⁸¹ The motif of judgment in baptism emphasizes its symbolic character. We do not *actually* experience judgment in baptism, else the judgment upon Christ would have been superfluous.

¹⁸² Our standard English Bible versions unanimously agree with this.

¹⁸³ E. Gordon Selwyn, in his famous commentary on *First Peter*, objected to this conclusion, mainly for stylistic reasons, and preferred to translate 1Pe 3.21,

Answering the second question requires some deeper investigation. The word *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος), like its root *type* (τύπος, 'tē-pōs), derives from the Greek verb which means *to strike* something (τύπτω, 'tēp-tō). Consequently, in the Greek of the apostles, both *type* (τύπος) and *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος) convey varied meanings related to the idea of *an impression made by a blow* (as the “mark (τύπον, 'tē-pōn) of the nails,” Joh 20.25 ^{CSB}). For its part, *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος), when used as an adjective can mean *echoing, corresponding*,¹⁸⁴ or *opposite, opposed, or firm, resistant*.¹⁸⁵ If used adverbially, it can mean *in a corresponding manner*. When used *substantively*, it can mean *a counterblow, an echo, a counterpart*,¹⁸⁶ or *a reproduction, a copy* (in Modern Greek, ἀντίτυπος means *copy of a book*) or a *corresponding copy*.

Sadly, Peter only had occasion to use *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, än-'dē-tē-pōs) one time in his epistles, so we have no further evidence of his particular understanding of the *Grk* term. In fact, *antitypical* is only used one other time in the canonical Scriptures, in Heb 9.24. In that passage, the Grk word ἀντίτυπος (än-'dē-tē-pōs) is clearly used *substantively* (as a noun, translated “a mere copy” in the *NAU*), and refers to the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple as a copy of God’s heavenly throne room.¹⁸⁷

And water now saves you too, who are the antitype of Noah and his company, namely the water of baptism...

For Selwyn, in other words, *antitypical* is in apposition to the pronoun *you*. He would say, *Noah and his company correspond to an antitypical counterpart which is you (i.e., Peter’s audience)*. Selwyn is almost a lone voice for this interpretation, however, and his interpretation requires inserting the extra words “of Noah and his company” that do not appear in the Grk text. It is more natural to simply connect the nominative neuter adjective ἀντίτυπον, (än-'dē-tē-pōn, *antitypical*) with the likewise nominative neuter noun βάπτισμα ('vāp-tēz-mā). See Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle Of St. Peter*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1946), p. 203.

¹⁸⁴ As in Sib 1.33, where it is the adjective modifying *copy* (μίμημα, 'mē-mē-mā).

¹⁸⁵ Philo, *Planter* 133; *Confusion* 102; *Heir* 181.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. 2Cl 14.3 in which the αὐθεντικός, the reality, is the fulfillment of the ἀντίτυπος.

¹⁸⁷ As Wallace explains,

The basic role of the adjective is as a modifier of a noun.... Not infrequently, however, it deviates from this role by one step in either [the direction of a substantive or a verb]. That is, it can stand in the place of a noun or in the place of an adverb. Its nominal role is a natural extension of the adjective in which the noun is elided; its

ANTITYPICAL IN 1 PE 3.21 AS A SUBSTANTIVE

If Peter, like the author of Hebrews, used *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, ān-'dē-tē-pōs) as a *substantive*, then, we may translate 1Pe 3.20b-21 like this (with implied words in italics):

... eight souls were saved through water, which *water, in an antitype to that of the flood, namely baptism water*, also now saves you, not in the removal of filth from the flesh, but in an appeal of a good conscience to God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...

This translation communicates that baptism [water] is an *antitype* of, i.e., *a counterpart to*, the waters of Noah's flood.¹⁸⁸ As such, baptism saves Christian believers *in it's character as an antitype of the flood waters*.

To avoid confusion at this point, we must remind ourselves that Peter used a story of physical salvation (Noah's deliverance from the judgment of the flood) to say something about his readers' spiritual salvation (from the "judgment [about to] begin with the household of God," 1Pe 4.17). Now, when we consider Noah's experience of physical deliverance, we realize that the flood waters were neither the *efficient cause* nor *instrumental cause* of his salvation (see [Fig. 6](#) below).¹⁸⁹ *God* saved Noah and his family (2Pe 2.4-5), by means of the ark (Heb 11.7). In fact, the flood waters did not save Noah at all; the flood was judgment, not salvation. *God* saved Noah and his family by bringing them "safely through *the water*" of judgment (1Pe 3.20).¹⁹⁰

adverbial role is more idiomatic, usually reserved for special terms.

See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 292.

¹⁸⁸ In support of the possibility that Peter intended ἀντίτυπος as a substantive, the PES uses a Syriac **noun** equivalent to the Greek word τύπος.

¹⁸⁹ For a full explanation of the different kinds of causes, and the fallacy of confusing them, see Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come, Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), pp. 173-177.

¹⁹⁰ However, Benjamin Wills Newton, as others, explained an oblique sense in which the flood waters "saved" Noah:

Water, at the Flood was the power of death and of destruction to the world of the ungodly; but it found Noah sheltered by the Ark — a type, not of the Church, but of Christ; and, finding him there, it became to him, not the power of death, but, on the contrary, it was the means of bearing him away from a judged earth, and of carrying him into a

The Six Causes Of Noah's Salvation

CAUSE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFICS
EFFICIENT	That <i>by which</i> Noah was saved.	God (2Pe 2.4-5).
INSTRUMENTAL	That <i>through which</i> Noah was saved.	The ark (Heb 11.7).
FINAL	That <i>for which</i> Noah was saved.	The repopulating of the earth & condemning of the world (Gen 9.1; Heb 11.7).
FORMAL	The essence <i>of which</i> Noah's salvation partakes.	Divine favor (Gen 6.8).
MATERIAL	That <i>out of which</i> Noah's salvation consists.	Warning & instruction (Gen 6.13-16).
EXEMPLAR	The pattern <i>after which</i> Noah's salvation was effected.	The typological judgments of animal sacrifices (Gen 8.20).

Figure 6

typically new earth, where it left him safe on the summit of Ararat. Thus the death and wrath which has fallen not on us personally, but on us as represented by our Substitute, has been the *means* of separating us from a condemned world into a new creation, and into a heavenly elevation higher than the heights of Ararat. Water, *as used in baptism*, is a corresponding type. It corresponds with water *in its relation to Noah*, as a symbol of death; yet, made unto him, deliverance. Water, in baptism, symbolises [sic] a power of death and of wrath coming down upon us in the person of our Representative, Christ; and so becoming to us a means of salvation; just as the waters of the Flood, coming upon Noah when sheltered under the protection of the ark, brought to him a typical salvation; for they bore him safely to Ararat.

Benjamin Wills Newton, *Thoughts On Scriptural Subjects*, (London: Houlston & Sons, 1871), pp. 379-380.

Nevertheless, Peter made a spiritual application from the physical [type](#) of the flood, and revealed that the flood waters *are* a symbol of salvation for Christian believers. For Christians, the water of the flood (along with other typological judgments, like the Jewish sacrifices, see [Fig. 7](#) below) is the [exemplar cause](#) of salvation in that it provide *a pattern of* (1) judgment for sin by death and burial in the water, and (2) of resurrection as the waters receded and allowed Noah to emerge from the flood into new life. Building upon this symbolism, Peter concluded his baptismal passage with an emphasis upon the [instrumental cause](#) of our salvation, namely, the [death and] resurrection of Jesus Christ, which fulfilled the [typological](#) foreshadowings of the flood judgment. In other words, Peter used a physical symbol of judgment, the flood water, to remind his readers that the water of baptism points to the metaphysical basis of our salvation, namely, the judgment of God that crashed against Jesus, our Ark.

If baptism thus saves us *in it's character as an* [antitype](#), i.e., in the same sense that the water of Noah's flood saves *us* (not Noah), it does not mean that our salvation is less than real. It only means that baptism saves in the sense that, as an [exemplar cause](#) (see [Fig. 7](#) below), it *points us to* the [instrumental cause](#) of our salvation, namely the flood of judgment that fell upon Jesus for our sakes. This interpretation of 1Pe 3.21, treating the [Grk](#) word ἀντίτυπον (än-'dē-tē-pōn) as a [substantive](#), underscores the figurative rather than [sacramental](#) power of Christian baptism, and keeps the focus upon Christ as Savior — our Savior by virtue of His having endured a baptism of judgment (Luk 12.50). As [Walter L. Wilson](#) said, “We are saved by baptism, but it is Jesus’ baptism, and not ours.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Walter L. Wilson, *A Dictionary Of Biblical Types* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 18. As I described in the preceding section, the final baptism of Jesus’ death was foreshadowed not only by the flood of Noah, but also by the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, and subsequently by the water baptisms with which both the Aaronic priests and then Jesus Himself were consecrated.

The Six Causes Of Christian Salvation

CAUSE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFICS
EFFICIENT	That <i>by which</i> Christians are saved.	God (Rom 8.33; 2Ti 1.8-9).
INSTRUMENTAL	That <i>through which</i> Christians are saved.	Jesus Christ, grace, faith (1Ti 1.15; Eph 2.8; Heb 5.9).
FINAL	That <i>for which</i> Christians are saved.	To become suitable siblings and the bride of the Son (Rom 8.29-30; 2Co 11.2).
FORMAL	The essence <i>of which</i> Christian salvation partakes.	Family friendship with God in Christ (Mat 12.50; Joh 15.13-15).
MATERIAL	That <i>of which</i> Christian salvation consists.	Justification, peace with God (Rom 5.1).
EXEMPLAR	The pattern <i>after which</i> Christian salvation is effected.	Typological judgments (1Co 5.7; 1Pe 3.20-21).

Figure 7

ANTITYPICAL IN 1PE 3.21 AS A NORMAL ADJECTIVE

Let us continue our investigation, though, and consider how it might change the interpretation of 1Pe 3.20-21 if Peter intended *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, ān-'dē-tē-pōs) as a normal adjective.¹⁹² In that case, our translation should look something like this (with implied words in italics):

¹⁹² The true adjectival use of ἀντίτυπος is found in Sib 1.33, ἀντίτυπον μίμημα, “a corresponding copy,” referring to Eve, and twice more, Sib 1.333 and 8.270, referring to Christ’s true humanity. For “non-adjectival” uses of the adjective, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 292ff.

... eight souls were saved through water, which *water, by way of an antitypical* baptism, also now saves you, not in the removal of filth from the flesh, but in an appeal of a good conscience to God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...

This translation places even greater emphasis on the idea that baptism is *antitypical*. Thus, it conveys that Christians undergo a baptism, the water of which corresponds to, the Noahic water of judgment. In effect, therefore, this translation says the same thing about baptism as the one treating *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, än-'dē-tē-pōs) as a *substantive*: baptism saves the believer in the same way that the Noahic flood waters save the believer, neither as the *efficient cause* nor *instrumental cause* of salvation, but as the *exemplar cause*. In other words, the water of Noah's flood provides a *pattern* of how God saves by judging sin, and the corresponding water of baptism does the same thing, pointing to the judgment that fell upon Jesus for our sakes.

ANTITYPICAL IN 1 PE 3.21 AS ADVERBIAL

What about the possible *adverbial* use of *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, än-'dē-tē-pōs)? In 1Pe 3.21, the form of our pivotal word is the *nominative*, neuter ἀντίτυπον (än-'tē-tē-pōn), and as A. T. Robertson remarked, “The border line between adjective in the *nominative* and adverb gets very dim sometimes.”¹⁹³ If then, Peter intended his word ἀντίτυπον as an adverb, our translation can read (with implied words in italics):

... eight souls were saved through water, which *water, namely baptism water*, also now saves you **antitypically**, not in the removal of filth from the flesh, but in an appeal of a good conscience to God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...

The meaning of this translation comes out essentially the same as the others: baptism saves the believer in a *corresponding manner* to the way that the flood waters save the believer, neither as the *efficient cause* nor *instrumental cause*,

¹⁹³ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos Bible Software, 2006), p. 659. Also, as in classic Greek literature, the NT often uses the accusative adjective in the neuter adverbially. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), p. 293.

but as the **exemplar cause**. Noah's experience provided a *pattern* of how God saves by judging sin, and the corresponding experience of baptism does the same thing, pointing to the judgment that fell upon Jesus for our sakes.

BAPTISM CORRESPONDS TO THE FLOOD

I have always been partial to the adverbial interpretation of **antitypical** (ἀντίτυπος, än-'dē-tē-pōs) in 1Pe 3.21, but our several translations of the verse have shown that the pertinent meaning regarding baptism comes out the same, regardless of what part of speech we assign to the **Grk** word: baptismal water provides a *counterpart* to the water of Noah's flood. To put it yet another way, the **Grk** word ἀντίτυπος (än-'dē-tē-pōs) in our text establishes a correspondence (≡) between the flood waters on the one hand, and baptism on the other. We can delineate these three terms of 1Pe 3.20-21 this way:

$$\text{FLOOD WATER} \equiv (\text{COUNTERPART} = \text{BAPTISM})^{194}$$

We read this delineation as saying, *the water of the flood corresponds to a counterpart which is baptism [water]*. Consistently with the majority's understanding of this passage, **E. W. Bullinger** sees the threefold linking of *WATER* ≡ (*COUNTERPART* = *BAPTISM*) in 1Pe 3.21 as an example of hyperbaton, a figure of speech which uses word order to put emphasis on a particular term. In this case the corresponding terms *water* and *counterpart* (**antitype**) combine to throw emphasis on the final **referent**, *baptism*.¹⁹⁵ All this confirms that the thing in view that corresponds to the flood water is baptism.

BAPTISM DOES NOT FULFILL THE FLOOD

At this juncture I must caution the reader: Don't be tempted, as some expositors have been, to interpret baptism as the *fulfillment* of the **typological** flood waters. For anyone familiar with Scripture's use of **types**, it may seem logical to interpret **antitype** (ἀντίτυπος, än-'dē-tē-pōs), as the fulfillment of a **type** (τύπος, 'tē-pōs). If the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22 is a **type**, foreshadowing the sacrifice of God's only Son, is not the crucifixion of Jesus the **antitype**? If this

¹⁹⁴ For this delineation, I'm treating ἀντίτυπος as a substantive.

¹⁹⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible Explained And Illustrated*, Libronix (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968), p. 697.

were the correct interpretation of *antitype*, then the word would indicate that its *referent* is the fulfillment of whatever antecedent *type* is in view. Thus, in 1Pe 3.20-21, baptism would be the fulfillment of the foreshadowing flood waters of judgment, and thus we might interpret baptism as *that which actually expiates sin*.

However, NT authors used a different *Grk* word, πληρόω (plē- 'rō-ō), to speak of the fulfillment of a prophecy or type (Luk 22.15-16; 24.44), and other writers of antiquity seem never to have used the word *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, än- 'dē-tē-pōs) to signify the reality or fulfillment of something foreshadowed. Instead, as with the word *type* (τύπος, 'tē-pōs), *antitypical*, or *antitype*, always speaks of an image, reflection or copy of the reality. For example, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, while erring much in his view of baptism, nevertheless, used the word *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος, än- 'dē-tē-pōs) to say that baptism was a *representation* or “counterpart of the sufferings of Christ.”¹⁹⁶ Similarly, a homily of c. AD 150 used the same word to mean a “copy” of an original or archetype.¹⁹⁷

More importantly, the writer to the Hebrews used both the words *type* (τύπος, 'tē-pōs), and *antitype* (ἀντίτυπος, än- 'dē-tē-pōs), and thereby showed us the relationship between the two terms, at least as he understood them. In Heb 8.5 ^{NIVO}, the writer recalls when God spoke to Moses about building the tabernacle. God said, “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern [*type*, τύπος] shown you on the mountain.”¹⁹⁸ We see here that God gave Moses a blueprint which is called a *type* of the tabernacle. However, in Heb 9.24 ^{NIVO} we discover that the man-made sanctuary itself is still only a *copy* (an *antitype*, ἀντίτυπος) of the ultimate Holy Place, heaven itself:

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy [ἀντίτυπος] of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.

¹⁹⁶ *Cat Lec* 20.6.

¹⁹⁷ *2Cl* 14.3.

¹⁹⁸ See Ex 25.9,40.

Here then is an interesting and biblical triad of ideas:

$$\text{Type} \equiv \text{Antitype} \equiv \text{Reality}$$

The *type* foreshadows and corresponds to (\equiv) both the *reality* and any intervening *antitype*; the *antitype* corresponds to the preceding *type* and continues to foreshadow or symbolize the *reality*. In the book of Hebrews, the tabernacle blueprint given to Moses on Sinai was the *type*, a pattern foreshadowing both the three-dimensional structure that the Israelites would build and simultaneously reflecting the heavenly reality. The physical tabernacle itself was an *antitype*, a reflection of the blueprint to be sure, but still pointing to the ultimate heavenly reality. Both the blueprint and the earthly structure, i.e., both the *type* and the *antitype*, foreshadow or model the greater reality of the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 15.5). The *antitype*, therefore, is not the fulfillment of the *type*, but rather a “corresponding *type*” that — together with the preceding *type* — still points to a more important reality.

BAPTISM ILLUMINATES THE TYPOLOGY OF THE FLOOD

The biblical example of *Type* \equiv *Antitype* \equiv *Reality* (*type corresponds to antitype corresponds to reality*) mirrors the way the Holy Spirit has often fulfilled biblical prophecies, a process which we can express this way:

$$\text{Prophecy} \rightarrow \text{Fulfillment}^{f^n} \rightarrow \text{Fulfillment}^{f^\Omega}$$

A prophecy is often followed by one or more *foreshadowing fulfillments*, f^1 , f^2 , etc. These preliminary fulfillments, while possibly having contemporary significance in their own right, provide context and perspective for the *final (omega) fulfillment*, f^Ω , yet to come.

As an example, Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth (Isa 7.14) had a foreshadowing fulfillment, f^1 , in the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isa 8.3-4), but had its final and complete fulfillment, f^Ω , in the virgin birth of Jesus (Mat 1.21-24). In the foreshadowing fulfillment, little Maher’s birth wasn’t supernatural, and his mother was not a virgin *after* his conception, but he was

a real human child, born of a Spirit-filled woman, and he served as a sign of salvation to Jerusalem and Judah. We see that this kind of preliminary fulfillment of the prophecy serves both to foreshadow and illuminate the yet-to-come final fulfillment.

Likewise, in the case of *Type* \equiv *Antitype* \equiv *Reality*, the *antitype* serves to further illuminate the greater reality in view. So it is with baptism. The waters of Noah's flood, the *type*, foreshadowed a divine judgment that would expiate sin while carrying believers to a new life. Baptism, the *antitype*, still points to the real (and now accomplished), sin-expiating judgment of God, but further illuminates that judgment by dramatizing our participation by faith in the death and resurrection of the sin-bearer, Jesus Christ. The flood taught God's judgment upon sin and His gracious deliverance of the righteous; baptism teaches that the righteous must receive their deliverance by believing identification with the death and resurrection of the One who endured God's judgment. An *antitype*, then, at least insofar as our limited NT usage of the term indicates, is a *corresponding type* that further illuminates a preceding *type*.

BAPTISM SAVES FIGURATIVELY, NOT ACTUALLY

This understanding of an *antitype* is consistent with the sense of 1Pe 3.21 that we have already derived from our several different translations of the verse. Baptism is *not* the fulfillment foreshadowed by the *type* of the flood waters. Instead, baptism serves as another corresponding *type*, echoing and illuminating the symbolic meaning of those earlier waters of judgment. Therefore, the baptismal water that “saves you” in 1Pe 3.21, must save *typically*, i.e., *figuratively*, rather than *actually*. The exegetical conclusion we must draw is that the adjective *antitypical* (ἀντίτυπος *än-'dē-tē-pōs*) in 1Pe 3.21 — whether it serves as a normal adjective, a *substantive*, or an adverb — describes the *manner* in which baptism saves. As B. W. Newton once translated 1Pe 3.21, “water ... that is to say baptism ... doth also now, in a **manner correspondingly typical**, save you”¹⁹⁹ Baptism saves

¹⁹⁹ Benjamin Wills Newton, *The Doctrine Of Scripture Baptism Briefly Considered*, (London: C. M. Tucker, 1907), “Appendix C.: Note On 1 Peter 3.20,” p. 82. Elsewhere, Newton wrote,

figuratively not *actually*, as it points to the ultimate saving reality. That reality is the atoning judgment that was poured out upon Jesus, and that was fully accepted by God.²⁰⁰

Apparently, then, Peter understood baptism not as a rite with intrinsic power to save, but as an acted parable, a visual dramatization of what does save, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus. As Ken Wuest expressed it,

[Peter speaks] of baptism saving believers. But he says that it saves them only as a counterpart [[antitype](#)]. That is, water baptism is the counterpart of the reality, salvation. It can only save as a counterpart, not actually. The Old Testament sacrifices were counterparts of the reality, the Lord Jesus. They did not actually save the believer, only in [type](#).... So water baptism only saves the believer in [type](#).²⁰¹

To reiterate, the rite of baptism itself has *no* intrinsic power. The power is in Christ, His death and resurrection, and our only access to that power is by faith.²⁰² The “Type \equiv Antitype \equiv Reality” formula presented by Peter then, is:

Flood Waters \equiv Christian Baptism \equiv [Death &] Resurrection of Christ

As the heirs of centuries of error and confusion about baptism, we cannot emphasize the corrective meaning of this formula enough: that Christian baptism is an [antitype](#) means that baptism saves *figuratively*, not *literally*.

Hence we may say that baptism, or water as used in baptism, *typically* saves — ἀντίτυπον σώζει, the word ἀντι signifying that it corresponds with a type that had preceded. To say that the waters of baptism typically save, is a very different thing from saying that they save. To say that they typically save is truth, precious truth — to say that they save, is deadly, soul destroying heresy.

Benjamin Wills Newton, *Thoughts On Scriptural Subjects*, (London: Houlston & Sons, 1871), p. 380.

²⁰⁰ As proven by Christ’s resurrection (Act 13.36-38; cf. 1Th 1.10). Peter made it plain that “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” rather than baptism, is the instrumental cause of our new birth (1Pe 1.3).

²⁰¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies In The Greek New Testament*, Electronic Edition by Logos (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1942), “First Peter,” p. 108. Even Tertullian, in a seeming retreat from his high view of the power in baptismal water, alludes to 1Pe 3.21, and says, when commenting on Paul’s reference to those who baptize for the dead, “For it is not the soul which is sanctified by the baptismal bath: its sanctification comes from the ‘answer.’”

²⁰² Peter emphasized the matter of “a good conscience toward God,” which the author of Hebrews affirmed could not be obtained by symbolic temple “sacrifices” and external “washings” (Heb 8-10).

Imagine a man (let's call him Larry) catching his teenage son sneaking mom's car keys out of her purse. As the boy looks up at his dad, Larry kills him figuratively by drawing his index finger across his own throat. Did Larry *really* cut his son's throat? No, as I said, he killed him *figuratively*. Could Larry have killed his son both figuratively and literally? Yes, God forbid, but not simultaneously. A figurative event and its corresponding literal event are mutually exclusive in that they cannot occur in the same act; either one occurs or the other. If Larry grabbed a knife and stabbed his son, we cannot say that he killed him *figuratively*. Likewise, if Larry only uses his finger to sign across his throat, we cannot say that he killed his son *literally*. Returning to the matter of baptism, then, what is true for a figure and its literal [referent](#), or for a metaphor and its corresponding reality, is likewise true for a type and the actuality to which it points: they cannot be the same thing. Either baptism saves [typically](#) or actually, not both, and Peter made it very clear: baptism is an *antitype* that saves us [typically](#). Therefore, *baptism does not save us actually*.²⁰³

The fact that baptism saves us *figuratively*, in no way diminishes its importance. The fact that Larry did not *really* kill his teenager does not diminish the importance and effectiveness of the symbolic act of drawing his

²⁰³ The late baptismal regenerationist theologian, Victor E. Hoven, made a serious expositional error on this point in his book *Shadow And Substance*, (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1934), pp. 22-23. After partially quoting 1Pe 3.21 (ASV), "After a true likeness (antitype) doth now save you, even baptism," in the next sentence he wrote, "Paul agrees with [Peter] by saying that God 'saved us through the washing of regeneration' (Tit 3.5)." Set aside for the moment the question of whether Paul refers to baptism in Tit 3.5, and notice the logical disconnect. According to Hoven, Peter says, "After a true likeness (antitype) X saves you," and Paul says, "God saved us through Y," and so they are agreed! If we grant that X = Y (which we will see below it does not), still X saves "after a true likeness" (i.e., antitypically), while Y saves, period. For Peter and Paul to agree, both X and Y must save *antitypically*, or both X and Y must save *actually*. Apparently Hoven believed an *antitype* to be a fulfillment, and so understood 1Pe 3.21 to mean that "in fulfillment of a true likeness, baptism (X) now *actually* saves you," just as "the washing of regeneration" (Y), which in Hoven's mind was baptism, *actually* saved us. The unfortunate conclusion that Hoven drew from these compounded errors was that, "As the 'eight souls' of the type were not saved before or after the flood, but while the water supported the ark, so salvation from sin is accomplished in baptism, not before or after the act. And as cleansing anything is not effected before or after washing but in the act, so cleansing from sin is consummated 'through the washing of regeneration,' for then the blood of Christ is applied." The reader will understand from the examination of Tit 3.5 below that Hoven's words are an outstanding example of the *confusion* arising from baptismism.

finger across his throat. We can imagine the eyes of Larry's son opening wide and his mouth dropping open as he hurriedly returns the car keys to their proper place. Let us be assured, then, that baptism is a powerful blessing, notwithstanding its [typological](#) character.

WHAT BAPTISM IS NOT AND IS

Having made a correlation between the Noahic flood and baptism, and having thus characterized baptism as [typological](#), Peter sought to avoid all misunderstanding by affirming what baptism *is not* and what baptism *is*. Using nouns that coordinate grammatically with the word *baptism* in 1Pe 3.21, the apostle clarified that baptism is “not the **removal** of the filth of the flesh” but *is* “the **answer** of a good conscience toward God” (NKJ). With regard to what baptism *is not*, various English versions make it sound like Peter indicates an external, bodily washing,²⁰⁴ and various commentators have seen this as an allusion to pagan or Jewish purification rituals. However, both translators and expositors have been misled by their mistaken association of baptism with the washing away of sin (see “[Does Baptism Wash Away Our Sins?](#)” below). Peter did not deny that baptism was an external washing; *he denied that baptism is a removal of the inner moral filth of the flesh* (σάρξ, sārḡ). It's true that Scripture uses the word *flesh* to speak literally (and amorally) of the physical body (see “[What Is Human Fallenness: The First Affliction](#),” below), and that Peter also used the term this way (e.g., 1Pe 3.18). However, Peter, like Paul, also used the word *flesh* in a moral sense, to speak of the corrupt human mind controlled by physical drives and instincts. Context helps us distinguish when Peter used *flesh* in this moral sense, as in 2Pe 2.10, where he mentions “those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires.” Likewise, in 1Pe 3.21, Peter combines the word *flesh* (σάρξ, sārḡ) with the word *filth* (ῥύπος, 'rē-pōs, which Scripture uses exclusively in reference to moral uncleanness),²⁰⁵ and so alerts us that he refers to the corrupt human mind.²⁰⁶ Thus, Peter

²⁰⁴ The NIVO adds confusion by substituting the physical word *body* for the moral term *flesh* (σάρξ, sārḡ) that appears in the Grk text.

²⁰⁵ Biblically, the word family that includes ῥυπαρία, ῥυπαρός, and ῥύπος speaks literally and non-prophetically of physical dirt only one time, in Jam 2.2.

²⁰⁶ According to David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Peter*, 2nd ed., (Dallas, TX:

denied that baptism is a removal of this internal corruption. Another way to say it is, *baptism does not regenerate, i.e., baptism is not new birth*. In spite of centuries of interpretation to the contrary (see [the exposition of John 3.5](#), below), this makes complete sense in light of the typology of the flood: baptism is neither about cleansing (except in the most indirect manner), nor about regeneration, but about judgment upon sin.

As a reenactment of judgment upon sin, baptism *is* — Peter affirmed — “the answer of a good conscience toward God ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” In other words, by receiving baptism, the believer testifies that his sin has been atoned for by the judgment poured out upon Jesus, and atoned for *successfully*, as proven by Christ’s resurrection. Now, when the Spirit of God searches the believer’s conscience, the believer can respond with a *good conscience*, pointing to his faith — demonstrated by baptism — in the atoning work of Christ.

MESSAGE AND APPLICATION OF PETER’S BAPTISMAL PASSAGE

Having carefully analyzed the meaning of 1Pe 3.21, let’s conclude our study of this passage with a summation of its message and its application. The larger context surrounding this verse has to do with instructing believers to patiently endure mistreatment. By affirming a [typological](#) correspondence between the Noahic flood and baptism, Peter reminded his readers of both God’s patience with wrongdoers and the certainty of His judgment upon persecutors. At the same time, Peter taught his readers that *they* have clear consciences before God’s throne only because they have identified by faith with the judgment that fell upon Jesus.

Though in his epistles Peter does not develop the [typology](#) of the flood beyond what we have already examined, his affirmation that the salvation of Noah through water has typological meaning, *and that* baptism is an [antitype](#) corresponding to the earlier [type](#) of the flood, we can make this inference: a

SIL International, 2008), J. Ramsey Michaels in *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49, (Waco, Texas: Word, 1988) is one of the few who see that Peter referred to “the defilement of carnality.” Thomas R. Schreiner, in *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, Vol. 37 of The New American Commentary, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), pp. 194-195, rejects this interpretation, but on the mistaken basis that, “Elsewhere baptism is connected with the cleansing and removal of sin”

baptizee is in a sense a “new Noah.” We baptized believers have been ushered into a new world, the kingdom of God, through the divine judgment that buffeted our Ark of deliverance, Jesus. Now, like Noah (cf. Gen 8.20-22), we have been consecrated to priestly service in this new world (as we saw above in the exposition of the passages about the baptism of Jesus, Mat 3.13-17, Mar 1.9-11, Luk 3.21-23 and Joh 1.29-34). As Noah and his sons again received the mandate to “Be fruitful and multiply,” (Gen 9.1,7), so have we received the commission to bear much fruit (Joh 15.8) and multiply disciples (Mat 28.19). As God gave Noah and his sons authority over all other creatures, including “everything that creeps on the ground,” (Gen 9.2), so Jesus has given His disciples “authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Luk 10.19). As God established a new and “everlasting covenant” with Noah, attested by a specific sign, to the effect that the judgment of the flood would never be repeated (Gen 9.8-17), so the believing baptizee has entered into the “new covenant” in Christ’s blood, with its specific symbols of bread and wine (Luk 22.17-20), and having to do with a judgment that obtained “eternal redemption” and occurred “once for all” (Rom 6.10; Heb 7.27; 9.12; 1Pe 3.18). Finally, as Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” before the flood (2Pe 2.5), inviting others to enter the ark of salvation, likewise we have been called — in view of the meaning of our baptism — to preach the gospel of the kingdom in order “to save those who believe” (Mat 24.14; 1Co 1.21).

If, therefore, baptism has *saved us in a typical fashion*, it is that we might fulfill the *typology* of Noah who, though he undoubtedly endured mockery for his faith as we do today, nevertheless stood in his generation as “a preacher of righteousness” (2Pe 2.5).

ROMANS 6.1-11 & COLOSSIANS 2.12: BAPTISM CERTIFIES OUR DEATH.

Rom 6.1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall **we who died to sin** still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that **all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death**? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if **we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death**, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that **our old self was crucified with Him**, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 **Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Col 2.12 ... having been **buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith** in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

SYNOPSIS

Paul, in his epistles, handed down otherwise unrecorded apostolic teaching on the figurative meaning and practical implications of Christian baptism. In the epistle to the Romans Paul does not teach about baptism *as such*, but argues that the Christian believer is obligated to eschew sin. This obligation to live righteously stems from the fact that the believer's old self died with Christ, an event certified by the baptismal reenactment of burial with Him.

Peter's teaching that baptism saves *figuratively* (see [the exposition of 1Pe 3.21](#) above) should keep us from interpreting Rom 6.3 as meaning that baptism *effects* our union with Christ or His death. Even the *sacramentally* biased *Fathers* recognized that the baptismal death of which Paul spoke was figurative. Paul himself makes his metaphorical intent explicit when he says, "we have become *planted together* with Him in the *likeness* of His death" (Rom 6.5).

Baptism does not effect a spiritual burial with Christ nor a spiritual participation in His death. However, it publicly reenacts Christ's burial and resurrection with the intent that the experience will oblige the [baptizee](#) to "walk in newness of life." In the hostile milieu of the early centuries, baptism's symbolism served as a psychological deterrent to falling back into fleshly behavior, and also fortified the believer with great boldness when facing death at the hands of persecutors.

Paul mentions the same baptismal symbolism of burial and resurrection to the Colossians. Once again he does not teach about baptism *as such*, but about the riches we have in Christ. Because believers have died and risen with Christ, as reenacted in their baptism, they need not be intimidated by those who teach that additional rituals are prerequisite to the fullness of divine blessing.

By his references to baptism in both Rom 6 and Col 2, Paul does not teach about baptism's mystical power, but about the moral implications of the believer's participation in the realities that baptism symbolizes. Baptism for Paul certifies our death with Christ and points to both great responsibilities and amazing privileges.

BAPTISM'S FIGURATIVE MEANING

Prior to the Act 2 passage about the Spirit's outpouring on the Day of Pentecost, the biblical narrative says nothing *explicitly* about the meaning of Christian baptism. Even in the Great Commission as recorded by Matthew (Mat 28.18-20), baptism is only commanded ("in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit") without any explanation of its intended meaning. If the NT consisted only of the Gospels, we would have very limited authoritative teaching about baptism's significance.

Still, the Gospels do communicate important ideas about baptism *implicitly*. As the preceding sections of this study show, the first Jewish readers of the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John would have — at the very least — understood Christian baptism as a sign of both repentance and commitment to Jesus. The narrative of Act reinforces these twin ideas, as we saw above in [the exegesis of Act 2.38](#): "Repent ... and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ..." The earliest Christian congregants would have learned

additional baptismal meanings as well, but they would have learned these further truths from oral teaching handed down from the apostles.

Thankfully, the twelve apostles and their disciples faithfully spread the unwritten teaching about baptism throughout their world. Paul assumed that the believers in Rome understood — or should have understood — the connection between baptism and Christ’s death; “Do you not know,” he asks in Rom 6.3 “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” Since Paul did not plant the church in Rome, he clearly believed that someone else had brought the apostolic teaching about baptism’s further meaning to the converts there. We Christians of a later generation, though, have Paul himself to thank for making the apostolic teaching about baptism’s additional significance available to us.²⁰⁷ Indeed, once we understand Christian baptism as a testimony (see [the exegesis of Mar 1.4 and Act 2.38](#) above) and as an *antitype* (see [the exegesis of 1Pe 3.21](#) above), we realize that Paul’s teaching in Rom 6.3-11 is the *definitive statement* about the realities which Christian baptism commemorates and to which it testifies.²⁰⁸

Ironically, this key statement of Paul’s does not appear in a doctrinal passage about baptism. Rather, Paul presents it in the midst of an argument that Christian believers are obligated to renounce sin and lawlessness even though justification is by faith and salvation is by grace. Any insight into baptism derived from Rom 6, therefore, must be understood as supporting the propositions that *salvation is by grace through faith* and that *the Christian is obligated to eschew sin*.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Even *The Didache*, likely a 1st-century document, while describing (in ch. 7) the preliminary teaching and fasting that should precede baptism, and the possible modes of baptizing, says nothing about *the meaning* of baptism.

²⁰⁸ There are a few, like Kenneth S. Wuest, who interpret Rom 6 as about spiritual conversion rather than water baptism. This approach to the text seems motivated by unnecessary scrupulosity to avoid attributing transformational efficacy to water baptism. See Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies From The Greek New Testament: For The English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), section on Rom 6.3.

²⁰⁹ H. A. A. Kennedy wrote that Romans 6.1ff. “can only be rightly understood from the argument which leads up to it. In chapter v. Paul has shown that faith, as linking the believer to Christ, has brought him into the sphere of those high privileges which he enjoys, experience of the Divine grace, hope, the love of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Can a faith of this kind be accused of being a solvent of right conduct? Nay, everything belonging to justification involves a break with sin. ... And then he proceeds [in Romans 6] to show that entrance into the Christian society accentuates and embodies the same

Bearing these things in mind, we see in Rom 6.1-11 that Baptism symbolizes (and reenacts) something radical. Rather than symbolizing the cleansing of sin — the idea seized upon by the early [Fathers](#) — baptism symbolizes the very cessation of the sinner in death, by reenacting the burial of Christ. Paul reiterates this symbolism in Col 2.12, though in less detail: “having been buried with Him in baptism...” The reenactment of burial in baptism is of the utmost importance because burial attests to death, and it is the symbolic burial in baptism that conveys this radical idea of the death of the sinner.

The declaration of this most fundamental symbolism by Paul does not imply that the apostle was ignorant or forgetful of the gamut of baptism’s meanings. In Rom 6 the first aspect of baptism for Paul is that it is “*into Christ Jesus*” (v. 3). The use of this phrase confirms Paul’s understanding that Christian baptism signifies a commitment to follow Christ as one of His disciples. Paul knew discipleship, and he knew that to be baptized as a Christian was to make an irrevocable decision to follow Christ. For Paul, renouncing Christ after receiving Christian baptism was as impossible as an Israelite changing his mind about following Moses once the Red Sea had been crossed (1Co 10.1-2). No, one can’t be unbaptized. Baptism places us in Christ and in His death *in the public eye*, and having thus publically testified to embracing Christ, the baptized person can sanely move only forward in his or her faith, not backward.

THE BAPTISMISM TWIST

Paul’s rich understanding of baptism begins with the idea of commitment to Christ, but sadly this is also where the misunderstanding of his teaching

principle. Baptism, the deliberate, decisive step which a man takes when he has surrendered his life to Christ, is not something vague or nebulous. ... the very symbolism of the rite is an impressive picture of the believer’s experiences. His disappearance beneath the water is a vivid illustration of this separation from the old life of sin. It is a burial of the old existence, just as Christ’s burial was a palpable proof that He had left all earthly conditions behind Him. Emergence from the baptismal water typifies entrance into a new environment, the life of the Christian society which is the life of the living Lord Himself, mediated to His followers by their fellowship with Him.” H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions* (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), pp. 245-247.

begins. In answer to the question, “Is water baptism necessary to salvation?” the [Church of Christ](#) writers for the *Truth For The World* web site answer,

(Romans 6:3) Baptism is that which puts one into Christ! Only in Him is there salvation (II Timothy 2:10; Acts 4:12). In order to get to that salvation, we must obey that which puts us into Him!²¹⁰

This appalling statement sandwiches one truth between two lies. The Scriptures clearly teach, and all orthodox Christians agree, that “Only in [Christ] is there salvation” — that part is true. However, it is a gross misinterpretation of Rom 6.3 to state that “baptism is that which puts one into Christ!” By saying this, the [Church of Christ](#) expositors show their lack of understanding that *baptized into* (εἰς, ēs) *Christ* and *baptized in* (εἰς, ēs) *the name of Christ* are equivalent phrases.²¹¹ To read any such phrases in the NT as meaning that by baptism we are literally placed in Christ (having been outside Him up to that point) is to engage in the worst kind of proof-texting that ignores both the literary and theological context of a passage. Just taking into account the final clause of Rom 6.3, “we were baptized into his death,” forces us to realize that we were no more *literally* placed into Christ by baptism than we were *literally* placed into His death by it.²¹²

Peter’s teaching that baptism is an [antitype](#) (1Pe 3.21, [explained above](#)) should guard us from such inappropriate literalism in interpreting Paul’s words in Rom 6.3. Even the [Fathers](#), men biased toward the [sacramental](#)

²¹⁰ “QUESTION: Is water baptism necessary to salvation?,” *Truth For The World*, <http://www.tftw2.org/QA/Q375.htm> (accessed October 29, 2009).

²¹¹ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle To The Romans, Vol. 1; Chapters 1-8*, Vol. 1, 2 vols. (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2005), pp. 138-139. Also, see the comments on the Greek preposition εἰς above in connection with Act 2.38. Ferguson rightly rejects the over generalized translation “baptized with reference (εἰς) to his death.” Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 156. Baptism is more than something done *with reference* to Christ’s death, it is both a reenactment of Christ’s burial and resurrection as well as an active commitment to Christ and to the moral implications of His death and resurrection. While the external ritual of itself neither places us in Christ nor in His body *spiritually*, the participant’s act of commitment places him in the Christian community in the public eye, and therefore *publicly* “in Christ” and exposed to all the persecution aimed at Christ. In this sense, the baptized person not only reenacts a burial as testimony to both Christ’s death and spiritual participation in it, but also embraces the possibility of following Christ in literal death for righteousness’ sake.

²¹² One could argue that Paul meant we were literally baptized into the *saving virtue* of Christ and His death, but that would heretically make baptism the instrumental means of our salvation in place of the NT’s instrument of *faith*.

efficacy of baptism, understood the symbolic meaning of Rom 6.3b. [Cyril of Alexandria](#) (fl. AD 412-444) wrote, for example, “We also were buried together with him when we were baptized. Does this mean that our flesh died the same way as his did? Hardly.”²¹³ Likewise, [Tertullian](#) gloried in the efficacy of baptism but understood that “we die figuratively in our baptism.”²¹⁴ Also [Oecumenius](#) (sixth cen.) wrote, “We have died Christ’s death metaphorically ...”²¹⁵ Paul made this meaning unmistakable by stating in v. 5 that we were “planted together”²¹⁶ with Christ — *not* “in His death” (as in the [NIVO!](#)), but — “in the **likeness** (ὁμοιώματι, ō-mē-’ō-mä-tē) of His death.”

Paul teaches us in Rom 6.3-4 that in Baptism we enact a mini-drama depicting the burial of Christ, and by implication His preceding death. Clearly Paul does not mean that by baptism we experience the literal agonies of the cross, nor literal enclosure in a tomb. Recognizing this forces us to admit that neither does Paul teach that we literally attain spiritual union with Christ by baptism. That spiritual union occurs by faith apart from, and ideally preceding, baptism.²¹⁷

It violates the gospel for the so-called [Church of Christ](#) (and like sects) to put a barrier — even so pious a barrier as baptism — between the repentant sinner and Christ.²¹⁸ To do so negates the very words of Jesus in Joh 5.24:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

²¹³ Cited in ACCOS, Vol. VI, p. 157.

²¹⁴ Res 47. We do not “die” in baptism, but my point here is that Tertullian understood the burial as experienced “figuratively.”

²¹⁵ Cited in ACCOS, Vol. VI, p. 158.

²¹⁶ The key term σύμφυτος (’sēm-fē-tōs), *planted together* (see KJV) is translated too abstractly, *united*, in our new versions, loosing its parallelism with the term *buried*.

²¹⁷ Diodore of Tarsus (d. c. 394) recognized that, “Those who have been validly baptized into Christ’s death have been united to him *by faith*” (emphasis mine). However, I’ve not found the context of this statement, so I don’t know if Diodore understood the faith union to precede or to occur concurrently with baptism. *Pauline Commentary From The Greek Church* cited in ACCOS, Vol. VI, p. 157.

²¹⁸ I know whereof I speak, having been raised in the Church of Christ. From my baptism at age 11 until my new birth at age 18 I derived false assurance of salvation from my baptism. When one is taught that baptism is “necessary” for salvation, one tends to believe that baptism *imparts* salvation.

By simply hearing and believing, a person has “passed out of death into life.”²¹⁹ Since “only in [Christ] is there salvation” (as the [Church of Christ](#) elders correctly state), it’s obvious from the above words of Jesus that *believing* “puts us into Him,” else it could not be said (without a further caveat) that the *hearer-believer* has “passed out of death into life.”²²⁰ As important as Christian baptism is, it does not “put us into Christ” in any sense other than that of being publicly associated with Him. Nor does baptism’s incidental delay preclude our being savingly united with Christ — and passing out of death into life — by faith alone.

Paul makes this all the more clear by his reminder in Rom 6.6 that “our old self was crucified with Him.” When did this crucifixion of our old self occur? Paul does not say that we were *crucified* with Christ by baptism but that we were “buried with Him through baptism into death.” Baptism affirms a state of death for the old self, just as burial confirms the death of a physical body. Generally speaking, burial proves that a person has truly died. Burial attests to *preceding* death. Thus, baptism is the declaration that a person has antecedently died with Christ, having had the old self crucified *by faith*. Since baptism does not reenact crucifixion or the event of death, and therefore does not depict but only attests to the crucifixion of the old self, baptism most certainly does not *effect* the death of the old self.²²¹ The death of the old self and union with Christ properly occurs before baptism, and always by faith.

At this juncture we must state an important caveat: the death of the old self is not absolute at the birth of saving faith. Paul expresses his frustration over this sad fact in the next chapter of Romans: “I find ... that evil is [still] present in me” (Rom 7.21). While the old self was judicially crucified with Christ, and effectively given the death blow by our [regeneration](#), the impulse

²¹⁹ The present tense-form ἔχει (‘ēch-ē, *has*) indicates that the hearer-believer has eternal life *concurrently* with hearing and believing; there is no lag between believing and having eternal life. The perfect tense-form μεταβέβηκεν (mē-tā-‘vē-vē-kēn, *passed over*) emphasizes that the hearer-believer has *already* passed out of death and into life.

²²⁰ For the so-called Church of Christ to be correct in its baptismal doctrine, Jesus would have had to have said, “he who hears ... and believes ... and is baptized ... has passed out of death into life.”

²²¹ Contra Pelagius: “Through baptism you ... were crucified with Christ.” *Pelagius’s Commentary On Romans* cited in ACCOS, Vol. VI (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 159.

of what Paul calls the “flesh” remains with us, as every honest Christian knows. The “old self” or the “flesh” will not die in the absolute sense until we leave behind our mortal bodies in physical death or exchange them for immortal ones at Christ’s coming. There is an already/not-yet aspect of these realities that Paul openly declares. While on the one hand “we have been buried with [Christ] through baptism” (in the past), “so that we might walk in newness of life” (in the present), on the other hand “we shall also be [united with Christ] in the likeness of His resurrection” (in the future, Rom 6.4-5).

Now, if saving faith does not immediately bring about the death of the old self in an absolute sense, far less does baptism (which is only the dramatization of our burial with Christ) bring about that death. However, here we arrive at the real power of Paul’s argument in Rom 6. While baptism does not accomplish our spiritual union with Christ, nor effect the death of the old self, it does provide a powerful impetus to embrace the process of our sanctification.²²² This is Paul’s expectation as he concludes his argument based on baptism. “*Even so,*” he writes, “*consider yourselves to be dead to sin*” (Rom 6.11). It is unnecessary to “consider” (λογίζομαι, lō-‘yē-zō-mě) ourselves dead to sin, of course, if we are already fully dead to sin in reality. This exhortation of Paul, the climactic inference of his baptism argument, underscores the fact that baptism *does not* effect anything with regard to our spiritual death, rebirth, or union with Christ, but that it *does* testify to a radical reality in the light of which we now have the privilege and obligation to live.²²³

Paul had already explained this impetus to right living as the practical purpose of baptism (given here in my translation and with my emphasis):

²²² I.e., for the ongoing putting to death of the deeds of the body (Rom 8.13)

²²³ For those accustomed to finding the idea of “union with Christ via baptism” in Rom 6, I humbly offer the counsel of Royce Gruenler who writes, “We should beware of reading too much of mystical union with Christ into Paul’s teaching in this verse [Rom 6.5], as the Greek suggests more the sense of ‘being conformed to’ his death and resurrection (so Phil 3.10), with an emphasis on what Christ has done for us by his grace, beyond some simple union with him in his descent and ascent. It is precisely because ‘the death he died, he died once for all’ (v. 10; so also Heb 7.27; 9.12, 28; 10.10; 1Pe 3.18), and because our old self was crucified with him (v. 6) that Paul can appeal to his readers that they should aspire to claim the logical and ethical implications of their death and burial with Christ.” Royce Gruenler, “Romans,” in *Evangelical Commentary On The Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996).

Rom 6.4 We were **buried** with Him, then,
 through **baptism** into **death**,
 in order that just as
 Christ was **raised** from the **dead** [ones]
 through the glory of the Father,
 thus also we may walk in the **newness of life**.²²⁴
 5 For if we were **planted together** [with Him]
 in the **likeness of His death**,
 we will certainly **live** [in the likeness of His] **resurrection**.

This important verse 4 in Paul's baptismal argument pivots on the Greek conjunction *ἵνα* ('ē-nə); translated "in order that" (NIVO) and "so that" (NAU), it denotes either purpose or result.²²⁵ If we were to read *ἵνα* in this verse as denoting result, it would mean that we can now "walk in newness of life" *as a result* of our burial in baptism. We have already seen, though, that Paul does not attribute this kind of efficacy to baptism. Instead, the apostle uses *ἵνα* in this verse to denote purpose. The meaning, then, is that we were figuratively buried with Christ in baptism *with the intent that* we would then "walk in newness of life."²²⁶ Verse 5 reiterates this. The adjective *planted together* parallels *buried* in v. 4, *likeness of his death* parallels the preceding *baptism into death*, and *in the likeness of His resurrection* parallels *in the newness of life*. The message is clear: imitating Christ's burial in our baptism commits us to imitating Christ's resurrection by living a new kind of life.

We cannot fully appreciate the force of Paul's baptismal argument, however, without an awareness of his audience's milieu of persecution.²²⁷ When Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans in AD 57, only six or seven years had passed since the Jews in Rome had rioted against the followers of "Chrestus" in their midst, and the emperor Claudius had consequently

²²⁴ Cf. 2Co 5.17; Gal 6.15; Eph 4.24.

²²⁵ The ideas of *purpose* and *result* cannot always be clearly differentiated.

²²⁶ As Ferguson puts it, "The future resurrection requires a present resurrection in manner of life." Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 157.

²²⁷ While it is true that persecution was not ubiquitous (see for example Act 2.47), it is interesting to note that much of the earliest Christian symbolism, including the famous ΙΧΘΥΣ fish, connoted security in a hostile environment. See Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence Of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985).

prohibited the Jews from assembling according to their custom. This induced many Jews to leave Rome (Act 18.2), but Claudius' attempt to suppress Judaism had only a partial and transient result; Jews — and the religious agitation between the sects — persisted in the city.²²⁸ Certainly then, when Paul wrote his epistle to the church in Rome, its converts still took a great risk to be publicly baptized.²²⁹ Since they had paid such a high price socially for their baptism, Paul would rightly assume their reluctance to betray their baptism's meaning. Paul could expect a Christian in Rome to think along these lines: "Since I risked my life to be baptized, how can I indulge in sin and thereby betray and negate that which cost me so dearly?" Thus, the apostle reminded the Roman believers that baptism symbolized the burial of the old self with Christ as an attestation that the new self had effectually "died to sin." By God's grace, this argument would have sufficed to bring a baptized believer in Rome to repentance for any lapses in his or her pursuit of holiness.

Baptism signifies still more: the person who participates in Christ's death dies not only to sin and the old self, but also to this world (Gal 6.14; Col 2.20). A disciple who has taken up his cross (Luk 9.23-24), has already died to worldly hopes and agendas. Paul's reminder about baptism's deeper meaning continues Christ's teaching about the principles of discipleship. A disciple who has taken up his cross has already died to this world; a disciple who has been baptized has already been buried *and raised to life in heaven* (Eph 2.6). Therefore, the cross-bearing, baptized disciple need fear no threat in his propagation of the gospel. Should the Christian disciple fear tribulation, famine, nakedness? He has already been crucified! Should he fear persecution

²²⁸ See Emil Schürer, *A History Of The Jewish People In The Time Of Jesus Christ*, Electronic Edition of 2007, trans. Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie, Vol. 2.2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), pp. 236-238.

²²⁹ As H. A. A. Kennedy expressed it, "... a comparison with baptism on the mission field to-day helps us to realise a situation with which Paul the missionary was quite familiar. ... baptism must have meant a decision of momentous importance for the convert. Now, for the first time, he deliberately affirmed his allegiance to Christ before the world, and solemnly identified himself with the Christian brotherhood. This was the actual spiritual crisis in which he turned his back upon his old associations, faced all manner of costly sacrifices, and committed himself, in utter dependence on the Divine grace and power, to a new mode of lif[e]. Rendtorff is fully justified in saying that an act which thus liberated the most powerful ethical motives 'became a religious experience of the first rank'." H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions* (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), pp. 247-248, quoting Rendtorff, *Die Taufe im Urchristentum*, p. 32.

or the sword? He has already been buried! With regard to distress and peril, the cross-bearing, baptized disciple is more than a conqueror. He is ready to lose his life for Christ's sake and the gospel's because he has already died, already been buried and already been saved! So, while Paul's baptismal argument in Rom 6 is primarily an argument against [antinomianism](#) or [libertinism](#) (Rom 6.12-15), it also helps him build to the rallying cry in Rom 8.31-39: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution ... ?" No, "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."

Its costly nature joined to its radical symbolism gave Christian baptism great practical power. The unbaptized had no such psychological deterrent to the temptation of falling back into fleshly behavior, nor any such powerful impetus to "walk in newness of life," nor any such boldness as those who had already died.²³⁰

THE RICHES WE HAVE IN CHRIST

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul did not argue against [antinomianism](#) (or the accusation of it) as in Romans, but against teaching that made Christ look like just another [demiurge](#) (minor god) in first-century Asia Minor. Paul's rebuttal of the false teaching in Colossae consists simply in declaring the supremacy of Christ, and the fullness of the Colossians' inheritance in Him. In Christ they had been made complete (Col 2.10), they had been spiritually circumcised (Col 2.11), and they had been made alive, with their transgressions forgiven and their debts nailed to the cross (Col 2.13-14). They had "died" and been "raised up with Christ" (Col 3.1-3), as attested in their baptism (Col 2.12). The logical conclusion of Paul's argument is that the Colossians need not, therefore, be intimidated by those who promote a doctrine

²³⁰ Charles Colson told the story of converted sex-offenders who were baptized in the exercise yard of their Kentucky prison. The new believers "marched out, one by one, to the accompanying jeers and catcalls from the main prison yard. They went into the water [of an old galvanized horse trough] and came out ... 'broken, weeping,' but overflowing with God's grace." Public baptism had a high initial cost for those converts, which testified to the seriousness of their commitment, but their baptism would also bring them intense scorn and ridicule if they were subsequently to betray it. For these convicts, baptism served as a powerful incentive to remain faithful to their profession of faith. Charles Colson & Ellen Vaughn, *Being The Body*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), pp. 116-117.

of justification by the observance of rules, rituals and holy days, none of which convey any grace for overcoming “fleshly indulgence” (Col 2.16-23).

If Col 2.12 were taken out of its context, however, and if it were the only explanatory verse we had in the NT about Christian baptism, it might imply to the careless reader that baptism effects a *mystical* union with Christ as the baptizee is ritually “buried,” or that baptism regenerates the baptizee as he or she is “raised up” from the water, or that at the very least, baptism marks the moment of the baptizee’s spiritual burial and resurrection. However, we must recall everything said above in connection with Rom 6 as countering any idea that baptism effects *mystical* union or *regeneration*. Also, we must look again at Col 2.12 in its context and see that the instrument of our spiritual resurrection is not baptism but “faith in the working of God” (Cf. Gal 3.26-27).

Furthermore, we must remember that the practical application of Paul’s argument to the Colossians is not that people must hasten to be baptized — an application we might expect if Paul had been teaching baptism as *the means* of being spiritually circumcised or of experiencing *mystical* union with Christ. Instead, the application that Paul’s argument builds to is that since the Colossian believers “have been raised up with Christ ...” (Col 3.1), they must continue putting to death the impulses of the old self (Col 3.5) and lay aside sinful habits (Col 3.8), while the new self continues to be renewed (Col 3.10). We see, therefore, that in both his epistle to the Colossians and his epistle to the Romans, Paul’s arguments build up to the moral implications of the spiritual realities *depicted* in a person’s baptism. For Paul, baptism does not have *mystical* power; it has practical power in that it certifies one’s death with Christ and points the baptizee to both great responsibilities and amazing privileges.

JOHN 3.5: JESUS POINTED NICODEMUS AWAY FROM EXTERNAL RITES.

Joh 3.3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?”

SYNOPSIS

The [Church Fathers](#) falsely assumed that the word *water* in Christ’s exchange with Nicodemus referred to baptism. Ironically, Jesus strategically used the word *water* to point Nicodemus away from external rites that could never satisfy the thirst of the human heart. The [Hellenized Fathers](#), however, did not understand our Lord’s [Hebraic](#) figure of speech.

Unlike the other [Evangelists](#), the apostle John made a point of recording instances when Jesus used the word *water* metaphorically (both in the gospel of John and in the Revelation). Those instances include Christ’s conversation with Nicodemus and His conversation with the woman at the well. In these encounters, Jesus used *water* to refer to the [regenerative](#) and soul satisfying ministry of the Holy Spirit. By using the word *water* in this way, Jesus employed the same metaphor for the Holy Spirit as did the Israelite prophets of earlier centuries.

In the [patristic](#) period, “the strong emphasis on the necessity of baptism was reinforced by John 3.5, which was *the favorite baptismal text of the early church*.”²³¹ Indeed, the early [Fathers](#) often appealed to Joh 3.3-5 not just to emphasize the necessity of baptism, but also to underscore the regenerative power of baptismal water. As early as about AD 160 we read in [Justin Martyr’s](#) *First Apology*,

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true ... 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. For Christ also said, “Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”²³²

[Justin](#) understood the necessity of heart conversion, and in derision of Jewish ritual baths asked Trypho the Jew, “what is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone?”²³³ However, [Justin](#) seems to have believed that God granted the requisite conversion of the heart *in the act of Christian baptism*, and identified this true baptism as the “water of life.”²³⁴

Perhaps 20 years later, [Irenaeus](#) wrote,

It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [it served] as an indication to us. For as lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: “Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”²³⁵

Like [Justin](#), [Irenaeus](#) identified spiritual cleansing and new birth with baptismal waters and cited Joh 3.5 as his biblical basis.

²³¹ Everett Ferguson, “Baptism,” in *Encyclopedia Of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York, NY: Garland, 1990), p. 134. Emphasis mine.

²³² *1Apo* 61.

²³³ *Dial* 14. While it is true that Jewish immersions have no ultimate value apart from Christ, the rabbis did *not* conceive of ritual washings as for “flesh and body alone,” *nor* as having value apart from inward spiritual intent.

²³⁴ *Ibid*.

²³⁵ *Frag* 34. We begin to see here that for the Fathers baptism was the fulfillment of OT types, rather than a corresponding type itself.

[Tertullian of Carthage](#) followed in the theological footsteps of [Irenaeus](#). By around AD 220, [Tertullian](#) had secured his place in Christian history as the “father of Latin theology,” thanks to his voluminous writings. This Christian apologist, who cast the die of Catholic belief for the next two centuries, strongly championed the [mystical](#) power of baptismal water. He repeated the commonly taught prescript of his time that “without baptism, salvation is attainable by none,” and cited as basis for this rule “that declaration of the Lord, who says, ‘Unless one be born of water, he hath not life.’”²³⁶ In this statement, [Tertullian](#) severely abridged Joh 3.5.²³⁷

Probably within a decade of [Tertullian’s](#) writings, the author of the *Clementine Recognitions* wrote about being “regenerated and born of water and of God” apart from which salvation “is impossible.” As proof of this dogma he wrote, “for thus hath the true prophet testified to it with an oath: ‘Verily I say to you, That unless a man is born again of water, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’”²³⁸ Notice how the phrase “and Spirit” *has dropped out* of this quotation of Joh 3.5.

By around AD 250, [Tertullian’s](#) disciple [Cyprian](#) had repeatedly chimed in on the subject. He wrote that “unless a man have [sic] been baptized and born again, he cannot attain unto the kingdom of God,” and cited Joh 3.5-6.²³⁹ In one of his epistles, [Cyprian](#) taught that repentant heretics should be baptized with the “only baptism of the holy church” so that “by divine regeneration” they “may be born of both sacraments, because it is written, ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”²⁴⁰

Probably within the next hundred years, parts of the compilation known as the *Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles* appeared, in which we read:

²³⁶ *Bap* 12.

²³⁷ Snyder believes that the fish symbol (ΙΧΘΥΣ) took on baptismal connotations with Tertullian, whereas before it had been more symbolic of life in an alien environment. Indeed, in the first paragraph of his treatise *On Baptism* Tertullian says “But we little fishes, after the example of our ΙΧΘΥΣ Jesus Christ, are born in water” See Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence Of Church Life Before Constantine* (Mercer University Press, 1985), pp. 24-26.

²³⁸ *Rec* 6.9.

²³⁹ *Cyp Treat* 12: *Three Books Of Testimonies Against The Jews*, Book 3, Testimonies 25.

²⁴⁰ *Cyp Epi* 72.21. The reference to “both sacraments” is to baptism and the laying on of hands. Cf. *Cyp Epi* 71.1.

Nay, he that, out of contempt, will not be baptized, shall be condemned as an unbeliever, and shall be reproached as ungrateful and foolish. For the Lord says: “Except a man be baptized of water and of the Spirit, he shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And again: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”²⁴¹

Notice how in the quotation of Joh 3.5, Christ’s word *born* has been replaced with the word *baptized*!

By the time of [Augustine of Hippo](#) (c. AD 400), it had become obvious to Catholic minds that Joh 3.5 referred to baptism and that baptism was necessary for salvation. In just one of many allusions to Joh 3.5, Augustine wrote,

... with how much greater certainty should it be said of baptism ... that without it no one can reach the kingdom of heaven For ... “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”²⁴²

[Augustine](#) even made a distinction between “the kingdom of heaven” and “Paradise,” since the thief on the cross went to “Paradise” but obviously (based on the words of Joh 3.5) Christ could not grant “the kingdom of heaven” to one not baptized.²⁴³ Elsewhere, in a clear allusion to Joh 3.5, [Augustine](#) summarized the belief of his day most succinctly, saying, “For the Lord has determined that the kingdom of heaven should only be conferred on baptized persons.”²⁴⁴

THE REPROOF TO NICODEMUS

Clearly, most of the [Fathers](#) assumed that Jesus spoke of baptism in Joh 3.5. Nevertheless, they failed — as many current interpreters do — to take into account the implications of Christ’s reproof given to Nicodemus in verse 10: “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” What Jesus had just propounded regarding the Kingdom, new birth, and birth “of

²⁴¹ *Const* 6.15.

²⁴² *Peti* 3.56.68.

²⁴³ *De Anima* 2.14.

²⁴⁴ *De Grat* 2.5 [V].

water and spirit,” had to do with ideas that should have been familiar to Nicodemus.²⁴⁵ In other words, in speaking about new birth “of water and spirit,” Jesus had taught “nothing but what the prophets and Moses said” (to borrow Paul’s phrase from Act 26.22). Therefore, unless it can be demonstrated that the Hebrew scriptures had taught [regeneration](#) by baptism (which they didn’t), inserting the idea of [baptismal regeneration](#) into Joh 3.5 portrays Jesus as committing the absurdity of reproving Nicodemus for ignorance of something never before taught. Furthermore, the [baptismal regenerationist Church Fathers](#) and their theological heirs make Jesus refer to *Christian baptism* in Joh 3.5! However, it should be obvious to us that, just as Jesus could not have held Nicodemus accountable for ignorance of [baptismal regeneration](#), he likewise could not have reproved Nicodemus for failure to understand the not-yet instituted “Christian baptism.”²⁴⁶

It follows that if the “water” of Joh 3.5 refers to any baptism at all, it would have to refer to a baptism with which Nicodemus was already familiar. This presents us with four options: the baptismal consecration of the priests, other Jewish ritual immersions, the first baptism of the proselyte, and John

²⁴⁵ As M. S. Mills puts it, “our understanding of ‘water’ should firstly be one which Nicodemus would have understood at the time, and then should also be one that was intelligible to the initial readers of John’s Gospel, so should be capable of definition from that Gospel alone.” M. S. Mills, *The Life Of Christ: A Study Guide to The Gospel Record*, (Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries, 1999), §45.

²⁴⁶ Regarding the fact that “Christian baptism” as such was not yet inaugurated, we note that the following context, Joh 3.22-26 and 4.1-2, does report that Jesus — technically His disciples — was baptizing. However, as Morris says, “It is difficult to think of this as Christian baptism in the later sense. More probably it represents a continuation of the ‘baptism of repentance’ that was characteristic of John the Baptist, though with some implication of adherence to Jesus. Both Jesus and his first disciples had come from the circle around John, and it may well be that for some time they continued to urge people to submit to the baptism that symbolized repentance.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To John*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 209-210. Similarly, Keener comments, “the baptism of Jesus’ followers at this stage would have appeared to outsiders as merely a continuation of the Baptist’s practice by one of his former disciples.” Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel Of John: A Commentary*, Vol. I (Peabody, IL: Hendrickson, 2003), p. 578.

M. M. B. Turner sees the implications of Christ’s reproof of Nicodemus. He writes that birth of “water and spirit” is “a hendiadys which must refer to a unitary event (so not natural birth followed by spiritual birth or John’s baptism followed by reception of the Spirit, etc.), and it cannot be Christian baptism, of which Nicodemus could scarcely be expected to know.” M. M. B. Turner, “Holy Spirit,” in *Dictionary Of Jesus And The Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 348.

the Baptist's baptism of repentance. Regarding the first two of these ideas, no one has ever seriously suggested that Jesus taught the necessity of priestly consecration or repeated immersions in *mikva'oth* in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven — such ideas are utterly foreign to the context of Joh 3.5. Regarding the special first immersion of the *convert* to Judaism, the rabbis (of perhaps a later era) did speak of the proselyte as having been “born again” in the process of his conversion.²⁴⁷ However, if Jesus in his address to Nicodemus had meant to say, “you must be baptized like a proselyte,” this would have been tantamount to requiring Nicodemus to change religions by receiving (what could only be thought of as) “Christian baptism.” Such an interpretation of Jesus' words to Nicodemus is doubly absurd.

The remaining hypothetical alternative is that Jesus referred to the baptism of John when he spoke to Nicodemus about being “born of water.” Nicodemus would certainly have been aware of John the Baptist's activities at the Jordan, and of the crowds being baptized by him there. Furthermore, in the Gospel of John, the only two references to water that precede the story of Nicodemus (Joh 3.1-21) are those to the miraculous changing of the water to wine (Joh 2.6-9) and to the preaching of John the Baptist (Joh 1.26-33). Could Jesus have intended the baptism of John as the *referent* for “water” in Joh 3.5?

As we have noted, the baptism of John was a baptism of repentance, preparatory for the appearance of the Messiah. Some have interpreted, therefore, that the Lord's instruction to Nicodemus meant that one must *repent* (= be born of water) and be regenerated (= born of the Spirit) to “enter the Kingdom of God.”²⁴⁸ This interpretation seems reasonable at first, but does not hold up under careful scrutiny, as three objections present themselves. First, since both John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministries by preaching a message of repentance (Mat 3.3; 4.17), Jesus would have undoubtedly used the plain word *repent* if that had been His intended

²⁴⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1896), Appendix 12 “On The Baptism Of Proselytes.” See also Oskar Skarsaune, *In The Shadow Of The Temple* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 355-356.

²⁴⁸ Cf. M. S. Mills, *The Life Of Christ: A Study Guide to The Gospel Record* (Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries, 1999), §45.

meaning: Jesus would have said, “unless one repents and is born of the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”²⁴⁹

Secondly, to use *water* as a **metonym** for a “baptism of repentance” is to retain the connection between repentance and *the act* of baptism. This would have Jesus mean that one not only had to repent, but also undergo a baptism of repentance to “enter the Kingdom of God.” This sense of Christ’s words would contradict the general teaching of Scripture regarding the requisites for salvation, because (contrary to the beliefs of the early **Fathers** and their theological heirs) salvation does not depend upon any external rite.

Finally, to interpret the “water” of Joh 3.5 as referring to a baptism of repentance is to reverse the order of regeneration and its fruit: repentance flows from new birth, not vice versa.²⁵⁰ Had Jesus intended to teach both spiritual regeneration *and* a baptism of repentance, He would have reversed the order of His words, and said, “unless one is born of Spirit and of water....” More likely, He would have stated plainly, “unless one is born of the Spirit and receives a baptism of repentance, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” Repentance is unquestionably a vital evidence of regeneration, but to interpret Jesus as telling Nicodemus that a baptism of repentance is requisite to entering the Kingdom creates more exegetical problems than it solves.

THE WATER METAPHOR IN JOHN’S WRITINGS

However, if the “water” of Joh 3.5 does not refer to Christian baptism, nor priestly consecration, nor Jewish ritual washings, nor to a baptism of repentance, to what does it refer? To answer this question we must observe how Jesus used the word *water* in our Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of John. It will also help to see how *water* is used in another of John’s writings, the book of Revelation.

²⁴⁹ As someone else has put it, “...had Jesus actually wanted to say that one must be baptized to be saved, He clearly could have simply stated, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is baptized and born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” “Does John 3:5 teach that baptism is necessary for salvation?” *Got Questions?*, 2002-2009, <http://www.gotquestions.org/baptism-John-3-5.html> (accessed October 29, 2009).

²⁵⁰ For the order of repentance *following* new birth, I recommend Grudem’s chapter on “Regeneration,” in Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), p. 699 ff.

We can divide the NT use of the word *water* into two general categories: literal and metaphorical. Interestingly, whenever Jesus mentions water in the three synoptic Gospels, He always refers to literal H₂O. Only in the Gospel of John does Jesus use *water* in both its literal and metaphorical senses. This points to a purposeful intent behind John's choice to record those instances, ignored by the other evangelists, when Jesus used the word *water* metaphorically. Let us then, set aside the *water* statements in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and survey the use of this word in John's writings.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus said, "Fill the waterpots with water" (Joh 2.7). In that context Jesus clearly spoke literally. In Joh 3.5, however, the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus has to do with spiritual realities, and Jesus did not use the word *water* to speak of the material liquid *as such*. Rather, He used *water* as a metonym for something involving water *or* as a metaphor for something that is in some way like water. Likewise, in the encounter with the woman at the well (Joh 4 ^{NIVO}), Jesus spoke at length about the "living water" that contrasts with the literal water the woman had come to draw. "Whoever drinks the [living] water I give him will never thirst," Jesus said. "Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." In Joh 7.37-39 ^{NIVO}, Jesus echoed these words with His pronouncement "on the last and greatest day of the Feast" when He said, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Thankfully, John interprets the metaphor for us: "By this He meant the Spirit."²⁵¹

The words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman also echo in the statement of the elder in Revelation 7.17 ^{NIVO} who says, "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water." And again in Rev 21.6 ^{NIVO} when the Lord says, "To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life." Once more in Rev 22.17 ^{NIVO} Jesus or His Spirit says, "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

²⁵¹ It makes sense that only John records the sayings of Jesus that involve the *water* metaphor for the Spirit, because one of John's unique purposes for his Gospel was to teach a fully rounded pneumatology.

Notice that these references to “living water” in John’s writings allude to OT prophecies, particularly those of Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied about drawing water “from the springs of salvation” (Isa 12.3), and about the divine Shepherd who will “guide them to springs of water” (Isa 49.10). Isaiah also recorded the Lord’s invitation,

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (Isa 55.1-2 ^{NIVO}).

Again Isaiah said, “The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (Isa 58.11 ^{NIVO}). Like John, Isaiah did not leave us in the dark as to the meaning of the water metaphor. He recorded the Lord’s promise in Isa 44.3,

I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Isaiah’s *water* metaphor refers to God’s Spirit, and Isaiah was not alone in speaking of the Spirit in this way. In Jer 2.13 ^{NIVO} God speaks of Himself as “the spring of living water,” and Jeremiah echoes this truth in Jer 17.13 ^{NIVO}, “they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.” The Lord also spoke through Ezekiel saying, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, ... I will put my Spirit within you...” (Eze 36.25-27). This *water* metaphor in the prophets is a fitting symbol for the Spirit of God because only the Holy Spirit can give and sustain spiritual life, and only He can satisfy the spiritual thirst of the human heart. This was the metaphor — from the ancient yet familiar prophecies — that Jesus employed in His conversation with Nicodemus, and this was the meaning of *water* that Nicodemus should have understood when Jesus said, “unless one is born of *water* and *Spirit*...”

As E. W. Bullinger and others have observed, Jesus employed a *hendiadys* in Joh 3.5. A *hendiadys* (lit. *one by means of two*) is a common figure

of speech in Scripture that uses two nouns to amplify and emphasize a single idea. Generally, one noun identifies the idea and the other noun — even if it comes first in the sentence — is a metaphor that amplifies it. As in the prophets, then, and in the proclamation of Jesus in Joh 7.38, “water” in Joh 3.5 is a metaphor for “Spirit,” and thus “water and spirit” speak of a single idea, i.e., the inwardly vivifying and thirst-quenching agency of the Spirit. We could translate the words of Jesus this way:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water, that is, of the [life-giving agency of the] Spirit [which the prophets spoke of], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Or as some have translated more simply,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water, even *the* Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.²⁵²

As [E. W. Bullinger](#) explained, “that only one thing is meant by the two words [in Joh 3.5] is clear from verses 6 and 8, where only the Spirit (the one) is mentioned.”²⁵³ [Bullinger](#) observed correctly. Reading the entire passage of John 3 gives a contemporary reader the impression that the word *water* is out of place because it seems so disconnected from the context. This difficulty evaporates, however, when one realizes that Jesus recognized in Nicodemus what He later saw in the woman at the well, namely, a profound spiritual thirst. Jesus spoke to the very heart of the Pharisee’s need by referring him to the agency of the soul-nourishing Spirit, of which the prophets had spoken using the *water* metaphor.

Ironically, rather than pointing Nicodemus to a baptismal ritual, Jesus was steering this Jewish man *away from* those external water rites that were powerless to quench the inner thirst. If only the [Church Fathers](#) had understood this!

²⁵² Or alternatively, “...unless one is born of water *of the* Spirit ...” *Dictionary Of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper III Longman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 73.

²⁵³ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, (London; New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode; E. & J. B. Young & Co., 1898), p. 664.

ACT 22.16: THE POWER IS IN THE NAME.

Acts 22.12 “And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him. 14 “And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. 15 ‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 **‘And now why do you delay? Get up, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’**”

SYNOPSIS

The study of Acts 22.16 will surprise many by revealing that baptism has nothing directly to do with spiritual cleansing. One cannot be cleansed of sin by baptism, but only by calling upon the name of the Lord. Ananias did not urge baptism upon Paul for the cleansing of his sins, but as a step of commitment to Christ and His commission.

CALLING ON THE NAME

In the time of the apostles, it was hardly a new thing to call upon the name of the Lord. From the time of the patriarchs, God’s people habitually called on the name of the LORD in faith and worship, and sometimes in cries of desperation (Gen 4.26; 12.8; 13.4; 16.13; 21.33; 26.25). Elijah famously called on the name of the LORD for a sign to his nation, after the prophets of Baal had called on their god (1Ki 18.24). Naaman expected Elisha to “call on the name of the Lord” for his healing, i.e., he expected Elisha to invoke the name of the LORD, as he laid his hands upon, or waved them over, the spot of Naaman’s leprosy (2Ki 5.11). The Psalmist called upon the name of the Lord for deliverance (Psa 116.4), and in thanksgiving (Psa 116.13,17). And Joel prophesied that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joe 2.32 ^{NKJV}). Indeed, the **eschatological** Kingdom will bring the restoration of nations so “that they all may call on the name of the LORD” (Zep 3.9 ^{NKJV}).

We see from these passages that the phenomenon of “calling on the name of the Lord” cannot be limited to a formalized sinner’s prayer nor an invocation at the time of baptism. I once attended an Islamic retreat with a Muslim friend, and the attendees endeavored all weekend to convert me to their religion. They assured me repeatedly, “All you have to do to become a Muslim is go to the front of the room and confess, ‘There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet,’ and you are a Muslim!” The biblical idea of calling upon the name of the LORD differs from this. Certainly in the case of Christians, we cry out to God at the point of conversion and beseech His forgiveness in the name of Jesus, and at our baptism we publicly confess Christ and request His grace to remain faithful, but there is no creedal pronouncement that *effects* our conversion. Rather, “calling upon the name of the Lord” is a characteristic practice of the Christian that begins when we first ask God’s forgiveness and then continues as we call upon Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the grace we need to serve God faithfully each day. Likewise for the Jew of antiquity, rather than a creedal pronouncement that marked the moment of joining the redeemed community, “calling upon the name of the Lord” was a frequent, ongoing, expression of enduring relationship with the God of Israel.

It was this age-long custom that Peter had in view when he quoted Joel on the day of Pentecost. On that occasion Peter pointedly connected Joel’s words, “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved,” to his proclamation about Jesus of Nazareth. The Lord upon whose name we call is now manifestly the *Lord Jesus Christ* (Act 2.21). “Calling on the name of the Lord” now means devoting one’s life to Jesus.

Invoking the name of Jesus formulaically does not work for the unconverted, as the Jewish sons of Sceva so embarrassingly demonstrated (Act 19.13). However, “calling upon the name of the Lord” *is* an expression of the faith that saves apart from the works of the law. Paul also quoted Joel in his epistle to the Romans (10.12-13), saying,

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him, for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

Paul made the point that Gentiles as well as Jews could “call on the name,” because it is an act that seeks “the righteousness that comes from God” (Rom 10.3 ^{NIVO}), and does not require a righteousness based on race or on works. So then, “calling upon the name of the Lord” in the NT milieu is both an expression of saving faith at conversion, and a characteristic habit of the Christian life.

This background gives dimension to Ananias’ instruction to Paul. Ananias had just resisted the Lord’s instructions to himself, saying, “Lord, ... this man [Saul] ... has come here ... to arrest **all who call on your name**” (Act 9.13-14 ^{NIVO}). The fledgling messianic community in Damascus knew of Saul’s commission from the chief priests, and Saul himself would have thought in terms of arresting those heretics *who call on the name of Jesus* rather than upon the name of the true God of Israel. So now, for Ananias to urge Saul to “be baptized ... calling on **His** name,” the name of Jesus the Righteous One (Act 22.14-16), was to ask Saul to admit to having been profoundly misguided, and to now take a radical step of breaking with his past.

At first glance, it appears to the English reader that Ananias instructed Paul to do four things:

1. Get up
2. Be baptized
3. Wash away your sins
4. Call upon His (the Righteous One’s) name.

The first of these instructions, “get up,” translates the **aorist** participle ἀναστὰς, (ä-nä-’stäs), which can have the sense, “having gotten up,” and may just be a redundant idiom.²⁵⁴ However, the participle could express a mild command,²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ It may be the “Semitic redundant participle” (cf. Luk 5.14, “having gone, show yourself to the priest ...”). See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts Of The Apostles: The Greek Text With Introduction And Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951-1975), p. 403.

²⁵⁵ As Culy and Parsons note, sometimes “with an imperative main verb an attendant circumstance participle carries imperatival force.” Martin M.Culy, and Mikeal C.Parsons, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), p. 429.

and indicate that Ananias found Paul kneeling or prostrate in prayer (cf. Luk 17.19 where ἀναστὰς refers to a man who had thrown himself down at Christ's feet). Regardless, this instruction does not translate a main verb of the sentence like the two verbs that follow. Rather, like the fourth instruction ("having called upon his name"), also an aorist participle, it serves to adverbially add dimension to the two primary commands.

Those two main commands are:

1. Be baptized,
2. Wash away your sins.

Luke put these imperative verbs in the middle voice. Were they in the active voice, they would translate *baptize [someone]* and *wash away your sins [yourself]*. Were they in passive voice, they would mean *be baptized [by someone]* and *[let someone else] wash away your sins*. The middle voice, however, while not quite reflexive in meaning, makes the subject more active than passive. In this case, we can translate Ananias' imperatives as "get yourself baptized and get your sins washed away," or "have your sins washed away."²⁵⁶ In other words, Ananias does not tell Saul to baptize someone else, nor to baptize himself (as in most Jewish ritual immersions), but to submit to Christian baptism, a humbling and radical step for this recent persecutor. Nor does Ananias suggest that Saul can wash away his own sins, but that he must nevertheless take initiative in faith and repentance to receive cleansing from God (cf. 1Jo 1.9).

Now, we must observe that Ananias gave Saul *two distinct* instructions, not *one*. Ananias did not instruct Saul to wash away his sins by being baptized (as though the two commands were a verbal [hendiadys](#)).²⁵⁷ Rather, he instructed Saul to get baptized "calling on [Christ's] name" *and also* to have

²⁵⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts Of The Apostles: The Greek Text With Introduction And Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951-1975), p. 403. Also, F. F. Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts* (The New International Commentary On The New Testament), Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 418, note 22. Cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 662, and R. J. Knowling, *The Acts Of The Apostles*, Vol. II, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 459.

²⁵⁷ A *hendiadys*, a figure of speech in the NT that uses two words (joined by the conjunction καί) to emphasize a single idea, uses nouns, not verbs.

his sins washed away “calling on [Christ’s] name.” The phrase “calling on His name” modifies both instructions.²⁵⁸ The kind of baptism Saul needed was baptism in the name of Jesus. The kind of washing he needed could only be accomplished by calling on the name of the Lord in confession and repentance.²⁵⁹

BAPTISM NOT DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH CLEANSING OF SIN

Understanding that Ananias gave Saul two separate instructions tells us something very important about baptism in the NT: baptism is nowhere directly — let alone *causally* — associated with the cleansing of sin. It is natural to think that a religious ritual involving immersion in water would have *some* connotation of cleansing, and the Church Fathers could not resist making such a mental association (for reasons I will explain in [Part II](#)). Nevertheless, a quick computer search will show that Act 22.16 is the NT’s closest contextual approximation of the ideas of baptism and cleansing, and as we have seen, this passage presents the baptism and the cleansing as two distinct events, not one.²⁶⁰ In the other Scriptures used by the Fathers and their doctrinal heirs to associate baptism with spiritual cleansing, baptism “appears” only by *eisegesis*: *it has been read into the text*.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ The NLT connects “calling on the name of the Lord” only to “have your sins washed away.” The NLT renders Act 22.16, “What are you waiting for. Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.” This translation commendably separates baptism from the washing away of sins, but fails to grammatically link calling on the name with both the baptism and the washing. As Culy and Parsons state, “the syntax and semantics, which closely link the two imperatives, disallow taking [‘calling upon the name’] as a modifier of [‘wash’] alone and suggest that it instead introduces an attendant circumstance: the whole process of baptism, washing of sins, and calling on the Lord’s name is portrayed as a single complex event....” Martin M.Culy, and Mikeal C.Parsons, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), p. 429.

²⁵⁹ See the above examination of Act 2.38 regarding the consistent biblical teaching that forgiveness of sin flows from personal repentance.

²⁶⁰ We do well to note also that Act 22.16 is not in a propositional context nor part of an apostolic teaching, but simply the reported instructions given to Saul by an otherwise unknown Christian.

²⁶¹ Particularly in Eph 5.26 (e.g., *Cyp Epi* 75.2) and Tit 3.5 (e.g., *De Pec* 1.34 [XXIV]). The Fathers also read baptism into the following washing/cleansing passages: Psa 51.7 (*De Myst* 7.34); Isa 1.16 (*1Apo* 61; *Conf* 13.19.24); Eze 36.25-26 (*Cyp Epi* 69); Joh 13.5-14 (*Fab Epi* 2.1); Joh 13.10 (*Bap* 12; *De Bap* 2.14.19); Rev 7.9 (*Com Apoc* 7.9); Rev 7.14 (*Scorp* 12). Methodius read baptism *and* cleansing into the symbol of the moon in Rev 12.1 (*Banq* 8.6)!

If the [NT dissociation](#) of baptism and spiritual cleansing surprises the reader, let me confess that the dawning realization of it surprised me as well. In Christian circles, Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical, we have all our lives heard baptism associated with the washing away of sins — not just as synchronous events, but as events in which the one effects or at least symbolizes the other. The lack of [NT](#) evidence for this conceptual union so struck me that I began asking questions about the Jewish immersions which provided the cultural context from which Christian baptism emerged. In response, Messianic scholar, [Tim Hegg](#), assured me that cleansing is *not* inherently part of the meaning of Jewish ritual immersions. Instead, baptism primarily symbolizes “a change of status.”²⁶²

One might wonder why God chose an act so reminiscent of washing for our rite of consecration if the symbolism of the ritual has nothing directly to do with cleansing. The answer is that immersion in water was the best way to visually illustrate an Israelite’s break with the past, in that it reenacts both Noah traversing the flood (1Pe 3.21) and Israel traversing the sea (1Co 10.1-2). Furthermore, immersion dramatizes the basis for our most important change of status, i.e., dying to the old life and rising to the new (see [the discussion of Rom 6](#) above).

Consider the popular use of unity candles in today’s weddings. Two candles are lit at the beginning of the wedding ceremony and then later used to light a single larger candle. Finally, the two initial candles are extinguished to symbolize that what was once two has become one. In this little ritual, the idea of *burning* is not part of the symbolism. Fire is only used as a convenient medium by which to portray two becoming one (recently some brides and grooms have taken to combining two differently colored sands where open flames are not allowed). Likewise, in Jewish and Christian baptisms, water — while it undeniably washes the body even as a flame burns wax — is used not to symbolize *cleansing*, but to conveniently illustrate passage from one relational and spiritual state into another.²⁶³

²⁶² See Tim Hegg, *Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), p. 79.

²⁶³ Admittedly, this can get confusing since Leviticus mentions some bathings in association with rituals of cleansing. However, consider Lev 14, “the law of the leper in the day of his

Therefore, Act 22.16 does not point us to baptism as the means of moral cleansing, but points us instead to *calling upon the Name of the Lord* as the means of a salvation that includes the washing away of our sins.

cleansing.” The bath is just one part of a multi-step ritual, each step having its purpose and symbolism. There is a first clothes-washing, shaving and bath that is one step of the ritual cleansing (Lev 14.8), then a second shaving, clothes-washing and bath, the second step of the ritual cleansing (Lev 14.9), and finally an animal sacrifice and a complex anointing with oil that is the final step in the ritual cleansing. While the entire process moves toward the priestly pronouncement of “clean,” the bathings neither cured the leprosy nor rendered the subject ritually clean without the other parts of the ritual that include the blood sacrifice. The whole multi-step ceremony serves as a testimony to the leper’s antecedent healing, and the bathing part, while undoubtedly providing added hygiene, can be interpreted as symbolizing a change of status: the leper’s death to the diseased life, and readiness to reenter the community.

EPHESIANS 5.26: CHRIST WASHES US BY HIS WORD.

Eph 5.25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; 26 that He might sanctify her, **having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

SYNOPSIS

The [Fathers](#) read baptism into “the washing” of Eph 5.26, but this [eisegesis](#) was unwarranted. The context of the verse speaks of marriage, and to read baptism into the passage not only obfuscates Paul’s teaching about God’s Spirit and His word, but also veils the nuptial imagery by which Paul alluded to God’s betrothal of Israel, and by which he pointed his readers to God’s grace.

CLEANSED AT THE BAPTISMAL FONT ?

By AD 300, the idea of baptism’s supreme and efficacious importance had so conditioned the minds of the [Church Fathers](#) that in their quotations of Scripture they did not hesitate to translate λουτρόν (lü-'trōn) in Eph 5.26 with the word *laver* (baptismal font). [Methodius of Olympus](#), for example, in alluding to Eph 5.25-27, wrote that Christ suffered for the Church “that He might present the Church to Himself glorious and blameless, having cleansed her by the laver.”²⁶⁴ Ninety years later, [Chrysostom](#) had no doubt that Eph 5.26 spoke of the baptismal “laver” and that Paul’s phrase *the word* referred to the baptismal formula, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”²⁶⁵ About that same time, [Augustine](#) followed suit and mentioned Eph 5.26 as speaking of “the laver of the water in the word.”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ *Banq* 3.8. In the same paragraph, Methodius alludes to Tit 3.5 saying that the Church gives believers “new birth by the laver of regeneration.”

²⁶⁵ *Hom Eph* 20.

²⁶⁶ *Perf* 15.35.

The Greek word taken by the [Fathers](#) to mean “laver” is λουτρόν (lū-’trōn), and is used in our [Grk NT](#) only in this passage and in Tit 3.5. The [Fathers’](#) misunderstanding of this Bible word culminated in the [Vulgate’s](#) translation of it with the [Lat](#) word *lavacrum* (laver), in both Eph 5.26 and Tit 3.5. Thankfully, modern translators corrected this mistake. Our English Bibles unanimously and correctly translate λουτρόν with the word *washing*.

Now, [David Williams](#) says that the common meaning of λουτρόν (lū-’trōn) “from [Homer](#) to the [papyri](#)” was “‘a bath’ or ‘a bathing place’ ... rather than ... ‘an act of washing.’”²⁶⁷ Indeed, to be fair to the [Fathers](#), the [Hellenistic](#) culture *had used* the word λουτρόν to refer both to the act of bathing or washing and to “the place for a bath.”²⁶⁸ Consequently, even some recent expositors interpret the two [NT](#) occurrences of λουτρόν as referring to *the place* for a ceremonial bath, i.e., the baptismal laver. Vincent, for example, insisted that λουτρόν means “laver” in Eph 5.26, and argues that it alludes to baptism on the basis of the definite article, “*the* washing.”²⁶⁹ He made an ill-informed interpretive choice, however, as we shall see in the explanation of Paul’s “[Hebraically Stacked Modifiers](#)” below. More interestingly, [Carol Meyers](#) in the [ABD](#)²⁷⁰ says that λουτρόν “is the same as the [LXX](#) word for ‘lavers,’” but in this assertion she errs; the [LXX](#) uses the cognate word λουτήρ (lū-’tēr) for “laver.”²⁷¹ [Meyers](#), nevertheless, points us to the real lexical issue: since the word λουτρόν in [Grk](#) literature can refer to *either* the place for a bath or to the washing itself, the

²⁶⁷ Williams seems to concede that λουτρόν could mean either “washing place” or “act of washing” in Eph. David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context And Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 70, n. 35.

²⁶⁸ See Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 60. The OTP illustrate our problem with the word λουτρόν for they sometimes use it to mean the act of bathing and sometimes to mean the bathing pool. The *Sibylline Oracles*, while of doubtful influence on the NT, nevertheless, use λουτρόν once in describing the fall of the stars (heavenly powers) into the ocean (Sib 5.530). In this reference, λουτρόν certainly has no reference to lavers but only to the potentially extinguishing “waters” or “baths” of the ocean. In *Poet* 4.2 (BW), the plural, λουτροῖς clearly speaks of pools, as λουτροῖς does also in *Trag* 1.20. The Apostolic Fathers did not use the word λουτρόν, but only its cognate λούω (“wash”) in quoting from Isa 1 (1Cl 8.4).

²⁶⁹ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1886), p. 402.

²⁷⁰ See the article on “Laver.”

²⁷¹ W. E. Vine notes this in his comments on Tit 3.5. W. E. Vine, *The Collected Writings Of W. E. Vine* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

important thing for us is to discover how Scripture uses the word, especially in the writings most closely related to Paul's.

Sadly, though, the word λουτρόν (lü-'trōn) occurs only four times in the Bible. The only occurrences of λουτρόν in the [LXX](#) appear in Song 4.2 and 6.6, where the noun refers poetically to the washing of sheep. In these two occurrences, λουτρόν translates the Heb noun רַחֲצָה (räch-'tsäh). While this [Heb](#) noun only occurs in these two verses, its related verb רָחַץ (rä-'chäts) appears throughout the [OT](#), often in reference to ritual washings of people and of sacrificial animals.²⁷² Therefore, in spite of the rarity of the word λουτρόν in the [OT](#), we can infer from its occurrences in Song that the [LXX](#) translators intended it to connote the idea of ritual *washing*. In Song, λουτρόν clearly speaks of *a washing* (rather than a washing place), and the [LXX](#) translators probably intended this word choice to point subtly to the ritual cleanliness of the bride who immerses herself before her wedding. If Paul had these two [OT](#) occurrences of λουτρόν in mind when he wrote Eph 5.26 and Tit 3.5, the connotations of the word for him would have been twofold: (1) ritual washing, and (2) bridal sanctity.

In lieu of further canonical occurrences of λουτρόν (lü-'trōn), let us take the liberty of looking at the single instance that occurs in the [Apocrypha](#). The apocryphal *Wisdom Of Ben Sira* (Sir 34.25) says,

One baptizing himself for [touching] a dead body, and [then] touching it again, what did he benefit in his washing (λουτρόν).²⁷³

The word λουτρόν in this case refers back to the act of ritual immersion (“baptizing himself”), and is referred to with the pronoun *his*, making it unequivocally a reference to actual washing, not to the bathing pool. Also, at the end of this verse from Sir, the [Grk](#) phrase includes the definite article: “in

²⁷² See 2150 in *TWOT*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980).

²⁷³ My translation. The Vulgate translates λουτρόν (lü-'trō) in Sir 34.30 (= [LXX](#) 34.25) with *lavatio*. The primary meaning of this Latin word is “a washing,” but it suffers from the ambiguity of the [Grk](#) λουτρόν because by transference it *can mean* “bathing apparatus” or “bathing place.”

the washing his.” Contrary to Vincent’s interpretation of Eph 5.26, therefore, the definite article *does not* necessarily point to a “well known” λουτρόν, and does not at all identify the λουτρόν with the baptismal laver. Granted, this passage does associate λουτρόν with what the text calls a baptism, but let us not miss the point: λουτρόν in this case does not speak of a pool or font, but of the washing or immersion itself.

So then, on the basis of our admittedly scant lexical evidence, it appears unjustified to identify λουτρόν (lü-'trōn) in the [NT](#) with a baptismal laver. However, we must still ask whether λουτρόν in Eph 5.26 refers nonetheless to a baptism (perhaps as in the Sir passage just mentioned). After all, the [OT](#) occurrences of λουτρόν in Song seem to root back to ideas of *ritual washing*. Might have Paul at least *alluded* to Christian baptism in this verse?

That we even have to ask this question shows how we have been conditioned to associate baptism with spiritual washing or cleansing. However, as we have seen above in connection with the baptisms of [Jesus](#) and [Paul](#), Christian baptism and its precursory Jewish immersions had no inherent symbolism of spiritual cleansing. Yes, the Jewish immersions could involve some external washing, but the immersion was never thought to convey spiritual cleansing, and it is precisely *spiritual cleansing* that Eph 5.26 describes.

Let’s be honest: Eph 5.26 makes *no explicit mention of baptism*.²⁷⁴ This passage tells how *Christ* cleansed His bride, and we surely dishonor our Lord when we instead attribute the cleansing to *a ritual*! Remember that baptism is a shadow, not the substance (as per [the exposition of 1Pe 3.21](#) above). When we read about a spiritual cleansing in scripture, it is absurd to immediately make an association with a distant [type](#), rather than with the reality immediately in view. The “washing of water” in Eph 5.26 is itself a metaphor, and rather than letting it direct our minds to another metaphor (i.e., baptism),

²⁷⁴ Expositors recognize Eph 5.26 as one of a handful of passages in which a reference to baptism is “disputed” at best. See “Baptism,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas and D. R. W. Wood (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

we must ask ourselves: to what important reality does the “washing of water” refer?

THE REALITY BEHIND “THE WASHING OF WATER”

Hebraically Stacked Modifiers

In his epistles, the apostle Paul often described a thing or an action with prepositional phrases *stacked on top of each other with increasing specificity*. This stacking of modifying phrases is a familiar **Hebraic** grammatical construction used by the biblical and **apocryphal** authors and by the translators of the **LXX**.²⁷⁵ Let us examine two instances in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians in which he uses stacked modifiers to precisely define *the means of an action*.

The first instance, in Eph 4.14, would read as follows in an amplified translation:

... being carried about by every wind, [by that kind of wind which consists] of teaching, by [teaching that is] trickery of men ...

In Eph 5.26, a similar construction of stacked modifiers would, if fully amplified, read like this:

... having cleansed her by the washing, [a washing] of water, by [that water which is] the word.

This grammatical construction — i.e., stating a thing or an action, and then using prepositional phrases to modify it with increasing specificity — occurs throughout the Scriptures. The important thing to observe about the construction is that it places the most specific modifier at the top of the stack, making it the key to identifying the thing, or to understanding the action, in view. While in English we tend to state the most specific modifier of a thing or event first (e.g., “...their village was aided by *Christian* missionaries, from the city of Tacoma, in the United States), a **Hebraic** construction would *build up* to the key modifier of the thing or event and state it last (“their village received

²⁷⁵ For a full discussion of this syntactical phenomenon, and to see other examples of its use, please see Appendix 1.

aid from the United States, from the city of Tacoma, through missionaries who were *Christians*").

Paul did this with the stacked phrases at the end of Eph 4.14 and 5.26: the final phrases identify specifically what accomplishes the action. In the first instance, what carries people away is "human trickery." In the second instance, what cleansed the Church was "the word." In Eph 5.26 the focus is not upon the middle modifier of the action ("of water") but upon the final modifier ("by the word"). Therefore, Paul did not refer to "water being accompanied by the word" (as might be implied by the preposition *with* in the [NAU](#)),²⁷⁶ but instead used *water* as a metaphor to emphasize the life-giving agency of the instrument that accomplished the cleansing, namely, *the word*. Paul's theology and poetic imagery, both of which consistently point us to divine rather than [sacramental](#) agency in redemptive events, confirm this interpretation of Eph 5.26, and preclude any reference to baptism in this passage.

Christ Did The Cleansing

Beginning with this very context, Paul tells us explicitly that Christ is the one who did the cleansing. Eph 5.25-26 says, "...Christ ... gave himself up for her ... having cleansed her ..." *Christ did the cleansing*. The only question, then, is whether Christ used water or a water ritual to mediate that cleansing. Does Christ cleanse the Church *with* or *by* something extraneous to Himself, or does the "washing of water" in Eph 5.26 refer to a spiritual reality accomplished directly by the Lord Himself?

Paul answers the question for us in 1Co 6.11. To the Corinthians, he identifies the cleansing and sanctifying agent unequivocally, not as water, but as the "Spirit of our God."

And that is what some of you were. But **you were washed**, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and **by the Spirit of our God.** [\(NIVO\)](#)

²⁷⁶ Some authorities argue for interpreting the preposition *ἐν* as referring to an *accompanying* word, but they have failed to recognize the force of the grammatical construction of stacked modifiers. See Glenn Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed., (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008).

This passage, 1Co 6.11, inevitably enters our study of baptism because a number of expositors have also thought that *it* alludes to baptism with the words “you were washed.”²⁷⁷ Again, such thinking shows how conditioned Christians are by *baptismism*. Why, in the face of a clear statement about being washed “*by the Spirit of our God*,” do we want to attribute our washing to a religious ritual? Honest exegetes must admit that in 1Co 6.11, the phrase “by (or *in*) the Spirit of our God,” means that the washing, as well as the sanctification and justification,²⁷⁸ “were effected by the agency of God’s Spirit ... the Spirit is the means by which God accomplishes [this work] in a believer.”²⁷⁹ Granted that Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as though He were a cleansing agent *like water*, but the “washing” of 1Co 6.11 does not refer to baptism; it refers to “the spiritual transformation effected by the Spirit of God.”²⁸⁰

Let us also remind ourselves at this juncture that the spiritual washing with which we’re concerned is the removal of sin and guilt. In other words, “washing” in this context is synonymous with the forgiveness (remission) of sin. Bearing this in mind, we will recall that Paul assures us that our forgiveness (and therefore our spiritual washing) does not come by baptism, but “through [Christ’s] blood” (Eph 1.7).

Paul echoes part of his Eph 5 teaching in Tit 2.13-14 where he speaks of how “Christ Jesus ... gave Himself for us ... to purify for Himself a people ...” While this Titus passage does not speak explicitly of the forgiveness or expiation of sin, such forgiveness is clearly in view, and Paul here uses the

²⁷⁷ Leithart cites Beasley-Murray’s claim that “scholars unanimously hold that this text [1Co 6.11] is baptismal,” but such a claim is manifestly false. Leithart goes on to defend his belief that 1Co 6.11 speaks of baptism with the evidence that (1) the aorist verb forms used in the verse “may denote a decisive event at a particular past moment,” and (2) the verse mentions the “name” of Christ and the Spirit, both of which are “often associated with baptism.” It is obvious “baptismism” to offer such evidence *as if* it did not apply equally well or better to the “decisive event” of conversion (or regeneration) itself. See Peter J. Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), p. 108.

²⁷⁸ In the Grk text, the threefold conjunction, “*but* you were washed, *but* you were sanctified, *but* you were justified,” joins all three terms (*washed*, *sanctified*, and *justified*) as modified by the following, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.”

²⁷⁹ So, Alford, Mare, Barrett, Hodge, Bruce, Lenski, Fee and others, as cited in Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary Of 1 Corinthians 1-9* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008).

²⁸⁰ Alford, Mare, Barrett, Hodge, Bruce, Lenski, Fee and others, as cited *ibid*.

same [Grk](#) verb, καθάρίζω (kā-thä-'rē-zō), as in Eph 5.26 where we translate it “cleansed.” As in Eph 5.25-26, the purification or cleansing of Tit 2.14 flows directly from Christ’s sacrifice of Himself, not from our participation in a ritual. For Paul, any cleansing, purifying or sanctifying that happens to God’s people derives from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and is accomplished by God Himself (1Th 5.23), by the agency of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15.16; 1Co 6.11).²⁸¹

Why then does the idiomatic statement of Eph 5.26 throw its focus upon “the word”?

The Cleansing Water Of Words

Some expositors have interpreted the “word” (ῥῆμα, 'rē-mə) in Eph 5.26 as referring to a baptismal invocation.²⁸² Such an interpretation is unwarranted, however, because in this epistle Paul uses ῥῆμα to mean the surgically effective word of God, the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6.17). In Eph 5.26, then, the ῥῆμα is the word that comes directly from the mouth of God, mediated by the Spirit to bring about cleansing faith (cf. Rom 10.8,17; Eph 1.13). In other words, this ῥῆμα is the gospel that “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1.16).

This idea of spiritual cleansing by God’s word (or words) appears repeatedly in the Scriptures and has nothing to do with baptismal formulas.²⁸³ Jesus told his disciples, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (Joh 15.3).²⁸⁴ On the same night He prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth” (Joh 17.17 [NIV0](#)).

The Jewish exegete [Philo](#) also utilized the idea of verbal cleansing.²⁸⁵ One instance in [Philo’s](#) writings is very helpful for interpreting Eph 5.26. In

²⁸¹ The book of Hebrews supports Paul’s teaching on this matter. Levitically speaking, “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9.22), and now “the blood of Christ” cleanses (καθαρίζω) our consciences “from dead works” (Heb 9.14). According to the writer of Hebrews, Christ Himself made purification for our sins (Heb 1.3).

²⁸² An example from antiquity is Marius Victorinus, *Com Eph* 2.5.25-26, cited in ACCOSNT, Vol. 8, p. 196. Also cf. Tertullian, *Bap* 4. Of various current authors, an example is A. Skevington Wood on “Ephesians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

²⁸³ See for example Psa 119.9,11.

²⁸⁴ As we will see below, the word also regenerates (Jam 1.18; 1Pe 1.23).

²⁸⁵ Nor is the idea foreign to the Apostolic Fathers as we see in *Hermas Visions* 3.8.11:

Planter 162, he wrote of those who “purified their bodies and souls, the former with baths (λουτροῖς, lü-'trēs), and the latter with waters (ῥεῦμασι, 'rēv-mā-sē) of laws and of right instruction.”²⁸⁶ Note the metaphor “waters” in this text. In the sentence, it is grammatically parallel with and contrasted to our now familiar noun λουτρόν (lü-'trōn). How significant! This is an instance in **Hellenistic** writing where λουτρόν does mean “laver” or “bathing pool,” but only bodies are purified in these lavers, while souls are purified in “waters (lit. *streams*) of laws and right instruction.” For **Philo**, H₂O baths cannot cleanse souls.

Not only **Philo's** philosophy of spiritual cleansing, but also his use of idiom is important for us here. “Waters” (or “streams”) stands for a cleansing agent, the identity of which is specified by the *following modifiers*, “laws” and “right instruction.” This parallels Paul’s use of the *water* metaphor in Eph 5.26, where “water” is a cleansing agent, the exact nature of which is specified by the following prepositional phrase, “with the word.” We find support from contemporary Jewish usage, therefore, to interpret Eph 5.26b as meaning, “having cleansed her by the washing of a cleansing agent *which is the word*.”²⁸⁷

THE NUPTIAL IMAGERY

Still, if in Eph 5.26 Paul has the cleansing work of God’s Spirit and God’s word in mind, why does he use the imagery of “water” and the metaphor “washing of water” instead of just saying, “having cleansed her by the word”? The answer:

“...speak all the words ... into the ears of the saints, that hearing them and doing them, they may be cleansed ...”

²⁸⁶ Philo, *Planter* 162. The word ῥεῦμα ('rēv-mā or 'rū-mā in Erasmian pronunciation) is the root for our English word for a watery discharge from eyes or nose.

²⁸⁷ As H. A. A. Kennedy commented, “The most notable feature in the passage is the phrase ἐν ῥήματι [in the word], which no doubt must be interpreted, as in Romans 10.8,17, of the proclamation of the Gospel.” H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions* (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), p. 252. This idiomatic use of *water* as a metaphor for an abstract cleansing agent seems to have endured at least till the time of Maimonides (AD 1135-1204). In *Yad, Mikva'ot* 11.12 the great sage wrote, “... one who sets his heart on cleansing himself from the uncleannesses that beset men’s souls ... becomes clean as soon as he consents in his heart to hear those counsels and brings his soul into **the waters of pure reason**.” Cited in Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle To The Romans, Vol. 1; Chapters 1-8*, (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2005), p. 134, emphasis mine. Again we see that “waters” is a metaphor for a cleansing agent, specified by the following modifier(s) as “pure reason.”

Paul is using nuptial imagery (cf. Eze 16.8-10).²⁸⁸ The larger context (Eph 5.22-33) is about wives honoring their husbands, and husbands loving their wives. To drive the message home for the husbands, Paul points them to the sacrificial love of Christ for the Church, and mentions the matter of Christ “having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present [her] to Himself ... in all her glory.” [Craig Keener](#) explains that with “washing of water” Paul calls to mind Jewish marriage practices:

This “washing” probably alludes figuratively to the bride’s prenuptial washing After this washing the bride was perfumed, anointed and arrayed in wedding clothes. The betrothal ceremony in Judaism also came to be called “the sanctification of the bride,” setting her apart for her husband.”²⁸⁹

Realizing that Paul is using nuptial imagery in Eph 5.26 further illuminates his use of the phrase “with the word.” As Markus Barth wrote, the ῥῆμα (‘rē-mə) “refers to the pronouncement by the Bridegroom which legally binds the bride to himself...”²⁹⁰

In Eph 5.26, Paul not only alludes to Jewish marriage practices in general, but to God’s “betrothal” of unfaithful Jerusalem (Israel) in particular.²⁹¹ As recorded in Eze 16.3-9,

Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem, ... “you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became

²⁸⁸ As H. A. A. Kennedy wrote, “The language used has an obvious reference to the lustration of the bride before marriage. The notion of a baptism of the ἐκκλησία is plainly metaphorical.” H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions* (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), pp. 251-252. Paul’s betrothal imagery in this epistle may begin with the use of “pledge” (ἄρραβών, Eph 1.14) which can allude to “the token of our ‘betrothal,’ given in anticipation of our ‘marriage’ at the return of Christ.” See David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context And Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 53. Why Paul develops the Bride-of-Christ idea in this epistle more than elsewhere may have to do with the great perversion of sex, womanhood and marriage emanating from Ephesus, a capital of Artemis/Diana worship.

²⁸⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993). Greek brides also “would often bathe in a stream sacred to a god or goddess to be cleansed of impurity — in a moral or religious sense, the literal washing symbolizing the inner purification.” David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context And Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 54.

²⁹⁰ Markus Barth, “Ephesians” in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 34A, as cited in Glen H. Graham, *An Exegetical Summary Of Ephesians*, 2nd Edition (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008).

²⁹¹ *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Vol. III, IV vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 333-334.

Mine,” declares the Lord GOD. “Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil.”

In other words, by choosing the particular phraseology that he did in Eph 5.26, Paul emphasizes that the Church is *the bride* that Christ betrothed to Himself by acts every bit as gracious as those by which God betrothed unworthy Israel to Himself. The point Paul makes is that if Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for an unworthy bride *with a view to her eventual perfection*, so also ought husbands to sacrificially love their wives, regardless of their worthiness, *for the sake of Christ’s sanctifying work in them*. What a pity it is when expositors obfuscate this nuptial imagery, and its deep expression of God’s grace, by an unwarranted fixation on baptism.

CONCLUSION: EISEGESIS AGAIN

No good reason compels us to read baptism into the “washing of water with the word” in Eph 5.26. On the contrary, the context gives us good reasons to *not* think of Christian baptism. Paul in this description of Christ’s redeeming love speaks of the Church corporately, not of the experience of individual Christians, and “baptism in water can only be applied to individuals, not to the church as a whole.”²⁹² Also, in Ephesians, baptism for Paul is a symbol of unity (Eph 4.4-6), not cleansing, even as “the word” is God’s word (Eph 6.17), not a baptismal invocation.

David J. Williams, echoes many other authors when he says in connection with Eph 5.26 that “Paul’s readers could hardly have failed to see in the bath an allusion to baptism — baptism being, as it were, the symbolic precursor to their union with Christ.”²⁹³ I disagree. I would not call baptism a precursor of any kind to our “union with Christ”! More importantly, I don’t believe that the Ephesian Christians, having been extensively taught by Paul, would have read Eph 5.26 and immediately thought of baptism. Instead, they would have mentally tracked with Paul’s marriage analogies. When reading of “the washing of water” they would have thought of the bridal tradition of

²⁹² Markus Barth, “Ephesians” in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 34A, as cited in Glen H. Graham, *An Exegetical Summary Of Ephesians*, 2nd Edition (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008).

²⁹³ David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context And Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), p. 55.

bathing before the wedding, and then, reading the phrase “by the word,” they would have thought, “ah, yes, as the bride is purified before her marriage, so the Lord is purifying the Church *by His word* in preparation for His coming.”

Those who find a reference to baptism in Eph 5.26 do so by [eisegesis](#), reading into the text what is not there. What *is* there — and what we must not obscure — is beautiful nuptial imagery, conveying strong teaching about the power of God’s Spirit, God’s word, and God’s *grace*.

TITUS 3.4-7: THE HOLY SPIRIT WASHES US BY REGENERATION.

Titus 3.4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy **He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (NKJ)

SYNOPSIS

The early Church Fathers read baptism into the “washing of regeneration” of Tit 3.5. However, this passage does not speak of baptism at all but of the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit. As Eph 5.26 emphasized the agency of the word in the cleansing of the Church, Tit 3.5 emphasizes the agency of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. To attribute to an external ritual what only the Holy Spirit can accomplish profoundly dishonors our God.

The Fathers read Tit 3.5 to mean that:

God saved us ... through *[water] baptism that regenerates* and a renewing by the Holy Spirit...²⁹⁴

In fact, the Church Fathers appropriated the phrase “washing of regeneration” in this verse and made the word *washing* (λουτρόν, lü-'trōn) a reference to their *lavers*, i.e., their baptismal fonts. Time after time the patristic writings glory in “the *laver* of regeneration.”²⁹⁵ The Hellenistic culture *had* sometimes used

²⁹⁴ Cf. Cyp *Epi* 73.6.

²⁹⁵ For examples, *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 7, “Catechumens”; 8, “The Divine Liturgy”; Irenaeus, *Adv Haer* 5.15; Tertullian, *Mod* ch. I; Theophilus of Antioch, *Auto* 2.16; Hippolytus, *Theoph* 10; *Chr-Ant* 59; *Com Prov* (comment of Pro 30.16); Cyprian, *Epi* 73.5;

the word λουτρόν to refer to “the place for a bath,” but to make Tit 3.5 refer to the baptismal font is [hermeneutically](#) untenable.²⁹⁶ To see the falsity of this interpretation, consider seven things about the passage:

1. The passage spotlights God our Savior, i.e., Jesus Christ, as the author of salvation. Paul neither emphasizes a ritual nor our participation in it, but explicitly points *away from* “works of righteousness which we have done.”
2. [Regeneration](#) in this passage is equivalent to *birth* or [new birth](#) in other NT passages. Related scriptures confirm that it is the Holy Spirit, i.e., God Himself, who spiritually births us (Joh 3.6,8; 1Pe 1.3) by the power of His word (Jam 1.18; 1Pe 1.23). The overshadowing power of God, rather than the water of baptism, is the matrix of our [rebirth](#) (Joh 1.13); we are born directly “of God” (1Jo 2.29; 3.9; 4.7; 5.4; 5.18).
3. The “washing of [regeneration](#)” and the “renewing of the Holy Spirit” in this passage are not two different things, but rather two *aspects* of the same event expressed in a [hendiadys](#): washing (of regeneration) = renewal (of the Holy Spirit).
4. Aside from the [KJV](#) and [NKJ](#), other English translations have confused us by inconsistently translating the prepositions in the phrase, “washing **of** regeneration and renewal **of** the Holy Spirit.” Notice that the [NAS](#), [NIVO](#), and others translate, “**of** regeneration **by** the Holy Spirit.” However, in the [Grk](#) text, both the nouns [regeneration](#) and *Spirit* are in the same [genitive case](#) (the case of possession, or kind) and in the same relationship to the nouns they modify. We see this clearly in the simplified sentence diagram below.

Treat 9.6; Methodius of Olympus, *Banq* 3.8; 8.6; Origen, *Com Mat* 13.27; *Com Joh* 6.17. In fairness to the Fathers, there were apparently non-biblical writings that used the word λουτρόν to refer to “the place for a bath” (see Ferguson, p. 60). The Latin Vulgate, a product of the patristic age, translates with the word *lavacrum* (laver) in both Eph 5.26 and Tit 3.5. Some more recent expositors seem to have been influenced by the Fathers’ use of λουτρόν and so also interpret the two NT occurrences as referring to the baptismal laver.

²⁹⁶ For a fuller examination of the word λουτρόν see the examination of Eph 5.26 [above](#).

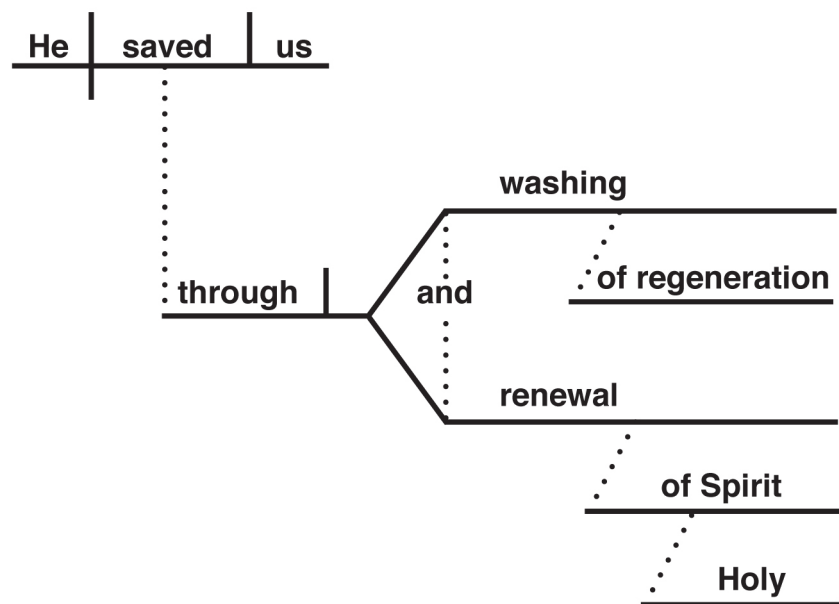


Figure 8

By default, we translate **genitive** nouns with the preposition **of**, if the context does not dictate otherwise.²⁹⁷ In the above diagram, therefore, I’ve temporarily used the standard preposition and rendered our key words “**of** regeneration,” and “**of** Spirit.” However, in this instance, both genitive nouns, *regeneration* and *Spirit*, are what we call “**genitives** of production/producer” and so we can translate more specifically, “*produced by* regeneration” and “*produced by* Spirit.” Now we can amplify the translation of our simplified sentence from Tit 3.5 this way:

He saved us through a washing *produced by* regeneration and a renewal *produced by* the Holy Spirit.

This rendering, while not in the most elegant English, makes good sense. The Lord saved us through a washing away of our foolishness, disobedience, deception and slavery to lusts (Tit 3.3), and this washing occurred when we became “a new creation” and “*the old things passed away*” (2Co 5.17). Now, that’s a washing! Another way to say it is that

²⁹⁷ For a description of the different kinds of genitives in the NT, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

we experienced a complete personal “renewal *produced by* the Holy Spirit.”

The problem arises when translators try to make our key nouns into two different kinds of **genitives**. While most have realized that the second noun, *Spirit*, is a “**genitive** of production/producer” many have been influenced by their presuppositions about baptism and have made the first noun, *regeneration*, a “**genitive** of product” (making **regeneration** the product of the washing). This mixing of **genitives** would result in the following translation (if it were fully spelled out):

... a washing *which produced* **regeneration** and a renewal
produced by the Holy Spirit ...

This would be a heretical translation, since the **NT** is clear in attributing **regeneration** directly to God, not to an external washing. Hence, translators have retained the general and ambiguous preposition *of* for the phrase “washing *of* regeneration,” and slipped in the genitive-of-production/producer preposition *by* for the phrase “renewal *by* the Holy Spirit.” This allows readers to interpret “washing *of* regeneration” according to their individual doctrinal bias.

However, Paul’s sentence structure provides no justification for this mixing of **genitives**. We must read both nouns as **genitives** of production/producer, or as **genitives** of product, not split them into one of each. We know we can’t read them both as **genitives** of product, because that would result in this absurd translation:

... a washing *which produced* regeneration and a renewal *which produced* the Holy Spirit ...

Many of the Church **Fathers** and their doctrinal heirs believed that baptism produced (or effected) **regeneration**, but no one has ever believed that our renewal produced the Holy Spirit! Therefore, we must recognize that the matched pair of **genitives** describing our salvation in this text are **genitives** of production/producer, and understand that the “washing” is not baptism; it is the spiritual cleansing *produced by* **regeneration**.

5. The [NLT](#) removes all ambiguity by rendering Tit 3.5 very freely with, “... He washed away our sins, giving us new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.” While this paraphrase obscures Paul’s precision, it produces a technically correct meaning, and arguably does the reader a service by eliminating anything that could misleadingly hint at [baptismal regeneration](#).
6. Though the [Grk](#) term translated *washing* in this text, λουτρόν (lū-’trōn), is a cognate of the more common verb λούω (’lū-ō) used in the [LXX](#) for the Levitical ceremonial washings, the word λουτρόν only appears four times in the Bible, five if we count the [Apocrypha](#). The two [OT](#) instances occur in Song 4.2 and 6.6 where it refers to the washing of sheep. The other [NT](#) use occurs in Eph 5.26 where it refers to the cleansing power of God’s word (see [comments regarding Eph 5.26](#) above). We have no warrant, therefore, to take this occurrence of λουτρόν in Tit 3.5 as a [metonym](#) for baptism.
7. Paul made no explicit mention of baptism in this passage. Those predisposed to the belief that baptism has cleansing power have read the idea of baptism into the text.

The early Church [Fathers](#) undoubtedly *meant well* in their handling of scriptures like Tit 3.5. They surely did their best to correctly interpret and make application of such passages, and did so under much less tranquil circumstances than ours (and with relatively limited academic resources). Since they and their congregations could be severely persecuted for practicing Christian baptism, they took the subject of baptism very seriously, and did not *frivolously* interpret Joh 2.3, Eph 5.26, Tit 3.5, etc., as pertaining to the rite. Nevertheless, by reading baptism into biblical passages that do not speak of it, they have bequeathed to their doctrinal heirs the unintentionally irreverent idea that an external rite effects what only the Spirit of God can accomplish.

1 CORINTHIANS 12.13 AND EPHESIANS 4.4-6: BAPTISM AND BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT UNITE US.

1Co 12.13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Eph 4.4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

SYNOPSIS

Expositors have constantly misinterpreted 1Co 12.13 as referring not only to water baptism, but to water baptism as *a rite of initiation*. However, in this passage Paul spoke of Spirit baptism, not water baptism. Furthermore, he did not refer to baptism as an *initiation* in *any* of his epistles; religious *initiation* is an idea foreign to the NT but absorbed into early Christian thought from the pagan *mystery religions*.

Once we eject the supposed references to water baptism and *initiation* from 1Co 12.13, we will see Paul's true emphasis in the verse. The apostle pointedly argued that the unity of the Spirit (the Spirit being the one and only source of charismatic gifting and empowering) attests to the unity and interdependency of the diverse members of the Body. Paul later echoed this argument for unity in Eph 4.3-6. In Eph 4.5, Paul *did* refer to water baptism, and just as he used baptism in the Spirit in 1Co 12.13, he used water baptism in Eph 4.5 as an argument for the unity of the Christian congregation.

What these passages teach us about Christian baptism, then, is that baptism (whether in the Spirit or in water) should unify those who believe in Jesus.²⁹⁸

POLLUTION IN THE BAPTISTERY

Christians of our time tend to read 1Co 12.13 as referring to *initiation* into the Church through the agency of the Holy Spirit by water baptism. This reading comes naturally to our minds, but only because we have been conditioned by

²⁹⁸ The irony of this will not be lost on students of Christian history who are aware of the many divisions that have arisen within Christianity over the doctrines of baptism and of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

foreign presuppositions absorbed into the church centuries ago. The chief problem with our “natural” interpretation of 1Co 12.13 has to do with one of the most fundamental of those extraneous presuppositions, namely, the false idea that *religious initiation is a biblical custom*.

Today, we often use the word *initiate* in its most rudimentary meaning of “beginning something” or “welcoming someone into the membership of a group.” When that group is a local church, *initiation* may come to mind as a word to describe a person’s introduction or induction into the membership. Fine, no problem, but stop and consider what religious *initiation* meant in antiquity. Historically the verb *to initiate* was always used ecclesiastically in association with a ritual or rituals, and had a more technical meaning derived from the pagan *mystery religions* (we’ll examine those secretive cults more thoroughly in [Part II](#) of this book).²⁹⁹ That technical meaning of the verb *to initiate* is: “to induct a member into a sect or society by rites, ceremonies, ordeals or instructions.” We must understand that this kind of *initiation* (by ancient religious definition) is considered the effective means by which a person is incorporated into his or her new faith and by which he or she is *saved*. In biblical Christianity, Christ saves us and incorporates us into His Church by virtue of His atoning work and by the agency of His Holy Spirit, His word, and the gift of faith. In the *mystery religions*, it was *initiation* instead, with its baptisms and other rites, that saved a person and incorporated him or her into their new religious body. As Gordon C. Neal writes, “*initiation* ... promised salvation now or bliss hereafter....”³⁰⁰

However, the Bible contains no such teaching of salvation by *initiation*. In fact, the *NT* contains no passage at all about *initiation* into the Church, the Body of Christ.³⁰¹ The apostles wrote much about how to be saved, about how

²⁹⁹ Secret rites of initiation were so integral to the mystery religions that these cults hijacked the word for *secret* (μυστικός, mē-stē-’kōs) and its cognates. To this day, μυσταγωγία (mē-stā-gō-’yē-ə) remains a current Greek word for an initiation, μυσταγωγός (mē-stā-gō-’gōs) for the initiator, and μύστης (’mē-stēs) for the initiate. See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 251, for the relationship between the technical and general use of these terms.

³⁰⁰ “...and it certainly gave the security and identity of belonging.” Gordon C. Neal, “Mystery Religions,” in *The New International Dictionary Of The Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978).

³⁰¹ R. A. Falconer mistakenly understands the verb τελειώω (tē-lē-’ō-ō) in Phil 3.12 as meaning

God justifies sinners, and about the prerequisites for entering the Kingdom of God. The Scriptures record exhortations to repent, to believe, and to “be saved from this perverse generation” (Act 2.40). They provide much teaching on “how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the Church” (1Ti 3.15). The idea of [initiation](#), however, never appears.³⁰² Jesus and the apostles concerned themselves neither with [initiation](#) into the Church, nor with an [initiatory](#) rite. Instead, [initiation](#) was uniquely a concern of the [mystery religions](#), because it was precisely by [initiation](#) that a devotee of one of those religions attained whatever salvation was promised.³⁰³

Sadly, the idea of salvation by an [initiation](#)-like process was not foreign to rabbinic Judaism. This was due to the fact that the rabbis believed a person was saved by being an Israelite; as it says in the [Mishnah](#) (*San* 10.1), “All Israel has a share in the world to come.” On the presupposition that a person is saved by being an Israelite, the obvious corollary is that Gentiles must become Israelites to be saved. And how can that be accomplished? By participation in the rituals to become a [proselyte](#), *i.e.*, by going through a set of religious ceremonies as one would in an [initiation](#). In effect, it was this idea of salvation by [initiation](#) that Paul argued so strongly against. *Circumcision (i.e., becoming a [proselyte](#)) does not save you! Christ saves you by grace through faith.*

Since [Hellenistic](#) religious experiences pivoted upon [initiation](#), and since Jewish [proselytism](#) also required something like an [initiation](#), Christians of

“to initiate,” but the idea Paul expresses in this passage is entirely different from the idea of initiation in the mystery religions. See *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels: Aaron–Zion*. Edited by James Hastings, John A. Selbie and John C. Lambert, (Edinburgh; New York: T&T Clark; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906), vol. 2, p. 71. The apocryphal Wis 14.15 mentions “secret rites and initiations” (μυστήρια καὶ τελετάς, *mē-stē-rē-ə kē tē-lē-’tās*) but only as the practices of idolaters.

³⁰² There is the idea of a “seal” in the NT, but a seal is not an initiation or an initiatory rite but a confirmation of an antecedent reality (Rom 4.11; cf. Rom 15.28; 1Co 9.2) or a certification of what is to come (2Co 1.22; Eph 1.13; 4.30).

³⁰³ Richard Bauckham, “Descent to the Underworld,” *ABD*, Vol. 2, p. 153. The present concern with initiation in Christianity is a vestige from those pagan religions. Christian interest in initiation grew in parallel with confusion over whether it was God or one’s initiation that saves, and increased with the clergy’s desire for ecclesiastical control. As in centuries past, initiation remains an important concern today, not because churches and denominations are particularly interested in the theology of baptism, but because they are concerned with identifying “who is *in* and who is *out*” with respect to their fold, and according to their particular formula for salvation or membership.

the [sub-apostolic](#) centuries naturally slipped into thinking that their religion also had an [initiation](#) rite. The obvious choice for such a rite (which was also part of both pagan [initiations](#) and the Jewish [proselyte](#) process) was baptism. Never mind that pagan [initiations](#) claimed for themselves the [salvific](#) efficacy that Scripture attributes only and directly to God and Christ. Never mind that rabbinical authorities never saw the [proselyte's](#) baptism as the vital part of the process that turned a Gentile into a Jew. In spite of these facts [Hellenized](#) Christians were irresistibly induced to believe that baptism (along with its attendant [catechesis](#)) was their [initiation](#). Once having absorbed this belief, early Christians also began to associate pagan ideas of [mystical](#) power with their baptismal [initiation](#).

Thanks to the later [Anabaptist](#) and [Baptist](#) movements, not all Christian denominations today attach [mystical](#) or [sacramental](#) power to baptism. Nevertheless, most Christian traditions have been infected by the idea that baptism is Christian [initiation](#), and this presupposition — so seemingly harmless — exerts a gravitational pull back toward [sacramentalism](#) and a [mystical](#) mindset when it comes to Christian [ordinances](#). In its turn, this [mystical](#) mindset predisposes people to misinterpret [NT](#) references to baptism, and to confuse water baptism with Spirit baptism.

[Thomas R. Schreiner](#), for example, in commenting on Eph 4.5 says, “Baptism here designates an [initiation](#) rite shared in common by all those belonging to the church of Jesus Christ.”³⁰⁴ [Schreiner](#) does not provide a basis for calling Christian baptism an [initiation](#) rite, but only presupposes this idea in his article. Furthermore, in a footnote attached to the statement just quoted, he writes, “Cross rightly argues that water and Spirit baptism should not be separated here ...”³⁰⁵ [Schreiner](#) continues in his next paragraphs to discuss 1Co 12.13 and says “Once again we should not separate Spirit baptism from water baptism ... Conceptually they may be distinguished, but Paul himself was not interested in distinguishing them from one another in this verse since both are associated *with the transition* from the old life to the

³⁰⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism In The Epistles: An Initiation Rite For Believers,” in *Believer's Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Wright Shawn D. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), p. 71.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

new.”³⁰⁶ We see a clue here that [Schreiner](#) understands Spirit baptism as [salvific](#), and as the inner reality depicted by water baptism. He makes this belief explicit in his discussion of Rom 6.3-4: “both Spirit baptism and water baptism were part and parcel of the complex of saving events that took place at conversion.”³⁰⁷ Later, [Schreiner](#) writes,

Baptism ... is not only an event in which the objective nature of Christ’s saving work is applied to his people. It is also conjoined with the subjective appropriation of such salvation.³⁰⁸

Now, it is the Holy Spirit who [regenerates](#), so He is obviously involved in “the complex of saving events,” but this does not require that we interpret Spirit baptism and water baptism as two aspects of the same event, nor does it require that we equate the Spirit baptism of the [NT](#) with the [regenerating](#) ministry of the Spirit. Nevertheless, thinking of baptism as an [initiation](#) predisposes people to believe that water baptism has [mystical](#) power, and this belief in turn inclines them to associate baptism with a [salvific](#) work of the Holy Spirit. This association then leads students of the Bible to conflate water baptism and Spirit baptism, creating confusion about the essence and meaning of the latter.³⁰⁹ It is imperative, therefore, that we cast [initiation](#) from our thoughts as we come to the interpretation of 1Co 12.13 and related texts.

NO RELIGIOUS INITIATION IN THE BIBLE

Someone will object that 1Co 12.13 uses the phrase *into one body*: “we were all baptized into one body....” Doesn’t the preposition *into* imply an induction? How can *baptized into one body* refer to anything but an induction (or [initiation](#)) into the Body of Christ, the Church, by baptism?

These questions are answered by the fact that the [Grk](#) preposition, εἰς (ēs), universally translated *into* in 1Co 12.13, is very flexible in its usage, and in the epistle of 1Co alone it means *many* different things. The preposition εἰς

³⁰⁶ Emphasis added.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁰⁹ For a full discussion of the meaning and significance of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, please see my forthcoming book, *The Pentecost Twist*.

often does mean *into*, but since there is no other passage in all the Bible that speaks of *initiation into* (or any other kind of *induction into*) a mystical body or congregation, translators should have given further thought to the diverse ways Paul uses this little word.³¹⁰ Had the “*initiation* presupposition” not so influenced translators as they came to 1Co 12.13, they might have more correctly translated εἰς with the words *in* or *for*, either of which change the meaning of the verse significantly. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that the *Grk* text of 1Co 12.13 in no way constrains us to the idea of baptismal *initiation* or induction into the Body.

Once we have dismissed the idea of *initiation* from our minds, we can interpret 1Co 12.13 more faithfully to its context. That context is a distinct section of Paul’s epistle (chs. 12-14) which he introduces with the words, “Now concerning spiritual *gifts* ...” Therefore, as we begin to read this section, we have no immediate contextual reason to expect that Paul is about to speak on the topics of water baptism or salvation. He may speak of such things in order to make a point about spiritual gifts, but unless he speaks of them explicitly, we should not hastily read the ideas of water baptism, salvation, justification, or conversion (and much less *initiation*) into a context to which they are foreign.

On the other hand, it should not at all surprise us (as Paul writes about spiritual gifts) if he should allude to the event of being baptized “in the Spirit” which John the Baptist and Jesus predicted, which Luke described as having occurred on the day of Pentecost, and which Peter connected to the *charismatic* manifestations prophesied by Joel.³¹¹ And this is exactly what Paul did. In an argument for the unity of the Body (in spite of the diversity of *charismata*) he wrote:

³¹⁰ In 1Co 10.2, Paul says the Israelites “were baptized into (εἰς) Moses”; they were indeed committed to Moses practically by this baptism, but they were hardly “initiated” into Moses or mystically brought into union with him.

³¹¹ If we take the NT documents at face value, we have every reason to believe that Paul was familiar with both the predictions and fulfillments of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. He would have been informed about such things by Ananias, Peter, Barnabas and other eye-witnesses. We know from Act 19.1-6 that Paul himself promoted receiving the Holy Spirit in a way that resulted in charismatic manifestations. Paul himself may have been the conduit through whom Luke learned the details of the Pentecost events recorded in Act 2.

For we were all baptized in [the] one [Holy] Spirit for [the sake of]³¹² one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all given [the] one Spirit to drink.³¹³

The common and simple — but key — terms for what Paul refers to here are:

- Baptized (ἐβαπτίσθημεν, ě-väp-'tēs-thē-měn)
- In/With (ἐν, ěn)
- Spirit (πνεύματι, 'pněv-mä-tě)³¹⁴

We see these very terms in the prediction of John the Baptist (Mat 3.11; Mar 1.8; Luk 3.16; cf. Joh 1.33):

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι)

In the affirmation of Jesus (Act 1.5):

You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε)

In the recollection of Peter (Act 11.16):

You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (βαπτισθήσεσθε ἐν πνεύματι)

And finally here in the mention by Paul in his teaching about spiritual gifts:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized (ἐν...πνεύματι ... ἐβαπτίσθημεν)

Now, in spite of Paul using the same words as all the other biblical persons to speak of being baptized *in the Holy Spirit*, many commentators still interpret 1Co 12.13 as referring to water baptism.³¹⁵ An equal number of

³¹² On rendering εἰς with the phrase *for the sake of*, compare my renderings of its use in 1Co 10.31, “for the sake of God’s glory”; 1Co 11.24, “for the sake of remembering me”; 1Co 14.8, “for the purpose of battle”; 1Co 16.1, “for the sake of the saints”; etc.

³¹³ 1Co 12.13, my translation.

³¹⁴ This dative form of the noun is consistent throughout all the passages about being baptized in the Spirit.

³¹⁵ See for example the faulty explanation by Findlay in the EGT.

others see that Paul does *not* speak of water baptism here, but of Christ baptizing in/with the Holy Spirit. That this latter understanding of 1Co 12.13 is correct should be clear, not only from Paul's wording that matches that of other passages about the baptizing in/with the Holy Spirit, but also from the double emphasis Paul makes in the verse. As [Gordon Fee](#) brings out,

Paul's focus here is not baptism but 'the Spirit' which he repeats in both clauses. If he were referring to water baptism he would have either used 'baptism' alone or have added 'in water'. Here he adds 'in one Spirit'.³¹⁶

So, in 1Co 12.13, Paul does not speak of water baptism nor of [initiation](#), but he does speak of being baptized in/with the Holy Spirit. Sadly, many expositors of this passage recognize the reference to being baptized in the Spirit, but equate this baptism in the Spirit with [conversion](#). Contrary to their assumptions, however, the being baptized in the Spirit to which Paul refers is neither [conversion](#) nor [new birth](#). Many expositors, [Pentecostal](#) and [cessationist](#), have wanted to make this verse about [conversion](#) for diverse theological reasons. [Pentecostals](#) have wanted to make 1Co 12.13 about [conversion](#) to avoid the *implication* that "all" believers have been baptized in the Spirit in the Day-of-Pentecost sense, for that would undermine their "tongues is the evidence doctrine." [Cessationists](#) have also wanted to avoid the Day-of-Pentecost sense of the baptizing in the Spirit in this verse because Paul so clearly speaks of this baptism as a universal experience among believers (at least at Corinth), and he gives not the slightest hint that it is a phenomenon that will pass away. Other [Charismatics](#) and [cessationists](#) want to make 1Co 12.13 about [conversion](#) because they have a vested interest in the principle of religious [initiation](#).

Therefore, many expositors have said, "Whereas on the day of Pentecost, Jesus baptized people in/with the Holy Spirit, in 1Co 12.13 Paul is talking about how the Spirit baptized us into the Body." However, the wording of 1Co 12.13 does not warrant making such a distinction. True, our English versions

³¹⁶ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle To The Corinthians, NIC*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), quoted in Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary Of 1 Corinthians 10-16* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), p. 139.

universally translate the verse as saying we were baptized *by* the Spirit, rather than *in/with* the Spirit, but as we have seen, the Greek text uses the same preposition (ἐν) used in all the other passages about being baptized *in/with* the Spirit. Though ἐν is correctly translated by our English preposition *by* in many biblical passages, there is nothing in 1Co 12.13 to warrant the translation *by*, a translation which makes the Holy Spirit the one baptizing! Nowhere else in Scripture is the Holy Spirit spoken of as a baptizer.

So again, 1Co 12.13 is neither about water baptism, nor [initiation](#), nor about [conversion](#) nor [new birth](#). Rather, it speaks about how the Corinthian believers were all [charismatically](#) empowered and gifted by the *one* Holy Spirit *for* (εἰς) the edification of the *one* believing community.³¹⁷ Whether Jew or Gentile, whether slave or free, they all drank the same Living Water that now welled up from their innermost being and overflowed in a river of [charismatic](#) manifestations. Sadly, the manifestations of the Corinthians' spiritual gifts prompted disorder and elitism. Therefore, Paul reminded them of their *necessary* unity. It is the same Spirit who distributes all the gifts, and it is within and for the same corporate Body that the Corinthians received these gifts. Furthermore, none of the gifts are self-sufficient; instead, they are all interdependent. Therefore, the conclusion that Paul pressed the Corinthians to with his arguments was that in all their exercise of the [charismata](#) they must "seek to abound for the edification of the church" (1Co 14.12).

1Co 12.13, then, while often interpreted as a foundational verse about baptism, is instead a verse calling the Corinthian believers to unity and mutual edification on the basis of their corporate experience of the Holy Spirit's charismatic empowering. In this passage Paul does not speak about baptism, but about how being baptized *in the Spirit* must unite God's people. In our study of baptism, therefore, we can leave this verse behind. However, Paul echoes its call to Christian unity in a verse that *does* mention water baptism, namely, Eph 4.5.

³¹⁷ For a full explanation of what the [NT](#) refers to as being baptized "in the Holy Spirit," please see my forthcoming book, *The Pentecost Twist*.

THE BAPTISMAL BASIS FOR UNITY

As with the context of 1Co 12.13, the context of Eph 4.5 does not teach about baptism, but rather makes a plea “to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” As Gentile converts of diverse nationalities and religious backgrounds began to swell the ranks of the Church, these new believers did not have the unifying influences of ethnic homogeneity and the religious obligations to the one national temple that the Jews had. Instead, they had cultural diversity, a geographically decentralized worship, and newfound individual significance in the charismatic gifting of the Holy Spirit. With no cultural unity on the one hand, and enhanced individual empowering on the other, the centrifugal force of human nature swiftly began to fling local congregations into disunity. The Lord Jesus foresaw this development and prayed against it (Joh 17.20-23), and the apostles witnessed it and preached against it (Eph 4.3; Phil 2.2; Col 3.14).

Paul, in particular, preached the unity of the Spirit (i.e., the fact that it was the one, selfsame Spirit working in the Body) as a basis for unity in the local congregations (1Co 12.13). Additionally, as shown in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 4.4-6), he set forth seven unities that not only provide the basis for Christian unity, but logically *require it*:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

This passage not only provides the rationale for Christian unity, but also provides a foundation for Christian theology. However, our present concern is neither Christian unity, as such, nor a thorough discussion of theology. Our present interest in Eph 4.4-6 is in what it has to tell us about baptism, and what it tells us is very simple: there is only *one*, and this oneness provides a basis (along with the other six unities) for “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” *There is only one baptism.*

But what does *that* mean? Paul’s affirmation of *one baptism* could conceivably mean that there is:

1. Absolutely one baptism (no other religions have baptism).
2. Only one *kind* of Christian baptism (not one kind of baptism for adults and another for infants, nor one kind for Jews and another for Gentiles).
3. Only one *mode* of Christian baptism.
4. Only one *medium* of Christian baptism.
5. Only one *true* baptism (Christian vs. pagan and Jewish).
6. Only one *combined significance* of water and Spirit baptism.
7. Only one baptism *for which we are responsible* (baptism in the Spirit is God's concern).
8. Only one *non-repeatable* baptism for the Christian (no re-baptism).
9. Only one *object* of baptism, namely, Christ (not also Peter nor Paul, etc.).

The context of Paul's statement, however, will clarify his meaning. The historical context eliminates the first four alternatives: both Judaism and paganism practiced baptism, and history provides no evidence of debate arising in the apostolic era about different kinds of Christian baptism for different kinds of people, or about different modes (e.g., immersion vs. sprinkling), or different mediums (only water was used). The textual context eliminates alternatives 5 through 8 because Paul was not writing a polemic against false baptisms, nor making any direct reference to being baptized in the Spirit (as in 1Co 12.13), nor did he ever have any occasion to argue against being re-baptized.³¹⁸ Many of these alternatives are eliminated also by the simple fact that they do not pertain to issues that united or divided the apostolic congregations. Hence, we are constrained to understand Paul as affirming the one *object* of Christian baptism, namely Jesus.

Not that any believers in the apostolic era were being baptized in a name other than that of Jesus;³¹⁹ Christians were not dividing over the object of baptism. Paul was not denouncing other baptisms, but affirming that baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus — as the Ephesian believers well knew — is a powerful unifier for the Christian congregations. To publicly stand for

³¹⁸ On the contrary, Paul re-baptized the Ephesian "disciples" who had only been baptized "into John's baptism" (Act 19.1-5).

³¹⁹ Except for those who had not yet heard the full message of the gospel (see Act 19.1-5).

Jesus by being baptized in His name, instantly brought the believers into deep interdependency with one another in the face of the surrounding culture's hostility. Thus, when the Corinthian believers started to compete among themselves on the basis of their favorite apostle, Paul reminded them that they had not been baptized "in the name of Paul" (1Co 1.13). No, they all shared and suffered for the *one baptism*, the baptism that testified to the lordship of Him whose name had been invoked over them, Jesus Christ.³²⁰

³²⁰ As to the correct name or formula that should be invoked during baptism, see below: [A Final Question](#).

25 QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

SYNOPSIS

In the preceding pages, we have carefully examined the Bible's most important passages relating to baptism. This examination will now allow us to answer many of the practical questions people ask about the subject of Christian baptism.

Many questions about baptism have to do with its effect; what does baptism really accomplish? Our examination of the Scriptures has shown that baptism is not a ritual with [mystical](#) power, but a ceremony that points us to the [salvific](#) power in Jesus Christ and His atoning work. Any teaching that presents baptism as the source of faith, the remission of sins, or regeneration, or asserts baptism as *the means* of gaining membership in a covenant community or in the Church of God, misrepresents both baptism and the gospel.

Other questions have to do with the proper practice of baptism: Who can baptize, who can be baptized, what is the proper mode of baptism, and is there a proper baptismal invocation. Once we divest ourselves of the belief that baptism has saving power, we realize that common sense answers most of the questions about its practice. The question of whether infants should be baptized requires more thought because of the long and controversial history of this practice.

Questions about Paul's puzzling reference to "baptism for the dead" require special attention, and are addressed in [Appendix 2](#).

1. WATER BAPTISM: SHADOW OR SUBSTANCE?

As we saw in the [treatment of 1Pe 3.21](#), baptism saves us *typically*, i.e., *figuratively*, by reenacting the judgment upon sin that satisfied God's justice. The waters of baptism save us *typically* even as the [OT](#) sacrifices atoned *typically*, serving as [exemplar causes](#) of, i.e., symbolic patterns for, the expiation of sin. Once we understand that baptism saves us *figuratively*, we realize that it cannot save us *actually*, since the two ideas are mutually exclusive.

Likewise, in the above [discussion of Rom 6.1-11](#) we observed that baptism effects neither a literal burial with Christ nor an actual participation in His death. Even the sacramentally biased [Fathers](#) recognized that Paul spoke figuratively in this passage.³²¹ Paul himself made this explicit when he said, “we have been planted together in the **likeness** of his death” (Rom 6.5 [KJV](#)). Therefore, just as with other ancient rituals, baptism is the commemorative shadow, but the substance, the reality, is in Christ and His atoning work (Col 2.16-17).

2. DOES BAPTISM REGENERATE?

We saw in the [discussion of Joh 3.5](#) and the [treatment of Tit 3.5-7](#) that it is [exegetically](#) fallacious to read baptism into Christ's words about the new birth “of water and the Spirit” or Paul's words about “the washing of [regeneration](#).” In both cases the metaphors point to the vivifying work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus asserted that only “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” and that “it is the Spirit who gives life” (Joh 3.6; 6.63). It is God Himself who regenerates us, i.e., gives us new birth (1Pe 1.3), by the power of His word (Jam 1.18). The overshadowing power of God's Holy Spirit, rather than the water of baptism, is the matrix of our [rebirth](#) (Joh 1.13); we are born directly “of God” (1Jo 2.29; 3.9; 4.7; 5.4; 5.18).

Granted, God as the efficient cause of our [regeneration](#) could use an instrumental cause, i.e., He could use *means* to [regenerate](#) us. We find in the [NT](#) that indeed He does, but as I have just said, the “means” God uses to [regenerate](#) us is His word (Jam 1.18; cf. Rom 10.17; Eph 5.26). The Bible

³²¹ E.g., *Res* 47.

nowhere states that God uses baptism to [regenerate](#) us (unless we exercise an unwarranted [eisegesis](#)), nor does it equate baptism and [regeneration](#) as the early [Fathers](#) did and Lutherans still do. Therefore, baptism does not [regenerates](#) us, and we dishonor the Lord when we ascribe our [regeneration](#) to any person or thing other than God, His Spirit and His word.³²²

3. DOES BAPTISM WASH AWAY OUR SINS?

The most difficult principle of [Baptismism](#) to dislodge from our minds is the idea that baptism washes away our sins. After all, most branches of the Church have taught this idea for centuries, and enshrined it in theological writings, religious songs and liturgy.³²³ Furthermore, baptism (particularly when by immersion) *looks like* a bath.

Nevertheless, as we noted in the [treatment of Eph 5.26](#) above, *Christ* is the One who cleanses us on the basis of His atoning work (1Jo 1.7-9), by the twin agencies of His Holy Spirit (1Co 6.11) and His word (Joh 15.03; 17.17), *not* by means of baptism. Furthermore, we saw in the [exegesis of Act 22.16](#) that Scripture never explicitly associates baptism with the cleansing of sin, and spiritual cleansing was never the significance of the Jewish ritual immersions.

Clearly, then, baptism neither symbolizes nor effects the cleansing of our sins, not even should we add soap to the water (Jer 2.22)! As with [regeneration](#), to attribute our spiritual cleansing to anything but the LORD profoundly dishonors Him. Like King David of old, we must call upon God Himself to cleanse us from sin (Psa 51.2), and not look to an external ritual.

³²² Just as it would have been irreverent to ascribe the healing of the man born blind to the spittle, the dust or the pool of Siloam (Joh 9). Neither friends nor enemies focused on these “means,” though, but ascribed the healing directly to Jesus.

³²³ In the Reformation era, for example, John Calvin taught that baptism has three main purposes, and wrote that “Scripture shows, *first*, that it points to that cleansing from sin which we obtain by the blood of Christ...” (*Institutes* IV, xvi, 2). The great Presbyterian theologian John Murray, in his *Christian Baptism* (1952), follows Calvin in teaching that baptism symbolizes the purification of sins. See Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer’s Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), p. 215.

4. DOES BAPTISM REMIT SINS?

Asking if baptism remits sins is just another way of asking if baptism washes away sins. The word *remit* is the legal term for releasing the guilt and cancelling the penalty for sin, while *washing* and *cleansing* are metaphors for the same judicial event. Therefore, what I have said already about *cleansing* and baptism applies equally to *remission* and baptism. Baptism neither cleanses nor remits our sins. Robert Lowry rightly taught us to sing, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus...”³²⁴

5. DOES THE NICENE CREED ERR?

The joyous fact that our sins can be forgiven was written into some of the earliest Christian creeds. The Roman Creed, for example, composed before AD 150, stated:

Credo in ... remissionem peccatorum ... (“I believe in ... remission of sins ...”)³²⁵

In this creed, the implied basis for remission of sins is Jesus Christ Himself, “conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead, and buried ... the third day he rose from the dead; etc.” There is no mention of baptism at all in the Roman Creed, nor in the Apostles’ Creed that soon followed.

This is consistent with the emphasis upon Christ, and the de-emphasis of baptism, in the creedal or proto-creedal statements of the NT. What scant creedal material appears in our NT did not necessarily originate with the apostles, but the NT authors recorded the material as anonymous sayings or parts of hymns that were faithful to the apostolic teaching (1Ti 3.16; 2Ti 2.11-13). A perusal of the creedal or confessional snippets in the NT shows us that the doctrinal concern of the apostolic church was overwhelmingly **Christological**. The apostolic church expressed its doctrinal confession most briefly in statements of Jesus’ essential identity,

³²⁴ *Nothing But The Blood*, Words & Music: Robert Lowry.

³²⁵ Schaff, Philip, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), Vol. 2. p. 47.

Jesus is Lord
(Rom 10.9; 1Co 12.3),

or

Jesus is the Christ
(Act 5.42; 9.22; 1Jo 2.22; 5.1),

or

Jesus is the Son of God
(Act 9.20; 1Jo 4.15; 5.5).

Along with such brief statements, other NT passages supplemented the confessional wording slightly to,

Jesus Christ is Lord
(Phil 2.11),

or

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God
(Joh 20.31).

Building on this confessional core, the apostles gave us a handful of expanded creedal passages in the [NT](#), each comprised of succinct statements about Christ's nature and mission:

...[God's] Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace... (Rom 1.3-5)

Jesus our Lord ... *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (Rom 4.24-25)

... Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name

which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2.5-11)

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col 1.15-20)

He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory. (1Ti 3.16)

...[God's] Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high ... (Heb 1.2-3)

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit ... (1Pe 3.18)

After the identity, nature and mission of Christ, the Apostolic church next crystallized to its essence the gospel proper. Paul stated it in its simplest form:

...Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David... (2Ti 2.8)

As one of my fellow students of the Bible remarked, this brief statement of Paul's gospel would have been pregnant with meaning for anyone versed in the Hebrew prophets. Nevertheless, Paul also gave an expanded, though still succinct, version of the gospel, in 1Co 15:

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel... 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time....

Having thus encapsulated the gospel proper, did the NT writers ever summarize how one appropriated the gospel? Certainly. John's prologue to his gospel (Joh 1) has a creedal tone, and begins, as we should expect, with the Christological foundation:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ... 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

However, in the midst of this declaration about Christ's preexistence and incarnation, John also summarized how people appropriated the good news of Christ's coming:

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.³²⁶

Christ's own sermons in the gospels, as well as the apostolic sermons in Acts, also explain how one is to appropriate the gospel and be saved, but perhaps Paul gives a proto-creedal summary of the transaction in Rom 10.9-10:

... if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

And again in Eph 2.8-9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

The NT authors also, though perhaps only once, reduced the nature of the Christian life to a confessional or didactic summary ("a trustworthy statement"):

³²⁶ While the words are generally attributed to Christ Himself in our red-letter Bibles, the salvific explanation of John 3.13-18 may be another of John's summaries of the gospel and its appropriation.

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself. (2Ti 2.11-13)

Finally, and only a few times, Paul ventured into a creedal or proto-creedal statement of theology that went beyond the person and work of Christ, and beyond the gospel and its appropriation. In 1Co 8.6 he wrote,

...for us there is *but* one God, the Father,
from whom are all things
and we *exist* for Him;
and one Lord, Jesus Christ
by whom are all things,
and we *exist* through Him.

Similarly, in 1Ti 2.5 he wrote:

For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus.

While these statements touch on the oneness of God and the necessary existence of a mediatory relationship between God and man, these proto-creedal snippets once again express a Christological focus.

Uniquely in the NT, Eph 4.4-6 gives us in its seven unities the one apostolic doctrinal summary that goes beyond Christology, the gospel and the call to sacrificial endurance, and *here at last* baptism is mentioned:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Still, the only information about baptism preserved in this creed-like summary is that there is only *one* baptism (see a [full discussion](#) above about the meaning of the *one baptism*), and this tiny bit of information is embedded in a statement primarily about the Trinity.

Evidently, therefore, the apostles believed that everything important for the Christian to know and do was implicit in ***a correct understanding of who Jesus is and what He did***. The apostles' basis for fellowship and unity was simply the Lordship and atoning work of Jesus. Beyond that doctrinal core, the apostles deemed it important that the gospel and its appropriation be succinctly grasped, and that the Christian life be realistically understood as entailing sacrifice, endurance and faithfulness (2Ti 2.11-13). They considered

baptism vitally important, but only insofar as it undergirded and testified to the truth about Christ and His gospel.

The Old Roman Creed, then, and the Apostles' Creed derived from it, are indeed apostolic in their Christological emphasis, and are in no way remiss for not mentioning baptism. After AD 150, however, or more precisely, after the Second Jewish Revolt of AD 135 and the severing of the Church from her Hebraic roots, the Church's perspective on baptism's importance changed rapidly.

The theological issues debated by the Church in the great ecumenical council of Nicaea (AD 325) were still primarily Christological, and served to confirm Christian belief in the essential deity of Christ. However, fifty-seven years later, the equally binding Council of Constantinople (AD 381), while reaffirming the Nicaean belief in the deity of Christ, quietly took the opportunity to also affirm Christendom's growing belief that baptism remits sin. Thus, the Creed of Constantinople, known to us as The Nicene Creed (of AD 381) included the statement:

ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν³²⁷

This translates, “we confess one baptism unto the remission of sins.”

Now, the Greek phrase “baptism unto the remission of sins” (βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) from the Nicene Creed closely resembles the wording about John's baptism in Mar 1.4 and Luk 3.3. Those passages describe John's baptism with the words:

βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν³²⁸

This biblical phrase was copied into the Nicene Creed, all except for one word, the word μετανοίας (mě-tə-'nē-ās), *repentance*. An early Creed Of Jerusalem (pre AD 386) retained the entire biblical phrase, stating:

³²⁷ Written phonetically: ō-mō-lō-'gū-mēn ěn 'vāp-tēs-mā ēs 'ä-fě-sēn ä-mär-tē-'ōn. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), vol. 2, p. 58.

³²⁸ Written phonetically: 'vāp-tēs-mā mẽ-tə-'nē-ās ēs 'ä-fě-sēn ä-mär-tē-'ōn.

Πιστεύομεν ... εἰς ἓν βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν³²⁹

This translates: “We believe ... in one baptism of repentance unto forgiveness of sins ...”

The authors of the Nicene Creed, however, seem to have taken their cue from the misinterpretation of Act 2.38. In that passage, as we found in [its examination](#) above, Peter said,

Repent and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins ...

The [Grk](#) looks like this (with my emphasis added):

Μετανοήσατε, καὶ βαπτισθήτω ... ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν...³³⁰

From this passage, the Nicene Creed took the verb *be-baptized* (**red font**), changed it to the noun *baptism* (βάπτισμα, 'vāp-tēs-mä), and joined it to the words *for remission of sins* (**green font**).

By doing this, the Council of Constantinople bequeathed to the Church a bit of Scripture-twisting that affirms baptism, rather than repentance and faith in Christ, as the vehicle for remitting sin. Had they retained the word *repentance* (μετανοίας, mē-tā-'nē-ās) as the Creed of Jerusalem did, they would have given us a biblical statement: We confess one baptism [having to do with] repentance, [i.e., a repentance leading] unto forgiveness of sins ...” If they had left baptism out of the creed, and simply affirmed the forgiveness of sins (on a Christological foundation), as the Apostles’ Creed did, they would have left us a Creed faithful to the emphases and spirit of the Apostles. Instead, in a move now transparent to Church historians with regard to its self-serving motive, the ecclesiastics of Constantinople bound all Christians to find their remission

³²⁹ Written phonetically: Pē-'stēv-ō-mēn ... ēs ēn 'vāp-tēs-mä mē-tā-'nē-ās ēs 'ä-fē-sēn ä-mär-tē-'ōn. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), vol. 2, p. 32.

³³⁰ Phonetically: Mē-tā-nō-'ē-sä-tē, kē vāp-tēs-'thē-tō ... ē-pē tō ō-'nō-mä-tē Yē-'sū Chrēs-'tū ēs 'ä-fē-sēn tōn ä-mär-tē-'ōn. Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press, 2010), Act 2.38.

of sins in baptism, *which only the Catholic Church could administer*: “We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.”

So, yes, the Nicene Creed doth err.

6. IS BAPTISM A CONDITION OF SALVATION?

Baptism does not wash away nor remit sins. Baptism does not regenerate. Still, is baptism a condition of salvation? In other words, must we obey God’s command to be baptized before He will vouchsafe to us the blessings of salvation already obtained by Christ?

In our [examination of Mar 16.16](#) above , we noted that making baptism a second condition of salvation contradicts all the passages in the Bible that make faith *the only* condition (e.g., Luk 8.12; Act 16.31; Rom 1.16; 1Co 1.21; Eph 2.8; 2Ti 3.15). As we compared Mar 16.16 with Rom 10.9-10 we saw that we have no warrant to call baptism or the confession of Jesus as Lord *conditions* of salvation. Rather, the NT presents such acts to us as external *evidences* or *expressions* of the heart’s faith, which faith is the *only* condition of salvation. Those who continue to teach that baptism is a condition of salvation forget that “man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1Sa 16.7).

7. CAN I HAVE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IF I’M NOT BAPTIZED?

The Lord is able to give believers assurance of salvation *directly* as He did to the thief on the cross. Normally, however, to have assurance that we are saved, we must:

1. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1Jo 5.1,5).
2. Cease from sinning as our habit of life (1Jo 5.18).
3. Practice righteousness (1Jo 2.29).
4. Love our fellow Christians (1Jo 3.14; 4.7).
5. Overcome the temptations of the world to deny Christ by word or deed (1Jo 5.4-5).

The apostle John taught these essentials to believers in Jesus so that they might *know* that they have eternal life (1Jo 5.13).

As we saw above in connection with [the baptism of Jesus](#), Jesus was baptized in order “to fulfill all righteousness” (Mat 3.15). Since Jesus Himself commanded that His disciples be baptized (Mat 28.19), and since the apostles repeated this command (Act 2.38), we also must be baptized in order to “practice righteousness” (point 3 in the list above). Indeed, since baptism is a step of obedience to our Lord, any authentic believer in Jesus will desire baptism. A believer who physically cannot be baptized before their death (like the thief on the cross) will certainly not be barred from Paradise for their lack of participation in the [ordinance](#), but any able bodied “believer” who refuses baptism can hardly be assured that he or she is saved.³³¹

8. DOES SALVATION OCCUR AT BAPTISM?

As we saw in connection with the [exposition of Gal 3.27](#) above, some have taught that being “clothed ... with Christ” is synonymous with salvation. They have concluded, therefore, that when Paul said, “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ,” he meant that the moment of one’s baptism is the time *at which* salvation is conferred. We saw that those who teach this have misunderstood the biblical metaphor of being “clothed,” and also contradict the observable reality that throughout Christian history people’s saving faith precedes their baptism by widely varying amounts of time.

The story of Apollos, for example, confirms that a person may be truly saved without Christian baptism. Act 18.24-25 tells us that Apollos “was mighty in the Scriptures” and that he “had been instructed in the way of the Lord,” and that, “being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, **being acquainted only with the baptism of John.**” No one can reasonably argue that Apollos wasn’t saved, yet he had no knowledge of Christian baptism.

So, contrary to the teaching of [baptismal regenerationists](#), all that we have learned about baptism from the relevant [NT](#) passages tells us that no

³³¹ I do not say that an able bodied person who refuses baptism *is not saved*, for only God can make that judgment. However, any persistent disobedience to a clear command of Christ calls into question a person’s spiritual state, and certainly precludes that person from having *assurance* that he or she has true faith and the salvation contingent upon true faith.

instrumental connection exists between baptism and salvation. Baptism neither remits sin nor [regenerates](#) the [baptizee](#). Therefore, since no essential connection exists between baptism and salvation, we cannot infer that the moment of baptism is the time *at which* salvation occurs.

9. IS BAPTISM A SACRAMENT?

The word [sacrament](#) comes from the [Lat](#) word for “an oath of allegiance,” which comes from the verb that means *to consecrate*. Therefore, to the degree that baptism expresses a pledge to follow Christ by the person baptized, we can think of baptism as a [sacrament](#).

However, while today the word [sacrament](#) often refers ambiguously to any religious ritual or observance, very early in the Christian era the term came to refer to a religious rite that was a “means of grace,” i.e., a rite that communicates a [mystical](#) work of God to the participant in the rite.³³² The Roman Catholic Church holds to seven such [sacraments](#): Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, and Matrimony.

The Bible says nothing about these rites as [sacraments](#), but the [Vulgate](#) sometimes used the [Lat](#) word *sacramentum* to translate the [Grk](#) word *μυστήριον* (mē-'stē-rē-ōn). In the [Vulgate](#), therefore, *sacramentum* appears four times in Dan and also occurs in Eph 1.9; 3.3,9; 5.32; Col 1.27; 1Ti 3.16; Rev 1.20; 17.7. Only in Eph 5.32 can the word [sacrament](#) be associated with matrimony, and possibly (if one misinterprets Eph 5.26) with baptism. All the other occurrences of *μυστήριον/sacramentum* clearly refer to apocalyptic symbols (in Dan and Rev), or to the work of God in Christ. Therefore, in the [Vulgate](#) *sacramentum* can be made to refer to “Church rituals” only by doing violence to the text. As [William Cunningham](#) writes,

... there is nothing said in Scripture directly about sacraments in general, or about a sacrament as such. The only plausible evidence which [Papists](#) ... produce upon this point, is to be found in those passages which seem to establish [a] ... connection between baptism on the one hand, and regeneration and salvation on the other.³³³

³³² This meaning of *sacrament* is therefore akin to the specialized meaning of *sacred*, i.e., “worthy of religious veneration.”

³³³ William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review Of The Principal Discussions In The*

In other words, the [Fathers](#) and their Roman Catholic heirs did not learn that baptism was a [sacrament](#) from the biblical text, but rather decided that baptism conveys [regeneration](#) and therefore applied to it the word *sacramentum* ([Grk](#) μυστήριον, mē-'stē-rē-ōn) that appears in Eph 5.32.

However, as we have already confirmed, baptism does *not* [regenerate](#). It is a “means of grace” only in the sense that any religious observance or reenactment brings instruction and encouragement to the Christian soul. Therefore, if by *sacrament* we mean that baptism [regenerates](#) or otherwise conveys [mystical](#) power or [salvific](#) merit to the recipient, then *No*, baptism is *not* a [sacrament](#). On the other hand, if by *sacrament* we mean only that baptism is an important religious observance worthy of reverence, then *Yes*, baptism is a [sacrament](#).

Still, non-Catholics often prefer to call baptism an [ordinance](#), since the word [ordinance](#) has no connotation of [mystical](#) efficacy. A Protestant might say that while Catholics have seven [sacraments](#), we have two [ordinances](#), Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The word [ordinance](#) emphasizes the obligation of Christians to participate in baptism and the Lord’s Supper as ceremonies *ordained* by Christ.

10. IS BAPTISM A SIGN OR A SEAL?

We can call baptism *a sign* of our faith and commitment to Jesus, but the Bible nowhere speaks of baptism as a sign. We may speak of baptism as a *seal* of our profession of faith but the [NT](#) nowhere speaks of baptism as a seal. A Christian denomination can refer to baptism as a sign or perhaps *the* sign of membership in the covenant community, but Scripture never speaks of baptism in this way. When it comes to a sign of our faith and a seal of our profession, the [NT](#) puts the emphasis on *righteous living* (2Ti 2.19; 1Jo 3.6-9) and on the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit (Joh 6.27; 2Co 1.22; Eph 1.13-14; 4.30). The book of 1 John, written to identify the bases for assurance of

Christian Church Since The Apostolic Age, 2nd Edition, Vol. II (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1864), p. 134.

salvation (1Jo 5.13), does not directly mention baptism at all.³³⁴

Only because Scripture speaks of *circumcision* as a sign and a seal (Rom 4.11), did the Church, once having equated baptism with circumcision, begin to call baptism a sign and seal. However, we have seen in the [exegesis of Col 2.12](#) above that the equation of baptism with circumcision is a late and fallacious proposition.³³⁵ Therefore, while we *may* speak of baptism as a sign and a seal, we best avoid this terminology because of the false assurance it gives to those who mistakenly view their baptism as the sure sign of their salvation. We should certainly *not* speak of “the ‘new covenant’ sign of baptism,” as [N. T. Wright](#) apparently does,³³⁶ because the [NT](#) never associates baptism with covenant. If there is any sign of the new covenant, it is the Lord’s supper (Mat 26.28, etc.).

Sadly, identifying baptism as a sign and a seal proved irresistible to early [Fathers](#) and medieval theologians. According to J. P. T. Hunt,

[[Tertullian](#)] does, however, see an analogy between circumcision and baptism in that they are both signs and seals of a prior righteousness by faith. Alluding to Romans 4:11 he argues that baptism is ‘a sealing of faith which faith is begun and commended by the faith of repentance’: it is a ‘sign and seal of repentance’ for those who by grace inherit the promise made to Abraham.³³⁷

Ironically, while [Tertullian](#) saw baptism as a sign and seal of a *prior* “righteousness by faith,” and *necessarily prior* if he was thinking of Abraham’s circumcision as his template, the medieval Church quickly took up baptism as a sign and seal of the imperceptible faith [mystically](#) communicated to infants.

³³⁴ The “water” in 1Jo 5.6-8 probably refers to the baptism of Jesus, and is mentioned as evidence that eternal life is to be found in God’s Son (1Jo 5.11). However, the fact that this one book of the Bible written about assurance of salvation nowhere else refers to baptism or water is fatal to the ideas that baptism is required for salvation or is itself salvific.

³³⁵ “Whether or not the New Testament references to sealing refer to baptism, from the mid-second century onwards baptism is described as a seal.” J. P. T. Hunt, “Colossians 2:11-12, The Circumcision/Baptism Analogy, And Infant Baptism,” p. 11, *Tyndale House*, 1990, http://www.tyndalehouse.com/TynBul/Library/00_TyndaleBulletin_ByDate.htm (accessed March 23, 2010).

³³⁶ Stephen Kuhrt, *Tom Wright For Everyone*, (London: SPCK, 2011), p. 52, citing Wright’s *What Paul Really Said*, pp. 120-9; *Paul: Fresh Perspectives*, pp. 113-14, 121-2, 125-9.

³³⁷ J. P. T. Hunt, “Colossians 2:11-12, The Circumcision/Baptism Analogy, And Infant Baptism,” p. 11, *Tyndale House*, 1990, http://www.tyndalehouse.com/TynBul/Library/00_TyndaleBulletin_ByDate.htm (accessed March 23, 2010).

This should serve as a cautionary tale: the misapplication of terms in biblical exegesis encourages the evolution of false doctrine. Since Scripture does not call baptism a *sign* or a *seal*, neither should we.³³⁸

11. DOES CHRISTIAN BAPTISM REPLACE OR FULFILL JEWISH CIRCUMCISION?

[John Murray](#), the great reformed theologian of the 20th century, believed that “circumcision ... signifies fundamentally the same things as baptism.”³³⁹ In regard to the things signified, [Murray](#) followed [Calvin](#) in his belief that circumcision (1) enabled one to have union with God, (2) represented cleansing from sin, and (3) was the seal of righteousness by faith.³⁴⁰ These, however, are grandiose claims for circumcision, and full of confusion. Only for Abraham was circumcision a seal of righteousness by faith (Rom 4.11); not for his descendants, the vast majority of whom received circumcision in infancy before they were capable of faith. Furthermore, circumcision represents “cleansing from sin” in only the most indirect manner, and it enabled *men* to “have union with God” only in the sense that it allowed Israelite *men* to participate in the national religion — it had no application to women at all! Therefore, to give such significance to circumcision and then transfer this significance to baptism, only compounds the doctrinal confusion. Baptism does not effect union with God, it does not cleanse us from sin (nor does Scripture teach that it represents such a cleansing), and nowhere does the Bible call baptism a seal of anything.

Only after the mid-second century did the [Fathers](#) begin to call baptism a seal, and not until the mid-3rd century did they begin to construe baptism as Christian circumcision. As we saw in our [examination of Col 2.11-12](#) above, theologians in the Middle Ages, and later [Reformers](#) and [Reformed theologians](#), misread Paul as teaching that baptism is Christian circumcision. This biased exegesis was (and remains) motivated by the desire to justify

³³⁸ As Jensen says regarding the NT epistles, “References to sealing never occur in direct connection with baptism or allusions to baptism.” Robin M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), ch. 3.

³³⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), p. 232.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

infant baptism as the continuity of a “sign of the covenant” for children of believers.³⁴¹ We know that baptism *is not* Christian circumcision, however, for in the apostolic [church](#), and in the Jewish culture from which it emerged, baptism and circumcision were two distinct and coexisting rites, each with its own meaning and symbolism.³⁴² Baptism and circumcision never meant the same thing.³⁴³

Nor does Christian Baptism fulfill the [typology](#) of circumcision. As we saw in the [study of Christ's baptism](#) above, Christian baptism mirrors the baptism of the Levitical priests, and fulfills the [typology](#) of the flood (1Pe 3.20-21) and the crossing of the sea (1Co 10.1-2). Also, as we saw in the [examination of Col 2.11-12](#) above, it is the circumcision of the heart, rather than baptism, that fulfills the [type](#) of circumcision in the flesh.

12. DOES BAPTISM CONVEY FAITH TO INFANTS?

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's belief that “God creates the gift of faith in a person's heart” upon their baptism as an infant is completely unfounded. Scripture does not support such an idea, in spite of the claim on the [LCMS](#) web site that they believe it “because of what the Bible says about Baptism.” Their biblical evidence amounts to nothing more than the ancient misinterpretations of Joh 3.5 and Tit 3.5-6.

Furthermore, the following admission should embarrass my Lutheran brothers and sisters, though it is consistent with Luther's teaching³⁴⁴:

Although we do not claim to understand how this happens or how it is possible, we believe ... that when an infant is baptized God creates faith

³⁴¹ See, “The ‘Covenant of Grace’: Foundation for Paedobaptism,” in Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), p. 228 ff.

³⁴² Witherington interprets the parenthetical phrase “not the removal of the filth [= foreskin] of the flesh,” in 1Pe 3.21, as words by which “we are told that baptism is not circumcision.” Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology Of Baptism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), pp. 108-109.

³⁴³ To construe baptism as the new circumcision, is to imagine that Jesus invented the ritual of immersion out of thin air and that baptism had no religious antecedents among the people of God.

³⁴⁴ For a snippet of Luther's beliefs about baptism, see Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), vol. 7, ch. 3, §45.2.

in the heart of that infant. This faith cannot yet, of course, be expressed or articulated, yet it is real and present all the same³⁴⁵

Can God's gift of faith and new birth described in the Bible really be received as such a dormant, unconscious and imperceptible gift? Not hardly! It's true that God works invisibly at every moment, but when He does miracles that have to do with us, the effects of the miracle are quickly perceived. Personal "miracles" that remain dormant and imperceptible are the domain of frauds and magicians who traffic in the hopes of the gullible. In contrast, the working principle of the entire book of 1 John — and indeed of the whole NT — is that "he who is born of God" shows the outward signs of the regenerating event.

Let's not "check our brains at the Church door." The secular world already has enough ammunition with which to accuse Christianity of being anti-intellectual, unscientific, obtuse and gullible. The faith of baptized infants "cannot ... be expressed or articulated" because *it is non-existent*.³⁴⁶

13. IS FAITH TOO SUBJECTIVE A BASIS FOR BAPTISM?

Martin Luther, in an attack against the Anabaptists' teaching of believer's baptism (which seemed novel at the time), said that people should be baptized because God commands it, *not* because they have come to faith. Regarding the Anabaptists, Luther wrote,

... as I have observed, they take their stand on this saying: 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.' [Mar 16.16] They wish to infer from this that no one should be baptized until he believes. On the contrary I say that they venture upon great presumptuousness. For if they intend to follow out this notion they must not baptize until they

³⁴⁵ The web article continues "(see, e.g., 1 Pet 3:21; Acts 2:38-39; Titus 3:5-6; Matt. 18:6; Luke 1:15; 2 Tim. 3:15; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:13)." "Infant Baptism," *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, 2003-2009, (accessed November 1, 2009, but no longer posted).

³⁴⁶ The belief that God gives faith to infants goes back to Luther. See Martin Luther, *The Larger Catechism 13A. Part Fourth, Of Infant Baptism*, Robert E. Smith, <http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/catechism/web/cat-13a.html> (accessed April 14, 2010). Luther "postulated the presence of faith in an infant, in order to bring his doctrine of infant baptism into line with justification by faith." But I agree with Beasley-Murray, from whom this preceding quote of Kattenbusch is taken, that "I can understand Luther in his day applying exegesis of this kind to infant baptism, but I find it difficult to comprehend how men of our time can take it seriously." See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism In The New Testament* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1963), p. 347.

know of a surety that the candidate for baptism does believe. But how and when can they ever know that? Have they become gods, so that they can see into the heart of the people and know whether they believe or not?

You say, 'He confesses that he has faith,' etc. No, rather, keep confession out of it. The text does not say, 'He who confesses,' but 'He who believes.' His confession you have, certainly, but his faith you do not know; hence on your view you cannot satisfy this saying unless you also know his faith, because all men are liars and only God knows the heart. Whoever therefore will base baptism on the faith of the person seeking baptism must never baptize anyone, for even if you were to baptize a person a hundred times a day you cannot once know whether he believes.

It is true that a person should believe for baptism, but baptism should not be administered on the basis of faith. It is one thing to have faith and another to trust in faith and so be baptized on the grounds of faith. He who gets baptized on the basis of faith is not only uncertain, but is also an idolatrous denier of Christ; for he trusts and builds on something of his own, namely on a gift that God has given him, and not on God's word alone, precisely as another builds and reposes trust on his strength, his riches, power, wisdom, holiness, which are also gifts given by God.³⁴⁷

[Kurt Aland](#), himself a [paedobaptist](#), provides further explanation of Luther's meaning:

I do not get baptized, explains Luther, because I am sure of faith, but because God has commanded it and will have it. "For even though I were never more sure of faith, yet am I sure of the command, since God enjoins baptism, sending forth the command for the whole world, Here I can make no mistake, for God's command cannot deceive; but he has never said or demanded or ordered anything about my faith."³⁴⁸

In other words, [Martin Luther](#), the great champion of "justification by faith," when confronted with the preaching and practice of [believer's baptism](#), decided that a person's faith was too subjective a basis for Christian baptism:

³⁴⁷ Martin Luther, quoted in K. Aland, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 114-155, as given in Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology Of Baptism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), pp. 124-125.

³⁴⁸ K. Aland, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 114-155, as given in Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology Of Baptism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 125.

how can anyone be sure that they have true faith? However, this ploy of [Luther's](#) was not just an attempt to discredit the [Anabaptists](#), but also a transparent defense of his own doctrine of infant baptism. If the Church were to see faith as the prerequisite basis for baptism, then the doctrine of infant baptism would collapse. Therefore Luther had to seek a basis other than faith for baptism, and he felt that he had found that basis in the biblical command to be baptized. The biblical command to be baptized is entirely objective, and unlike the [Anabaptists'](#) prerequisite of faith, it does not (in [Luther's](#) understanding) place a lower limit on the age of the [baptizand](#).

While I appreciate the emphasis upon objective theological truth in [confessional](#) churches, this argument of [Luther's](#) highlights the chief weakness of [Confessionalism](#), a weakness which likely contributed much to the descent of many mainline churches into liberalism and apostasy, namely, the de-emphasis of the biblical insistence upon a subjective relationship with God and Christ via the Holy Spirit. The priority upon doctrinal correctness deprioritized the Christian's subjective experience of Christ. Indeed, by making every subjective Christian experience uncertain, [Luther's](#) argument against [believer's baptism](#) undermined personal assurance of salvation, and encouraged instead a corporate assurance based upon external obedience and conformity to denominational tenets.

However, regarding assurance of salvation, consider John's words in 1Jo 5.13: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." John anticipated that his audience could *know* that they have eternal life, and could know it on the basis of evidence of belief (faith) in their lives. Look also at the words of Jesus in Joh 5.24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." These words would have had *no meaning* for the hearers — and certainly no comfort — if they had thought it impossible to know whether they really believed. Along the same lines, [Luther](#) seems not to have understood the [NT's](#) teaching regarding the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1.13; 4.30). A seal only has value if it is observable; the pledge of the Holy Spirit's sealing in the believer only makes a difference to the degree

that it is a *perceptible* down payment of all the blessings of salvation still to come (2Co 1.22). Therefore, not only can believers know that they have true faith, but they should also have a discernable experience of the Holy Spirit's presence, assuring them of vital relationship with Christ.

Furthermore, by his anti-faith argument, [Luther](#) showed a lack of understanding of (or at least a disregard for) the first-century setting of the [NT](#). In the time of Jesus and the apostles, subjective faith in Christ was swiftly made objective by the cost of professing it. [Luther](#) disparaged the one who “confesses that he has faith,” but in the early centuries (as also now in many lands) Christians confessed their faith in Jesus at the risk of their lives. Theirs was not a personal faith that anyone was uncertain about!

[Luther](#) also seems to have been confused about the gift of faith. He accused the one “who gets baptized on the basis of faith” of being “an idolatrous denier of Christ; for he trusts and builds on something of his own, namely the gift that God has given him.” *If* the Anabaptists had trusted in their faith, they would not have trusted in something of their own, but in — as [Luther](#) calls it — a gift that God has given. However, the Anabaptists never trusted in faith, for to believe in belief is absurd.

The problem lies in the fact that [Luther](#) believed in [baptismal regeneration](#), and so he conflated baptism and salvation, and took offense at anything he perceived (or interpreted) as an attempt to *merit* baptism (= salvation). However, the [Anabaptists](#) were not trying to merit their salvation. They believed and trusted in Christ for their salvation, and on that basis were subsequently baptized. They did not trust in faith. Neither did they teach that one had to merit baptism, but only that it was appropriate to believe in Christ before being baptized. Ironically, while [Luther](#) professed that faith in Christ was paramount, he promoted *trust in baptism* as the sacrament that produces faith and regenerates the baptizee!³⁴⁹

[Aland](#), as we might expect, also conflated baptism and salvation, and said that if “faith is made a presupposition for baptism which a [person] brings with him — it is made into a work that he does.”³⁵⁰ Bringing works with us to

³⁴⁹ In this he followed Augustine.

³⁵⁰ K. Aland, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; London:

baptism is only a problem if we believe that baptism saves us, but it does not. Biblically, we don't bring works with us to be saved, but we ought to bring works with us to be baptized, as John the Baptist made abundantly clear (Luk 3.7-8). It is appropriate to bring a "track record" of good works with us, even if that track record is brief, because according to Scripture, the first thing Christian baptism testifies to is *repentance*, as I have explained above in the section entitled "[Baptisms Of Repentance](#)" and following. [Luther](#) focused upon the biblical command to be baptized, but God nowhere commands the whole world to be baptized irrespective of their faith.³⁵¹ However, God *does* command "that all *people* everywhere should repent" (Act 17.30).

So, let us return to the question: Is faith too subjective a basis for baptism? If so, the book of Acts misleads us by repeatedly reporting belief as the only antecedent to Christian baptism (Act 2.38; 8.12-13; 18.8; 19.4). No, on the contrary, the [NT](#) consistently teaches a *subjective* experience of faith in Christ, made *objective* by observable repentance and confession, as the appropriate antecedent to baptism. By excising the subjective experience of faith and repentance from baptism, Lutherans and other [paedobaptists](#) have multiplied the ranks of those who call themselves Christians but remain [unregenerate](#) with no true knowledge of Christ or interest in His kingdom.

14. DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY THAT ENTIRE FAMILIES WERE BAPTIZED?

Paul said that he had baptized "the household of Stephanas" (1Co 1.16). Luke wrote that Lydia and "her household" were baptized (Act 16.15), and that the Philippian jailer and "all his household" were baptized (Act 16.33). Luke also implied that all the "household" of Cornelius was saved and baptized together (Act 10.33-48; 11.14), and implied the same for the household of Crispus (Act 18.8). However, to assume that the households described in these passages had infants who were included in the baptisms is a symptom of [baptismism](#).

SCM Press, 1963), pp. 114-155, as given in Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology Of Baptism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 125.

³⁵¹ On the contrary, it is only *disciples* who are to be baptized and taught (Mat 28.19-20).

Such an assumption also ignores how people use language in reporting group events. Imagine a family named Smith which consists of husband, wife, two teenagers and a toddler. I say to you, “I’ve enlisted the Smith family (household) for our church softball team.” Knowing that the Smith family includes a toddler, you would not assume that said toddler was going to play on the ball team. Rather, you would assume I had enlisted all the *eligible members* of the family for the team, not the toddler, because you know the nature of softball. By this thought experiment we see that the nature of the activity defines the meaning of *household*, rather than the term *household* defining the nature of the activity.

Indeed, we discover in the book of Acts that the family members of the “households” who were saved and baptized feared God (Act 10.2), heard the gospel (Act 10.44; 16.32; 18.8), believed (Act 16.34; 18.8), and rejoiced (Act 16.34). We cannot bring ourselves to believe that in the households of Lydia, Cornelius or the Philippian Jailer there were *infants* who feared God, heard the gospel, believed and rejoiced! Instead, we use our common sense and realize that the apostolic reports of household conversions refer to the household members old enough to be evangelized. As Ben Witherington III writes, “We conclude that those who are searching for hints of infant baptism in the New Testament would do well to look elsewhere than among the household texts.”³⁵²

Let’s once and for all set aside the “household” passages of the NT as having no doctrinal bearing on baptism. “Household” reports do not appear in any doctrinal passages in Scripture and so do not utilize the precise language necessary for presenting a definitive statement on who should be baptized and who should not.

15. IS THERE ANY VALUE IN INFANT BAPTISM?

The NT teaches us that Christian baptism is a person’s response to conscious faith and repentance, not the divine means to produce faith or effect

³⁵² Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 65.

regeneration.³⁵³ Likewise, the practice of catechizing baptizands in the subapostolic church tells us that baptism for the first followers of Jesus was a step of obedience, not a rite received unconsciously in infancy. The NT does not require instruction before baptism, but that is beside my point here. *The Didache* (c. AD 80-110), Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* (c. AD 150), and *The Shepherd Of Hermas* (c. AD 160) are among the early Christian writings that prescribe instruction (and sometimes fasting) before baptism. “Indeed, the season of Lent is a survival from that practice [of catechizing in the early church]. [Lent] was originally the final period of preparation before baptism.”³⁵⁴ All of this militates against the idea of baptizing an oblivious baby.

Not only did the early church catechize, but Justin Martyr also emphasized the importance and privilege of *choosing* to be baptized.³⁵⁵ Justin taught that believers need not remain helplessly conditioned by the wickedness of their parents, but by choosing baptism can become wise and

³⁵³ David F. Wright quoted English Congregationalist Bernard Lord Manning (1892-1941) as having said:

In baptism the main thing is not what men do, but what God has done. It is a sign that Christ claims all men as His own and that He had redeemed them to a new way of life. That is why we baptise children ... The water of baptism declares that they are already entitled to all God’s mercies to men in the passion of Christ. Your own baptism ought then to mean much to you. It ought to mean all the more because it happened before you knew, or could know, anything about it. Christ redeemed you on the first Good Friday without any thought or action on your part. It is right therefore that as He acted in the first instance, without waiting for any sign of faith from you, so Baptism, the sign of the benefits of His Kingdom, should come to you without waiting for any faith or desire on your part. Every time we baptise a child, we declare to the whole world in the most solemn manner that God does for us what He does without our merits and even without our knowledge. In baptism, more plainly perhaps than anywhere else, God commends His love toward us that *while we were yet sinners* Christ died for us.

According to Lord Manning, then, it would appear that we should desist from preaching the gospel and from calling people to repentance and instead we should just baptize all babies! Such ideas of unconscious salvation are utterly foreign to the NT. David F. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done To Baptism*, (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 21.

³⁵⁴ “Later when baptism was mainly something that happened in infancy, Lent, now no longer needed as a preparation for baptism, evolved its new rationale as a period of penitence.” Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (London; Grand Rapids, MI: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Baker Academic, 2010), p. 21.

³⁵⁵ *1Apo* 61.

responsible Christians, or as he puts it, they “may become the children of choice and knowledge.” Justin conflates baptism with regeneration and, therefore, absurdly speaks of *choosing* “to be born again,” but again, that is beside my point here. My point is that the earliest Christians never contemplated infant baptism, and far less would they have assigned any value to it.

Paedobaptists, of course, vigorously resist the fact that the early Church had nothing to do with infant baptism.³⁵⁶ Some proponents of infant baptism, for example, argue that the earliest Christian writings do not mention infant baptism *because* the Church up to that time only did “missionary baptism,” i.e., it baptized converts “from without,” and did not yet have to address the needs of children born within the Church to Christian parents. This, however, is an argument contradicted by historical evidence.³⁵⁷ As Kurt Aland observed, “this distinction between ‘missionary baptism’ and the baptism of a child of Christian parents ... does not come to terms with the actual situation of the churches of the second century, and in fact it is a distinction that never existed.”³⁵⁸ Indeed, as late as AD 125, Aristides described how Christian parents “persuade” their children to become Christians, in the same way that they persuade servants (if they have them).³⁵⁹ Clearly, the children that Aristides had in view were old enough to reason, past the age when they could be baptized as infants, and were being evangelized in the same way as any other thinking person. It appears, therefore, that only doctrinal bias has

³⁵⁶ A Lutheran website claims that, “From the beginning of New Testament Christianity at Pentecost to our time, unbroken and uninterrupted, the Church baptized babies.” Besides doctrinal bias, this claim reveals historical naiveté. The site goes on to claim that, “Polycarp (69-155 AD), a disciple of the Apostle John, was baptized as an infant,” but provides no evidence for this assertion. It is, in fact, only an inference from Polycarp’s testimony that he had served Christ for “eighty and six years” (*The Encyclical Epistle Of The Church At Smyrna Concerning The Martyrdom Of The Holy Polycarp* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1). Polycarp’s brief words, however, say nothing about baptism, and only provide evidence for his youthful conversion. See “Infant Baptism History,” *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, 2003-2009, <http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine - history> (accessed August 3, 2015).

³⁵⁷ Besides the fact that it is a fallacious *argumentum ex silentio*.

³⁵⁸ Kurt Aland, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1961), p. 45.

³⁵⁹ Aris 15. See the discussion of this passage from Aristides in Kurt Aland, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1961), p. 57.

prompted the hypothesis of an early distinction between the baptism of outsiders and the baptism of children born to Christian parents.

As further evidence against such a distinction, as well as against the belief that the earliest Christians practiced infant baptism, we find that when later Christians began to ask that their infants be baptized, [Tertullian](#) (AD 200) urged with admirable common sense that “the delay of baptism is preferable” particularly “in the case of little children.” “Let them [come for baptism],” he said, “while they are growing up; ... while they are learning, while they are learning wither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ.”³⁶⁰ From this passage of [Tertullian’s](#) we learn that even after baptism had come to be viewed as [salvific](#) by many, the practice of infant baptism was far from the norm; it was only becoming a trend at the beginning of the 3rd century. As [Kurt Aland](#) put it, “[Tertullian](#) endeavors by every possible means in his power to stem the *tide of development* towards infant baptism.”³⁶¹

Thus, the early Church’s lack of, *and later resistance to*, infant baptism, assures us that such baptism confers no benefit upon the oblivious baby. Instead, infant baptism and its doctrinal assumptions have done immeasurable harm for generations by deleting repentance and conscious assent from the reception of the gospel, by making a person’s faith and [new birth](#) things that need no corroboration, and by — more than any other doctrine — producing a world full of *nominal* Christians “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2Ti 3.5^{ESV}).

16. MUST I RENOUNCE THE BAPTISM I RECEIVED AS AN INFANT; SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED AGAIN?

The Bible says nothing about infant baptism, and so does not address the question of what we should do about an infant baptism we no longer believe in. People who were baptized as infants certainly did not sin by their involuntary involvement in the rite. There is no biblical reason to make a public issue of

³⁶⁰ *Bap* 18.

³⁶¹ Kurt Aland, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1961), p. 62, emphasis added. Tertullian’s reasons for resisting the baptism of infants may have been faulty, but his resistance nevertheless demonstrates that paedobaptism was no apostolic norm.

one's inward repudiation of their infant baptism. However, since the NT teaches baptism as a *response* to conscious faith, it is appropriate that the infant-baptized person who comes to faith receive a believer's baptism.

17. DOES BAPTISM MAKE US CHURCH MEMBERS?

To answer this question, we must specify whether we mean membership in the Church, the redeemed family of God, or whether we mean membership in a church, i.e., in a particular local congregation or denomination. If we ask whether baptism makes us a member of the Church, the redeemed family of God, the answer (contrary to the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and other baptismal regenerationist theologies) is unequivocally *No*.³⁶² God Himself makes us members of the Church when He gives us new birth by His Spirit (Joh 1.12-13; 6.63). The question of membership in a local church or denomination is more complex, in part because membership in a church and in the Church has often been conflated.

The Bible never mentions Church/church membership, as such, even as it never speaks in terms of *initiation* (see the [analysis of 1Co 12.13](#) above). The overarching themes of our NT are that people must be reconciled to God through His Son (Rom 5.10-11; 2Co 5.18-20), become disciples of Jesus (Mat 28.19) and testify to His lordship by word and life (Act 1.8). In the light of these mandates, it makes sense that the apostles never concerned themselves with prerequisites for membership in a local church, but rather with how one should “conduct himself in the household of God, which is the Church” (1Ti 3.15). As far as the apostles were concerned, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and the practical imperative was that “everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness” (2Ti 2.19).

Indeed, in the apostolic era, people didn't “join a church,” but simply came to faith and began to associate with other believers. Therefore, because

³⁶² According to David F. Wright, “In the sixteenth century Martin Luther liked to challenge the Anabaptists (who rejected paedobaptism) to say whether they accepted that there had been no Christian baptism for 1500 years and consequently no Christian church.” Luther erred in making such a challenge, however, both in his high estimation of what baptism effected and in his assumption that infant baptism had been practiced since the apostolic era. See David F. Wright, *What Has Infant Baptism Done To Baptism*, (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p.11.

frauds often appear in vibrant fellowships, the apostles vigilantly protected the church's testimony by demanding the discipline of those who claimed to be brothers in the faith but who lived immorally (1Co 5). Thus we find that in the earliest post-biblical Christian writings, like the *Didache*, profession of faith in Christ sufficed for a person to be received into the Christian community, and the main requirement for remaining in good standing in the fellowship (besides maintaining faith) was that the person work and not idly take advantage of the others.³⁶³

Historically, it was not until the marriage of church and state (after Emperor Constantine) that church membership began to take on greater importance. Once government jobs and other benefits began to go to Christians rather than pagans, church membership became a vital concern both to ambitious individuals and to avaricious bishops. By the time church membership had thus become an issue, baptism had already been reinterpreted as *salvific*, and so it followed naturally that the church declared baptism, properly administered by a duly ordained member of the clergy, the *sine qua non* of church membership.³⁶⁴ It also followed naturally that the Roman church and those congregations under its sway came to think of itself as *the Church* and to make no distinction between the organizational entity and the spiritual one. This encouraged the populace to believe that they could not be saved unless they were members of the earthly organization of the church. As Philip Schaff commented, “Before *Zwingli* it was the universal opinion that there can be no salvation outside of the visible [c]hurch (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*).”³⁶⁵ Indeed, during the middle ages, not only eternal salvation but the right to receive any of the sacraments, including a proper marriage and funeral, pivoted on church membership. This made excommunication a weapon of the church that could humble kings.

³⁶³ *Did* 12.

³⁶⁴ As *Origen* wrote, “Those who are being begotten again [ἀναγεννώμενοι, ä-nä-yën-'nō-mē-nē] through divine baptism are placed in Paradise, that is, in the church.” Origen, *Commentary On Genesis*, Book 3, on Gen 2.15, quoted by Everett Ferguson, *Baptism In The Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 417.

³⁶⁵ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes, Volume I: The History of Creeds* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1878), p. 382.

Of course, the more baptism became synonymous with [regeneration](#) and with membership in the Church, the more compromised the church became. Precisely because people could receive baptism as a purely external act requiring no evidence other than itself, a situation quickly evolved in which “large segments of church membership consisted merely of baptized pagans.”³⁶⁶ [Luther](#) and other [Reformers](#) did not help this state of affairs when they retained infant baptism in their [Protestant](#) theologies. Indeed, baptism in the new state churches became equated (in the popular mind) not only with [regeneration](#) but with citizenship. Before long, to be a German or an Englishman was to be a Christian by virtue of membership, via infant baptism, in the Lutheran or Anglican church.

This [sacramentalized](#) version of Christianity, in effect basing salvation upon church membership, sparked a reaction from the Puritans and Baptists.³⁶⁷ These groups began to explicitly require “a conversion experience prior to church membership and baptism.”³⁶⁸ Now, the Baptist movement early on “linked baptism with church membership,”³⁶⁹ but the difference was that the Baptists required persons to be born again *before* baptism, thus ensuring, in theory, that only [regenerate baptizees](#) would populate the church membership.

From the foregoing historical summary, we should see that, while every local church and denomination has the right to define for itself the prerequisites for membership in their particular organization, it has always created problems to emphasize a linkage between membership and baptism. At worst, linking baptism with church membership has conveyed the idea, intentionally or not, that baptism is [salvific](#). At best, stressing baptism as the door to church membership has tended to make the message of baptism, “You’re in!” and to obscure the biblical message of baptism which is, “Jesus

³⁶⁶ Howard Frederic Vos and Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Exploring Church History*, Nelson’s Christian Cornerstone Series (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), part 2, §6.

³⁶⁷ The Methodist and subsequent holiness movements can also be seen as, in part, reactions to the nominal Christianity unintentionally encouraged by the [paedobaptist](#) Anglican and other churches.

³⁶⁸ Howard Frederic Vos and Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Exploring Church History*, Nelson’s Christian Cornerstone Series (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), part 4, §19.

³⁶⁹ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 581.

took your wrath, now go to work in His Kingdom!” We look around us in the church and we see the fruit of the [initiation](#) emphasis; we desperately need to return to the [consecration](#) emphasis.

To summarize, water baptism in no way saves people or makes them members of the Church (God’s family of the redeemed). On the other hand, baptism *may* make the [baptizee](#) a recognized member of a local church or denomination, but Scripture never addresses this matter in any direct way.

18. WHO CAN BAPTIZE?

As [Wayne Grudem](#) writes, we should recognize that,

...Scripture simply does not specify any restrictions on who can perform the ceremony of baptism. Those churches that have a special priesthood through which certain actions (and blessings) come (such as Roman Catholics, and to some extent Anglicans) will wish to insist that only properly ordained clergy should baptize in ordinary circumstances (though exceptions could be made in unusual circumstances). But if we truly believe in the priesthood of all believers (see 1 Peter 2:4–10), then there seems to be no need *in principle* to restrict the right to perform baptism only to ordained clergy.³⁷⁰

I heartily concur. However, for Christian baptism to make sense, the [baptizee](#) should have some understanding of its significance. Generally speaking, therefore, persons should be baptized by those who evangelized them, or at least under the guidance of someone who can provide a biblical understanding of the event. Scripture does not preclude friends baptizing friends or fathers performing the ceremony for their offspring, so long as the baptizee has a biblical understanding of the consecration they are receiving. Obviously, then, it is generally beneficial for baptism to occur under the guidance of mature spiritual leadership, like the pastors or elders of the local church.

19. WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO FOR ME?

What does baptism do for me? This question has a wrong orientation. Early on, the [Fathers](#) began to emphasize baptism’s benefit to the [baptizee](#), but this was not the ritual’s focus from the beginning. For the apostles, baptism was all

³⁷⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), pp. 983–984.

about Christ, our repentance toward Him, our commitment to serve Him in His Kingdom, and our testimony about His death and resurrection. Sadly, an anthropocentric focus in baptism replaced these apostolic emphases, and persists among us.

I recently perused a brochure for a local church. It listed “What We Believe” under six headings: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Bible, Sin, and Baptism. Under Baptism the bullet points were:

- An Act of Obedience commanded by Christ in order to receive salvation
- Biblical Baptism is only by Immersion
- Baptism is for the Forgiveness of Sins, for Putting on Christ, Receiving the Holy Spirit, for appealing to God for a clear Conscience.

Only the second point is correct, but none of the three points direct the reader’s mind to repentance, commitment, nor testimony.³⁷¹ Not one point emphasizes the person and atoning work of Jesus. The one that comes closest is the first point acknowledging the need for obedience to Christ, but even the obedience, in this case, is *not about Christ* but about receiving salvation! Sadly, the points in this church brochure follow the [Fathers](#) in promoting baptism as a man-centered [sacrament](#); a ritual that does something for *me*.

Nevertheless, while our baptism should primarily point to our Lord Jesus Christ, the act of baptism *does* bless the [baptizee](#). As we have seen from the [examination of Gal 3.27](#) and of [1Co 10.1-2](#), baptism both announces and (particularly in a milieu of persecution) strengthens our resolve to follow Christ. This public announcement of faith made in our baptism not only fortifies us against turning back to the world, but also knits us into the local Christian community. It bonds us to fellow believers by allowing them to witness the sincerity of our commitment to Christ and His work, and gives them the confidence to welcome us into the ministries of the church. Since baptism is a potentially costly step of obedience, it also contributes to our own confidence and boldness in the faith. Finally, our baptism provides us with a lasting memorial of the vital truths of the gospel. Baptism reminds us of

³⁷¹ The reference to “putting on Christ” in the third point should be understood as having to do with Christian commitment, but the general reader of the church brochure would hardly understand this.

Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and thus of the wages of sin and of our liberation from sin's power (Rom 6), it helps us recall how Christ took the billows of God's judgment in our place (see the [analysis of 1Pe 3.21](#) above), and also reminds us of our consecration to the priestly work of Christ's Kingdom (see the [study of Christ's baptism](#), Mat 3.13-17, above). All of this taken together makes baptism a precious gift from God.

One might object that I have listed only the practical blessings of baptism, and that I have not mentioned any [mystical](#) benefits. Indeed, I have not mentioned any of the latter, because, by strict definition of the word [mystical](#), baptism provides no such benefits (this truth is covered at length in [Part II](#) below). This does not negate, however, that the experience of baptism can be accompanied by a subjective and personal experience of blessing from God, such as joy in the Holy Spirit, etc.

20. IS BAPTISM A MEANS OF GRACE?

If by “means of grace” we express the [sacramental](#) view that baptism [regenerates](#) the baptizee, or that baptism “creates ... the gift of faith in a person's heart,”³⁷² then we credit to baptism what the Bible credits only to God's Holy Spirit (Tit 3.5; Gal 5.22), and the answer is *No*, baptism is not a “means of grace” in this sense. However, if we mean that baptism, by virtue of the [baptizee's](#) faith and obedience in receiving the rite, is a source of spiritual boldness, or that baptism through its rich symbolism is a vehicle for instructing and encouraging those who witness it, then, *Yes*, baptism is one of God's means of maturing and fortifying His people by His grace. As such, it is a source of blessing and encouragement just like the Lord's Supper, corporate prayer and worship, and the study and preaching of the Scriptures.

21. WHY DIDN'T JESUS BAPTIZE?

If baptism is such a blessing, even without any innate [mystical](#) or [salvific](#) power, why didn't Jesus baptize (see Joh 3.22-26 with Joh 4.1-2)? Scripture does not address this question directly, and so the answers we suggest are necessarily speculative. [Olshausen](#), for example, quotes [Meyer](#) to the effect

³⁷² “Baptism And Its Purpose,” *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*, 2003-2009, <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2607> (accessed November 1, 2009).

that Jesus thought it “unsuitable to baptize in His own name.”³⁷³ However, Jesus baptizing in His own name would hardly have been unsuitable in purpose and meaning.³⁷⁴ Instead, for Jesus to baptize in His own name might have prematurely aroused both the pro-messianic and anti-messianic sentiments among the people. Jesus wisely did not baptize before His hour had come; once the hour had come, He had to ascend to the Father and leave the baptizing to His disciples.

We also find a clue about Jesus’ not baptizing in Paul’s statement that, “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1Co 1.17). In the context of that statement, Paul was reproving the schismatic spirit in the Corinthian church and thanking God that he had hardly baptized anyone there, and that no Corinthian could claim to have been baptized in *his* name. In like manner, Jesus by His lack of baptizing may have avoided providing a basis for baptizees to boast that they were in an elite class. In view of human nature, if some had been baptized by the very hands of Jesus, they probably would have claimed to have been baptized into “the order of Melchizedek,” or the like.

Godet provided further insight still. Godet said that “By baptizing, [Jesus] attested to the unity of His work with that of the forerunner. *By not Himself baptizing*, He made the superiority of His position above that of John the Baptist to be felt.”³⁷⁵ In other words, Jesus not baptizing with His own hands helped maintain His unique position as the object of Christian baptism and as the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit (rather than one who baptizes no differently than John did (cf. Chrysostom, *Hom Joh* 31.1, as enlarged upon by Aquinas³⁷⁶). In another place Godet added that, “By leaving the baptism of

³⁷³ Hermann Olshausen, John Henry Augustus Ebrard, and Augustus Wiesinger, *Biblical Commentary on the New Testament by Dr. Hermann Olshausen, Volumes 1-6*, translated by A. C. Kendrick and David Fosdick, Jr. (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, & Co., 1857-1859), Vol. 2., p. 373.

³⁷⁴ Augustine (*Ad Seleuciam* Epi 18) believed that Jesus baptized His own disciples. See Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers, Volume 4: St. John* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1845), p. 135.

³⁷⁵ Godet, quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To John (Revised)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 223, n. 7, emphasis mine.

³⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers, Volume 4: St. John*, (Oxford: John

water to the apostles, He rendered the rite independent of His personal presence, and so provided for the maintenance of it in His Church after His departure.”³⁷⁷ This is undoubtedly true. Had Jesus Himself baptized, after His departure believers might have doubted the validity of baptism performed by anyone else!

Apparently, Jesus Himself did not baptize for various reasons. The chief reason, however, may have been to undercut the human tendency toward works-justification and [sacramentalism](#). We realize that if baptism were [salvific](#), then it would have been inconceivable for Jesus the Savior to not baptize. Instead, we would have expected Him to set the example for His disciples by baptizing as many people as possible, leaving no room for Paul’s remark, “For Christ did not send me to baptize” (1Co 1.17).³⁷⁸ Therefore, in the unwillingness of Jesus to baptize by His own hands we should see the confirmation of Paul’s declaration that the *gospel*, not baptism, is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1.16). Hence, Paul’s full statement to the Corinthians, “For Christ did not send me to baptize **but to preach the gospel**” (1Co 1.17). Our Lord Jesus could have made the same statement, with one variation: “For *the Spirit did not anoint* me to baptize but to preach the gospel” (see Luk 4.18).

Henry Parker, 1845), p. 135.

³⁷⁷ Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, W. Robertson Nicoll, (ed.), *The Expositor’s Greek Testament, Vol. 1*, (New York: George H. Doran Company), p. 723.

³⁷⁸ As H. A. A. Kennedy wrote,

... one of the chief impressions left upon the careful reader of the Epistles must be that of the Apostle’s detachment from ritual in every shape and form. If “sacramental teaching is central in the primitive Christianity to which the Roman Empire began to be converted,” [as K. Lake says in his *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*] it is astonishing to find such scanty references to it in letters, some of the most important of which were addressed to Christian communities which Paul had never visited. It is absurd to suggest that the reason for this silence lies in the fact that “Baptism and its significance was common ground to him and all other Christians”. This is not in accord with Paul’s practice. His delight is to come back again and again to all the crucial elements in his own religious experience, an experience which was foundational in shaping his doctrine.

H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions* (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), pp. 234-235.

22. WHAT IS BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD?

Since baptism was neither [salvific](#) nor preeminent in the ministries of Jesus and Paul, why were people baptized for the dead (1Co 15.29)? The answer to this question is multifaceted enough to require more than a brief treatment, so I refer the reader to [Appendix 2](#).

23. WHAT IS THE PROPER MODE OF BAPTISM?

The question of Christian baptism's proper mode, is the question of how the water should be administered: should it be sprinkled on a person (as in the [OT](#) sprinklings of blood), poured (in analogy with the outpourings of the Holy Spirit), or used in sufficient quantity for the [baptizee](#) to be fully immersed?

Ironically, the verb βαπτίζω (vāp-'tē-zō) means *to dip* or *immerse* (2Ki 5.14), and by analogy to overwhelm (Isa 21.4^{LXX}).³⁷⁹ Had this verb and its cognate nouns βαπτισμός (vāp-tēz-'mōs) and βάπτισμα ('vāp-tēz-mə) been consistently *translated* rather than *transliterated* in our Bibles, Christians might have been saved centuries of controversy and grief. Our Great Commission would have read, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **immersing** them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mat 28.19). What endless debate that would have avoided! No one would now be asking the absurd question, “What is the proper mode of *immersion*?”

The fundamental meaning of βαπτίζω (vāp-'tē-zō), *to dip* or *immerse*, is not altered by its application to the ritual washing of hands and of kitchen vessels. Mark used βαπτίζω of the washing of the hands³⁸⁰ in water before eating, and the noun βαπτισμός (vāp-tēz-'mōs) of the purification of kitchen vessels (Mar 7.4). In both cases the *immersion* of the things being “baptized” is in view, whether simply by plunging or by being held under a copious pouring of water. The biblical word usage, then, implies that for human objects of

³⁷⁹ Cf. the baptism of overwhelming suffering to which Jesus alludes in Mar 10.38 and Luk 12.50.

³⁸⁰ See John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew-1 Corinthians: Volume 2, Matthew-Mark* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), pp. 417-418, for an explanation that the baptism of self in Mar 7.4 was of the hands only.

baptism, immersion (even if it involves some pouring) is the mode contemplated.

Furthermore, baptism's commemoration of the flood and the crossing of the sea, its imitation of the consecration of the Levitical priests and of Jesus Himself, and finally its dramatization of the burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6.4-5; Col 2.12), all imply full immersion as the proper mode of baptism.

Still, [Reymond](#) joins [John Murray](#) in arguing from Rom 6 that since the mode of baptism cannot reflect *all* aspects of our union with Christ, we should therefore not focus on the burial aspect as implying the mode of baptism. In other words, as [Murray](#) correctly noted, Paul in Rom 6 mentions four aspects of our participation by faith in Christ's atonement:

- (1) "crucified with Him," v. 6;
- (2) "baptized into His death," v. 3;
- (3) "buried with Him," v. 4;
- (4) "united with Him in the likeness of His ... resurrection," v. 5.

Since Paul clearly *does not* suggest that the mode of baptism reflects crucifixion (item 1), [Reymond](#) and [Murray](#) argue that neither does Paul imply in Rom 6 that the mode of baptism reflects burial and resurrection (items 3 and 4), and therefore, Rom 6 does not set forth immersion as the mode of baptism.

This caution is well taken, since, as I have said above, Rom 6 is not primarily about baptism. That being the case, we should not expect the passage to offer direct teaching about the mode of baptism. However, while Paul never speaks of our being *crucified* with Christ in baptism, he does say "we have been **buried** with Him through baptism" (Rom 6.4), and speaks of having been "planted together in the likeness of his death" (Rom 6.5 ^{KJV}), and also speaks of "having been **buried** with him in baptism, in which you were also **raised up** with Him" (Col 2.12). Thus, Paul associates the ideas of burial and resurrection with baptism in a way that he does not associate the idea of crucifixion. Furthermore, Paul associates the ideas of burial and resurrection with baptism in a way that becomes meaningless or [mystical](#) if the external act of baptism does not somehow illustrate both burial and resurrection.

Reymond goes on to argue that, “We should no more single out our union with Christ in burial and resurrection and make these two aspects of our union with him the pattern for the mode of baptism than we should appeal to Galatians 3.27 (‘For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, ...’) and argue on the basis of its statement that baptism should be carried out by requiring the new Christian to don a white robe, that is, by a ‘baptism by donning.’” However, this clever argument confuses the symbolism of baptism with the practical result of baptism. Baptism does not *result* in our being buried with Christ, nor *result* in our resurrection, thus, Paul calls baptism the “**likeness** of His death” (Rom 6.5). Conversely, Paul does *not* call baptism the “likeness of His clothing” or the “likeness of being clothed.” Rather, for those who understand the clothing metaphor (see the [examination of Gal 3.27](#) above), Paul says, “all of you who were baptized into Christ [experienced the result that you] have clothed yourselves [i.e., identified yourselves] with Christ.” Reymond and Murray, who associated baptism with OT circumcision rather than with the flood, crossing of the sea and priestly consecration, were forced by their commitment to [infant baptism](#) to resort to thin and convoluted arguments in their attempt to sidestep the clear implications of the NT that the first Jewish followers of Jesus knew only immersion as the mode of baptism.³⁸¹

Mennonites, on the contrary, favor baptism by pouring. They argue for this mode by analogy with the Lord’s baptizing “in the Holy Spirit,” which event was both prophesied and later described as a “pouring forth” of the Spirit (Act 2.17-18,33; 10.45). However, with regard to the gift of the Holy Spirit, *pouring* emphasizes what the baptizer does, while in baptism *immersion* emphasizes the experience of the [baptizee](#). I would not criticize a baptism by pouring in which so much water is poured out so as to immerse the [baptizee](#)! The Mennonite argument suffers from another problem, though. The biblical passages that explicitly speak of a baptizing in the Holy Spirit all mention it *in contrast to* baptism in water. Therefore, descriptions of how our Lord baptized

³⁸¹ *The Shepherd Of Hermas*, Mandates 4.3, speaks of descending into the water and shows that immersion was still the mode of baptism practiced at around AD 140-160.

His people in the Holy Spirit can hardly define how we should baptize them in water.³⁸²

While Mennonite writer Daniel Kauffman correctly observed, that “the Bible nowhere expressly states how the water is to be applied,”³⁸³ the example that our Lord Jesus set for us involves His coming “up from the water” (Mat 3.16). This language hardly allows us to conjure up a mental picture of Jesus being sprinkled. Nor can this wording speak of His coming “up from” a puddle after having been baptized by pouring.

Nevertheless, while I argue that immersion is the only mode of baptism implied and illustrated in Scripture, it is important to recognize that — since baptism is not salvific — *the mode of baptism is important primarily in regard to its symbolic message*. With this idea in mind it would seem that, in circumstances where sufficient water for immersion is unavailable, baptism in another mode is preferable to no baptism at all. If a whole village were to come to faith in a drought-stricken land, for example, the evangelist might sprinkle converts *while explaining* that the water is symbolic of God’s judgment against sin in the flood and in the exodus, and likewise symbolic of the “burial” and “resurrection” of Jonah that looked forward to the burial and resurrection of Jesus, etc. Adequate teaching combined with the repentant baptizees’ public

³⁸² Mennonite writer Daniel Kauffman made the less than compelling argument that pouring “is the only mode mentioned in the Bible that is called a baptism.” There is of course no scripture that says, “the mode of pouring is a baptism.” Rather Kauffman had to argue that the *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is elsewhere called a *baptism*, therefore, pouring is the mode of baptism. This is an example of faulty hermeneutics. Not only should we not equate varied metaphors from different passages, since they likely describe different aspects of a thing, but Kauffman was also wrong in his premise that pouring “is the only mode mentioned in the Bible that is called a baptism.” If we were to imitate his way of arguing, we would have to say that Jesus also spoke of the baptism of His suffering (Mar 10.38-39; Luk 12.50), and so we might conclude that suffering is a proper mode of baptism.

Kauffman also asked the embarrassing question, “Can it be shown any place that immersion is called baptism?” This is to ask, “Can it be shown any place that immersion is called immersion?” Kauffman followed up with the regrettable statement, “The word immersion is not so much as named in the Bible,” which is tantamount to saying, “The word *baptism* is not so much as named in the Bible.” He had clearly not done sufficient word study in his Greek testaments. Daniel Kauffman, *Manual of Bible Doctrines* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1898), pp. 117-120.

³⁸³ Daniel Kauffman, *Manual of Bible Doctrines* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1898), p. 119.

testimonies would accomplish everything that apostolic baptism did, except for the *dramatization* of “burial and resurrection.”

24. SHOULD WE PERMIT RELIGIOUS PRACTICES NOT EXPLICITLY FORBIDDEN IN SCRIPTURE?

If the mode of baptism is secondary to baptism itself, and since alternative modes of baptism like sprinkling aren’t explicitly forbidden in Scripture, shouldn’t we just let others baptize however they wish? And speaking of things not explicitly forbidden in Scripture, what about infant baptism? For the sake of peace and unity in the Church, shouldn’t we allow [infant baptism](#) and other practices that aren’t expressly proscribed by the Bible?

Well, let us first recognize that the question of baptismal mode (immersion or sprinkling) and the question of the proper subjects of baptism (infants or persons of cognitive age) are questions of different theological magnitude. Regarding the first question — since I have already acknowledged that “the mode of baptism is secondary” — it *does* seem that the Church has greater theological priorities than a continuing argument over whether we should baptize by sprinkling or pouring or immersion.

However, let us recognize that the absence in Scripture of an explicit proscription of a proposed practice does not give us a *carte blanche* to invent whatever religious practice we wish. Rather, biblical principle must guide and delimit any religious innovation. For example, the Bible neither prescribes nor proscribes flag-waving in worship. Therefore, churches who wish to wave flags in their worship must first examine the practice in the light of biblical principle. Is it legal? Yes. Is it immoral? No. Does it contradict or undermine the gospel or somehow besmirch our Lord? No. Then we may feel free to adopt this practice if we wish, only we must further apply the positive biblical principles which require that any church practice be done “for edification” (1Co 14.26), “in an orderly manner” (1Co 14.40), and “in love” (1Co 16.14).

By way of contrast, what about the practice of forming “spiritual connections” through one-to-one dancing, a practice taught in one of our area churches back in the 1980’s? Though obviously not mentioned in Scripture and thus not explicitly proscribed, this practice clearly crossed the boundaries of

the Bible's principles of propriety and morality. Therefore, the greater church community rightly censured it.

Returning, then, to the question of whether to allow [infant baptism](#), we see that in lieu of an explicit biblical prescription or proscription, we must examine this question also in the light of biblical principle. Of course, much interpretation and tradition enters into the debate over infant baptism, and so different people will have opposite opinions about how infant baptism holds up under this kind of examination. [Paedobaptists](#) see their practice as edifying, orderly and loving. From my perspective though, I must say, No, biblical principle does not allow the practice of [infant baptism](#).

Let's apply the biblical principle of the tree and its fruit. Both the Catholic and Protestant practices of infant baptism have done much harm through the ages in promoting false security in individuals and encouraging Christian nominalism in society. While in its context the principle of the tree and its fruit pertains first to false prophets, we can broaden its application to false doctrines in general. Since infant baptism has produced so much bad fruit, it cannot be a good tree and we should eliminate it.

Other applicable principles to this question include the many commands to love one another, and the golden rule to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. These commands imply that we should not administer baptism in such a way as to mislead people into thinking that anything other than conscious and repentant faith in the gospel leads to salvation. Would we want someone to mislead *us* on this point? The gospel is clearly the power of God for salvation to "*everyone who believes*," just as it is to "*those who believe in His name*" that the right is given to become children of God (Joh 1.12). Therefore, those incapable of believing by virtue of their infancy should not be subsequently taught that they were saved or became children of God, when, without believing, they were baptized as infants. Ultimately, the principle of the gospel itself precludes the practice of infant baptism, a practice that has always planted seeds of false assurance. So, even though no Bible verse says, "Thou shalt not baptize infants," the Bible forbids [infant baptism](#) *in principle*.

In summary, we can neither give a blanket approval nor a blanket condemnation of religious practices not explicitly forbidden in Scripture.

Rather, we must examine such practices on a case by case basis, in the light of biblical principle.

25. WHICH BAPTISMAL FORMULA IS EFFICACIOUS?

The person who takes the vitally important step of receiving Christian baptism certainly wants their baptism to be biblically correct and authentic in every way. Along with investigating [the proper mode of baptism](#), therefore, the serious [baptizand](#) may wonder about the proper verbal formula that should be invoked by the baptizer over the [baptizee](#). Since there are different baptismal formulas used in the various Christian traditions, which formula is correct and efficacious?

The most common baptismal formula invoked during baptism is the Trinitarian “name” of Mat 28.19. The [Fathers](#) of the 4th century placed great importance on this formula as part of their campaign to uphold the doctrine of the [Trinity](#) against the Arians who denied the eternality of the Son. Thanks in part to that early Christological controversy, the words “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” became the almost universal formula pronounced over Christian baptisms to this present day.

However, in the early 20th century, a group affirming the deity of Christ but denying the doctrine of the [Trinity](#), decided that baptism should be performed only in the name of Jesus (or of “the Lord Jesus Christ”). This came about in 1913 when some [Pentecostals](#) began to discuss the seeming discrepancy between the “baptismal formula” in Mat 28.19 and that in Act 2.38.³⁸⁴ In the former passage, Jesus commanded that new disciples be baptized “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”; in the latter passage, Peter commanded converts to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Persons looking into this “new issue” noted that the formula of Mat 28.19 was nowhere repeated in so many words by the apostles, but that instead, the followers of Jesus invariably (at least insofar as the limited testimony of the book of Acts is concerned) baptized “in the name of Jesus

³⁸⁴ See D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance Of Eschatology In The Development Of Pentecostal Thought*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 270 ff. See also Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901–2001*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), pp. 141–148.

Christ” (Act 2.38; 10.48), or “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Act 8.16; 19.5). This resulted in the “new issue Pentecostals” concluding that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were *all titles* for the *one person* named Jesus. This inference in turn resulted in the creation of the “Jesus Name Only” Pentecostal movement that denied the doctrine of the [Trinity](#) and taught a form of [modalism](#) instead.³⁸⁵ This movement is more widely known as Oneness Pentecostalism, and is chiefly represented today by the non-[Trinitarian](#) United Pentecostal denomination.

Though [modalism](#) is a misguided doctrine with serious theological consequences, I sympathize with the [modalist’s](#) desire (shared by [Trinitarians](#)) to preserve the truth of God’s unity (Deut 6.4) in the face of the Bible’s countless indications of plurality within the divine nature. Oneness teaching becomes particularly offensive (and even ludicrous), however, in the salvation doctrine of certain Oneness communities who combine Joh 3.5 and Act 2.38 to teach that new birth and Spirit baptism both occur in the event of water baptism, and that, “To be saved by water baptism, it must be administered in the name of Jesus.”³⁸⁶ For groups that teach this, the name of Jesus has become a talisman which, when invoked in baptism, [mystically](#) unites “the [initiate](#)” with the crucified and risen Lord, and thereafter becomes “a source of divine protection against evil forces” and “an instrument of spiritual power....”³⁸⁷

If we understand the problem with using the name of Jesus as a talisman, we will understand the essential answer to this section’s question. Which baptismal formula is efficacious? The answer is, *Not any*. No religious invocation or ritual has regenerating or justifying efficacy, nor does any verbal formula ultimately render a person’s baptism valid or invalid.³⁸⁸ Furthermore, neither Mat 28.19 nor Act 2.38 nor any other passage present us with an

³⁸⁵ D. A. Reed, “Oneness Pentecostalism,” in Stanley M. Burgess (Ed.), *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements, The: Revised And Expanded Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 943.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 941.

³⁸⁸ Quibbles over the precise wording of *what* is pronounced over the person being baptized, just as arguments over *who* can validly baptize, are vestiges of the magical view of baptism.

explicit verbal formula to be pronounced at baptism. Jesus *did not say*, “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *as you recite*, ‘in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’” Nor did Peter say, “be baptized *while someone intones*, ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ *over you*.” The commands of both Jesus and Peter simply direct that people be baptized with reference to and in commitment to the triune God whose Kingdom agenda has now been made manifest in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As the people of Israel were baptized “in the cloud and in the sea” and did thereby fully commit themselves to Moses and his agenda (1Co 10.1-2), so the intent of Christian baptism is that persons thereby signify their total commitment to God and Christ.

Let us note that the Israelites “all were baptized into Moses” (1Co 10.2) without anyone at the time intoning over them, “I now baptize you in the name of Moses.” Likewise, a believer today, say in an underground church in China, can be authentically and fruitfully baptized *in complete silence* so long as they have previously come to understand that by being baptized before witnesses they are publically committing themselves to Jesus and His Kingdom agenda. Remember, man concerns himself with external words and rituals, “but the LORD looks at the heart” (1Sa 16.7).

Recognizing God’s concern for the heart, however, should not detract from the NT commands to be baptized, nor from the significance of whatever invocations are pronounced during baptism, nor from the power of baptism in a believer’s life. Every true disciple of Jesus will be baptized at the earliest opportunity, and whatever pronouncements are made during the ceremony are important by way of encouragement to the baptizee and clarification of baptism’s meaning for the audience. The *power* of baptism, however, is practical not *mystical*. If adequate teaching and preaching accompanies baptism, it will testify powerfully to onlookers, speaking to them of God’s unwavering commitment to judge sin. It will also speak to them of the death and resurrection of the One who took God’s judgment upon sin in our place, and of the commitment of the baptizee to dedicate his life to priestly service in God’s Kingdom under Jesus the King. Even as baptism testifies powerfully to the onlookers, it fortifies the baptizee against future temptations to recant his

faith in Christ, because he has already begun a life of costly obedience to the Lord. We can hardly overstate the *practical* importance of Christian baptism, but none of it has to do with the precise words recited as it occurs.

CONCLUSION: GOD THE ONLY JUSTIFIER, JESUS THE ONLY SAVIOR, THE SPIRIT THE ONLY REGENERATOR.

The preceding examination of [key biblical passages](#) relating to the topic of baptism, and review of [25 questions about baptism](#), should confirm for us what the Scriptures tell us clearly elsewhere, namely, that God is the only one who justifies (Rom 8.33; cf. 1Co 1.30), that there is no other Savior but God Himself in Christ (Isa 43.11; 45.21; Hos 13.4; Act 4.10-12; Heb 5.9), and that only the Holy Spirit [regenerates](#) and gives life (Joh 3.5-6; 6.63; cf. Eze 37.14; 2Co 3.6; Gal 5.25). In other words, no religious ritual, no ecclesiastical pronouncement, nor any other human deed accomplishes the salvation of man. Even those [ordinances](#) and ministries of the [Church](#), intended for the edification of those being sanctified, would completely fail to bear fruit if not for the agency of God's Spirit working both in those ministering and in those ministered to. God Himself takes credit for our justification *and* our sanctification (Eze 20.12; 37.28; Eph 5.25-26; Heb 13.12; cf. Joh 17.17; Rom 8.30; 1Co 1.30; Phil 1.6; 1Th 5.23; Heb 2.11). Salvation — from beginning to end — belongs to our God (Psa 3.8; Rev 19.1), and He will not share this glory with another (cf. Isa 42.8; 48.11). We must, therefore, value and honor the [ordinance](#) of baptism for what God designed it to accomplish, but must never attribute any *inherent* power to baptism or baptismal water whatsoever.

PART II: HOW BAPTISM BECAME ENCHANTED

Enchant: \ěn-'chănt\ **verb** 3. to impart a magic quality or effect to.

Random House Unabridgd Dictionary, 1993

Men mocked at the Olympic gods, but professed great respect for diviners, astrologists, jugglers, and magicians of every sort. The occult sciences were believed in; men sought initiation in the mysteries; the dead were invoked; men fed their hungry minds on every description of fable, miracle, and metamorphosis. A pardonable credulity had given way to a credulity that was shameless and boundless. This superstition came in great part from the East; at least those who turned it to account were chiefly orientals.

Edward Reuss, describing the pagan milieu of the apostolic world in *History of Christian Theology in the Apostolic Age*, trans. by Annie Harwood (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872–1874), Vol. 1, p. 318.

SYNOPSIS OF PART II

When we realize that early Christianity got its understanding of baptism seriously twisted, we cannot help but wonder how the confusion occurred. At the root of the Church's early departure from the truth about baptism is the spiritual blindness common to all fallen man, but several other factors also contributed to the perversion of baptismal doctrine. History tells us that by the second century the early Church had lost important safeguards against heresy. One of the most important safeguards it lost was its Hebraic cultural heritage.

When the early Church severed itself from its Hebraic heritage after the second Jewish-Roman war (AD 135), the pervading Hellenism of the time immediately filled the cultural void. Brought about by the merging of nations that occurred in the wake of Alexander's conquests, the culture of Hellenism was characterized by religious syncretism and an underlying belief in magic. Magical presuppositions and an awe of ritual soon seeped into Christian practice with the result that baptism came to be seen as a mystical ritual with inherent, salvific power.

The primary carriers that infected early Christianity with mystical ideas were undoubtedly the mystery religions that flourished even as classical Greek and Roman mythological religions waned. The mystery religions presented themselves as vehicles of personal salvation, i.e., as means of gaining a better afterlife. These mysteries, as they were called, involved an expensive and secret initiation. Depending on the particular cult, the initiation could involve a sacred meal and a baptism or baptisms. As with the ancient Jewish rituals, the rites of the mystery religions were symbolic. However, the mysteries involved a belief in the inherent salvific power of their rites. Such a belief was never an element of the Jewish religious observances. The magical rites of some mysteries, though, even promised mystical union with a god.

Incredibly, a paradigm shift occurred in the second and third centuries that transformed Christianity into a religion utilizing the presuppositions and vocabulary of the pagan mysteries. Early Church Fathers began speaking of the mystery (= sacrament) of baptism, and attributed to baptism (or baptismal waters) the mystical (= sacramental) power previously only attributed to rituals in pagan observances. Sadly,

some of this vocabulary from the pagan **mystery religions** persists in Christian **churches** to this day.

The more the clergy taught that Christian baptism had **salvific** power and washed away sins, the more parents wanted baptism for their children. The practice of baptizing infants was resisted at first, by leaders like **Tertullian** (c. AD 200), but finally became universal in the time (and partially through the influence) of **Augustine** (c. AD 400). Along the way, some raised the question: What sins do infants have that need to be washed away in baptism? **Origen** (c. AD 250) came forward with the answer: Infants need cleansing from an innate defilement. What evidence proves that innocent little babies have an inward defilement? **Origen** answered: If babies weren't defiled, the Church's practice of baptizing them would be superfluous.

If baptism has no inherent **mystical** power, then how did so many **Fathers**, theologians, and doctors of the Church, Catholic and Protestant, err by implying otherwise in their baptismal doctrine? How could the Church, from its earliest centuries,³⁸⁹ have come to believe in baptism's saving efficacy, teaching baptism as the means of **regeneration**, or even equating baptism with the **new birth** itself, if these beliefs conflict with Scripture? How could such misunderstandings about baptism — if they are so wrong and detrimental to spiritual life — not have been noticed and swiftly denounced by early Church leaders? These are fair questions, and they deserve a thorough response. To answer them, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of our human propensity for heresy.

OUR PROPENSITY FOR HERESY

To understand the devolution of biblical doctrines in Christian history, we must realize that as members of a fallen race we all have difficulty perceiving truth (Joh 18.38), and difficulty preserving it once perceived (Pro 23.23). When it comes to grasping and holding onto biblical truth, we must contend with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Worldly philosophies, for example, vie for our attention, drawing our minds away from the austere doctrines of the Bible.

³⁸⁹ By AD 140, *Hermas, Mandates (Commandments)* 4.3, spoke of baptism remitting sins.

Those philosophies constantly batter the Christian believer, pressuring him to compromise his inflexible morals and to jettison his “unscientific” commitment to such things as the virgin birth or resurrection of Jesus (cf. Col 2.8). Likewise, the flesh, i.e., the self-serving and self-indulgent impulse that remains even in [regenerate](#) man, entices the worldly man to subordinate truth to his own lusts, and wheedles the Christian to liberalize his morals — even if it means liberalizing his theology. Then “the god of this age,” the devil (2Co 4.4^{NIVO}), the father of lies (Joh 8.44), joins the fray, blinding the minds of unbelievers and appearing as an angel of light to God’s people, inducing them to believe that they have misunderstood God’s word (Gen 3.1; cf. 2Co 11.14).

We see, then, that the community of the faithful, once having believed biblical propositions, is subjected to intense pressure to liberalize, reinterpret, or even jettison those scriptural beliefs. For this reason, Christian communities, like those of Galatia and Colossae, began to slide into heresy *within a decade* of their inception, even while their founding apostles still lived! For the same reason, the Church has had to battle a constant parade of heresies since. Consider this *partial* list of heretical “Christian” sects that arose before AD 400:

- AD 60³⁹⁰ Ebionites
- AD 90 Nicolaitans
- AD 100 Docetists
- AD 100 Carpocrations
- AD 100 Elkesaites
- AD 144 Marcionites
- AD 150 Sethians
- AD 160 Valentinians
- AD 180 Adoptionists
- AD 200 Sabellians
- AD 250 Manichaeins
- AD 250 Novatianists
- AD 260 Paulianists (Samosatines)
- AD 320 Arians
- AD 350 Apollinarians
- AD 380 Pelagians

³⁹⁰ These dates are approximate.

Clearly, the early [Fathers](#) had their hands full as they endeavored to defend the truth, and subtle errors easily slipped past them and into the Church's teaching. Thankfully, God has always given safeguards to protect the truth from His own people's propensity for heresy and apostasy.

THE SAFEGUARDS AGAINST HERESY

During His earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus, the very personification of the truth (Joh 14.6), served as both the ultimate corrective to heresy and the supreme guardian of the right understanding of Scripture. He corrected the bad theology of the Sadducees regarding the afterlife and resurrection (Mat 22.23-32). He also reprimanded the wrong application of Scripture practiced by the scribes and the Pharisees (Mar 7.5-13). While with His disciples, He guarded them from error and apostasy, and they kept God's word (Joh 17.6,12). (If Jesus still walked among us today as He did among the people of that generation, we would have no misunderstandings about Christian baptism today!) When Jesus ascended to heaven, six other safeguards remained to preserve the true doctrines of Scripture. Those safeguards were:

1. The apostles taught by Jesus (cf. Eph 2.20; 2Pe 3.2; Jud 1.17).
2. The Holy Spirit (Joh 16.13; cf. 1Jo 2.27).
3. The Church (1Ti 3.15).
4. The commitment of believers to do the will of a holy God (Joh 7.17).
5. The canon of Scripture (2Ti 3.16).
6. The Hebraic hermeneutic (see Isa 8.20).³⁹¹

As already mentioned, the perversion of true doctrine began even while the apostles still lived and labored,³⁹² but those men who had walked with Christ reined in the heretical impulses of their generation. John warned believers sternly about "those who are trying to deceive you" (1Jo 2.26), and said that "many false prophets have gone out into the world," referring

³⁹¹ Since the touchstone for all subsequent revelation is the Pentateuch, I infer that not only the Pentateuch's propositions, but also its Hebraic worldview must be taken into account when interpreting all other Scripture and formulating doctrine.

³⁹² The gospel itself was being twisted by AD 64 and the real incarnation of Christ was being denied by AD 90.

apparently to heretics ([Gnostics](#) or proto-[Gnostics](#)) who denied the real incarnation of Jesus (1Jo 4.1-3). Likewise Paul famously warned the Galatians (Gal 1.7-9),

...there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Peter, looking to the future, warned fellow believers that there would arise “false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies” (2Pe 2.1). Paul also gave prophetic warning to the elders of Ephesus (Act 20.28-30), saying,

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

When the apostles had all died, heresy surged forward in the second century, but for a short time, the Church, “the pillar and support of the truth” (1Ti 3.15), continued to faithfully safeguard Christian doctrine. The Holy Spirit, that *Paraclete* whom Jesus promised would guide the apostles “into all truth” (Joh 16.13), and whom John described as “the anointing” which abides in God’s people and teaches them about all things, “and is true and not a lie” (1Jo 2.27), worked in and through the Church to preserve right teaching. The Holy Spirit also worked in individual believers, giving them a heart commitment to do the will of the Father, which commitment allowed them to discern whether any given teaching came from God or not (Joh 7.17). At the same time, Christian communities began collecting the writings of the apostles, recognizing those writings as having divine authority like that of the Jewish Scriptures.³⁹³ As the biblical [canon](#) thus came together, it too served as

³⁹³ Cf. 2Pe 3.14-16 where Peter refers to Paul’s writings as “Scriptures.”

a corrective for heresy and a guardian of doctrinal truth. These various safeguards of the truth overlapped and worked together, and all depended to a greater or lesser degree upon a final and underlying protection, a safeguard the importance of which we can only fully appreciate in retrospect, namely, the [Hebraic hermeneutic](#).

A [hermeneutic](#) is simply a method of interpretation, and in the context of theological studies, we mean a method of interpreting Scripture. The [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) is simply that method of interpreting Scripture that utilizes a Jewish worldview, and a Jewish understanding of the cultural and religious phenomena spoken of in the Scriptures. This [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) was naturally (and unconsciously) utilized by the first Christians who were all Hebrews, i.e., Jews. Thus, in the apostolic and [subapostolic](#) Church, when a Jewish Christian read of Christ's command to baptize, or Peter's command to be baptized, he did not mentally process the word *baptize* as a 21st-century Gentile does, but as a first-century Hebrew did. Again, when a Jewish Christian of that time read the Gospel of John, he did not interpret John's many water metaphors as a Post-Reformation Gentile would, but as a first-century Israelite did, and as one familiar with both the water rituals of the Jewish religion and the underlying meanings of those rituals as handed down through his religious heritage. Since all of the Scriptures, probably even those written by Luke, were written by Jews, and to a Jewish (or predominantly Jewish) audience, the [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) was vital to understanding the words, figures of speech, and allusions utilized throughout the [canon](#). As long as the pastors and teachers of the early Church exercised the [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) (even while reading the Scriptures in [Grk](#)), it worked together with the other safeguards of the truth to protect the proper understanding of Christian beliefs and practices.³⁹⁴ Sadly, the [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) was all but completely lost to the Church by AD 140, and we must understand how this happened.

³⁹⁴ This does not imply that Jewish people never misinterpreted Scripture nor that use of the Hebraic hermeneutic guarantees proper interpretation. Nevertheless, the further away Gentile interpreters drifted from the Jewish understanding of the Bible's laws, figures of speech, and allusions, the wider the door opened to false interpretations.

THE SEVERING OF CHRISTIANITY'S HEBRAIC ROOTS

The Church did not *knowingly* jettison its [Hebraic hermeneutic](#). Instead, the loss occurred while larger events captured the world's attention, and the Church failed to notice when this vital doctrinal safeguard slipped through its fingers. The story of how Christianity lost its [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) is essentially the story of the rapid rise of enmity between the Jewish nation and the followers of Jesus. It happened as follows.

As we know from the gospels, enmity between the Jewish establishment and the disciples of Jesus arose before the crucifixion. However, after Christ's resurrection and ascension a rapid succession of events exacerbated the antipathy. The mass conversions on Pentecost (Act 2), the rage against Stephen (Act 7), and the subsequent persecution of the Way by Saul of Tarsus (Act 8.1-3), stirred up the anti-Christian bias, first among the temple elite and then throughout the synagogues of Palestine. The persecution led by Saul also caused the Christ-followers to scatter throughout the empire, and it appears that Jewish believers, returning to Rome after the Pentecost event (Acts 2), eventually precipitated Claudius' expulsion of Jews from that city in AD 49 (Act 18.2). Suetonius gives the reason for the expulsion as rioting having to do with "Chrestus," and Marvin R. Wilson interprets this ancient report as pointing to "a dispute between Jews and Jewish Christians."³⁹⁵ Since the [Church](#) already had a strong Gentile constituency by this time,³⁹⁶ I speculate that the rioting having to do with "Chrestus" may also have involved uncircumcised Gentile Christians demanding recognition and acceptance by the local synagogues, so as to benefit from Judaism's status in the empire as a [religio licita](#).

Whatever the cause for the rioting, if the generally accepted date of AD 49 is correct for the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, then the Jerusalem Council described in Act 15 followed the expulsion by no more than three years. At that Council, sometime around AD 50-52, the apostles opened the

³⁹⁵ Graydon F. Snyder, *Christianity In Rome*, Vol. I, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), p. 968. Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots Of The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 74.

³⁹⁶ Paul Barnett, *After Jesus: The Birth Of Christianity, The First Twenty Years*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 22.

door for Gentiles to join the Church without having to become Jewish proselytes. This meant that Gentile believers would not have to be circumcised nor take upon themselves the whole burden of rabbinic *halakah*.³⁹⁷ Since the rabbinic *halakah* was (and is) the Jewish “law of custom,” (i.e., the Oral *Torah* which supplements, interprets, and applies the Written *Torah*), to keep the *halakah* — in the rabbinic opinion — was to “obey the law of Moses” (Act 15.5 *NIVO*), and to neglect the *halakah* was to “change the customs [of] Moses” (cf. Act 6.14 *NIVO*).³⁹⁸ Therefore, the decision at the Jerusalem council offended all of those “believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees” who could not let go of their traditional presuppositions (Act 15.5 *NIVO*). As the letter from the council was copied and read throughout the empire, it brought joy to Gentile God-fearers, but seriously agitated the more pharisaical synagogues scattered around the Mediterranean world.

At the beginning of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome in AD 66, the fact that the constituency of the Church was by then predominantly Gentile served to heighten suspicion in the synagogues of Palestine toward their lingering Jewish members who believed in *Yeshua* (Jesus) — how could a patriotic Jew believe in that god of the Gentiles and Romans? When the Jewish Christians of Palestine then refused to join the revolt against Rome, but instead fled to Pella to sit out the war, it deeply embittered the surviving Jewish nationalists toward Christians in general.³⁹⁹ It should not surprise us, then, that by the time John received the Revelation on Patmos (c. AD 90), the letters to the seven churches revealed hostility between the synagogues and the Christian congregations in the cities of Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev 2.9; 3.9). At this time Judaism still had exemption from emperor worship because of its imperial status as a *religio licita*. Therefore, it was advantageous for Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus to remain connected to their local Jewish

³⁹⁷ <http://www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html> (accessed November 13, 2009): Tim Hegg, “Acts 15 And The Jerusalem Council: Did They Conclude The Torah Was Not For Gentiles?” *TorahResource.com*, 2008.

³⁹⁸ For a full explanation of Jewish *halakah*, see Emil Schürer, *A History Of The Jewish People In The Time Of Jesus Christ*, trans. Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie, Vol. 2.I, pp. 330-339, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson/T & T Clark, 2009/1890).

³⁹⁹ Pella was one of the cities of the Decapolis east of the Jordan. The Jewish believers in Jerusalem probably heeded Christ’s warning in the Olivet discourse (Luk 21.20-22) to flee from the city when they saw it surrounded by armies.

synagogues so as to not have to compromise their faith by sacrificing to Caesar. However, this legal circumstance prompted antagonistic Jews to slander the Christians in their midst to the provincial authorities. When the synagogue accused Christians of not being “real Jews,” they exposed them to the legal penalties for not worshipping the emperor.⁴⁰⁰

About this time, Rabbi Samuel the Small composed the *Birkat ha-Minim* at the rabbinical headquarters in Yavneh (Jamnia) on the southern coast of the land of Israel. The *Birkat ha-Minim*, or “blessing for the heretics” is actually an exclusionary curse or malediction. It reads in part, “For apostates let there be no hope, and the dominion of arrogance do Thou speedily root out in our days; and let Christians and *minim* perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living and let them not be written with the righteous.”⁴⁰¹ While the *Birkat ha-Minim* was aimed at many types of sectarian or deviant Jews, and was essentially a call to renewed Jewish vigilance against heretics in general and against defectors from the traditions, it obviously exacerbated the strained relationship between the remaining Jewish Christians and their one-time spiritual family in the synagogue.

Indeed, while the NT hints that by AD 60 some Christians had begun congregating on the first day of the week instead of on the Sabbath (Act 20.7; 1Co 16.2; cf. Rev 1.10), the promulgation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* may have encouraged lingering Jewish Christians to finally leave their synagogues and switch their day of worship. Regardless, the wholesale shift of Christian worship from the Sabbath to the first day of the week was nearly complete by AD 115-120.⁴⁰² With Christian Gentiles giving no importance to circumcision, and Christian Jews abandoning the Sabbath, what affront remained to be thrown in the face of the synagogue?

⁴⁰⁰ See Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), on “Revelation, Ch. 2.8-11.” See also David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 1-5*, Vol. 52 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), p. 162.

⁴⁰¹ Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots Of The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 64-68.

⁴⁰² Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots Of The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 79-81. Ignatius, c. AD 107, wrote of those who though “brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day...” (*Ign Mag* 9).

However, it was not an offense by Christians toward Jews that caused the final parting of the ways, but an insult by Jews to their Christian neighbors. The Second Jewish Revolt of AD 132-135 did revive resentment by the nationalist Jews against their Christian brethren, because once again Jewish followers of Jesus refused to join the fight against Rome. Nevertheless, it was the Jewish nationalists who irrevocably offended their Christian brethren and neighbors by announcing a new messiah. Rabbi Akiba proclaimed that the leader of the Jewish revolt, Simon Bar Kokhba (“son of a star”), was *the messiah*, and Bar Kokhba indeed had messianic aspirations.⁴⁰³ The Jewish community’s “allegiance to its own messianic movement, spawned by its own charismatic leader, signaled clearly its final rejection of Jesus as Messiah.”⁴⁰⁴ Therefore, Christian Jews were not about to compromise their allegiance to Jesus by supporting the cause of a “competing messiah,” and instead pulled away from nation and synagogue. As [Marvin Wilson](#) explains,

Until this point, the pressure for separation of the [Christian and Jewish] communities had come from the Jewish side. But those Jews who believed in Jesus sought to remain within the synagogue, or at the very least, under the religious umbrella of Judaism. The *Birkat ha-Minim* ... had not been fully successful in rooting these believers out of the synagogue. They still had hope that their fellow Jews would believe in the messiahship and resurrection of Jesus as they did. But the Second Jewish Revolt forced Jewish Christians to separate themselves from those associated with Bar Kokhba’s cause. The impetus for dissociation came from them and no longer from the other side.⁴⁰⁵

In the Second Jewish Revolt, “more than half a million Jews perished and nearly all of Judea lay in ruins.”⁴⁰⁶ By the end, emperor Hadrian had completely destroyed Jerusalem. He had the ruins of the Jewish capital plowed under and then built a new city over them, calling it “Aelia Capitolina” in honor of himself. He populated the new city with Greek-speaking pagans, and forbade Jews to come near it under threat of death. Though Hadrian did not

⁴⁰³ Not all Jewish authorities accepted Bar Kokhba’s messianic credentials and increasingly in subsequent literature preferred to call him Bar Kosiba, “son of a lie.”

⁴⁰⁴ Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots Of The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 83.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

revoke Judaism's status of *religio licita*, as such,⁴⁰⁷ he did ban circumcision, in effect bringing into question the legality of Judaism for a time.

So, in the Mediterranean world, *barely a century since the death and resurrection of Jesus*, it became increasingly undesirable, even objectionable, to have anything to do with Jews and Jewish things. Jews became *personae non gratae* throughout the Empire. The devastation of the Jewish nation and the non-existence of Judaism's capital and temple served as proof to the world (and to Gentile Christians) that God had weighed the Jews in the balance, had found them wanting, and had rejected them as a nation.⁴⁰⁸ Within a few years (c. AD 160), the Gentile *Justin Martyr* taught that Christians are the "true spiritual Israel."⁴⁰⁹ A hundred years later (c. AD 250), *Origen* took up the anti-Judaism baton and taught that the Jews were a "most wicked nation" deserving of their calamities, and that "Christians are the spiritual Israel."⁴¹⁰ Anti-Jewish sentiment grew so steadily through the second and third centuries that soon after the "Christianization" of the empire (c. AD 339) it became a criminal offense to convert to Judaism. Sometime around AD 380, *Ambrose* the Bishop of Milan praised the burning of a synagogue, and in the same decade (AD 386-387) *Chrysostom* launched his preaching series in Antioch entitled "Homilies Against The Jews." *Wilson* provides us with an excerpt:

Many, I know, respect the Jews and think that their present way of life is a venerable one. This is why I hasten to uproot and tear out this deadly opinion ... the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theatre; it also is a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts ... When God forsakes a place, that place becomes the dwelling of demons.⁴¹¹

Naturally, therefore, Gentile Christians living between AD 140 and AD 400, who did not associate with Jews nor have any Jews in their congregations, but

⁴⁰⁷ See *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 1156, contra Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots Of The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 93.

⁴⁰⁸ In contradiction to Jer 31.35-37.

⁴⁰⁹ *Dial* 11.

⁴¹⁰ *Celsus* 2.8 and *Com Joh* 1.1.

⁴¹¹ John Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos* 1.3.1; 1.4.1. Quoted in Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots Of The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 95.

who were taught to despise both the name and culture of the Jews as accursed by God, *did not* endeavor to learn about the Jewish way of understanding the Christian Scriptures. Thus, the Church, unaware of the far-reaching consequences, discarded its [Hebraic hermeneutic](#) by around AD 140.

THE ADULTEROUS MARRIAGES OF THE CHURCH

Christian exegesis suffered a serious setback by the loss of the [Hebraic Hermeneutic](#). Meanwhile, the world, the flesh, and the devil incessantly battered the other safeguards of biblical truth as well. By AD 325, the Church, called as “the pillar and support of the truth,” compromised its mandate through two adulterous marriages. The so-called “conversion of Constantine” in AD 312 began a series of events which culminated in peace for the Church, but at the price of being ruled by the Emperor and married to the government. The Church, nevertheless, embraced this arrangement, in part because it could not resist the economic windfall of welcoming pagans (who wanted to belong to the politically favored religion) into the fold. Pagan “converts” remained committed to their old idols and festivals, though, so the surge in church membership also brought an escalation of [syncretism](#) as churches repurposed pagan statues and holidays. So, the marriage to government on the one hand, and to paganism on the other, rendered the Church incapable of *consistently* prioritizing true doctrine above all else. The Church still upheld the basic truths pertaining to the Trinity and the bare facts of the gospel, as witnessed by the promulgation of the Nicene Creed, but the devil busied himself in the details of every doctrine that impinged directly on the Church’s role as the arbiter of salvation in society.

THE OTHER SAFEGUARDS LOST OR WEAKENED

The Christian populace, enervated by the periodic persecutions of the preceding 250 years, readily embraced the new era of toleration. Freedom from persecution allowed the rapid development of a professional clergy, so Christian laypersons, with their diminishing responsibilities in the work of the church, and increasing privileges in civil society, followed the lead of the Church hierarchy and got busy with the pursuit of their own “personal peace

and prosperity.”⁴¹² So, that safeguard of the truth, that bulwark consisting of the individual believer’s commitment to God’s will above all else, slipped away as imperceptibly as had the [Hebraic hermeneutic](#).

Obviously, the safeguard of the Holy Spirit still remained, but our willing Guide into all truth was grieved by compromised Christians, and quenched by an increasingly worldly Church (in violation of Eph 4.30 and 1Th 5.19). The whole corpus of the Scriptures also remained, but its effectiveness was limited by the scarcity of copies on the one hand, and illiteracy or the lack of translations on the other. Churches and schools had copies of the Scriptures, but we can now appreciate the fact that the few who studied the sacred writ did so without vital safeguards against their own propensity for heresy.

To recapitulate:

- Jesus had ascended to heaven.
- The Apostles had died.
- Christian leaders had jettisoned the [Hebraic hermeneutic](#).
- The [Church](#) compromised itself by its marriages of convenience to government and to paganism.
- The Christian populace, now enjoying freedom of religion, prioritized “personal peace and affluence” over God’s will.
- The Holy Spirit was grieved by “believers” and quenched by the [church](#).
- The Scriptures remained, but practically speaking, by AD 325 precious little stood in the way of their misinterpretation.

WHAT DID EARLY THEOLOGIAN DO?

How, then, did a Christian Gentile theologian go about interpreting the Scriptures after AD 140? He would probably not confer with a Jewish person (least of all a rabbi!) about the meaning of biblical texts. A Gentile theologian would have had little interest in the [Hebraic](#) worldview, or in [Hebraic](#) thought and figures of speech. Through what mental lens, then, would he have interpreted the Bible? Well, apart from the [Hebraic](#) cultural outlook, all that

⁴¹² Readers of the works of Francis Schaeffer will recognize this phrase as describing the chief values of current Western society. See Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), Vol. 5, Book 2: *How Should We Then Live*, ch. 11.

remained was the all-pervasive [Hellenistic](#) worldview, and [Hellenistic](#) presuppositions *felt right* when it came to interpreting the Christian Scriptures. After all, the apostles had written those new-covenant Scriptures in *Greek*. Why then would a Christian theologian of those early centuries, a man whose mother tongue was Greek, think that He needed Jewish help to interpret Scriptures written in his own language? He would not!⁴¹³ Therefore, the theology of the early [Church Fathers](#) was profoundly influenced by the [Hellenistic worldview](#).⁴¹⁴ This fact is no secret. The influences of [Platonism](#), the [mystery religions](#), and even of the [Gnosticism](#) which the early [apologists](#) so vigorously denounced, remain evident for the modern reader of the [Fathers](#).

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the early [Fathers](#)' writings teach a baptismal doctrine that is neither Jewish nor apostolic, but instead [Hellenistic](#) and [magical](#).

THE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OF HELLENISM

THE BIRTH AND CHARACTER OF A WORLD CULTURE

[Hellenism](#), *the civilization*, was imposed upon the Mediterranean world by Alexander the Great as he marched his conquering armies eastward from Macedonia, breaking down national and religious boundaries all the way to the Punjab. [Hellenism](#), *the culture*, birthed from that merging of nations and “the extensive mingling of populations,”⁴¹⁵ outlived both Alexander and his civilization, such that the succeeding Roman Empire became markedly [Hellenistic](#) in its [worldview](#) — as did the [subapostolic Church](#). As D. F. Watson explains,

⁴¹³ Not only were the church Fathers increasingly loathe to seek biblical insight from Jewish sources, but as apologists they also felt the need to make “an intensely Jewish document” relevant to Greeks. It was completely natural therefore to develop a more and more Hellenistic hermeneutic with its underlying influences from Platonism and the mystery religions. See “Exegesis in Alexandria” in Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With The Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 141.

⁴¹⁴ Particularly since some of the Fathers had pagan background and had been trained in Hellenistic thought categories from which they could not fully divest themselves.

⁴¹⁵ “Hellenism” in Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

Although Greece was no longer a political power, its cultural influence — the [Hellenization](#) begun by Alexander the Great — was a powerful force molding not only Palestinian culture but Roman as well. Greece continued as a cultural and intellectual center during the Roman period, being the location of choice for upper-class Romans to finish their formal education. The influence of [Hellenism](#) upon the church was also marked. The early church used rhetorical and other facets of a Greek education in its preaching and teaching, modes of worship and ethical exhortation, among others things. This Greek influence is particularly seen in the fact that the early church used the [Septuagint](#), a Greek translation of the [OT](#), and wrote the documents of the [NT](#) in Greek. This influence continued beyond the first-century church to play a role in interpretation and theological formulations.⁴¹⁶

This [Hellenistic](#) culture, so influential in the Roman period, remained distinctively Greek because *Koine* (the common Greek language that followed the Attic Greek of the classical era) long persisted as the international language of learning and commerce throughout the Mediterranean world.⁴¹⁷ Nevertheless, [Hellenism](#) was an amalgam of Greek, Middle Eastern, and Asian elements, and for our present study we should understand that a chief characteristic of this world-blanketing culture was “[syncretism](#) in religion....”⁴¹⁸ [Albert Henry Newman](#) wrote that in Alexandria, for example, “long before the beginning of the Christian era, Greek, Jewish, Egyptian, Persian, Old-Babylonian, and Indian thought had met and *eclectic systems* were a characteristic feature of the intellectual life of the time.”⁴¹⁹ Indeed, the Greeks’ willingness to assimilate foreign divinities had greatly aided the [Hellenization](#) of conquered regions.⁴²⁰ The [syncretizing](#) character of [Hellenism](#) was not simply an expression of political expediency, however. Instead,

⁴¹⁶ D. F. Watson, “Greece and Macedon” in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁴¹⁷ Erich S. Gruen notes that “even the Jewish communities in Rome were still Greek-speaking in late antiquity.” Erich S. Gruen, “Hellenism, Hellenization”, in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 724.

⁴¹⁸ “Hellenism” in Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

⁴¹⁹ Albert Henry Newman, *A History Of Anti-Pedobaptism: From The Rise Of Pedobaptism To A. D. 1609* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), p. 1, emphasis added.

⁴²⁰ François Chamoux, *Hellenistic Civilization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 344.

religious [syncretism](#) was natural to [Hellenism](#) because Greek religion had always been non-exclusive (largely because “for the Greeks ritual was more important in a cult than theological content”⁴²¹).

This aspect of [Hellenism](#), its readiness to assimilate and blend religious beliefs and practices, produced a vigorous spiritual milieu in the world at the very time when the Roman Republic transitioned into an Empire and the Christian era dawned. Indeed, the [Pax Romana](#) that so benefited the spread of Christianity, also provided a favorable environment for eastern religions to sink their roots more deeply in the west, for [gnostic](#) cults to get organized, and for the old [mystery religions](#) to spread their influence to new cities. So rich was the religious soil of the time, that throughout the Empire, as S. Angus put it, “[the] religious [syncretism](#), inaugurated by Alexander, *increased in momentum* until it reached its might in the third and early fourth centuries.”⁴²² As [Newman](#) concurred, “The philosophies and theosophies of the East had never been more active and aggressive than they were during the first three Christian centuries.”⁴²³

This dynamic religious environment, continually fanning a cross-pollination of ideas, profoundly affected the Christian Church that was just learning its way in the Gentile world. [Everett Ferguson](#) tells us that, in the early centuries, “... Greek philosophy provided the vocabulary, ethical assumptions, thought world, and intellectual options with which Christian thinkers worked.”⁴²⁴ Indeed, [Hellenism](#) in general, and pagan religion in particular (through its increasingly popular [mystery cults](#)) powerfully influenced the development of Christian doctrine from the second to the fourth centuries.

That influence had largely to do with [Hellenism’s](#) addiction to magic (and its associated awe of ritual⁴²⁵). Nothing was more fundamental to both

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 352.

⁴²² S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions* (New York, NY: Dover, 1928, 1975), p. 37, emphasis added.

⁴²³ Op. cit.

⁴²⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), p. 29.

⁴²⁵ “The magical ceremony involved two activities: the invocation of the supernatural power (the ‘formula’) and the ritual practice (the employment of material means, the ‘recipe’).”

paganism and Hellenism than the universal belief in magic: the power of spirits, or *daemons*, mediated by the rites and incantations of adepts. Ferguson tells us that “Magic came to rule supreme in late antiquity,” and explains that, “The root idea in magic was that by employing the proper means the gods or demons could be forced to do something for you.”⁴²⁶ According to the Hellenistic worldview, spirits were ubiquitous and their realm intersected the visible and tangible world of human experience: people envisioned the universe “as a vast, multistoried [tenement] with swarms of supernatural beings occupying the floors above and below” its mortal inhabitants.⁴²⁷ Because these ever-present *daemons*, were the causes behind supernatural occurrences, Hellenists thought of miraculous events as an utterly normal part of daily life.⁴²⁸ Of course, this worldview made it constantly necessary that its adherents avail themselves of religious practitioners who could manipulate the *daemons* and the gods.⁴²⁹

GENTILE CHRISTIANS AND MAGIC

Since every Hellenist in late antiquity believed in magic, it surprises us to learn that Christians were sometimes persecuted for practicing it. Our surprise dissipates, however, when we discover that the Roman world differentiated between the “good magic” of physicians and priests, and the “bad magic” of sorcerers who met clandestinely after dark to cast spells and curses upon their neighbors. “Magic as a discipline, as a form of religion, or as a

Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 231.

⁴²⁶ Op. cit., p. 229.

⁴²⁷ Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity In The Greco-Roman World*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), p. 25. For more on the ubiquity and hierarchy of gods and *daemons* see Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism In The Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 79-85.

⁴²⁸ Cf. Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World*, (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 129. See also Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism In The Fourth To Eighth Centuries*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 140. MacMullen explains that the Hellenistic belief in demonic causation was greatly fortified and confirmed by the Church’s “doctrine of demons best known through what priests recited at baptism, that doorway to the church.” So, baptismal renunciation of the devil confirmed the Hellenistic belief in demonic causation, which in turn fortified a magical worldview.

⁴²⁹ For an insightful summary of the great variety of magical practices in the Hellenistic world, I refer the reader to Edwin M. Yamauchi’s 1981 Institute For Biblical Research Lecture, “Magic In The Biblical World,” Tyndale Bulletin 34 (1983), pp. 169-200.

doctrine was not suppressed; nor were magicians brought to court just because they were magicians.”⁴³⁰ However, groups that met before dawn or late at night⁴³¹ to chant and engage in strange rituals behind closed doors (as Christians did), were sometimes suspected of casting spells upon their neighbors or of hexing the authorities in the course of fomenting insurrection. The Roman world considered *that kind* of magic a crime, and some Christians exposed themselves to the charge of practicing it, as we shall see.

Luke wrote in Act 19.18-19, that when the power of Jesus’ name became manifest in Ephesus,

Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

The Grk verb forms that Luke used in this vignette imply that many in Ephesus who had come to faith in Jesus had not immediately renounced their magical practices. New believers retained their books of spells and incantations as a back door, an insurance policy of sorts, in case the power of their new Lord proved inadequate for all the challenges of life. When the power of Jesus became fully manifest, they realized that Jesus *could* protect them from all other supernatural powers. They repented of their double-mindedness, bringing out their magic books and burning them.⁴³²

The Ephesian Christians repented of their reliance on magic — for a time. However, as the Hebraic influence upon the Church dissipated in the following decades, Gentile Christians had little to keep their Hellenistic

⁴³⁰ Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome And The Early Christians*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 130.

⁴³¹ These were perhaps the only times that Christian slaves could lay aside their duties to attend a religious gathering.

⁴³² The sheer number of those books, worth 150 years’ wages, helps us realize how wildly popular such books were in the first century (both BC and AD). Ephesus was a center of magical practice and produced so many books of magic spells that “Formulas used in magic were known as *Ephesia grammata* (‘Ephesian letters’).” Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 231. See also Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1998), pp. 130-131.

assumptions about the magical workings of the world in check. Therefore, in the second century, while Christians battled the frontal attack of [Gnosticism](#), the presuppositions of [magic](#)-drenched [Hellenism](#) steadily slipped in through the [Church's](#) back door. The temptation for [Hellenistic](#) Christians to think of the Holy Spirit as the mightiest of [daemons](#), and of the Christian rituals as embodying the most potent [magic](#), proved too great to resist. Before long, as Stephen Benko tells us,

...the Christians used objects, rites, words and formulas charged with divine potency to force demons to yield, all in accordance with well-known contemporary rules of magic.⁴³³

As Christians practiced such rites, and did so with a [magical](#) mindset, they did indeed make themselves susceptible to the charge of practicing *criminal* rituals. However, as Benko continues,

...as far as the charge of [magical](#) practices is concerned, it is clear that Christians were no better and no worse than their contemporaries. They believed in demons and exorcisms; they attributed supernatural power to material elements when used in connection with precise formulas and under specific circumstances; they identified certain names as having unusual potency; they preferred nights and daybreaks for their meetings; they warded off evil by signs and symbols; they ate food charged with divine energy; and they spoke in tongues. These are all characteristics of the working of [magic](#) and with these Christians opened themselves to the pagan charge, "They are magicians."⁴³⁴

Benko then concludes,

... Christians were deeply influenced by Greco-Roman [magic](#) and in fact practiced a Christian type of [magic](#). ...What does this prove? ... the early Christians ... were children of the milieu. They thought in the categories of their times, and they were part of the society in which they lived.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome And The Early Christians* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 125.

⁴³⁴ Op. cit., pp. 127-128.

⁴³⁵ Op. cit., p. 163.

As true [Hellenists](#), therefore, the early Christians could not help but bring their presuppositions about a [magical](#) world — along with a profound awe of ritual — with them into their Christian practice and doctrine. The pagan influence of those presuppositions became most pronounced in the [patristic](#) teachings about baptism. This development should not surprise us, for as W. E. Vine wrote, “[The belief] that salvation could be obtained by a mere outward form or ceremony, appealed to pagan ideas, and would ever prove attractive to the natural mind.”⁴³⁶ Very early, therefore, the Church [Fathers](#) began to write of baptism as a [mystical](#) ritual with inherent, [salvific](#) power.⁴³⁷

READING MYSTICISM INTO PAUL

Sadly, many have attempted to read the [Fathers’ mystical](#) view of baptism back into the writings of the Apostle Paul.⁴³⁸ Rabbi [Kohler Kaufmann](#), for example, wrote,

⁴³⁶ W. E. Vine, “The Church,” in *The Collected Writings Of W. E. Vine* (Nashville,, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

⁴³⁷ By the fourth century, Christian baptism would be integrated into a whole array of magical rites that included exorcism (of the baptizand and of the water), offering of salt to the baptizand, exsufflation, standing on a goatskin or haircloth shirt, spoken renunciation of Satan, anointing with oil of exorcism, and the performance of a variety of ascetical acts, none of which rites or deeds were ever part of apostolic baptism nor of the Jewish immersions that preceded it. See Robin M. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual and Theological Dimensions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), ch. 1.

⁴³⁸ William Ramsay mentioned scholars who thought of Paul as “powerfully influenced by the teaching conveyed through those impressive rites” of the mystery religions, but then argued at length that Col 2.8-23 contains a forceful denunciation of Mystery Religion principles by Paul. See W. M. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day: The Deems Lectures in New York University* (London; New York; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 283 ff. Apparently, Albert Schweitzer also stood against the idea that Paul’s teaching was influenced by Hellenism, and argued instead that Paul’s theology was Jewish, so much so that it “was not understood by the Greek Fathers.” See G. H. Clayton, “Eucharist,” in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church (2 Vols.)*, edited by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916-1918). Günter Wagner’s book, *Pauline Baptism and The Pagan Mystery Religions* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), is a thorough demonstration of the fact that Paul’s *baptismal* ideas had no connection to the mystery cults. See also Ferguson’s thorough summary of the differences between the mystery religions and apostolic teaching in Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 297-300. Further, in response to the history-of-religions thesis that Paul’s concept of dying and rising with Christ in baptism (Rom 6) derives from the mystery religions, Davies argued that whatever similarities there are must be regarded as superficial. Paul’s thinking takes its departure from Jewish ideas about the solidarity of the pious with the Messiah. Douglas R. A. Hare, “Davies, W(illiam)

Paul, the [Hellenist](#), ... knowingly or unknowingly, seems to have taken the heathen cult associations as his pattern while introducing new features into the [Church](#).... To him baptism is no longer a symbolic rite... as in Jewish and Judæo-Christian circles..., but a [mystic](#) rite by which the person that enters the water and emerges again undergoes *an actual transformation*, dying with Christ to the world of the flesh and sin, and rising with him to the world of the spirit, the new life of the resurrection (Rom 6.1-10).⁴³⁹

While [Kaufmann](#) “knowingly or unknowingly” misinterpreted Paul’s teaching, he nevertheless affirmed two historical truths: (1) Baptism in “Jewish and Judæo-Christian circles” was originally “a symbolic rite,” and (2) the heathen cults provided the pattern for the *later view* of baptism as “a [mystic](#) rite” that effects “an actual transformation” in the [baptizee](#).

Indeed, the apostolic [Church](#) and its Jewish cultural matrix understood baptism as symbolic and [typological](#), not [magical](#). However, post-apostolic, Gentile Christians, immersed in a [Hellenistic worldview](#) and cut off from all things Jewish, undoubtedly saw in certain [NT](#) passages what appeared as clear teaching about baptism’s [magical](#) virtues. They would have rejoiced in the superior power of Christian rites over the dubious efficacy of the pagans’ rituals. The supposed [magic](#) in pagan rites derived from cloudy and uncertain bases, rooted in human actions that somehow appeased or gratified the spirits. The [mystical](#) power of Christian rites, by contrast, derived from the clear merits of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice — an atonement that reasonably appeased a just and holy God. Still, the [Hellenistic](#) mind perceived the essential difference between Christian rites and pagan ones as mostly one of magnitude — it still understood [magic](#) as the operative principle.

THE FATHERS’ PARADIGM SHIFT

According to Scripture, however, it was never possible “for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin” (Heb 10.04), and so the early [Fathers](#) should never have decided that the water of baptism suddenly could. All the [OT](#) rituals

D(Avid) (1911–2001)”, in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim, (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p. 352.

⁴³⁹ Kohler Kaufmann, “Saul Of Tarsus,” in Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.), p. 83, emphasis added.

ordained by God were [typological](#) or symbolical; *none* had [sacramental](#) or [magical](#) power. For the [Fathers](#) to teach that baptism *did have* such power was to precipitate an unbiblical paradigm shift in the [Church's](#) understanding of God's ways. To posit a [mystically](#) efficacious baptism begs the question: *Had God for millennia administered His grace, with the didactic aid of rituals that were only [types](#) and shadows, and then suddenly realized that people needed a rite with inherent, transformative power?* God forbid! One can only imagine such a thing by ignoring the twin facts that it has always been the Holy Spirit who spiritually transforms, and that He has never depended upon external rites to accomplish His work. "Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required," wrote King David (Psa 40.6).

No, the [OT](#) rituals were never indispensable to the Spirit's work. The [Fathers](#) should have recognized this fact and allowed the [typological](#) and symbolical nature of the [OT](#) sacrifices and rituals to inform the character of [NT](#) baptism: this baptism is also [typological](#) and symbolical, and could never "take away sin." The [Fathers](#) missed this truth, however, and promulgated the idea that Christian baptism has [mystical](#) power. We realize, though, that they could not have gotten such an idea from the apostles. Instead, the Church *caught it* from the surrounding, [magic](#)-infused culture. The infectious "carriers" for that [mystical](#) understanding of baptism were undoubtedly the [mystery religions](#) that competed with Christianity at the time.

MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND THE FATHERS

In [Part I](#) of this book, I mentioned the [mystery religions](#) as cults that (a) introduced Christianity to the principle of religious [initiation](#), and that (b) saw their [initiations](#) as [salvific](#). We must now examine the character of these secretive religions more fully.

By the time of Christ, most of the [mystery religions](#) (sometimes referred to simply as *the mysteries*) — the Eleusinian, the Dionysian, that of [Serapis](#), that of the [Great Mother](#) and [Attis](#), etc., — had already existed for centuries, and that of [Isis](#) and [Osiris](#) for millennia. Even the relatively newer [mystery religions](#) probably derived elements from much older traditions, reaching back

in some instances to the Babylonian story of [Ishtar](#) and [Tammuz](#).⁴⁴⁰ These cults had certainly existed long enough to be disdained by the post-exilic Jews.⁴⁴¹ With the dawning of the [Pax Romana](#), however, the [mystery religions](#) *proliferated* so that by the apostolic era they seemed to be, as [Newman](#) said, “lying in wait, as it were, for nascent Christianity.”⁴⁴²

History refers to these cults as [mystery religions](#) precisely because of their secretiveness. Most etymologists trace the [Grk](#) word *mystery* (μυστήριον, mēs-'tē-rē-ōn) to the verb μύειν ('mē-ēn) which means ‘to shut the eyes or the mouth.’ Thus “a [mystery](#),” in pagan usage, is something about which one must remain silent, whether from ignorance or by oath.⁴⁴³ Oaths of silence were indeed integral to the [mystery religions](#), undoubtedly for commercial reasons. These cults involved expensive rites of [initiation](#),⁴⁴⁴ and if the details of those rites were given away so as to be imitated by whomever, who would pay the top price to experience them? Thus, [initiates](#) were sworn to secrecy. In fact, a person “could incur the death sentence by revealing the mysteries” of a cult, whether he or she communicated the information “through speech, pantomime, dance, or depiction.”⁴⁴⁵ Because the [mystery religions](#) so closely guarded their secrets, our historical knowledge of their practices and teaching is necessarily limited, and historians still debate the precise significance of their rites.

Nevertheless, as R. C. and C. C. Kroeger explained, the influence of the [mystery religions](#) “permeated ancient society so deeply ... that the general outlines can be constructed with a considerable degree of certainty. Literally thousands of allusions to the [mysteries](#) remain in the form of literary references, vase paintings, reliefs, frescoes, inscriptions, funerary statues, and so forth. We are further aided by the confessions of certain of the Church

⁴⁴⁰ See Henry C. Sheldon, *The Mystery Religions And The New Testament* (New York: Abingdon, 1918), p. 21. The worship of Tammuz is attested since the third century BC.

⁴⁴¹ See an allusion to pagan initiation in Wis 12.4-5; 14.15.

⁴⁴² Albert Henry Newman, *A History Of Anti-Pedobaptism: From The Rise Of Pedobaptism To A. D. 1609* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), p. 1.

⁴⁴³ In contrast, a *mystery* in biblical usage is something once hidden but now disclosed.

⁴⁴⁴ See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 258.

⁴⁴⁵ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 804.

Fathers who had been initiated into one or more of the mysteries....”⁴⁴⁶

The general principles of the mystery religions, then, were these:

1. An expensive, non-repeatable initiation by a combination of public and secret rites involving (in stages) offerings, purifications, and participation in dramatic reenactments of the life of the god (or god and goddess) to whom the particular religion was devoted.⁴⁴⁷ This initiation inducted a person into a society whose adherents knew each other by “confessional formulae or symbolic signs,”⁴⁴⁸ but not necessarily into a brotherhood because “initiation was individual, and so were its benefits.”⁴⁴⁹
2. Devotion to a god (or god and goddess) of the underworld whose myths had to do with the changing of seasons and with human life and death, such that their cultic celebrations dramatically portrayed “sorrow and joy, seeking and finding, conception and birth, death and life, end and beginning” through “sacred meals and weddings, fertility and birth rites, baptisms, investitures with sacred garments, rites of death and resurrection, or cultically symbolised [sic] journeys to Hades and heaven.”⁴⁵⁰
3. The performance of cultic rites which portrayed by sacred actions the trials, triumphs and destiny of a god (or god and goddess).⁴⁵¹ In these powerfully sensual dramas, many scholars believe that the initiate (at least in some cults) identified with the god, joined mystically in the experiences of the god, and himself became divine.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ W. M. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day: The Deems Lectures in New York University* (London; New York; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 290 ff. Regarding stages of initiation, Ferguson mentions two grades of initiation at Samothrace, a third degree of initiation in the Eleusinian Mysteries, and seven grades of initiation in Mithraism. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 254, 256, 293 ff.

⁴⁴⁸ TDNT, *μυστήριον*, A. 1. b.

⁴⁴⁹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 258, 300.

⁴⁵⁰ TDNT, *μυστήριον*, A. 1. c.

⁴⁵¹ TDNT, *μυστήριον*, A. 1. a.

⁴⁵² W. M. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day: The Deems Lectures in New York University* (London; New York; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 292-293. Ferguson, a dissenting voice on the issue of apotheosis, does not concur, saying,

4. The promise of salvation resulting from the [mystical](#) union between the devotee and the deity. The [mystical](#) union was understood as an [apotheosis](#) for the [initiate](#), who consequently enjoyed the same destiny as the god in this life and the next.⁴⁵³ Sometimes a sacred meal began the process of deification through the infusion of the imperishable Divine nature.⁴⁵⁴ Since sacred meals and other rites of initiation achieved one's [apotheosis](#), adherents of the [mysteries](#) attributed [salvific](#) power to the *very rituals*, as well as to the [initiation](#) as a whole.⁴⁵⁵
5. A vow of silence required of devotees as to the nature of the religion's secret rituals — thus keeping the religion a lucrative [mystery](#).⁴⁵⁶

With this summary of the [mystery religions'](#) elements in mind, let us now consider the influence of those religions upon the doctrine of baptism in the [subapostolic](#) age.

THE ENCHANTMENT OF BAPTISM

As noted, the [mystery religions](#) emphasized an [initiation](#) which provided an objective boundary between those who were “in” the cult (and therefore expected to benefit from whatever salvation it promised) and those who were “out” (or at least “not yet in”). Depending upon the particular religion in view, [initiation](#) (or preparation for it) involved a baptism or baptisms. [Tertullian](#) mentioned the baptisms of the devotees of [Apollo](#) and of the [Eleusinian](#) mysteries, and said that, “they presume the effect of their doing that is their

“There is no divinization, becoming children of the god, or receiving the divine nature.” See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 298. Günter Wagner also said, “A mystic unification of the life of man with the life of the godhead to whom he swears allegiance’ cannot be affirmed for Eleusis. [Also, a]n identification of the fate of the *mystes* with the fate of Kore is nowhere asserted.” Günter Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and The Pagan Mystery Religions* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), p. 259.

⁴⁵³ TDNT, [μυστήριον](#), A. 1. c. See the preceding footnote regarding dissenting opinions about apotheosis.

⁴⁵⁴ *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels: Aaron–Zion*. Edited by James Hastings, John A. Selbie and John C. Lambert, (Edinburgh; New York: T&T Clark; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906), vol. 2, p. 71.

⁴⁵⁵ The rites of the mystery religions were clearly symbolic and commemorative, even as the rituals of Judaism were symbolic and typological, but the Hellenists endowed their rites with a magical efficacy that was never a part of the Jewish rituals.

⁴⁵⁶ TDNT, [μυστήριον](#), A. 1. d.

regeneration and the remission of the penalties due to their perjuries.”⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the first stage of initiation, i.e., “the Lesser Mysteries,” involved purifications that included bathing in the Illisos River outside of Athens.⁴⁵⁸ The later preparation for the second stage of initiation, “the Greater Mysteries,” involved a purifying bath in the sea.⁴⁵⁹ Likewise, initiation into the mysteries of Isis began with a trip to the public baths, accompanied by a priest, “for purificatory washing accompanied by prayers.”⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, but with a grotesque enhancement to the drama, the cult of Attis (consort of Cybele) had the rituals of *taurobolium* (also practiced in Mithraism) or *criobolium* in which adherents were “baptized” in the blood of bulls or rams respectively.⁴⁶¹

Scholars continue to debate the particular significance of these baptisms in the various mystery religions, but for our present purpose we only need understand that: (1) the mystery religion baptisms, even if only preparatory for the initiation proper, were essential to that initiation; (2) because many of the mystery religion baptisms were preliminary purifications and therefore public, they were among the most familiar of the initiatory rites so far as the general populace was concerned; and (3) consistent with the magical worldview of Hellenism, these baptisms (officially or unofficially) were invested with apotropaic virtue.

Naturally, therefore, church leaders of the late second century who knew little of Christianity’s Hebraic heritage, who had consciously or unconsciously adopted a Hellenistic hermeneutic, who faced the challenge of sporadic persecutions here and there in the Roman Empire, and who very much needed to know who was “in” and who was “out” with regard to the faith, seized upon Christian baptism as that which had always differentiated believer from unbeliever, and as that which was the obvious and superior

⁴⁵⁷ Ter Bap 5.

⁴⁵⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 257.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Op. cit., p. 274.

⁴⁶¹ The second grade of initiation in Mithraism involved nuptial imagery and may have involved a purification by water. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 294.

counterpart to pagan [initiation](#). However, while Christian baptism had intentionally and from the beginning served as a public demonstration of who was committed to Jesus Christ, its power was practical, not [mystical](#). Nevertheless, for a Gentile Christian of the late second century, the [Hellenistic](#) worldview would hardly permit belief that the power of Christian baptism was only practical while the power of pagan baptisms was [apotropaic](#), or even [salvific](#).⁴⁶² Therefore, by AD 200, Christian baptism, which had always been a vital but [non-mystical](#) ordinance of Christ, became for many the “[mystery](#) of baptism” *with power to save*, and Christianity became — at least with regard to its rituals and the power attributed to them — the ultimate [mystery religion](#).

The metamorphosis may seem incredible, but history well documents this early conversion of Christianity into a religion utilizing the presuppositions and vocabulary of the [mysteries](#). In fact, the alteration shouldn't surprise us because peoples' ways of understanding and practicing their religions have always evolved under the influence of cultural trends. From one generation to the next, doctrines, rituals, and the vocabularies used to express religious beliefs change.⁴⁶³ We ourselves, Christians of the 21st century, feel keenly the continuing influence of cultural ideas upon the conception of our faith, and upon the language we use to talk about it.

We can easily imagine, for example, an American preacher on a Sunday morning, closing his sermon with an invitation like this:

So, are you ready for the touchdown that wins the game of life? Then it's time to receive Jesus as your Quarterback and get on the winning team. Come and join His huddle and get His instructions for the next play. You may feel like you're young and you're still at the 40-yard line

⁴⁶² As Newman wrote,

Among the universal features of paganism was belief in the efficacy of external rites. That the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper should have been allowed to remain symbolical and memorial rites to be celebrated in simple obedience to the Master's command was more than could have been reasonably expected. Similar rites existed in paganism and were regarded as possessing magical virtue.

Albert Henry Newman, *A History Of Anti-Pedobaptism: From The Rise Of Pedobaptism To A. D. 1609* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), p. 2.

⁴⁶³ Hence the phenomenon of reformers who rise up to call their coreligionists back to the principles *and vocabulary* of a religion's founding documents.

with three quarters to go, but you may be at the 1-yard line with only seconds on the clock! I'm calling a time-out right now and asking that everyone bows their head and closes their eyes....

The language of such an invitation would tell us several things about the preacher:

1. Whether or not he knows God's ways, he understands football.
2. He is either currently a great fan of football, or was at one time.
3. He perceives that the phenomenon of football is so ingrained in his audience's cultural consciousness that his hearers will not only understand his metaphorical invitation but perhaps even find it compelling.

Now, having imagined and analyzed this contemporary (though hypothetical) invitation, consider a real invitation of antiquity given by [Clement of Alexandria](#), and take particular notice of the words I've put in italic font. In his work entitled *Protrepticus*, or *Exhortation To The Heathen (Greeks)*, [Clement](#) called his audience to Christ with these words:

Come, ... I will show thee ... the *mysteries* of the Word ... *dramas* of truth O truly *sacred mysteries*! ... I become holy whilst I am *initiated*. The Lord is the *hierophant*, and seals while *illuminating* him who is *initiated*, ... Such are the *reveries* of my *mysteries*. If it is thy wish, be thou also *initiated*....⁴⁶⁴

Clearly, [Clement](#) considered his [Hellenistic](#) contemporaries thoroughly familiar with the main elements of the [mystery religions](#) (as Americans are with the elements of football), and indeed they were. Countless converts to Christianity in the early centuries had previously been *initiated* into one or more of the [mystery religions](#), and as already noted, the influence of the [mystery religions](#) “permeated ancient society.”⁴⁶⁵ Sadly, though, [Clement](#) didn't just take advantage of his culture's awareness of the [mystery religions'](#) terminology; *he was apparently a fan* of the [mystical](#) approach to religion and saw Christianity as the ultimate and only true [mystery religion](#). Indeed, a

⁴⁶⁴ *Exh* 12, c. AD 200.

⁴⁶⁵ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 804.

paradigm shift had begun in Roman Christianity that would, in time, introduce a new umpire (the emperor), a new kind of team (professional priests), new player-coaches (the hierarchy of bishops), a new game of worship (services performed by a professional clergy and choir), a new playing field (the [basilica](#)), and new rules for winning the game of life and attaining blessedness in the next one. The most important new rule was that a person must train for and attain the primary goal: the [mystery](#) of baptism.

Consider that phrase, *the [mystery](#) of baptism*. Is it familiar? If you grew up in [Evangelical](#) or [Charismatic](#) circles it might not be. However, if you have Catholic background, or background in any of the mainline Protestant denominations, the phrase, “the [mystery](#) of baptism,” does not sound foreign to you because Catholics and mainline Protestants use it in baptismal teaching to this day. Isn’t it interesting, therefore, that no one ever referred to Christian baptism as a [mystery](#) until around the time of [Clement](#) (AD 200)?⁴⁶⁶

The apostles certainly never referred to baptism as a [mystery](#). The closest proximity of the word [mystery](#) to the word *baptism* in the apostolic writings of our [NT](#) is in Col 2.2 and Col 2.12 where the words are 10 verses apart and have no semantic connection.⁴⁶⁷ The [NT](#) does speak of [mysteries](#), particularly in Paul’s epistles, but these [mysteries](#) are always *truths* (pertaining to God’s redemptive plan and eschatological agenda) not *rituals*.⁴⁶⁸ Nowhere does the [NT](#) speak of baptism, the Lord’s supper or any other religious ritual as “a [mystery](#).” Nevertheless, as their understanding of Christianity evolved from a [Hebraic](#) conception into a [Hellenistic](#) one, the

⁴⁶⁶ [Origen](#), in his *Homilies On Luke*, makes some of the earliest references to “the [mystery](#) of baptism,” *Hom Luk 11 and 33*, Lienhard trans.

⁴⁶⁷ For Paul, in this context, the mystery in view is Christ, and the nature of the mystery is entirely unlike that of the mysteries of the pagan cults.

⁴⁶⁸ The [NT](#) speaks of:

- “the mysteries of the kingdom” (Mat 13.11; Mar 4.11; Luk 8.10),
- the “mystery” of Israel’s hardening (Rom 11.25),
- “the mysteries of God” (1Co 4.1; Rev 10.7),⁴⁶⁸
- “the mystery of His will” (Eph 1.9),
- “the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3.3-4, 8-9; Col 2.2; 4.3),
- the “mystery” of marital oneness (Eph 5.32),
- “the mystery of the gospel” (Rom 16.25; Eph 6.19; Col 1.26-27),⁴⁶⁸
- “a mystery” we now speak of as “the rapture” (1Co 15.51),
- “the mystery of lawlessness” (2Th 2.7),
- “the mystery of the faith” (1Ti 3.9), and
- “the mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3.16).

Church Fathers began speaking of baptism as a [mystery](#).⁴⁶⁹ The influence of the pagan [mystery religions](#) had altered the vocabulary of the [Church](#), even as it continued to alter its theological understanding.

At the time when the [Fathers](#) began speaking of baptism as a [mystery](#), i.e., around the end of the second century, the lingua franca of the Empire was beginning its slow shift from Greek to Latin. As Latin gradually took hold in the Church, the [Fathers](#) began to translate the Greek word *mysterion* with the Latin word *sacramentum*.⁴⁷⁰ Thus, in the later works of the Church [Fathers](#), we see baptism and other Christian rites referred to both as [mysteries](#) and as [sacraments](#).⁴⁷¹ We realize, therefore, that when we speak today of “the mystery of baptism” or “the sacrament of baptism,” we unwittingly testify to the influence of the ancient [mystery religions](#) upon the vocabulary and theology of the Church in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

TERTULLIAN’S EMBARRASSMENT: MAGIC WATER

[Tertullian](#) (a contemporary of [Clement](#), but based in Carthage at the other end of the Mediterranean) was among the first of the early [Church Fathers](#) to use the Latin word *sacramentum* both in reference to what pagans called

⁴⁶⁹ See as examples:

AD 234: *Hom Luk* 11 and 33, Lienhard trans.

AD 325: *Const* 7.3.40.

AD 348: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat Lec* 18.32. *Lec* 19 presents baptism as one in a list of the Christian “mysteries” to be explained to the newly baptized. For Cyril, the Christian mysteries also included chrism, the partaking of the body and blood of the Lord, the sacred liturgy and the communion of the saints. None of these things are spoken of as mysteries in the NT.

AD 360: The Synod Of Laodicea, *Canon* 47.

AD 374: Basil, *Pneuma* 15.35.

AD 387: Ambrose, *De Myst*.

AD 390: Chrysostom seems to think of baptism as leading to participation in the Christian mysteries, rather than as a mystery itself.

AD 398: Augustine, *De Bap* 4.22.

AD 450: Leo The Great, *Ser* 21.

⁴⁷⁰ Tertullian serves as a prime example of the use of *sacramentum* to mean *mysterion*. See notes 473 and 474 below.

⁴⁷¹ The etymology of the word *sacrament*, along with the different uses and connotations of the word in antiquity, has been thoroughly researched and discussed by Christian scholars. What the scholars do not always mention, however, is that when the early Fathers used *sacrament*, they meant *mystery*.

mysteries⁴⁷² and with reference to what the NT writers called mysteries.⁴⁷³ However, the pagan and biblical ideas had become conflated in Tertullian's mind, such that — without any biblical authorization — he named baptism a sacrament along with the Eucharist.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, Tertullian began his treatise *On Baptism* with the words,

Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life.... we little fishes ... are born in water ...⁴⁷⁵

Evidently the pagan and biblical ideas indicated by the word *mystery* had merged in Tertullian's mind, because he did not simply speak of baptism as a sacrament, but also assigned to it the mystical power previously only attributed to the rituals of the mystery religions. Thus, in this place he used the word sacrament as a true equivalent of the pagan word *mystery*. Clearly, the Hellenistic view of religious rituals had overtaken and replaced the Hebraic in Tertullian's mind.

In his baptismal treatise, Tertullian went on to elaborate upon the mystical virtue of baptism. He wrote that since baptism is administered “without pomp, without any considerable novelty of preparation, finally, without expense,” the carnal mind stumbles over the fact that “a man is dipped in water, and amid the utterance of some few words, is sprinkled, and then rises again, not much (or not at all) the cleaner” but having attained “eternity.” Contrary to the unbelief of the skeptics, he continued, death is “washed away by bathing.”⁴⁷⁶ To further admonish doubters, Tertullian explained why it should not surprise us that baptismal water has such power:

[In the creation] water was the first to produce that which had life, that it might be no wonder in baptism that waters know how to give life.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷² In *Adv Val* 30, Tertullian used *sacramentum* and our English edition correctly translates with *mystery*. In *Scorp* 10, he used *sacramenta* to refer to the “hidden mysteries of the heretics.” See also *Adv Marc* 1.13.

⁴⁷³ In *Mon* 5, Tertullian used *sacrament* for what Paul called a *mystery*. In *Adv Marc* 3.18.2, he used *sacramentum* (translated *mystery*) in reference to the crucifixion. See *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* (2 Vols.), edited by James Hastings, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916-1918), vol. 2, pp. 50-51.

⁴⁷⁴ *De Cor* 3.

⁴⁷⁵ *Bap* 2-4.

⁴⁷⁶ *Bap* 2.

⁴⁷⁷ *Bap* 3.

Let us note that in Tertullian's view, not only does baptism have [mystical](#) efficacy, but baptismal waters themselves have [mystical](#) power, and are even personified as *knowing* "how to give life"! A few lines later, [Tertullian](#) seems embarrassed by his exaltation of water:

I fear I may seem to have collected rather the praises of water than the reasons of baptism...

Nevertheless he insisted that "it is not to be doubted that God has made the *material substance* which He has disposed throughout all His products and works, obey Him also in His own peculiar [sacraments](#); that the material substance which governs terrestrial life acts as agent likewise in the celestial."⁴⁷⁸

Not one to leave his readers bewildered, [Tertullian](#) explained precisely how baptismal waters get their power:

All waters, therefore, in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, attain the [sacramental](#) power of sanctification; for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from Himself; and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying.⁴⁷⁹

Such ideas — divine, sanctifying power being transferred directly to material waters by priestly invocation — should horrify us as totally contra-biblical, and yet they are utterly consistent with the [worldview](#) of [Tertullian's Hellenistic](#) milieu, and so, sadly, unsurprising.

Nor does it surprise us, in view of the [magical](#) power he ascribed to water in the rite of baptism, that [Tertullian](#) insisted on the necessity of baptism for salvation, based "chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the

⁴⁷⁸ *Bap* 3, , emphasis mine.

⁴⁷⁹ *Bap* 4-6. In this same section, Tertullian alluded to the healing virtue in the Pool of Bethesda attained "through the intervention of an angel" (Joh 5.1-5), but the fact that the waters of Bethesda only had *alleged* efficacy for *physical* maladies did not trouble him. In the next chapter, Tertullian explained that the healing virtue of Bethesda was [typological](#). "This figure of corporeal healing," he wrote, "sang of spiritual healing, according to the rule by which things carnal are always antecedent as figurative of things spiritual. And thus, when the grace of God advanced to higher degrees among men, an accession *of efficacy* was granted to the waters ..." In Tertullian's view, the angel of Bethesda was "the forerunner of the Holy Spirit."

Lord who says, ‘Unless one be born of water, he hath not life’ ...”⁴⁸⁰ To those who might object that OT saints were saved without baptism, Tertullian retorted that,

... in all cases it is the *later* things which have conclusive force, and the *subsequent* which prevail over the antecedent. Grant that, in days gone by, there was salvation by means of bare faith, before the passion and resurrection of the Lord. But now that faith has been enlarged, and is become a faith which believes in His nativity, passion, and resurrection, there has been an amplification added to the sacrament, viz., the sealing act of baptism; the clothing, in some sense, of the faith which before was bare, and which cannot exist now without its proper law. For the *law* of baptizing has been *imposed*, and the formula prescribed: “Go,” *He* saith, “teach the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The comparison with this law of that definition, “Unless a man have been reborn of water and Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of the heavens,” has tied faith to the necessity of baptism.⁴⁸¹

While Tertullian correctly observed that the details of the gospel are clearer to us now than they were to OT saints, and that NT saints have new mandates, he seriously erred in seeing an “amplification” of the means of justification. He taught that the “bare faith” of Abraham would no longer suffice for salvation, but must now be sealed by obedience to the *law* of baptism. Notice how the commitment to sacramental magic always pulls us away from grace and back to law. I dare say that if Tertullian went to heaven when he died, Paul of Tarsus was waiting at the gates to give him a thrashing, because Tertullian’s teaching gutted Paul’s argument in Romans that justification after Christ’s resurrection is received by *faith alone*, just as it was received beforehand by faithful Abraham (Rom 4).⁴⁸²

Sadly, Tertullian was not an aberration in his day, but only among the first to so clearly ascribe mystical (= sacramental) power to baptism and other rituals. We have already seen that Clement of Alexandria had begun to speak of Christianity in the language of the mystery religions, and this same

⁴⁸⁰ Bap 12, referring to Joh 3.5.

⁴⁸¹ Ter Bap, in Vol. 3, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), ch. 13. All italicized emphases by the editors of this edition.

⁴⁸² Note Paul’s unequivocal application of the same principle of justification to both Abraham and us by stating that the words spoken about Abraham “were written not for him alone, but also for us ... who believe...” (Rom 4.23-24).

Clement wrote that God “generated us from our mother — the water,” by which he referred to baptism.⁴⁸³ But long before Tertullian of Carthage and Clement of Alexandria, Ignatius (c. AD 117) got the mystical idea into his head that Jesus Christ “was born and baptized, that by His passion He might purify the water”!⁴⁸⁴ Barnabas — not to be confused with the Barnabas of the NT — wrote (c. AD 130) that “we indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up, bearing fruit in our heart, having the fear [of God] and trust in Jesus in our spirit.”⁴⁸⁵ Notice that this Barnabas attributed the cleansing of sin to baptism rather than to faith, and in fact implied that baptism produces faith. Likewise, the author of the work known as *The Shepherd (or Pastor) Of Hermas* wrote (c. AD 140), “we descended into the water and received remission of our former sins.”⁴⁸⁶ By AD 160, Justin Martyr taught that persons are brought to the water to be “regenerated” in fulfillment of Christ’s words, “Except you be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁸⁷ Theophilus of Antioch (c. AD 170, not Luke’s Theophilus) wrote of “men’s being destined to receive repentance and remission of sins, through the water and laver of regeneration....”⁴⁸⁸ Notice that, for this Theophilus, even repentance is vouchsafed through baptism. Then Irenaeus (c. AD 180) gave us one of the earliest Christian references to holy water when he wrote, “For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes....”⁴⁸⁹ We see, then, that other Christian writers, similarly led astray by their Hellenistic

⁴⁸³ *Strom* 4.25. Here Clement personifies the water even as Tertullian did. In another place, commenting on 1Jo 5.8, he wrote of the water “which is [symbolizes?] regeneration and faith.” This is not an explicit reference to baptism, but why would Clement associate regeneration with the water rather than with the Spirit of 1Jo 5.8 if he were not thinking of baptismal regeneration?

⁴⁸⁴ *Ign Eph* 18, emphasis mine. Another version of this epistle interprets Ignatius as meaning that Jesus “was baptized by John, that He might ratify the institution [of baptism] committed to the prophet,” but while this wording makes the passage less mystical it is not considered the genuine reading.

⁴⁸⁵ *Bar* 11. Barnabas seems to have anticipated by some 1,400 years the Lutheran doctrine that baptism produces faith in the baptizee.

⁴⁸⁶ *Hermas* 2.4.3.

⁴⁸⁷ *IApo* 61. In this same passage, Justin presents being “born again” as something a person chooses to do; i.e., a person chooses to be baptized and that is the new birth.

⁴⁸⁸ *Auto* 2.16.

⁴⁸⁹ *Frag* 34.

presuppositions, were attributing [mystical](#) power to water and to Christian baptism well before [Tertullian of Carthage](#) and [Clement of Alexandria](#).

THE NATURAL COROLLARY: INFANT BAPTISM

[Tertullian's](#) writings, though, give us the first hint of the ecclesiastical problem created by this [mysticism](#), namely, the problem of the increasing demand for the baptism of young children. This demand arose in direct response to the Church's teaching that baptism itself, *and even baptismal water*, has the power to save. When people are taught that baptismal water [regenerates](#), they cannot help but infer that the [Church](#) should baptize anyone and everyone who can be subjected to the rite, including newborn infants. This is apparently what the Christian populace of the second and third centuries came to believe, and [Tertullian](#) found himself right at the doctrinal tipping point between the old belief and the new, between the apostolic and the [Hellenistic](#), with regard to the proper subjects for Christian baptism.

From the time of the apostles, the Church had understood baptism as *a response* to hearing the gospel and *a testimony* to having come to faith. So much so that the Gentile Church began instituting more and more lengthy periods of catechism for baptismal candidates, to insure that they truly believed *before* receiving the rite.⁴⁹⁰ However, with the growing perception that baptismal waters had [salvific](#) power, it became increasingly unseemly, to the [Hellenized](#) Christian mind, that those saving waters should be withheld from any who wanted them, whether for themselves or for their children. The idea that *all* should be baptized in earliest infancy would not win the day until the time and teaching of [Augustine of Hippo](#) (c. AD 410),⁴⁹¹ but [Tertullian](#) was perhaps the first to address the problem in writing. One might have expected that [Tertullian's](#) high regard for Christian baptism's [mystical](#) efficacy would have compelled him to join with those who urged the baptism of all, but to our

⁴⁹⁰ G. Wainwright says that the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus describes a catechesis of up to three years in the church of Rome of c. AD 200. See Ralph P. Martin, and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 122.

⁴⁹¹ See David F. Wright, "Augustine And The Transformation Of Baptism," in *The Origins Of Christendom In The West*, Alan Kreider (ed.), (New York: T & T Clark, 2001).

surprise he resisted that trend. “The delay of baptism is preferable,” he wrote, “principally, however, in the case of little children. ... 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?’”⁴⁹²

Notice Tertullian’s phrase, “the innocent period of life.” Up to his time, the Christian attitude toward little children, an attitude undoubtedly anchored in Christianity’s [Hebraic](#) heritage, was to think of them as *innocent* — not indeed as without sin, but as not yet being of an age of spiritual accountability or of religious obligation. After all, Jesus had said, “unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 18.3), and “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*” (Mar 10.15), and “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Luk 18.16). In this spirit, various of the [Apostolic Fathers](#) exhorted their readers to be like little children,⁴⁹³ and [Aristides](#) (c. AD 125 or 150) went so far as to describe a child who dies in infancy as “having passed through this world without sins.”⁴⁹⁴ As we shall see, however, the cultural perception of little children as spiritually and religiously “innocent” would not last long, but be destroyed by the drive to baptize infants and by the doctrine invented to justify that trend.

THE APPEAL FOR THE GENERAL POPULACE

In spite of [Tertullian’s](#) resistance, the more people were taught that baptism saves, the more they wanted it for their children as well as for themselves.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹² *Bap* 18.

⁴⁹³ Kurt Aland, ET by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), pp. 105-107.

⁴⁹⁴ *Aris* 15.

⁴⁹⁵ Johannes Warns sensed a root of infant baptism going back to the Roman *lustratio liberorum* [purification of deliverance] administered to newborn girls on the eighth day after birth and to boys on the ninth, and another root of the practice going back to the initiatory religious customs of the Mithras and other Mystery cults. Johannes Warns, *Baptism*, trans. G. H. Lang, (Minneapolis, MN: James & Klock, 1976), p. 74. The available evidence implies that the Christian trend toward infant baptism developed both because of a predisposition for it inherited from pagan ritual, *and* because of the supernatural benefits of baptism increasingly taught by the Christians.

The idea that one could be eternally saved simply by being ritually immersed in water proved irresistible to the Hellenistic mind. As Cumont wrote,

... the peoples of the Empire with their hungry hearts and unrelieved consciences particularly welcomed two ... new elements [of the [mystery religions](#)]: “[mysterious](#) means of purification by which ... to cleanse away defilements of the soul, and the assurance that an immortality of bliss would be the reward of piety.”⁴⁹⁶

We can expect, therefore, that when Christians began using the language of the [mysteries](#) to proffer salvation, they found a receptive religious marketplace.⁴⁹⁷ After all, the Christians offered purification (in the form of simple immersion), and assurance (on the basis of divine — though misinterpreted — authority), while requiring a period of [catechesis](#) but *not* the usual steep fees for [initiation](#). Many factors, both commendable and regrettable, contributed to the steady Christianization of the empire,⁴⁹⁸ and the increasing [Hellenization](#) of Christianity was a regrettable one. As Christianity developed a growing affinity to the [mystery religions](#), religious seekers increasingly perceived the benefits of the Christian alternative over the other [mysteries](#). Who wouldn’t want eternal salvation for themselves, *and for their children*, in exchange for little more than taking a ritual bath?

THE APPEAL FOR THE ECCLESIASTICS

As Christian [initiation](#) grew more popular with the masses, less-than-wholly-sanctified Christian clergy began to recognize a windfall for their growing profession. The more that people came to understand baptism as the [sine qua non](#) of eternal salvation, the more dependent the populace became upon the

⁴⁹⁶ Cumont, *Les Religions Orientales*, p. 61, cited in H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul And The Mystery-Religions* (New York, NY: Hodder And Stoughton, 1913), p. 22.

⁴⁹⁷ Particularly from the end of the second century to the beginning of the fourth. Examples of touting salvation using mystery language include Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation To The Heathen*, ch. 12 (quoted above), and also in his *Pæd* 1.6 where he says that “Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated ... we are made immortal.” We might also include Justin’s offer of a happy life through “initiation” to Trypho (*Dial* 8).

⁴⁹⁸ The books of Rodney Stark are informative on this point. See also D. S. Lim’s helpful summary in “Evangelism In The Early Church,” in Ralph P. Martin, and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

professional clergy who could administer the [magical](#) rite. In time, as W. E. Vine wrote,

The ordinance of baptism, with its profound significance for the believer, became changed into a rite which was practiced for the maintenance of priestcraft, and fostered superstition.⁴⁹⁹

Indeed, [Hellenized](#) Christian leaders began to see greater and greater ecclesiastical control flow into their hands as their congregations came to see them as the [hierophants](#) of the new religion. Whoever controlled Christian baptism controlled the eternal lives and deaths of the people.

THE NECESSARY RATIONALE OF INFANT SINFULNESS

To maintain that control, though, the clergy could hardly deny requests from Christian parents for the baptism of infants. Indeed, those in authority can obtain the ultimate control over a person's life if they can secure that person's allegiance before he or she even has the power of speech! So the trend of baptizing infants continued and steadily grew during the 3rd century.

However, someone eventually raised a logical question: If baptism saves, and it saves by washing away one's sins, why do infants need baptism? What sins do "innocent" little infants have? What have babies done that needs washing away?

The preeminently [mystical Church Father](#), [Origen](#) (AD 182-254), stepped forward with the answer. In his commentary on the book of Romans (c. AD 240), Origen wrote that,

...the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to little children. For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed were aware that in everyone was *sin's innate defilement*,⁵⁰⁰ which needed to be washed away through water and spirit.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ W. E. Vine, *Collected Writings of W.E. Vine*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

⁵⁰⁰ Emphasis mine. Quasten translated this phrase of Origen's with the words *original sin*, but Scheck's translation (*innate defilement*) is truer to the original Latin. *Romans Commentary* 5.9, quoted in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. II, (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1992), p. 83. The original Latin is *genuinae sordes peccati*, "innate uncleanness of sin," (J. P. Migne, *Origenes Opera Omnia*, (1862), §565.14, p. 1047), and makes no direct connection to Adam's sin as does the later doctrine of original sin.

⁵⁰¹ *Origen: Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans Books 1-5*, ET by Thomas P. Scheck, (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), p. 333. Notice the

In other words, Origen defended infant baptism as an apostolic institution⁵⁰² (the first person to ever do so), and said that *the apostles knew* what infants needed to have washed away, namely, “sin’s innate defilement.”

To any who balked at the idea that infants have some inner stain of sin, Origen may have offered the argument he used in one of his homilies on Leviticus (c. AD 242-244): while defending the truth that everyone is born with sin, Origen gave various biblical evidences, and then wrote,

To these [evidences] can be added the reason why it is required, since the baptism of the Church is given for the forgiveness of sins, that, according to the observance of the Church, that baptism also be given to infants; since certainly, if there were nothing in infants that ought to pertain to forgiveness and indulgence, then the grace of baptism would appear superfluous.⁵⁰³

In other words, to the biblical evidence that all are born sinners, Origen added the Church’s practice of baptizing infants as evidence that even infants are born with sin. Surely infants must be born with the need for remission of sin, else the Church’s practice of baptizing them would be superfluous.

So, Origen’s full answer to the question of why infants need to be baptized is: *Infants need to be baptized to wash away the “innate defilement” that they are born with, and we know this is so because of the Church’s observance of infant baptism that she received from the apostles.*

These teachings of Origen include some astounding assertions. First, his statement that infants are born with “sin’s innate defilement” sounds biblical, but what Origen meant was utterly pagan (as we shall see in [Part IV](#)). Second, his claim that the Church has an *observance* “that baptism also be given to infants,” was a boldly unqualified pronouncement to make when the practice of infant baptism had only emerged within the last 50 years, and was far from universal in Origen’s time.⁵⁰⁴ Finally, to state that the Church had received the

mystery language of Origen’s statement. This is the first evidence of the belief that the apostles taught the baptism of infants.

⁵⁰² Augustine would later claim that “the necessity of baptizing infants” had been authorized by the Lord [Jesus] himself (*De Pec* 1.39 [XXVI]).

⁵⁰³ Origen: *Homilies On Leviticus 1-16*, ET by Gary Wayne Barkley (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), Homily 8, p. 158.

⁵⁰⁴ Kurt Aland places “the emergence of infant baptism” at c. AD 200. Kurt Aland, ET by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 103.

tradition of infant baptism *from the apostles* was an unprecedented claim, and clearly a personal opinion based on [Origen's](#) own — and often questionable — [hermeneutics](#).

Nevertheless, considering the spiritual milieu in which [Origen](#) labored, his propositions about infant baptism are all reasonable enough *if* we adopt certain presuppositions of the time. If we presuppose that (A) baptism has [mystical](#) power to wash away sins, and that (B) even infants have sin that needs to be washed away, then (C) the [Church](#) surely must have baptized infants from the beginning, and therefore, (D) because the apostles baptized infants, we know that we should too.

Well, we have seen that the first presupposition, namely, that baptism has [mystical](#) power, is utterly un-[Hebraic](#) and contra-biblical; the [Church](#) absorbed that idea from paganism. Baptism became “enchanted” as the [magical](#) assumptions of a [Hellenistic](#) culture flowed into the presuppositional void left in the Gentile Church by the loss of the [Hebraic worldview](#). We must repudiate as pagan claptrap the idea that baptism, or that any other Church ritual, has [mystical](#) power, whether inherently or from above by way of a liturgical invocation.

However, what about the idea that infants have sin that needs to be washed away? Is this idea biblical? [Origen](#) was certainly correct to say, in his works just cited, that the Bible ascribes sin universally to all people (Rom 3.23), and that David acknowledged having this sin from conception (Psa 51.5), but does this mean that the sin of an infant should be — or even can be — washed away by baptism? In order to answer this last question conclusively, we must now study what the Bible teaches about the congenital malady of sin that afflicts all human beings — not Scripture's description of specific sins, but rather its revelation about the sinful condition every person is born with, a condition I will call *fallenness*. Once we understand what the Bible says about human fallenness, we will know whether or not it is a condition that baptism can address.

PART III: UNDERSTANDING HUMAN FALLENNESS

As sparks fly upward.

Job 5.7

But if we cannot account for “the corruption of our whole nature” as a direct penal infliction on account of Adam’s sin, how then can we account for it? One way forward is suggested by a statement used by the Shorter Catechism to define the “misery” of man’s fallen condition: “All mankind by their fall lost communion with God.” This defines man’s loss in personal rather than abstract terms, and this loss of personal fellowship with God (communion with the Holy Spirit) explains, in turn, the corruption of our nature. Yet the loss of our communion with God was not a separate, subsequent experience, external to the first act of disobedience. The very act itself (and indeed the unbelief that was its prelude) grieved the Holy Spirit. It was tantamount, indeed, to a repudiation of him, and in that moment all is lost, not only to Adam but to his posterity. In Adam’s choice, the race ceased to be *pneumatikos* and became *psuchikos* ([1Co 2.14–15]). Such are we born, and such we remain until grace re-creates us.

Donald Macleod, “Original Sin in Reformed Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 143.

[Sin’s] first and immediate effect is to destroy the balance or harmony of principles in the soul, to dethrone love to God from its place of supremacy in the soul, and give the lower and sensuous side of the nature an undue and wrongful predominance. Not only are these lower principles now in the place of ascendancy, but, the spiritual bond being cut which kept them in due relation and subordination, they are now turbulent, disorderly, warring among themselves, their motions are violent and irregular, sin reveals itself as a principle of anarchy (ἀνομία).

James Orr, *God’s Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), pp. 223-224.

SYNOPSIS OF PART III

The accuracy and effectiveness of our gospel proclamation cannot exceed our understanding of the problem addressed by the gospel. That problem is man's alienation from God, but that alienation is not simply a matter of people breaking God's laws. Instead, it is a congenital malady that inclines all humans to evil from infancy. The patriarchs of antiquity knew about the systemic moral impairment in the race of man, and we ourselves have seen the evidence that our very nature was damaged in a primeval moral fall.

While philosophers and sages of various religions have tried to understand human fallenness, two revelations have particularly helped Christians in this study: the Pauline teaching that links our sinfulness to *one fallen man*, and the *gospel* testimony to the life of *one unfallen man*. Jewish sages investigated the topic of human fallenness before Christians did, but sadly they arrived only at speculative conclusions based upon legends and pagan philosophy. Jewish tradition recognizes the reality of sin, but generally denies a fall and the corruption of human nature. Nevertheless, the whole of Scripture testifies to the fact that after God pronounced all of His creation "very good," something in man's created nature changed for the worse.

In fact, the Bible testifies to a comprehensive death that befell the first human beings *and that* has subsequently vitiated the nature of all their progeny. As a result, human nature still remains a twisted reflection of its original design. The original design of human nature involved a living link between man and his Creator via the Holy Spirit. The sin of our first parents caused the Spirit to withdraw, breaking the God-to-man link. This left man's carnal faculties — rather than the Spirit — in dominion over his now withered soul. This constituted a vitiation of human nature that has produced a race in which "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3.23). Even infants are guilty sinners, as proven by the fact that even infants die (Rom 5.12).

Tragically, fallen man's soul is not only ruled by his fleshly drives, but also by the devil. Adam and Eve, by despising God's command, shifted the allegiance of the human race to the Serpent, who became "the god of this age" (2Co 4.4 ^{NIVO}). Now, Satan and his minions exacerbate fallen man's fleshly lusts.

An understanding of human fallenness helps us realize that spiritual rebirth is the soul's only cure. The prophets proclaimed this, and Jesus confirmed it when he told Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again..." (Joh 3.3 ^{NIVO}). Thankfully, Jesus Himself made such a new birth possible, saying, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes ... has crossed over from death to life.... a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (Joh 5.24-25).

Recognizing human fallenness as spiritual deadness — as a deprivation — explains how it passes down through the generations, and why Jesus did not inherit it. Since human fallenness does not consist of a thing but reflects the lack of a thing, and since parents can only reproduce offspring like themselves, Adam and Eve could not conjure up a vital connection to God's Spirit and bequeath it to their offspring. Neither could Mary and Joseph. However, since God rather than Joseph fathered Jesus, Jesus was perfectly linked to the Father by the Spirit from conception. Jesus was born without any spiritual deficiency, but rather with a body and soul perfectly and perpetually oriented to the Father by the Spirit.

WHAT KIND OF REMEDY IS JESUS?

If you've ever watched ***House, MD*** you know that the medical geniuses in this TV drama figure out a cure for everything. I don't think I've seen an episode where they have failed to heal the patient. But there would be no drama if not for a fundamental reality of medical practice: *before you can cure someone, you have to understand their disease*. The most interesting part of each episode of ***House, MD***, apart from the eccentricities of Dr. House himself, is the intense quest to understand the patient's disease.

As 21st-century Christians, we would do well to take a cue from Dr. House (and other medical-drama heroes), and put a little more effort into understanding the congenital human disease we call *sin*, i.e., the *fallenness* we are all born with. If we do not understand our sin malady, we will not understand the remedy which Jesus embodies for our fallenness. That lack of

understanding will in turn undermine our communication of the gospel. The American church is plagued today by people living a superficial Christianity, but has only itself to blame, because we have so often presented a shallow gospel. Much of our gospel proclamation is good, so far as it goes, but it rarely speaks to more than the surface problems of our culture, and so leaves people's deeper alienation from God unaddressed. To experience the gospel as "the power of God for salvation" for the *whole* man, we must understand the whole of man's lostness, the whole of his spiritual problem. To pursue this understanding, we must delve into the Bible's teaching about man's fallenness.

THE BIBLICAL ASSESSMENT OF MAN'S CONDITION

A search for the Bible's teaching on the human condition quickly reveals that the Patriarchs of antiquity knew of a systemic moral impairment in the race of man. Eliphaz the Temanite said, "man is born to *do* mischief just as sparks fly upward" (Job 5.7^{TNK}). Job agreed with this assessment of humanity, and said, "Man *who is* born of woman is of few days and full of trouble....Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? No one!" (Job 14.1-4^{NKJ}). Bildad the Shuhite also concurred (Job 25.4), "how can he be clean who is born of woman?" We find in the Scriptures that even God has commented repeatedly upon the ubiquity of the human inclination toward evil (Gen 6.5; 8.21).

Not only have patriarchs and prophets recognized our race's universal inclination toward evil, but they have also observed that the gravitational pull toward iniquity appears in the human individual from the earliest moments of life. Eliphaz, Job and Bildad saw the problem as emerging from birth. King David bemoaned the fact that, "I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psa 51.5^{NIVO}). David said that "the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies" (Psa 58.3^{ASV}).

OUR OWN EXPERIENCE AND SUSPICION

These biblical assessments resonate with our own experience. We have observed throughout our lives that human nature is disgustingly selfish and

shockingly prone to sociopathic behavior.⁵⁰⁵ We have seen that even little children are capable of the most galling, and even malevolent, acts. However, we also sense that there is something *unnatural* about man's ubiquitous and apparently congenital problem, for we have observed a tension, even a battle within ourselves, between our conscience and our will. All too often we find ourselves asking, "Why do I fail to do what I know I should, and instead do what makes me feel horrible?" The loathing we feel toward our own moral failures, along with the altruistic nobility to which we occasionally rise, make us wonder: if doing right is desirable and possible, why is right behavior so very hard to sustain? We feel that something within us must be damaged. How else can we explain our deep discontent with our behavior? We suspect that we have been infected with some disease of the soul, or have come under bondage to some malign force, and that our very nature is somehow impaired. We suspect that the human race has somehow *fallen* from a more noble archetype. Who or what did this to us? Why do we have this problem?

It should not surprise us that this question — the question of how such an impairment came upon our race — has long captured the attention of those pastors and theologians who have desired to ameliorate man's predicament. Adherents of many religions and philosophies have tried to understand the origin of human evil, but the endeavor to understand human fallenness is a particularly Christian quest.⁵⁰⁶ This is so because in the NT the moral defectiveness of man stands out starkly in the light of *one* un-fallen life.

⁵⁰⁵ On my own street recently, a drunk or drug-addled driver smashed his vehicle into two parked autos around midnight, totaling them both, and then drove away before anyone could record his plate number. A few hours later, someone else came along, broke into the two smashed vehicles and stole everything of value. Even more recently, a man high on something drove his pickup truck through the chain link fence of my neighbor's front yard, and then through the corner of his garage, coming to a stop between our houses, and promptly fled the scene on foot.

⁵⁰⁶ No word or phrase in Scripture refers succinctly to the idea of the human race's fall from a better state. As with the word *Trinity*, we will not find the phrase *The Fall [of man]* in the Bible. Perhaps the first use of the word *fall* (πτῶμα, 'ptō-mə), in connection with Adam's sin, appears in the work of Methodius of Olympus (d. c. AD 311) called *The Banquet (Symposium) Of The Ten Virgins* 3.6. However, the Scriptures do use "fall" terminology to depict corporate apostasy (Rom 11.11; Gal 5.4; Rev 2.5), and so for convenience — and for consistency with the discussion of this matter over the centuries — I will speak of mankind's initial change from sinless to sinful as *The Fall*. Though somewhat less in keeping with traditional theological language, I will also refer to humanity's sinful state as *fallenness*.

Perhaps more than anything else, the moral flawlessness of Jesus Christ has driven the theological quest to understand why *all others* have done wrong. Furthermore, only the NT explicitly links humanity's iniquity and consequent death to one man, Adam, the father of our race. "Through one man," Paul wrote, "sin entered into the world, and death through sin ..." (Rom 5.12). For these reasons, Christians in particular have taken an interest in the study of human fallenness.

Of course, Jewish sages investigated the subject of human fallenness before Christians did. Sadly, though, early Jewish teachings on human fallenness were more speculative than scriptural, and do not jibe with the whole of biblical revelation. Nevertheless, let us note those Jewish teachings briefly as examples of what human fallenness is *not*.

FALLENNESS, SHMALLENNESS!

N. P. Williams traced four strands of early Jewish thinking about man's ubiquitous bent toward iniquity.⁵⁰⁷ One strand, that of the early Jewish apocalyptists, suggested that human corruption originated from the "unnatural angel-marriages of Gen 6." This theory fails on several counts: (1) human corruption preceded the events of Gen 6, (2) human corruption survived after the depraved population perished in the flood, and (3) while the idea of angels propagating with humans persists as an interpretation of Gen 6.2, it is highly speculative and problematic.⁵⁰⁸ We can state confidently,

⁵⁰⁷ Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927). See the summary from his Lectures 1 and 2 on pp. 87-88.

⁵⁰⁸ In spite of the fact that "the majority of interpreters from across the theological spectrum accept the angel interpretation" of Gen 6.2 (so G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, CNTUOT, on Jude 1.6), it is by no means certain that "this interpretation is assumed by the LXX." On the contrary, while different editions of the LXX interpret the "sons of God" as ἄγγελοι ('angē-lē) in Job 1.6 and 2.1, some editions carefully translate the same phrase as οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (ē ē-ē tū thē-ū) in Gen 6.2. The implication is that some translators (or editors?) of the LXX made a distinction between the *angels* in the story of Job and the *sons of God* in Gen 6. Commentators nevertheless assume Jude subscribed to the "angel interpretation" of Gen 6.2 because that interpretation is prevalent in "the pseudepigraphal Book of Enoch (7, 9.8, 10.11; 12.4), from which Jude quotes in v.14" (so Edwin A. Blum in the EBC). That Jude quotes from 1En 1.9, however, does not prove that he endorsed all the book's teachings. Nevertheless, even if Jude did consider the book of 1En authoritative on the Gen 6

therefore, that human fallenness *is not* corruption derived from human marriages with wicked angels.

A second strand of Jewish thinking regarding man's propensity for evil comes from the *later* Jewish [apocalyptists](#). They focused on the Adam and Eve narrative of Gen 3. The [NT](#) also derives its doctrine of the fall from Gen 3, so we will return to the Genesis narrative below. For the moment, though, we need to know that while some Jewish thinkers saw the origin of human sin "in Adam's willful transgression of a known divine command," other folklorists within this same strand of tradition attributed human moral corruption to Eve's physical defilement "by the serpent, or Satan."⁵⁰⁹ There is, of course, no biblical basis whatsoever for the idea that Eve had a physical relationship of any kind with the Serpent. Therefore, while we can agree with the Jewish [apocalyptists](#) that human fallenness derives from the events described in Gen 3, we can say with certainty that it has nothing to do with Eve having had sexual relations with the Serpent.

The writings of [Philo](#) provide a third strand of Jewish thinking about the fall. This strand shows the influence of both Hindu and [Platonic](#) thinking, and anticipates second-century developments in [Gnosticism](#). According to [Philo](#), "evil is a necessary quality of finite and relative being, and is communicated to human souls through their individual falls to the material plane from the transcendental sphere in which they are conceived as having existed before their births in time."⁵¹⁰ The idea of "individual falls to the material plane," an idea later taken up by [Origen](#), has no basis in Scripture. It also makes evil an inherent aspect of the material creation that God declared "very good" (Gen 1.31). Biblically speaking, human fallenness *is definitely not* a necessary aspect of human finiteness.

The fourth strand of Jewish thinking about human sinfulness seems to have become the official view of the rabbis.⁵¹¹ This view denies the fall

question, he does not mention the wicked angels as the cause of man's fallenness, but rather as an example of the sure judgment awaiting evil men.

⁵⁰⁹ For the story of Satan's intercourse with Eve that produced Cain, see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends Of The Jews*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), p. 100.

⁵¹⁰ Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 88.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

altogether! Rabbinic Judaism teaches instead that the real problem is external to man. “Contrary to the [Christian] concept of [fallenness], according to Rabbinic Judaism people do not have an inherited, corrupt nature.”⁵¹² The rabbis explain ubiquitous human sinfulness by the doctrine that God originally created man with two propensities, one to do good and one to do evil (*yetser tov* and *yetser ha-ra*), of which the *yetser ha-ra*, the evil impulse, kicks in immediately after birth (see Gen 8.21 ^{NIVO}: “evil from childhood”).⁵¹³

Wait a minute! The rabbis taught that *God* created the evil impulse in man?⁵¹⁴ What about the declaration of Gen 1.31 just mentioned: In the beginning “God saw everything that **he had made**, and, behold, it was **very good**”? The apparent contradiction did not present a problem for the ^{Talmudists} who explained that the *yetser ha-ra* is ultimately a good thing. How so? Well, it is necessary “for the continuance of the world,” because the tension between a man’s good and evil impulses constitutes his moral existence. Furthermore, the *yetser ha-ra* is the source of ambition and sexual lust without which “a man would not take a wife, build a house, have children [nor] engage in business.”⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² Alan J. Avery-Peck, *Sin In Judaism*, Vol. V, in *The Encyclopaedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Brill, 2000), p. 1325.

⁵¹³ Birth defects are thus blamed on the sins of the parents, Joh 9.2.

⁵¹⁴ Indeed, if a fall of man did not occur, then God is responsible for sin, in one way or another. As Reeves and Madueme explain from a Christian perspective,

... without a fall, human sinfulness is no longer contingent but emerges from the very structure of the material world—creaturely matter is evil
.... The creator God is rendered ultimately responsible for sin.

Michael Reeves and Hans Madueme, “Threads in a Seamless Garment: Original Sin in Systematic Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 211.

⁵¹⁵ David Kraemer, *Evil And Suffering, Judaic Doctrines Of*, Vol. I, in *The Encyclopaedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Brill, 2000), Vol. 1, p. 263. In many ways the *yetser ha-ra*, evil impulse, anticipates the Roman Catholic *fomes peccati* explained below. However, the *yetser ha-ra* is sometimes understood as a physical, external force. One talmudic legend says that “when the men of the great synagogue succeeded in capturing the *yetser ha-ra* for three days, they discovered that, during that time, no productive activity took place. Even chickens ceased laying eggs.” (Alan J. Avery-Peck, *Sin In Judaism*, Vol. V, in *ibid.*, p. 1326.) Cf. 2Ba 56.5 (italics added): “For [since] when [Adam] transgressed Untimely death came into being, Grief was named And anguish was prepared, And pain was created, And trouble consummated, And disease began to be established, And Sheol kept demanding that it should be renewed in blood, And the

If having understood the above rationalization, we are nonetheless scandalized by the idea that our Creator implanted the evil impulse in man, Jewish tradition assures us that God Himself regrets having done so (based on Mic 4.6). But let us take heart. The rabbis tell us that God has provided the Law as the remedy for mankind.⁵¹⁶ They assure us that the very hearing of the Torah read in the synagogue can temporarily drive off the evil impulse. “The only sure place in which a person can overcome [the *yetser ha-ra*] is in the study house. ... Within the study house, in the setting of Rabbinic learning, the inclination to sin is powerless.”⁵¹⁷

Notice the personification of the *yetser ha-ra* in these teachings.⁵¹⁸ The evil impulse is sometimes imagined as a demon or evil angel. Together with the *yetser tov*, therefore, it provides a basis for the religious myth of a good angel and a bad angel sitting on each person’s opposite shoulders.⁵¹⁹ Most importantly for our present investigation, though, we see that in rabbinic doctrine, man’s evil impulse is external to himself, and thus is *not* a corruption of human nature, nor is it inherited from Adam.⁵²⁰

begetting of children was brought about, And the passion of parents produced, And the greatness of humanity was humiliated, And goodness languished.”

⁵¹⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (New York: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1896), pp. 318-319. Also, Alan J. Avery-Peck, *Sin In Judaism*, Vol. V, in *The Encyclopaedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Brill, 2000), p. 1324.

⁵¹⁷ Alan J. Avery-Peck, *Sin In Judaism*, Vol. V, in *The Encyclopaedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Brill, 2000), pp. 1328-1329.

⁵¹⁸ One rabbi, Simeon b. Laqish, said, “Satan, the *yetzer hara*, and the Angel of Death are one and the same.” David Kraemer, *Evil And Suffering, Judaic Doctrines Of*, Vol. I, in *The Encyclopaedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Brill, 2000), p. 263.

⁵¹⁹ *The Shepherd Of Hermas*, in its Twelfth Mandate (or Commandment) may have been influenced by the rabbinic antithesis of *personified* good and evil desires. In ch. 2 of this Mandate, the evil desire (ἡ ἐπιθυμία ἡ πονηρά, ē ēpē-thē-'mē-ə ē pō-nē-'rā) is called “the daughter of the devil.” One must submit to the good desire in order to “gain the mastery over the evil desire” (ch. 2.5). By the final two chapters of the Mandate, the antithesis has transformed into that between God (the Lord) and the devil. Therefore, while this second-century document speaks (not necessarily biblically) of the Christian’s struggle with sin and evil, it does not present any definite doctrine of the fall or of fallenness.

⁵²⁰ N. P. Williams sees Paul’s phrases in Rom 8.6, *the mind of the flesh* (τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός, tō 'frō-nē-mē tēs sār-'kōs) and *the mind of the spirit* (τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος, tō 'frō-nē-mē tū 'pnēv-mā-tōs) as Hebraisms corresponding to — and replacing — the *yetser ha-ra* and the *yetser tov*. If Paul echoed the Jewish idea of the *yetser ha-ra*, the evil impulse, in his teaching about *the flesh*, he nevertheless set forth *the flesh* as something radically different. Unlike the *yetser ha-ra*, *the flesh* (in Paul’s thought) (1) stems from the Adamic fall, (2) is innate in man, and (as Williams notes) “is unreservedly evil” (Rom 7.18). See

Interestingly, Judaism does trace the universal experience of *physical death* to the sin of our first parents. “Death was instituted as a result of Adam and Eve’s violation of God’s will,” when they ate the forbidden fruit and were ejected from the garden.⁵²¹ However, if for Adam’s posterity any inward consequence resulted from his sin, it was only a lessening of human perfection.⁵²² This marring of man’s perfection has been partially counteracted (at least for Jews) by the merits of Abraham and it will be fully removed by Messiah in the world (age) to come. At that future time God will destroy the *evil impulse*.⁵²³

So, according to the rabbis there’s nothing wrong with man. At worst, man has only lost a bit of his sheen. It logically follows, therefore, that according to rabbinic doctrine “it is within the power of man to vanquish sin, and to attain perfect righteousness.”⁵²⁴ In fact, according to this doctrine, perfect men have walked the earth. For example, “neither Enoch nor Elijah ... sinned, and accordingly they did not die.”⁵²⁵ This rabbinic belief in man’s

Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), pp. 150-154.

⁵²¹ Alan J. Avery-Peck, *Sin In Judaism*, Vol. V, in *The Encyclopaedia Of Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Brill, 2000), p. 1325.

⁵²² Thus, the author of 2 Baruch, probably writing in Palestine c. AD 100:

For though Adam first sinned
And brought untimely death upon all,
Yet of those who were born from him
Each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come,
And again each one of them has chosen for himself glories to come. ...
Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul,
But each of us has been the Adam of his own soul. (2Ba 54.15, 19)

In other words, Adam’s sin brought death to all, but then each of his descendants is responsible for his or her own inclination to do evil or good.

Likewise, 4 Esdras, of similar date and provenance, says that when Adam sinned, God forthwith appointed “death for him and for his generations.” However, whether or not a corruption of human nature occurred is unclear. The writer says that the “first Adam” clothed himself “with the evil heart” and “likewise all who were born of him. Thus the infirmity became inveterate.” This sounds like a germ or disease theory of fallenness, but the author speaks of the post-Davidic inhabitants of Jerusalem and says, “they also clothed themselves with the evil heart,” as if a corrupt heart is chosen rather than inherited. See *4Es* 3.7-26.

⁵²³ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (New York: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1896), Vol. 1, p. 52, with footnote 4. See also p. 550, footnote 4.

⁵²⁴ See op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 52.

⁵²⁵ See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (New York: Longmans, Green, And Co., 1896), Vol. 1, p. 52, footnote 4. The rabbinical denial of man’s corruption is

abiding innocence is a shocking example of human hubris and flies in the face of the clear teaching of the Hebrew scriptures, as we shall see below. For now, though, we can state categorically that human fallenness *is not* a non-reality, and human sinfulness *is not* simply the ongoing struggle between external good and evil impulses.

We cannot square these rabbinical ideas with the Bible, but they do help us focus upon a key question: what impact *if any* did Adam's sin have upon human nature? As we've already noted, Paul said that "through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." This universal spread of death and sin implies a corruption of the very core of man, does it not? Doesn't Paul's teaching imply that the nature of man, or at least the condition of man's nature, has deviated from that which God first created in Adam? Doesn't it imply a moral-spiritual *fall*?

DID THE FALL REALLY HAPPEN?

The Rabbis' speculations compel us to reexamine the question of whether a "fall of man" indeed occurred. What we see on the news and in our own hearts convinces us that evil inhabits all human beings, but did a *fall* occur that corrupted our race and produced our bent toward evil? Various theological perspectives besides the Rabbinic one say *No*,⁵²⁶ but the Bible unequivocally says *Yes*.

The story of this tragedy begins with God acknowledging the goodness of His entire creation, as already noted: "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1.31). This assessment of goodness included the human pair that God had created in His own image (Gen 1.26-27). The first man, Adam, was so completely good that his holy Creator spoke freely

echoed in the teachings of the Pelagians who said that "even before the advent of our Lord there were impeccable men, i.e., men without sin," and that "man can be without sin and can keep the divine commands easily if he will." Harnack, *History of Dogma*, p. 175, cited in R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, electronic ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 42.

⁵²⁶ Notably the perspectives of liberal theologians like Barth, Bultmann, and Niebuhr. See Carl R. Trueman, "Original Sin and Modern Theology," in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

with him, gave him dominion over the earth, permitted him to live in His own gorgeous garden, employed him there, gave him the authority to name the animals, made woman for him as a suitable companion and then blessed both him and her. Furthermore, Adam's inherent goodness was not [accidental](#), but was a necessary feature of his created being, by virtue of having come from a perfect Creator. As [William G. T. Shedd](#) observed,

Original righteousness enters into the very idea of man as coming from the hands of the Creator. It is part of his created endowment, and does not require to be superadded. The work of the Creator is perfect....⁵²⁷

Indeed, it should go without saying that a good and perfect God would create nothing short of a perfectly good man, particularly since that man was preordained to reflect the divine image (Gen 1.26-27).

Nevertheless, by the end of Gen 3 we find God casting man from His garden and promising enmity, pain, toil and death to Adam and Eve. In the fourth chapter of Gen we read of the first murders. By the sixth chapter of Gen we read that "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6.5). With startling rapidity, people became so corrupt that God felt compelled to destroy the race in a flood, choosing to save only one family (Gen 6-9).

One would hope that man's inclination toward evil would have perished in Noah's flood, but no sooner did Noah emerge from the ark than God observed again that "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen 8.21). Indeed, the story of corruption continues immediately with the account of an offense in Noah's family that resulted in Noah cursing his grandson. As the world population rebounded, human rebellion again came to a head on the plain of Shinar where people built the tower of Babel as an affront to God (Gen 11).⁵²⁸ Even as the Bible story of humanity continues with the lives of the

⁵²⁷ William G. T. Shedd, *The History Of The Christian Church*, 2 vols., (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), vol. 1, p. 145, cited in Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), p. 19.

⁵²⁸ Josephus attributed the building of the tower of Babel to Nimrod, who reportedly said that, "he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for

patriarchs, and then focuses upon Israel with the stories of the judges and the kings, we read about moral crimes committed by the best of God's people. Even King David, a man after God's own heart (1Sa 13.14), committed adultery and murder, and when finally repentant, bemoaned his congenital bent toward iniquity (Psa 51.5). Eventually the prophet Jeremiah concluded (Jer 17.9), "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"

The apostles of the New Testament concurred. Paul wrote an unsparing summary of human moral history, mentioning how men suppressed the truth about God, turned to worship other things, pursued their own lusts and yielded to their degrading passions, becoming "filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice," becoming "gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, ... unloving, unmerciful," and approving of those who practice things "worthy of death" (Rom 1.18-32). In a word, he wrote, "both Jews and [Gentiles] are all under sin; ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3.9,23). Even Jesus said, "No one is good except God alone" (Mar 10.18), and that, "out of the [human] heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, [and] slanders" (Mat 15.19).

Contrary to the rabbis, then, the Scripture teaches us unequivocally that something in man's created nature changed for the worse.⁵²⁹ As Solomon observed, "God made mankind righteous, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecc 7.29^{RG}).⁵³⁰ After God pronounced all of His creation "very good," Adam forfeited his goodness. Since that forfeiture brought Adam's very nature from a higher condition to a lower, and would have consequences for all his

that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach!" *Ant* 1.4.2 (113-114).

⁵²⁹ As James Orr wrote, "If a fall were not narrated in the opening chapters of Genesis, we should still have to postulate something of the kind to account for the Bible's own representations of the state of man." James Orr, *God's Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p. 201.

⁵³⁰ For a good analysis of this verse, see Christian D. Ginsburg, *Cohleth, Commonly Called the Book of Ecclesiastes: Translated from the Original Hebrew, With a Commentary, Historical and Critical*, (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), pp. 389-390.

posterity after him, we traditionally call this catastrophe *the fall of man*.⁵³¹ Less traditionally, but I think no less appropriately, I'll use the word *fallenness* to refer to the state of human nature that resulted from the *fall*.

WHAT IS HUMAN FALLENNESS?

Though the Bible does not present us with a formal doctrine of human fallenness in a single passage, its earliest chapters do document the essential truths about the damage that befell man's nature. The growing canon then progressively illustrates those sad truths in the history of Israel,⁵³² and clarifies them in the declarations of the prophets and apostles. So, let's review the Bible's overall teaching on this matter, starting with the Genesis narrative about the first human sin.

In Gen 2.17, God warned Adam, "In the **day** you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] **you will surely die!**" Nevertheless, Eve, tempted by the Serpent, ate the forbidden fruit and induced her husband to partake of it with her. However, Adam and Eve did not instantly draw their last breaths.⁵³³ On the contrary, they continued to toil on the earth for nearly a

⁵³¹ M. D. Gow, in his otherwise valuable article on the Fall, notes that the Heb root *npl* ("to fall") is not used by the OT in connection with the sin of Adam and Eve. "Hence," he concludes, "it is better to describe the disobedience of Eve and Adam as one of defection, deviation or transgression. Using 'Fall' language may lead to misconstruing the biblical data." Gow is correct in noting that "nowhere in the Bible" is the word *fall* used "to describe the events of Genesis 2 – 3." However, Gow fails to distinguish between Adam's transgression considered in and of itself and Adam's transgression considered with regard to its impact upon the human race. When we consider Adam's sin in its latter aspect, we must realize that to eject the word *fall* from our theological vocabulary would be like ejecting the word *Trinity*. Just as for centuries we have used the non-biblical word *Trinity* to refer to a divine reality described by manifold biblical data, so theologians have long used *fall* to refer to the multifarious biblical content describing Adam's loss of his original innocence and the consequences for his posterity. To abandon "'Fall' language" at this point would undoubtedly deemphasize man's inherent corruption in the minds of Christian students, just as abandoning Trinitarian language would deemphasize Christ's deity. See: M. D. Gow, "Fall," in *Dictionary Of The Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, pp. 285-291 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003).

⁵³² The Babylonian exile of Judah, for example, was a sort of recapitulation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden.

⁵³³ As Noel Weeks puts it, the threatened consequence of their sin was "one of entering into the *state* of death rather than immediate cessation of existence." Noel Weeks, "The Fall and Genesis 3," in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 300.

millennium. Still, God does not lie.⁵³⁴ Adam and Eve *did die* “in the day”⁵³⁵ they ate the fruit, and it was a death “of the whole man.”⁵³⁶

THE MECHANICS OF THE FALL

THE COMPREHENSIVE DEATH

The Genesis narrative does not relate the details of exactly how this comprehensive death of our first parents ensued. However, the subsequent biblical teaching about both the symptoms and the cure for that death imply much about its mechanics. Regarding the symptoms, we know that *the sentence of death* came immediately upon Adam’s and Eve’s physical bodies (Gen 3.17-19);⁵³⁷ their bodies instantly began a long deterioration toward an inevitable physical demise.⁵³⁸ However, the more immediate death came upon their spirits, their inner selves. Adam and Eve died:

- Morally: they were overcome by the impulse to cast blame *even upon God* (Gen 3.12-13);
- Psychologically: they were instantly plunged into fear (Gen 3.10);

⁵³⁴ The phrase “in the day” should not be construed as vaguely meaning something like “when”; it emphasizes prompt action as in 1Ki 2.37,42.

⁵³⁵ Of course, due to the pressure exerted by the Darwinian agenda, there has been much debate about the precise meaning of “day” in the early chapters of Genesis. The natural way to understand the term, though, remains the traditional one: a day is that unit of time that is equivalent to one revolution of the earth. When “God blessed the seventh **day** and sanctified it,” (Gen 2.3), it does not mean that “God blessed and sanctified an indeterminate but lengthy age of time.”

⁵³⁶ *De Civ* 13.12.1. Cf. Hans Küng: “Thus in sin the sinner earns for himself instantaneous death — instantaneous death in the massive Old Testament body-soul sense of the word.” Hans Küng, *Justification*, (New York: Nelson, 1964), p. 149, cited in R.C. Sproul, *Renewing Your Mind: Basic Christian Beliefs You Need to Know*, electronic ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), ch. 7, § “Dead And Buried”.

⁵³⁷ Cf. Chrysostom *Hom Joh* 28.1: “How then ‘died’ he? By the decree; by the very nature of the thing; for he who has rendered himself liable to punishment, is under its penalty, and if for a while not actually so, yet he is by the sentence.” As Sailhammer notes, “In the remainder of the Pentateuch, the expression מוֹת תָּמוּת (*môṭ tāmût*, “you will surely die”) means that one has come under the verdict of the death penalty (cf. 20.7; Ex 31.14; Lev 24.16). It is a pronouncement of a judge on one who has been condemned to die.” See John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in Frank E. Gaebelein (ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, Vol. 2., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), p. 48.

⁵³⁸ R. C. Sproul refers to Augustine regarding the idea that “physical death was not totally delayed...” R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, electronic ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 59. Even for us who are alive in Christ, “the body is dead because of sin” (Rom 8.10-11) in the sense that our bodies too remain under that sentence of death.

- Intellectually: they were immediately blinded by a stupidity that made them think they could justify themselves before an omniscient Creator (Gen 3.12-13);
- Relationally: they were alienated from God and from one another;⁵³⁹
- Administratively: they forfeited their dominion;
- Vocationally: they lost their joy in caring for the earth;
- Teleologically: they undermined their purpose of reflecting God's character and nature.

This spiritual death was more catastrophic still, for not only did it effect their own inner ruin, but it subjected them to two new gods: the god of physical appetites (i.e., *the flesh*, cf. Phil 3.19) and “the god of this age,” the Serpent or Satan (2Co 4.4^{NIV}). The latter they had submitted to willingly (if naively); the former took them by surprise.

Regarding the cure for this comprehensive death of man, the Bible tells us clearly (in Old Testament and New) that the one and only solution is regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the apostles described this regeneration as *being born again* “of the Spirit” (Joh 3.5-6; cf. Eze 11.19; 18.31). Now, the utter corruption of Adam and Eve's inner selves, along with the fact that the cure for this corruption comes by the agency of the Holy Spirit (Joh 6.63), implies that the death of our first parents ensued in the following manner.

MAN'S ORIGINAL DESIGN TWISTED

God designed man to have a body for life on earth and a soul for interaction with heaven. Upon creating man, God gave him the appropriate physical and spiritual appetites and instincts for the two aspects of his being. In addition, God designed man's nature to have an integral connection to Himself via the Holy Spirit, in order that man might reflect God's own image. In other words, God did not design man to be an independent entity, but to be a creature

⁵³⁹ Wenham comments that, “The expulsion from the garden of delight where God himself lived would ... have been regarded by the godly men of ancient Israel as yet more catastrophic than physical death. The latter was the ultimate sign and seal of the spiritual death the human couple experienced on the day they ate from the forbidden tree.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1–15*, (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 90.

uniquely “linked” to God Himself.⁵⁴⁰ God designed man to be a *discrete* entity having individuality, but did not design him to be an *independent* entity having self-sufficiency.⁵⁴¹ The agency of the Holy Spirit, operating *from within human nature*,⁵⁴² kept man’s creativity, relational drive and administrative aptitude all properly aligned. The same working of the Holy Spirit kept man’s physical instincts in subjection to his spiritual drives. Thus, man was synchronized to God by God’s Spirit, and our first parents effectively reflected their Creator, even being clothed in His divine light ([Fig. 9](#) below).⁵⁴³

When Adam and Eve, having been deceived and tempted, willingly shifted their allegiance from God and His word to the Serpent and his word, *they themselves*, by their own act of rebellion, severed the Holy-Spirit link to their Creator. When that connection snapped, not only did man’s physical demise become inevitable, but man’s spiritual drives were thrown out of alignment and became instantly distorted into egoism, self-expression and the need to dominate. Man’s this-worldly instincts immediately ascended to a despotic position in his inner being. As man’s character was thereby twisted into a distortion of its original design, the new “god of this age,” the Serpent, came forward to torque the wreckage further (see [Fig. 10](#) below). Finally, all of this death was made immediately tangible to Adam and Eve by their expulsion from the Garden of God’s presence, and from the tree of life.

⁵⁴⁰ I say uniquely because God sustains all things “by the word of His power” (Heb 1.3), but only when He created man did God breathe His own breath into the creature (Gen 2.7).

⁵⁴¹ James Orr put it this way: “For even in the unfallen state it must be noted — and it was one of the merits of Augustine to emphasise this — man was not an independent, self-acting unit, but stood necessarily in a relation of dependence on God, and drew continually his supplies of strength from Him. His life was never intended to be one lived from himself, but was to be a life *in God*. Sin alters this in destroying that relation of dependence, and making it impossible for God to hold communion and friendship with one who has become guilty and impure, while awakening in man the sense of shame and distrust and fear towards God, through this consciousness of guilt.” James Orr, *God’s Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p. 224.

⁵⁴² This operation of the Holy Spirit within man did not communicate God’s essence to man, i.e., did not deify man, anymore than do the Spirit’s present ministries of regenerating and infilling believers. Cf. Hesychius of Jerusalem (c. AD 450) *Commentarius in Leviticum* 16.16: “Our substance was holy in the beginning, to the point that the spirit of God dwelled within it”; cited by Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, p. 54.

⁵⁴³ As Moses later was for a short time (Ex 34.29-35), and the saints will be again in God’s presence (Dan 12.3).

CREATED MAN

A vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit is an integral component of man as the imago Dei. As a creature, man is also endowed with natural instincts that enable him to maintain his physical life on earth. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to man and draws man's faculties toward God, aligning those faculties so that the whole man reflects his Creator, and is clothed in divine light.

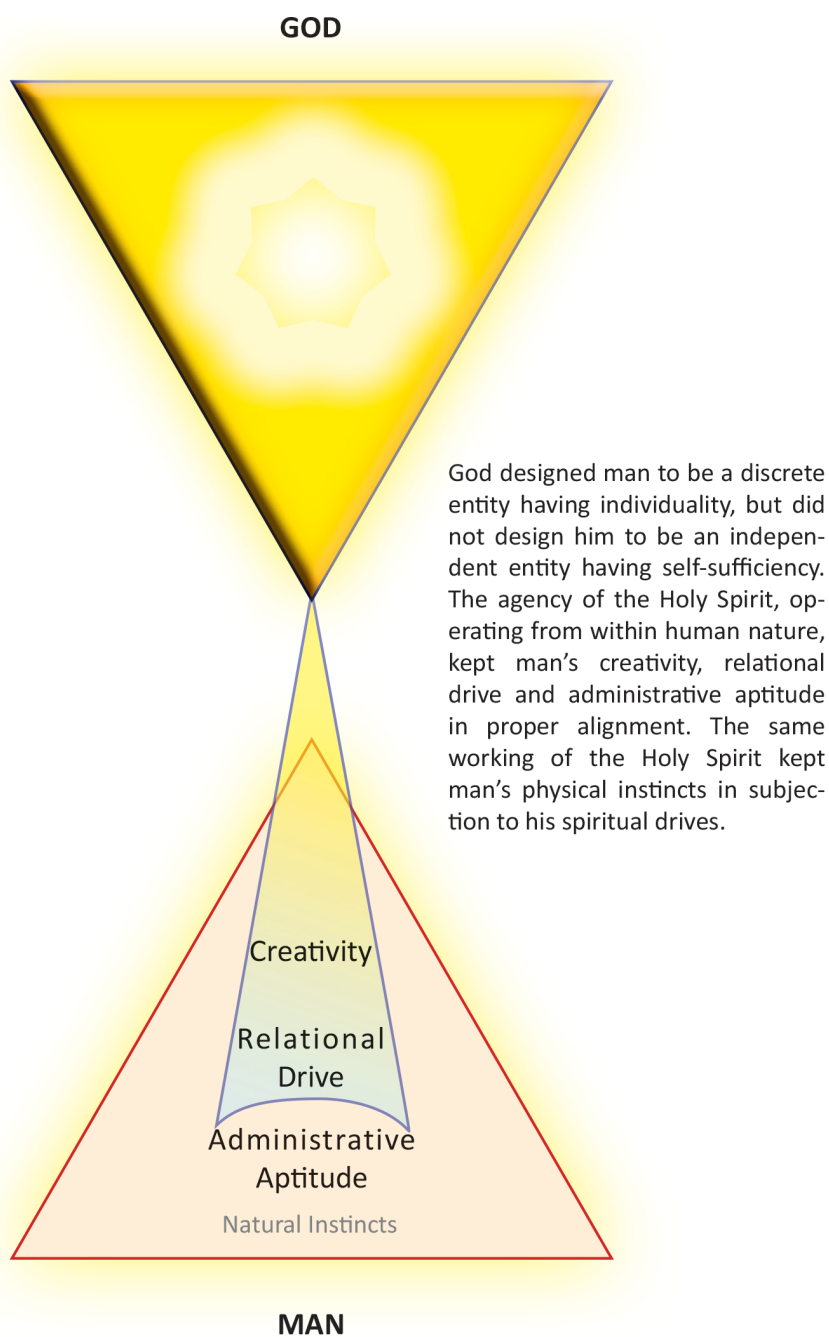


Figure 9

FALLEN MAN

Man, by turning away from God and submitting to the Serpent, broke his vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit. Man is no longer whole, no longer an accurate reflection of his Creator, is denuded of the divine light and deprived of God's palpable presence. Man's faculties are no longer properly aligned by the Spirit, but are now perverted by the overwhelming pull of now ascendent natural instincts and by Satan's blinding deceptions. Man is spiritually dead, dying physically, and judicially under condemnation.

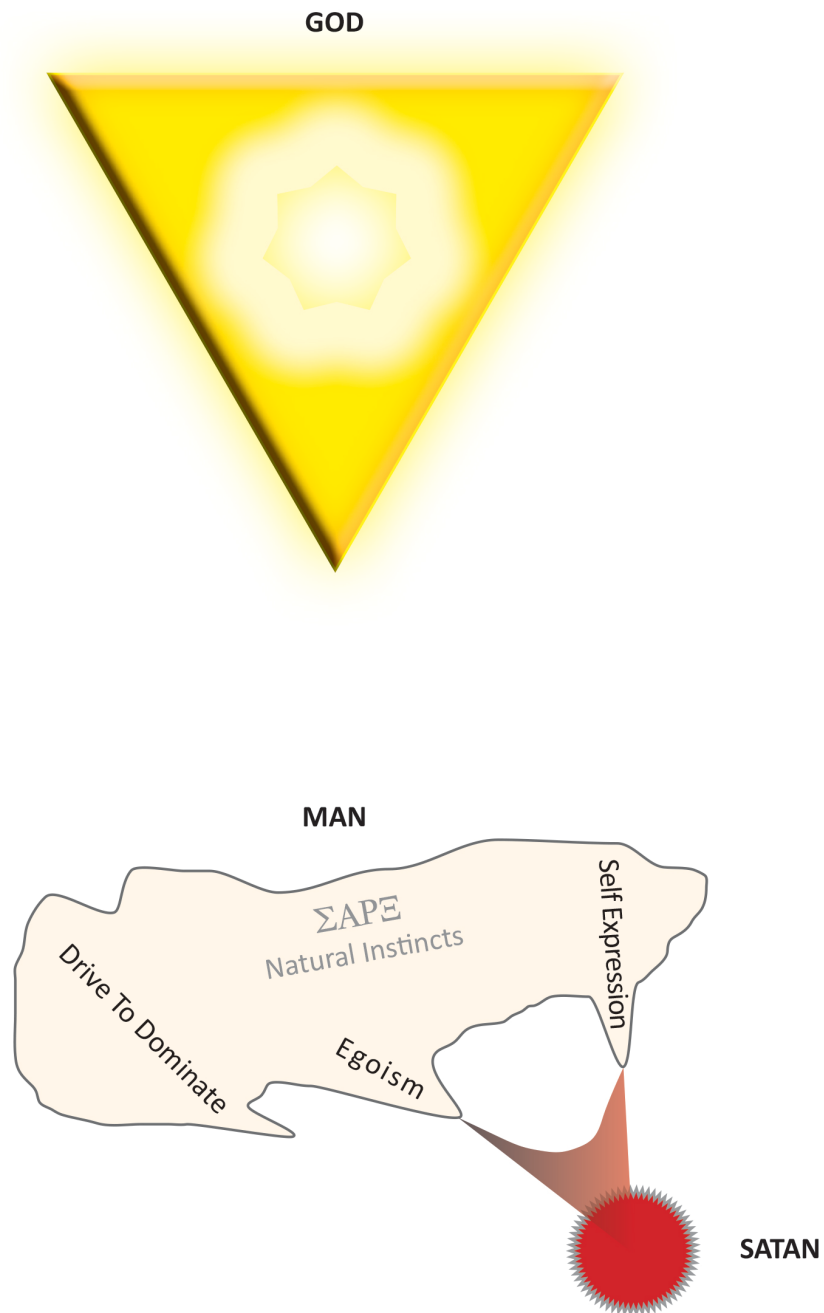


Figure 10

AN INHERITED CONDITION

Adam's progeny have inherited this spiritual deadness, because Adam, once having severed the link between human nature and God's Spirit, could only propagate what he was, namely, a sinner. If the human race multiplied, not by biological propagation, but by God wholly *creating* each new person, as he had created Adam, then every human being would be perfectly good at his or her genesis. However, God only creates the human spirit, while man propagates the body ("flesh gives birth to flesh ... Spirit gives birth to spirit," Joh 3.6 ^{NIVO}). Since God made each living creature, including man, to reproduce "after its own kind," man can only reproduce man in the state he is in when the propagation occurs. After the Fall, that state is sinful, even for parents who are themselves in the process of sanctification when they beget children. Therefore, the Holy Spirit cannot and does not automatically link himself to the newly conceived human, and each person is born without that vital connection to the Spirit that would make him or her like Adam or Eve before the fall. Consequently, all of Adam's and Eve's descendants are born in spiritual deadness, with the flesh in ascendancy, and the mind hostile toward God (Rom 8.7; Col 1.21).

All Adam's children come into the world DOA, so far as their spiritual selves are concerned. Hence, Jesus referred to people as "the dead" (Mat 8.22; Joh 5.25), and said to the Galileans, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have **no life** in you" (Joh 6.53 ^{NIVO}). Echoing these statements of Jesus, Paul described the human condition before redemption as being "**dead** in [our] transgressions and in the uncircumcision of [our] flesh" (Col 2.13). He wrote: "you were **dead** in your transgressions and sins" (Eph 2.1 ^{NIVO}). Paul even sang, "Wake up, O sleeper, **rise from the dead**, and Christ will shine on you" (Eph 5.14 ^{NIVO}).⁵⁴⁴ The apostle wrote to people in Ephesus and Colossae who were, of course,

⁵⁴⁴ Paul may have taken this triplet from an early baptismal song, in which case the death in view would also speak of identification with Christ's atoning death. However, the preceding context of Eph 5 shows that Paul was thinking of the darkness, sleep and death that characterized the Ephesians before they received Christ.

physically alive, so the deadness he referred to was not physical, but spiritual. Nor do the contexts of these passages give any hint that Paul *only* referred to a judicial or decreed death.⁵⁴⁵ Though he rightly could have done so, he did *not* say, “you once lived under judicial condemnation such that you were on your way to eternal death.” He did not tell the Christians of Asia Minor that they had been “dead men walking”; he reminded them that they had been *dead men!*

We see, then, that the death that befell our first parents was indeed catastrophic because it was both comprehensive and manifold. Upon reflection, however, we realize that while physical death is a devastating reality, the spiritual aspect of human death constitutes the real tragedy of our existence, a tragedy made manifest even while people are in their physical prime. This is true because, spiritually speaking, i.e., with regard to godliness and our ability to pursue it, [unregenerate](#) man is not just sick, or “mostly dead,” but is utterly bereft of life.

THE FIRST AFFLICTION: A VITIATED NATURE SLAVERY TO THE FLESH

This spiritual deadness lies at the core of human fallenness. We must understand, though, that this deadness in man is not a “thing” but the lack of a thing, *a deprivation*.⁵⁴⁶ This deprivation has had a deleterious effect upon our race by vitiating human nature. The deprivation of spiritual life severely impairs human nature by turning the body into an unchecked vehicle of *the flesh* (σάρξ), and in our flesh there dwells “**no good thing**” (Rom 7.18 [KJV](#)).⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ I say *only* because Paul’s perspective was probably holistic; he understood the earlier deadness of his audience to be *both* spiritual and judicial.

⁵⁴⁶ Some of the early Fathers, like Gregory of Nyssa, sensed that evil in general and human fallenness in particular is “a ‘privation,’ absence, or negation of good, not a thing-in-itself existing in its own right.” See Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 278. In his *Catechetical Oration* (aka *The Great Catechism*), ch. 7, Gregory absolved God from responsibility for man’s fallenness, saying that God “is external to the causation of things that are evil, since He is not the Maker of things that are non-existent. He who formed sight did not make blindness. He Who manifested virtue manifested not the deprivation thereof.”

⁵⁴⁷ As James Orr wrote, “In this inversion of the lower and higher principles of man’s nature—the predominance of the earthly and sensuous, and the enfeeblement and relative

Lest we be confused by terminology, let us note that the Bible uses the word *flesh* in several different ways.⁵⁴⁸ Primarily, the biblical authors used *flesh* to speak of the physicality of the body, and no negative connotation attaches to this usage; remember that “the Word became **flesh**, and dwelt among us” (Joh 1.14). In other contexts, however, *the flesh* refers to the sinful mind as inseparable from physical drives and instincts — drives and instincts left unguided by the Holy Spirit and unrestrained by the Spirit’s power.⁵⁴⁹ *The flesh* has a will and has desires (Joh 1.13; Rom 13.14; Gal 5.16-17, 24; 1Jo 2.16), and it asserts itself from birth, doing great damage to both soul and body (see Eph 2.3 and Rom 8.6).⁵⁵⁰

In fact, while left unrestrained by the Spirit, *the flesh*, i.e., *the sinful mind*, impels a human being along a path of unmitigated, severely short-sighted self-interest. Self-destructive persons bemoan their lack of self-control and their susceptibility to unhealthy cravings, but cannot see that there is a part of themselves that *is* in control: the flesh. Fallenness renders man a complete slave to the flesh, and therefore a slave to sin, imprisoned and constrained by the drives of his own selfish self (Joh 8.34).

inoperativeness of the spiritual—we have the basis of the Pauline description of man as *flesh* (σάρξ).” James Orr, *God’s Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p. 225.

⁵⁴⁸ The NIVO (1984) has regrettably added confusion by translating the NT’s specialized instances of σάρξ with the phrase “sinful nature.” (The NIV of 2011, adds more confusion still by translating it with “flesh” in some instances and “sinful nature” in others.) The flesh is not fallen man’s nature, though. It is one component of human nature that asserts influence over the whole in the absence of the Spirit.

⁵⁴⁹ N. P. Williams analyzes Gregory of Nyssa’s doctrine of the fall as involving human “appetite permitted to indulge itself without limit or government...” Apparently for Gregory, the problem was that the human will was weakened by the Fall, “so that it is not always capable of opposing ... the clamorous demands of the appetites Hence, the radical flaw of human nature may be defined as ‘weakness of the will’.” See Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 276.

⁵⁵⁰ Some have mistaken the NT emphasis upon the problem of “the flesh” as implying that the “germ” (or presumed positive principle of human fallenness) resides in the physical body, and from there reaches out to pollute the soul. (Cf. Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 139.) However, since the principle of human fallenness is not a thing, but the absence of a thing, it does not reside in a component of our nature, nor does it actively corrupt other components.

THE SOUL STRIPPED OF DISCERNMENT

Furthermore, because fallen man's spirit has no godly vitality, unregenerate people fall prey to every kind of spiritual deception. The first spiritual deception to which they succumb is the Devil's lie that *man is not fallen*. From this one deception, all the false religions of the world have arisen with their Pelagian-like teaching that man can achieve salvation by his own effort. From this same deception all the world's antinomian philosophies have arisen, assuring man that since he is not fallen but noble, all his innate desires must be virtuous and healthy, and so he has no need of the constraints of any external moral law.

A second deception follows hard on the first, namely the belief that *man is not susceptible to spiritual deception*. Fallen man assumes that because he thinks, he knows how to think. He reasons that because he knows, he knows correctly. He perceives, and feels no need for verification of his perceptions; he feels no need for revelation from outside the matrix of his existence.

Thus fallen man's deceptions steadily accumulate, earning compound interest, and paying dividends in the ruin of lives, the destruction of families and the collapse of nations. We, however, must not allow our own fallenness to deceive us about the realities of our fallen condition. Instead, we must let Scripture show us the full extent to which fallenness has damaged our human faculties.

DAMAGE TO THE HUMAN MIND AND WILL

Some of the early Church Fathers,⁵⁵¹ reacting to the gnostic doctrine of the fall with its negation of moral freedom,⁵⁵² taught that the fall affected "only the body and the sensuous nature" but not the will.⁵⁵³ These Fathers' views were preserved and later amplified in the Pelagian doctrine which asserted that Adam's posterity retained complete freedom of will. In response to the

⁵⁵¹ Particularly Origen and Clement of Alexandria.

⁵⁵² Gnosticism taught that all souls had pre-existed and, because of some pre-mundane apostasy, fell to earth to be imprisoned in physical bodies. As such, all men were *created* sinful and were at the mercy of fate. See William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), p. 29.

⁵⁵³ William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), p. 35.

Pelagians, Augustine insisted on the more biblical teaching that the fall had affected the whole of man and did not leave any human faculty undamaged, including man's volition.⁵⁵⁴

Indeed, Jesus had taught that everyone committing sin (as their natural way of life) "is a slave of sin" (Joh 8.34 ^{NIVO}). In other words, the will of fallen man is *not* free. It does not have the freedom to choose godliness. Instead, it is bound by sin, and bent toward ungodliness.⁵⁵⁵

However, if sin enslaves the will of fallen man, then fallen man's volition is not simply weakened or handicapped, and the bondage of the will is not a minor deficiency that **unregenerate** man can somehow overcome in his own strength. On the contrary, as the apostle Paul wrote, the fleshly mind "is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even **able to do so**" (Rom 8.7; cf. Col 1.21). The hostile mind and enslaved volition cannot change themselves by utilizing some higher faculty within human nature; *they are the higher faculty*.

Therefore, contrary to current Roman Catholicism and other **Semi-Pelagian** and **Pelagian** traditions,⁵⁵⁶ the spiritual deadness of human fallenness renders man totally incapable of responding to God in *any* fruitful way. Yes, obviously, people *do* respond to God in positive ways, but only as God extends His grace to them, giving them the unsought-for gifts of new birth, faith (Eph 2.8; cf. 2Pe 1.1), and repentance (2Ti 2.25; cf. 1Ki 18.37). Apart from what both **Calvinist** and **Arminian** theologians call *prevenient grace*, fallen humans can no more apply their minds and wills to seek God or do good than a cadaver can cartwheel.⁵⁵⁷ I reiterate that with regard to godliness and our ability to pursue it, our spiritual deadness at birth is complete.

⁵⁵⁴ For the role that experience played in shaping Augustine's belief that the human will is vitiated, see William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), pp. 53-54.

⁵⁵⁵ This is the message of Luther's book (written against Erasmus) entitled, *The Bondage Of The Will*.

⁵⁵⁶ Roman Catholicism officially renounces Pelagianism, but the religious practice of the average Catholic — and of all nominal "Christians" — is essentially Pelagian.

⁵⁵⁷ The Calvinist believes prevenient grace is irresistible while the Arminian believes that man can reject it, but both recognize that God must first work in man before man can respond positively to Him. In contrast to and predating both, Pelagius (fifth century AD) taught that Adam's fall had no fatal effect on mankind, but that all persons are born perfectly able to choose either good or evil, and able to keep God's commandments without

Tragically but inevitably, this spiritual deadness residing in the mind and will affects the totality of human experience and culture. The more we study the Bible's assessment of man, and the verification of that assessment in human history, the more we see that fallen man is *insane*. Consider:

1. All people hunger for meaning and purpose, but fallen man rejects the transcendent, eternal Being who is the *only* basis for a meaningful life. Fallen man chooses instead to practice self-deception and pretend he can existentially create his own meaning.⁵⁵⁸
2. All people hunger for justice, but fallen man rejects the holy Being who is the *only* objective basis for defining rightness and wrongness.
3. All humans pursue happiness, but fallen people (aside from a few philosophers and theologians) never even stop to *define* happiness. In fact, when it comes to the pursuit of happiness, fallen man perfectly illustrates the definition of insanity (attributed variously to Albert Einstein or Benjamin Franklin): "doing the same thing repeatedly, each time expecting different results." We doggedly pursue pleasure, wealth and fame, even after the attainment of these things has failed over and over again to bring us the happiness we seek in them.
4. Fallen man fears spiders, the dark, poverty, standing in front of an audience, or getting a bad seat at the theater, but suppresses the fear of losing his eternal soul.

The author of Ecclesiastes does not surprise us when he observes, "the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and **insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives**" (Ecc 9.3).

any infusion of God's grace. The Semi-Pelagianism which soon followed, gave place to "both divine grace and human will as co-ordinate factors in the renewal of man, ... basing predestination on foreseen faith and obedience. It did not deny human corruption, but regarded the nature of man as weakened or diseased rather than as fatally injured by the fall. Fallen human nature retains an element of freedom, in virtue of which it can co-operate with divine grace. Regeneration is the joint product of both factors, but it is really man and not God that begins the work..." Louis Berkhof, *The History Of Christian Doctrines*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1937), p. 138. See also Berkhof's section on "Peculiarities Of Roman Catholic Anthropology," *ibid.*, pp. 144-146.

⁵⁵⁸ Witness the current fad of hiring a "life coach" to help people invent their own purpose and meaning in life.

OUR SHARED CONSCIOUSNESS OF FALLENNESS

Because the destructive effects of fallen man's self-deceptions confront us daily through both experience and the media, secular people are conscious of our race's desperate condition, though they do not understand it. Society does not want to believe that our race is fallen, but even the most irreligious of observers know that something is wrong with the world, that the problem is universal and that it is inextricably bound up with human beings. Though everyone knows some "saints," they still sense that humans in general aren't right and don't do right. Mankind doesn't seem to grasp how we're meant to live. As American novelist, Christopher Morley, put it, "Life is a foreign language; all men mispronounce it."

The character Morpheus in the film *The Matrix* put it even better in an unforgettable dialog with the befuddled Neo:

- Do you believe in fate, Neo?
- No.
- Why not?
- Because I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life.
- I know exactly what you mean. ... Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. ... you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.

Hollywood has hardly produced a more biblical sound bite! Everyone feels that there is something wrong with the world, but — apart from revelation originating from outside their own matrix — they can't figure out what it is. They can't unravel the mystery because they are inside it and it is inside them. They cannot step out of their frame of reference to objectively observe the problem. They are slaves, born in bondage, a bondage invisible and impalpable because it resides within their own minds. It is a bondage due to the absence of a spiritual "faculty" that is needed to restrain the selfishness at man's core.

BIBLICAL CONFIRMATION OF MAN'S CORRUPTION

Thankfully, we do have revelation from outside our worldly matrix. It comes to us in the form of the Holy Bible. The inspired Scriptures do indeed guide us to freedom, explaining along the way the depth of our bondage. The Bible describes sin-enslaved, spiritually unrestrained men as “corrupt,” and declares that their deeds are “abominable,” and tells us that “there is no one who does good.” It characterizes the fallen man as one for whom “there is no fear of God before his eyes” (Psa 14.1,3; 36.1). Isaiah described men separated from God (and thus presumably living by the flesh), saying, “Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths” (Isa 59.6-8 ^{NIVO}). In the NT Paul describes fallen man, not only as “dead,” but also as given over to the most horrendous behavior:

Rom 1.21 ^{NIVO} ...although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator....

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

All of this ugliness emerges from the spiritually flat-lined heart. As Jesus said, “from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly” (Mar 7.21-22 ^{NIVO}). Indeed, Jeremiah described the self-reliant human heart as “deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer 17.5,9 ^{NIVO}). C. H. Spurgeon put it this way:

You cannot slander [fallen] human nature; it is worse than words can paint it. Man is an animal that sins. He is often a wolf to man, a serpent to God, and a scorpion to himself.⁵⁵⁹

More recently [Stanley Kubrick](#) quipped, “Man isn’t a noble savage; he’s an ignoble savage.”⁵⁶⁰

OUR INTUITION OF MAN’S SAVAGERY

Because of our self-deception, people resist such a verdict upon the state of human nature. However, the famous Milgram experiments,⁵⁶¹ and Philip Zimbardo’s 1971 “prison experiment” at Stanford University,⁵⁶² demonstrated that “the reservoir of evil in all of us is deeper than we know, and [the] barriers against its eruption are shockingly fragile.”⁵⁶³ Fallen man resists such a generalized assessment of our race, and yet deep down he knows it’s accurate. Contemporary culture would like to believe that wicked people are

⁵⁵⁹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars: A Collection of Proverbs & Quaint Sayings, Vol. 2 — M To Z*, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), p. 8.

⁵⁶⁰ The full quote is:

Man isn’t a noble savage, he’s an ignoble savage. He is irrational, brutal, weak, silly, unable to be objective about anything where his own interests are involved—that about sums it up. I’m interested in the brutal and violent nature of man because it’s a true picture of him. And any attempt to create social institutions on a false view of the nature of man is probably doomed to failure.

From Craig McGregor’s film review, “Nice Boy From the Bronx?” *The New York Times* On The Web: <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/film/013072kubrick-profile.html>. Accessed March 12, 2013.

⁵⁶¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment (accessed on December 3, 2013).

⁵⁶² <http://www.prisonexp.org/> (accessed on December 3, 2013).

⁵⁶³ Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall And Sin: What We Have Become As Sinners*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 164.

the exception, and that mankind in general is noble, so authors write novels and screenplays about the triumph of the human spirit in the face of adversity, and the altruistic sacrifices of great lovers and leaders. Such works do not err by portraying human nobility, for the image of God is not entirely erased in any human being. Nevertheless, our intuition that there is depravity at the core of man spills out of *other* works that take a more unflinching look at human nature — we need only think of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde* (1886), in which the civilized Dr. Jekyll gradually transforms more and more involuntarily into the savage Mr. Hyde, or the modern classic, William Golding’s *Lord Of The Flies* (1954), in which the monster feared by the marooned boys turns out to be the monster within themselves.⁵⁶⁴

THE SECOND AFFLICTION: DEMONIC OPPRESSION

THE SPIRITUAL REALM ABHORS A VACUUM

If man suppresses the idea that he is depraved, he never imagines that he is also influenced by evil spirits! Even when a fallen man is confronted with his ignobility, whether by current events or by works of fiction, he takes comfort in the belief that at least he is his own boss, at least he lives autonomously without letting anyone tell him what to do. He imagines saying at the end of his life, in the words of the Frank Sinatra song, “I did it my way.”

However, fallen man cannot be autonomous, because the spiritual realm abhors a vacuum. The idea that spiritual interlopers are somehow barred from

⁵⁶⁴ William Golding, *Lord Of The Flies*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954).

A novel along a similar vein, though of the preternatural horror genre, and of more recent publication, is Scott Smith’s *The Ruins* (New York: Vintage (Random House), 2008). I’ve heard surprisingly little about this novel, but the *Plain Dealer* called it “an icy dissection of human nature.” Ironically, I picked up the unabridged audio version at the public library because of my interest in archaeology. I was surprised to discover that the “ruins” to which Smith refers in the title were not the Meso-American structures of the story’s setting, but rather the human characters themselves. One by one, every character in the story is caught and their physical bodies reduced to bones by an implacable horror, but only after their inner selves are reduced to the ruins of their own humanity, revealing the base instincts, fears and self-loathing at the core of their being. *The Ruins* is indeed a hard, cold look at human nature, and it’s not a pretty picture.

While the novel takes an honest look at human nature, the DreamWorks movie is an action film in which one girl escapes, thanks to the altruism and self-sacrifice of her boyfriend. Instead of a study of man’s inner ruin, the movie is a celebration of the human spirit’s greatness in the face of adversity! Considering the book and the movie together, we see both our intuition of man’s fallenness and our wish to live in denial of that fallenness.

the steering wheels of our souls is just another deception to which our spiritual deadness leaves us vulnerable. We are ill-informed if we think that, while our own spirit lies dead in the trunk, some other “higher faculty” of human nature comes forward to take the driver’s seat (remember, our dead spirit *is* the “higher faculty”). Instead, the aforementioned “god of this age,” the spirit of evil, comes into the spiritual vacancy of our fallen nature to stimulate and guide the base instincts of our flesh, to blind our minds, and to screen us from the redemptive overtures of God’s grace (2Co 4.4^{NIVO}).

The devil and his minions steer the souls of fallen men, and Satan has had *the right to do so*. Satan’s authority over fallen men derives from the fall itself: Adam despised God’s authority,⁵⁶⁵ and shifted the allegiance of the human race over to “the god of this age.” As Augustine put it, man “joined the faction of the fallen angels.”⁵⁶⁶ Thus, Jesus said to the hypocritical seekers of His day, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire” (Joh 8.44^{NIVO}), and John affirmed the wider principle that all who habitually practice sin demonstrate thereby that they are “of the devil” (1Jo 3.8).

Obviously, not all fallen men are demonized to the extent of the Gerasene driven mad by Legion (Luk 8.26-33).⁵⁶⁷ The passages quoted in the preceding paragraph do not imply any such a thing. Rather, as John wrote, “... the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one” (1Jo 5.19).⁵⁶⁸ That is, Satan assumes the right to afflict every unregenerate person, and *influences their lives*, whether subtly or overtly.⁵⁶⁹ Not everyone abandons themselves to that evil influence, but no fallen man can escape it entirely. Instead, fallen man

⁵⁶⁵ So Augustine in *De Civ* 14.15.

⁵⁶⁶ *Enchi* 27.

⁵⁶⁷ The reader should note that the GNT never speaks of demon “possession” like our English versions. Instead, it speaks of “having” a demon or demons, or uses the verb δαιμονίζομαι (thē-mō-’nē-zō-mě), which simply means “to be demonized” or “to be tormented by a demon.”

⁵⁶⁸ The operative verb, καίμαι (’kē-mě), appears only twice in the GNT (1Jo 5.19; Rev 4.2). As in these two instances, the LXX uses the word to speak of the geographical location of *things*, and *the state or condition of persons*.

⁵⁶⁹ This is why Peter could characterize the ministry of Jesus as one of “healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Act 10.38). No wonder some Christian baptismal traditions include a ritualized blowing upon a baptizand to remove evil spirits and invite the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Bible nowhere commands these rituals of Exsufflation and Insufflation, but we see that there is a biblical basis for their intended objective.

yields to it unwittingly in what seem the most human of behaviors, like jealousy and ambition (Jam 3.14-15). However, when a man *does* embrace the demonic impulse, he soon finds himself in the grip of an overpowering compulsion to evil. The spiritual deadness of a fallen man is catastrophic; if he yields to Satan's exacerbation of his selfish lusts, it becomes horrific (see Eph 2.2-3).

EVIDENCE OF DEMONIC INVOLVEMENT

Genocides And Terrorism

No one wants to believe that man serves Satan. No one wants to think that human beings tend to fall into step with that monster's agenda. We prefer to believe that human nature tends toward the good and noble. As [Marguerite Shuster](#) writes, however, "Optimism about human tendencies does not hold up well under examination."⁵⁷⁰ We need only remember the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, the horror of the Nazi holocaust, the purges under Stalin and Mao, and various genocides before and since, to realize that there is an evil lurking within fallen man that is beyond his own unmitigated selfishness. TIME, in a web site article dated January 3, 2014, reported on the beheading of children during sectarian violence as the Central African Republic "teeters on the brink of genocide."⁵⁷¹ Such atrocities are not new, but they bear the signature, not just of man, but of the one who "was a murderer from the beginning" (Joh 8.44).

The Gog And Magog Archetype

Alongside the secular record of history, the Bible emphasizes both the depth and the devilishness of human depravity in a most sobering way. It does this by describing incidents, past and future, in which man defies God *to His face*. It's one thing for people to do evil because they disbelieve in a God they cannot see; it is quite another for people to defy God when He appears before their

⁵⁷⁰ Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall And Sin: What We Have Become As Sinners*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 164.

⁵⁷¹ <http://world.time.com/2014/01/03/un-raises-alarm-over-child-beheadings-in-central-african-republic/?xid=newsletter-daily>. Referenced on Jan. 12, 2014.

eyes. Such a defiance reveals the influence of the one who first defied God face-to-face in heaven.

Pharaoh At The Red Sea

Pharaoh's defiance of God at the Red Sea is archetypal of these encounters on earth. When Moses first presented God's demands to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt retorted, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go" (Ex 5.2). Pharaoh wavered in his resolve during the plague of frogs, but then remained obstinate, even after the plague of gnats, during which his own magicians admitted, "This is the finger of God" (Ex 8.19). Pharaoh appeared to repent when the plague of hail destroyed Egypt's flax and barley crop; he said, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. ... I will let you go ... (Ex 9.27-28)." But Pharaoh again hardened his heart, and again wavered under the devastation brought by the plague of locusts. Again he confessed to Moses, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you....please forgive my sin ... and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me" (Ex 10.16-17). Throughout this narrative of the ten plagues, we see that Pharaoh had a deepening awareness of exactly Who was afflicting him, but as the Scripture says, "the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart." After the locusts were swept away, Pharaoh again refused to let the Israelites go. Finally, after the death of all Egypt's firstborn, Pharaoh commanded Moses and Aaron, "get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel" (Ex 12.31).

And yet, when the Egyptians saw that the Israelites prolonged their journey and that Moses had no intention of returning his people to their oppressors, "Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart" (Ex 14.5). The Egyptians regretted that they had let their slaves go, so Pharaoh rushed out with his army of chariots, and overtook the Israelites who had arrived at the sea. What Pharaoh may not have realized until that moment, was that the LORD Himself had joined the travellers and "was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night" (Ex 13.21-22)!

This manifestation of God's presence consisted of not two pillars but one, a "pillar of fire and cloud" (Ex 14.24), a cloud that gave light at night so bright as to enable the entire multitude of Israel to travel after sunset (Ex 13.21; 14.20). It was the shining *Shekinah*, whose cloudy exterior muted its inner luminescence in the brilliance of the desert sun, but whose fiery interior became perfectly visible in the dark of night.⁵⁷² In retrospect, we recognize the *Shekinah* as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. He was not the only member of the Godhead who accompanied Israel in the wilderness, however, for we see in the text that the second Person travelled with them also.⁵⁷³ The Angel of the LORD who had appeared to Moses in the "burning bush" (Ex 3.2), apparently walked beside Moses at the head of the multitude. When Pharaoh's army of chariots charged upon the Israelite's rearguard, *both* the "angel of God ... and the pillar of cloud moved from before [the Israelites] and stood behind them," between the armies of Egypt and Israel, and would not allow the Egyptians to attack (Ex 14.19-20).

Now, one would think that a rational human being would give up the fight when God Himself steps into the ring! Yet, Pharaoh had already gone ten rounds with the LORD, and still would not concede. Pharaoh refused to abandon the fight even when the LORD's presence became visible to the human eye and stopped the Egyptian army in its tracks. As soon as the Israelite's got safely across the sea and the *Shekinah* followed at the rear of the multitude, Pharaoh's army rushed after it, right down onto the seabed. The LORD had to smite the Egyptians with confusion and misalign their chariot wheels before they would have second thoughts and say, "Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against [us]" (Ex 14.24-25).

A demonically driven madness had overcome the Egyptian army. In fact, we can assume a demonic aspect to Pharaoh's resistance to God from the beginning. It was when the sorcerer magicians of Egypt (whom tradition names Jannes and Jambres, 2Ti 3.8) imitated the miracles of Moses "with their secret arts" that "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" (Ex 7.11,22). How could

⁵⁷² As it was also in the relative dimness inside the house of Acts 2.

⁵⁷³ The syntax of the Heb text of Ex 14.19 indicates two distinct personages (and with this the LXX concurs), even though the following verse focuses only upon the cloud. With regard to the presence of the second Person of the Trinity, cf. Paul's poetic statement in 1Co 10.4.

Pharaoh himself escape demonic bondage and deception when he depended upon sorcery for the very management of his government? Interestingly, the [pseudepigraphal](#) *Testament Of Solomon* preserves an early Christian or Jewish-Christian legend that names the very demon who manipulated Pharaoh: Abezethibou. According to the legend, Abezethibou confessed to king Solomon,

I was present when Moses appeared before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, hardening his heart. I am the one whom Jannes and Jambres, those who opposed Moses in Egypt, called to their aid. I am the adversary of Moses in (performing) wonders and signs. ... I gave Pharaoh pangs of anxiety and hardened the heart of him, as well as of his subordinates. I caused them to pursue closely after the sons of Israel, and Pharaoh followed with (me) and (so did) all the Egyptians. ... We all approached the Red Sea. Then it happened that at the time when the sons of Israel crossed over, the water turned back upon us and covered over the company of the Egyptians. ... I too was engulfed by the water, and I remained in the sea, being held there⁵⁷⁴

This is only a legend, but it reveals a long-standing sense among God's people, that whatever the depth of his personal depravity, Pharaoh was also demonically motivated. Indeed, by the time he got to the Red Sea, Pharaoh knew that *it was the LORD* who had destroyed his nation, its crops, its livestock, and its firstborn sons, and yet he was still compelled to send his army charging against the Angel of the LORD and the blazing [Shekinah](#). When glimmers of reality finally began to penetrate the minds of the Egyptian soldiers, it was too late; the sea closed back in upon itself and swallowed them up. The sight of Egyptian bodies washing up on the shore burned an enduring memory into the minds of the Israelites, a memory of the consequences that came upon a people for submitting to the demonic influences of false gods (Ex 14.30-31).

Sadducees And The Resurrection

Like Pharaoh raging against the mighty manifestation of the Holy Spirit, so the Sadducees would not cease their campaign against Jesus Christ, even in

⁵⁷⁴ *Test Sol* 25. *OTP*, Vol. 1, James H. Charlesworth (ed.), (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 985-986.

the face of His death-conquering power. Just as Pharaoh's certainty regarding the identity of his divine Antagonist grew through the course of the ten plagues, in like manner the Sadducees' certainty regarding the identity of Jesus grew over the course of Jesus' miraculous ministry. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sadducean chief priests "convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' ... So from that day on they planned together to kill Him." (Joh 11.47-53). We see that the Sadducees did not seek Jesus' death because of doubt regarding His identity, but because of increasing *certainty* regarding it and its implications vis-à-vis their own political interests. When Jesus cleared out the corrupt Temple market (which the Sadducees controlled and profited from) for the second time (Mat 21.12-13; Mar 11.15-18; Luk 19.45-48), it was the last straw. The chief priests accelerated their plans to destroy Him (Mar 11.18). They accused Jesus before Pilate (Mat 27.12; Mar 15.3) and before Herod (Luk 23.10), and persuaded the crowds to demand amnesty for Barabbas rather than for Jesus (Mat 27.20; Mar 15.11). At length, the Sadducean chief priests obtained their desire to have Jesus crucified, but they did not commit their treachery in ignorance of Christ's identity, but rather in a refusal to acknowledge it. At the crucifixion of Jesus, they asked Pilate to change the placard posted on the cross, from reading, "The King Of The Jews," to, "He said, 'I am King of the Jews'" (Joh 19.19-22).

On the morning of Christ's resurrection, an angel rolled away the stone that had sealed the tomb. The guards saw this angel, shining with the brilliance of lightning, and were petrified with fear. We know that when the angel had departed, the guards verified the tomb's emptiness, because some of them went into the city "and reported to the chief priests **all** that had happened" (Mat 28.11). Would not a rational person acknowledge Jesus as Lord at this juncture? It's here that we see something beyond the money motive at work in the Sadducees. The chief priests "gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, 'You are to say, "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep"' (Mat 28.11-15). We see that the Sadducean

chief priests *knew* that Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah (King of the Jews), *knew* that He had done countless miracles, including raising the dead, and *knew* that He Himself had risen from the dead with angelic attestation, and still maintained their hostility toward Him! In this they showed the reality in their own lives of what Jesus had said to some other hypocrites: “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning ...” (Joh 8.44).

It was surely under demonic influence that the Jewish establishment refused to end its campaign against Jesus. When Peter and John healed a man “lame from his mother’s womb” (Act 3.1-8), “the Sadducees came up” to the apostles, “and put them in jail” (Act 4.1-3). They recognized Peter and John’s connection to Jesus (Act 4.13), and that these apostles had done a “noteworthy miracle” (Act 4.16), against which the Jewish council (led by Sadducees) could say nothing (Act 4.14). If men were inherently noble, or if they were at least free from bondage to the devil, we would expect an acknowledgement by the Sadducees of Jesus’ divine authority at last. Instead the Sadducees descended further into their demonic madness and threatened the apostles, commanding them “not to speak or teach **at all** in the name of Jesus” (Act 4.18-21).

When this happened, the assembled believers recognized that the Sadducean persecution fit the scriptural paradigm of infidels daring to rage against God, even when He has made Himself manifest. They lifted up a prayer (Act 4.25-26), quoting from Psalm 2:

Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the Peoples devise futile things?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the LORD and against His Christ.

In quoting this psalm, the believers recognized that the Sadducees suffered from the same demonic insanity that had afflicted Pharaoh, the same madness that would again drive fallen men *at the end of the age*.

End-Time Idolaters

The end-time, face-to-face challenge against the Lord by fallen men will approach its climax when men shake their fists at God because of His warning judgments. When the tormenting plagues of the sixth trumpet of the Apocalypse fall upon evil men, those not killed will refuse to repent of their *worship of demons*, idolatries, murders, drug potions, sexual immoralities and thefts (Rev 9.20-21). Their refusal to repent will *not* be due to ignorance of Who is chastening them. When the fourth angel pours out his bowl of wrath, men scorched by the intense heat of a solar catastrophe will blaspheme the name of God, Whom they will recognize as having “the authority over these plagues” (Rev 16.9 ^{RG}); they will refuse to repent and give Him glory. Again, when the fifth angel pours out his bowl, causing tongue-gnawing agony, men will curse the God of heaven because of their pains, yet will refuse to repent of their deeds (Rev 16.10-11). Granted, God will not yet have become directly manifest, but His full revelation at the climactic battle of our age will follow swiftly after these bowl judgments.

The Battle Of Armageddon

Psalm 2 refers prophetically to *this* battle. At the battle of Armageddon⁵⁷⁵ “the kings of the earth,” *with devilish and demonic motivation* (made explicit in the Revelation), will take “their stand ... against the LORD and His Christ” (Act 4.26; cf. Psa 2.2; Rev 16.14). They will assemble knowingly to make war against Christ, the “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords,” *whom they will see* descending from heaven on a white horse and surrounded by a vast heavenly army (Rev 19.11-19). Will evil men repent when they see the Lord descending from heaven? No, their bondage to their own lusts and to the invisible entities driving them, will fill them with a suicidal frenzy. As with pharaoh’s charioteers, the Lord will have to smite the armies of Antichrist with bewilderment and blindness to stay their madness (Zec 12.4), and will finally have to give them over to internecine annihilation (Zec 14.12-13).

⁵⁷⁵ More correctly, the battle of Jerusalem. Armageddon in northern Israel is only the staging location; see Rev 16.16 and Zec 12.2-3.

The Battle Of Gog And Magog

Even so, fallen man's face-to-face rebellions against God will not have ended! A thousand years later, when Satan is released from his prison for a short time, a new rebellion of mortal men will instantly rise up behind him to challenge the Lord's rule. This will result in the infamous battle of Gog and Magog (Eze 38-39; Rev 20.7-10).⁵⁷⁶ This final battle will occur in spite of the fact that mankind's memory of "Armageddon" will still be fresh by virtue of people's longevity during Christ's millennial reign (Isa 65.20-22), and by virtue of the continuing influence of the glorified saints *who witnessed* the battle (Rev 5.9-10).

What will make the battle of Gog and Magog *abominable above all others*, and most telling about the condition of fallen man, is that it will occur after Jesus Christ has visibly ruled on planet earth, and brought a thousand years of peace, prosperity, and health to both biosphere and geosphere. In spite of the restoration of the world to an enduring Edenic condition, those human beings still in a mortal and fallen condition, will jump at the chance to join Satan in a final attempt to *cast of God's yoke*.⁵⁷⁷ Not just a few will rise up in rebellion against our gloriously visible Lord. Instead, "the number of them [will be] like the sand of the seashore" (Rev 20.8).

THE POINT OF THESE BIBLICAL WARNINGS

My purpose for mentioning these passages about defying God face-to-face, is not to imply that unbelievers are "demon possessed." Instead, I offer them as encouragement to take seriously the words of Jesus, John and Paul when they say things like:

⁵⁷⁶ Many current teachers have erroneously made a distinction between the "Gog and Magog" battle of Eze 38-39 and that of Rev 20, though these battles are in fact identical. Expositors have imagined two different battles because they have failed to follow the chiasmic structure of Ezekiel's prophecy, and thus have misunderstood its chronology. Nevertheless, for those who insist that Ezekiel's prediction will have a fulfillment *before* Christ's coming, I will grant this: because Ezekiel's prophecy is one among the paradigmatic biblical passages about fallen man's rebellion against God-made-manifest, it may have *foreshadowing* fulfillments in pre-millennial skirmishes, and most definitely will have a *foreshadowing* fulfillment in the battle of "Armageddon." Nevertheless, Eze 38-39 and Rev 20.7-10 describe the same, final, face-to-face battle of fallen man against God at the end of Christ's millennial reign.

⁵⁷⁷ See the wording of Psa 2.3 in the LXX.

... the tares are the sons of the evil *one* (Mat 13.38).

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers ... (2Co 4.4 [NIV](#)).

... correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps ... they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2Ti 2.25-26).

...Cain, who belonged to the evil one (1Jo 3.12 [NIV](#))....

The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning (1Jo 3.8).

... the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one (1Jo 5.19).

We must understand that fallenness makes every human being vulnerable to demonic exacerbation of his or her sinfulness. Every human being is born in double bondage: bondage to sin and to Satan. The manifestation of this oppressive enslavement varies from person to person, but every [unregenerate](#) human being desperately needs salvation from it.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF HUMAN FALLENNESS

SPIRITUAL REBIRTH THE ONLY SOLUTION

Because fallen man is born in such bondage, and because his fallenness is a congenital condition that affects the totality of his nature, attempts to please God by religious compensation are decidedly ludicrous. No amount of religious devotion can mask fallenness. Isaiah says that “righteous acts” by rebellious people are as attractive to God as used feminine hygiene products (Isa 64.6 [NET](#)). **“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God”** (Rom 8.8). God *hates* religious performance apart from true spiritual life (Amos 5.21-22; cf. Mal 1.10). Our secular friends scorn two-faced religionists, but our friends’ criticisms are tame compared to Christ’s own condemnation of religious hypocrites (Mat 23). Regardless of the show of worship or devotion that a fallen man might make, his self-seeking acts do not serve God but the devil.

The same applies to sincere works of benevolence done by those without any pretense of religion. No one will stand before God and successfully argue

that they should be justified because they weren't like the religious hypocrites who "said" but didn't "do." No one will gain heaven because they devoted their lives to building homes for the homeless and feeding the poor, instead of wasting time with "religious mumbo jumbo." No amount of good works can justify a sinful man, be he a hypocritical churchgoer or a kind-hearted atheist (Eph 2.8-9). Contrary to man's fondest delusion, no one can save himself by his own effort or merit.

In view of that fact, our hearts should overflow with thankfulness to God that Christ has opened the way for the healing of our spiritual deadness. Paul wrote that Jesus Christ "has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2Ti 1.10 ^{NIVO}). Let us note here again that the scriptural cure confirms the nature of the disease. Christ has presently, *now*, destroyed death. This implies that the death which Christ has already destroyed is spiritual death, since people still die physically. He has destroyed spiritual deadness by making believers alive *in their spirits* by His Spirit.⁵⁷⁸ Jesus did this throughout His earthly ministry. While in Jerusalem He said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes ... has crossed over **from death** to life.... a time is coming and has now come when **the dead** will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (Joh 5.24-25 ^{NIVO}). The idea of curing people — who are physically alive — by enabling them to cross over from death to life, only makes sense when we understand that the death or deadness in view is that of the human spirit, not of the physical body.

The prophets understood this. They knew that man, though a spiritual being, suffered from spiritual deadness. They knew that humans need spiritual resurrection, and so they couched their talk of redemption in terms of a *coming to life*. Habakkuk famously said that, "the righteous will **live** by his faith" (Hab 2.4).⁵⁷⁹ We normally associate this passage with the event of

⁵⁷⁸ Paul wrote, "the last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit" (1Co 15.45), i.e., Jesus undoes the spiritual death we inherit from Adam, *as well as* the finality of our physical death. The apostle then exulted, "O Death where is your victory?" (1Co 15.54-55).

⁵⁷⁹ There are intricacies to this passage and to Paul's interpretation of it in Rom 1.17, for which see G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), p. 608 ff. My point here, though, is that Habakkuk contrasts the soul that "is not right" with one

justification, and we *are* justified by faith (Rom 3.28), but Habakkuk had more than a change of judicial status in mind. The righteous person, on the basis of faith or faithfulness, would *come to life*. It reminds me of the dramatic scene in Eze 16.6. In that passage, the Lord speaks about His relationship with wayward Jerusalem (= Israel), and about the condition in which He found her at the time of the people's national birth. The Lord describes incipient Israel as an infanticide victim, a newborn thrown out in an open field, kicking in her blood, as good as dead. God redeems the pitiful creature by uttering one word: "*Live!*"

Admittedly, these passages in the prophets speak of more than just the cure for the deadened human spirit; they also speak of national restoration. Indeed, the motif of resurrection applies equally to the redemption of the individual and to the restoration of the nation of Israel. We see this in Ezekiel's famous vision of the dry bones where the Lord says "I will put my Spirit in you and you will **live**" (Eze 37.14 ^{NIVO}). Israel's national resurrection is in view, but the national restoration requires the spiritual resurrection of individual citizens. Through Ezekiel, God pled with His people: "get a new heart and a new spirit" (Eze 18.31 ^{NIVO}). The solution, the cure, for Israel's national "fallenness" was — and is — the spiritual rebirth of each individual man and woman.

The capstone of the prophets' revelations about human fallenness and its cure, is the explicit statement of Jesus in John 3.3-5: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.... no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water, [that is] the Spirit."⁵⁸⁰ In other words, a person cannot come under God's rule, unless his human spirit is **regenerated** by the Spirit of God.⁵⁸¹ As Paul would later say, "the mind [of] the flesh ... does not subject itself to the law [or rule] of God, for it is not even able *to do so*" (Rom 8.7). In fact, a person must be born again of the Spirit before he

that will come to life.

⁵⁸⁰ NIVO. See the full exposition of Joh 3.5 above.

⁵⁸¹ As I have shown above, the post-apostolic Fathers, having confused spiritual regeneration with baptism, thought of *baptismal regeneration* as "the divinely appointed remedy for the hereditary disease of human nature." See N. P. Williams commenting on the writings of Ambrose in Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 306.

or she can even perceive the kingdom of God (Joh 3.3), let alone enter it.

However, once brought to life by the “regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3.5 ^{ASV}), once we are “made ... alive with Christ” (Col 2.12-13 ^{NIVO}), we can then “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom 8.13 ^{NIVO}), because a vibrant spirit now restrains our flesh. We can then meet the righteous requirements of God (Rom 8.4), and instead of continuing in self-absorption we turn our focus upon God as our Father, crying out as true sons, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8.15). We no longer put any confidence in ourselves or in the flesh, but we “worship by the Spirit of God” and “glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3.3 ^{NIVO}).

INACTION WORTHY OF DEATH

We must understand another sobering fact, though: our fallen condition doesn’t just generate sinful *actions*; it just as often produces sinful *inaction*.⁵⁸² In my youth I fretted long and hard over the sins I’d committed, hoping that God would not condemn me for them. In the end, God convinced me of my lost state, not by the things I’d done, but by the most important thing I hadn’t done. For 18 years I had passively broken the greatest commandment of all: *I had not loved God* (Mat 22.36-38). As Paul said of fallen men, “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks” (Rom 1.21). This passivity toward God is a fruit of our fallenness, and *it is sin* against a Holy Creator, a sin deserving of eternal death.⁵⁸³

For this reason even infants are sinners and even infants die (Rom 5.12). *Infants actually sin*. Their first sins, however, are sins of omission rather than commission. They are like the sins David was “unaware of” having committed (Psa 19.12 ^{NET}), and like the unknowing and unintentional sins addressed by the law in Num 15.22-29, and mentioned in the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 9.7).⁵⁸⁴ As Paul explained, *we have all sinned*, and one of the

⁵⁸² The idea of “debt,” in the prayer, “forgive us our debts” (Mat 6.12), puts a greater emphasis upon what we have failed to do than upon what we have done. It reminds us of the things that we owe to God but have failed to render to Him.

⁵⁸³ No one will be excused for their sins of omission by claiming ignorance of what they should have done (Pro 24.11-12).

⁵⁸⁴ These passages teach us that culpable sin does not require an awareness of the commandment being broken, *nor even a conscious choice*. Culpability before God for unwitting sins is a principle that seems to have been lost on the Fathers, even as it goes

ways we sin is that we passively “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3.23). This is what it means to be “by nature children of wrath,” i.e., to *by nature be deserving of God’s condemnation* (Eph 2.3), and it was to this that David referred when he wrote, “in sin my mother conceived me” (Psa 51.5). *From our conception*, we sinfully affront our Creator just by our natural lack of a Godward orientation. That Godward orientation was part of the original blueprint for human nature, and our congenital lack of such an orientation makes it inevitable that we do all things selfishly rather than “faithfully.”⁵⁸⁵ Thus, even infants are guilty sinners, from a biblical point of view.

The fact that John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luk 1.15 ^{NKJ}), and leaped *in utero* for joy at the sound of Mary’s voice (Luk 1.41-44), gives us an idea of what gestation for *unfallen* humans might have been like had Adam and Eve not sinned. Sadly, though, even John fell short. The Holy Spirit came upon him for a moment in his mother’s womb, but his own spirit, like that of all men, was withered, and the divine image stamped upon him was obscured. John actively honored God for a moment while still in the womb, but for the rest of his gestation he also passively sinned by the lack of a Godward orientation in his developing faculties.⁵⁸⁶

Fallenness is truly devastating in the way it taints even infants with sin. I hasten to assure the reader, though, that the real sinfulness of infants

unnoticed by many Christians today. It certainly escaped the understanding of Augustine who insisted that “there can be no sin but what is voluntary.” (See William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2., (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), pp. 88-89.) Augustine believed that infants were guilty of willful sin, but not a willful sin of their own — a matter I will explain below.

⁵⁸⁵ Paul said that “whatever [act] is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14.23). The scope of this principle is debated, but it is probably not limited to the contextual question of eating meats. See David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Romans 9–16*, (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2009).

⁵⁸⁶ The President of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, Dr. A. L. Barry, uses this in-utero incident as a proof text for infant baptism: “The unborn child, John the Baptist, leaped in his mother’s womb when he heard the word of God (Luk 1.41-44). Why is there any doubt that in and through the Word and the promise of Baptism, God works a similar gift of faith in the infant?” (Barry, A. L. “What About ... Holy Baptism,” (The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod). Let us note that it was not the “word of God” but the greeting of Mary that the unborn child heard, and that the momentary coming of the Spirit upon the unborn John no more indicates a “gift of faith” than did the momentary falling of the Spirit upon king Saul (1Sa 19.24).

does not imply that babies who die go to hell (as [Augustine](#) feared).⁵⁸⁷ The Bible provides clues suggesting that children who die before they are old enough to *consciously* respond to God are saved by God's grace (2Sa 12.18-23; Mat 18.1-6; 19.14). That infants die does not mean they go to hell; it only means that they themselves have sinned. No one suggests that their sins are as willful or as knowing or as heinous to society as those of teenagers and adults, but the sins of infants are real sins that arise from our race's universal malady, namely, our congenital spiritual deadness. The real sins of infants are culpable before God, not because babies are evil, but because God is infinitely holy.⁵⁸⁸

WHY JESUS WAS NOT FALLEN

Understanding human fallenness as spiritual deadness — as a deprivation — explains how it passes down through the generations. It also explains why Jesus wasn't fallen. Human fallenness is passed from generation to generation simply because it is the lack of a thing, a thing which fallen parents cannot conjure up and bequeath to their offspring: Adam and Eve could only reproduce offspring *like themselves*, lacking a vital component of their original design. Jesus did not catch this malady of fallenness because it was never a substantive thing that can be caught. Mary did not have “fallenitis” germs with which she could infect her son, but neither could she bequeath spiritual vitality to Jesus. However, the Father of Jesus *couldn't* not *propagate spiritual life*, and that made all the difference. Had Joseph fathered Jesus, Jesus would have been born as fallen as all other men, because Joseph could not have passed down a spiritual connection to God any more than Mary could have. However, since the Father of Jesus is God, Jesus was perfectly linked to the Father by the Spirit, from conception. Thus, Jesus was not born with a spiritual deficiency, but with a body and soul perfectly and perpetually

⁵⁸⁷ See N. P. Williams' comments on Augustine's wrestling with the issue of the damnation of infants, Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), pp. 376-378.

⁵⁸⁸ When David said, “The wicked go astray from the womb,” (Psa 58.3^{RSV}; 58.4^{WTT}), the common adjective he used for “wicked,” רָשָׁע, can just as well be translated “guilty,” as in Ex 23.7. David did not imagine infant sin without guilt.

oriented to the Father by the Spirit. Far from being fallen, Jesus was born the Holy One, the only One Who is Good (Luk 1.35; Mat 19.17).

17 QUESTIONS ABOUT HUMAN FALLENNESS

SYNOPSIS

The biblical teaching about man's fallenness offends our pride. Hence we wonder if the fall really happened, and whether Adam and Eve really existed as historical individuals. Hasn't science disproved human fallenness? Isn't man constantly evolving into an ever more noble being? Can't we just chalk up the bad things some people do to the influence of bad examples and learned behavior? Where is the word *fallenness* in the Bible anyway? Isn't a belief in human fallenness a pessimistic view of mankind?

When we take a humbler approach to the topic, we still wonder how the biblical teaching of fallenness fits together with our other tenets. Is fallenness the same thing as original sin? Is it tantamount to the loss of an original righteousness, as Roman Catholicism teaches?

Furthermore, doesn't this teaching of human fallenness contradict our belief in free will? And anyway, if people were really spiritually dead, wouldn't their bodies be dead too? Or does spiritual deadness imply that other human faculties can compensate for the handicap?

Finally, didn't people save themselves in the OT time by offering animal sacrifices? They didn't need to be born again, did they? If people now in the NT time really need to be born again, how can they go about it? If people must be born again, but can't do anything (like being baptized) to bring it about, why even preach the gospel?

Having delineated the main points that Scripture teaches us on the subject of human fallenness, we can now address a list of related questions, beginning with:

1. IS *FALLENNESS* SYNONYMOUS WITH *ORIGINAL SIN*?

We must not confuse the Bible's teaching of human fallenness with the traditional teaching of *original sin*. Theologians often incorrectly equate *fallenness* and *original sin*,⁵⁸⁹ because the two ideas both have to do with man's sinful *condition* as opposed to his actual sins. However, a vital historical distinction exists: while the biblical revelation about fallenness tells us of an inherited *spiritual deadness* (and the sin that flows from it), the traditional doctrine of *original sin* posits an inherited *guilt*. The evolution of the idea of *original sin*, and the problems that its doctrinal formulations pose for the Church today, are the subjects of the final part, [Part IV](#), of this book.

2. IS *FALLENNESS* JUST THE LOSS OF SUPERADDED ORIGINAL RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Catholicism does insist that man has a problem of *inherited sin*, but like Judaism, Catholicism found a way to affirm the continuing integrity of human nature. Louis Berkhof explained:

[In the Roman Catholic Church] the view gradually prevailed that *original righteousness* was not a natural but a supernatural endowment of man. Man, it was held, naturally consists of flesh and spirit, and from these diverse or contrary propensities there arises a conflict (*concupiscence*), which often makes right action difficult. To offset the disadvantages of this original languor of nature, God added to man a certain remarkable gift, namely, *original righteousness*, which served as a check to keep the inferior part of man in proper subjection to the superior, and the superior to God. This original righteousness was a supernatural gift, a *donum superadditum*, something added to the nature of man, who was created without positive righteousness, but also without positive unrighteousness.

With the entrance of sin into the world man lost this *original righteousness*. This means that the *apostasy* of man did not involve the loss of any natural endowment of man, but only the loss of a supernatural gift, which was foreign to the essential nature of man. *Original righteousness* was lost and man lapsed back into the condition

⁵⁸⁹ As Marguerite Shuster does in ch. 8 of her *The Fall And Sin: What We Have Become As Sinners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

of an unrestrained conflict between flesh and spirit. The supremacy of the higher over the lower element in his nature was fatally weakened. Man was brought back to the neutral condition, in which he was neither sinful nor holy, but from the very constitution of his nature subject to conflict between the flesh and the spirit.⁵⁹⁰

The Roman Catholic doctrine of [superadded righteousness](#), then, means that, in the fall, man simply returned to his natural condition having capacity for good or evil. All Adam lost was a special, added propensity for good. Since the fall, man's inner conflict between the flesh and spirit often leads to sin, but — according to this Catholic doctrine — there is no inherent reason why a person can't help out with his or her own salvation, or even become a saint whose abundant merits can help save others. As [Berkhof](#) adds,

Roman Catholics reject the idea of man's supernatural impotence and his utter dependence on the grace of God for renewal. They adopt the theory of [synergism](#) in [regeneration](#), that is, that man co-operates with God in the spiritual renewal of the soul. He prepares and disposes himself for the grace of [justification](#), which is said to consist of [infused righteousness](#). In the days of the [Reformation](#) the [monergism](#) of the [Reformers](#) [i.e., the idea that salvation is totally the work of God alone] was opposed by the Roman Catholic Church with greater vehemence than any other doctrine.⁵⁹¹

As the [Reformers](#) insisted, the Roman Catholic doctrine of [superadded righteousness](#) has no biblical basis, but the Catholic scholars who propounded it were nevertheless onto something when they intuited that fallenness had to do with a deprivation, "the absence of something that ought to be present." The thing that man lost, and that "ought to be present," however, was *not* a gift of [superadded righteousness](#), but a spiritual vitality in the human soul generated by the Spirit of God. That spiritual vitality was an essential component of man's original nature and design, such that man's nature is vitiated by its

⁵⁹⁰ Louis Berkhof, *The History Of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1937), pp. 144-145. Also see *Donum Superadditum* in DLGTT. Athanasius seems to have understood this *Donum Superadditum* as the divine image itself, "which is none other than the indwelling of the Logos, the 'image of the invisible God,'" for which see Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), pp. 259-261.

⁵⁹¹ Op. cit., pp. 145-146.

absence. The loss that man experienced in the fall did not return his nature to neutral, leaving him with equal capacity for good and evil, but instead completely destroyed his capacity to relate properly to God.

3. WHENCE THE WORD *FALLENNESS*?

Since the early centuries of Christianity, theologians wishing to refer to the change brought upon mankind by the first sin, have used phrases like *hominis ruinam* (man's ruin),⁵⁹² or *hominis lapsu* (man's lapse).⁵⁹³ Later English writers have usually translated these Latin phrases with the words, "fall of man." Therefore, it became common for English theologians since the [Reformation](#) to call the catastrophe in Eden "the fall," and it became grammatically logical to refer to the deleterious effects brought upon man by the fall as *fallenness*.⁵⁹⁴ *Fallenness*, then, is a word (like *Trinity*) which does not occur in the Bible, but which theologians have found useful for referring to an abundantly attested biblical phenomenon, namely the spiritual deadness and moral corruption of [unregenerate](#) man.

4. HASN'T SCIENCE DISPROVED THE FALL OF MAN?

The internet has facilitated the publication of new challenges to the biblical doctrine of the fall. Here is one such challenge by an anonymous, armchair atheist:

I have a faith that has one rule: Harming none, do as you will. To me, Evangelical Christians are the epitome of inflicting harm on other people. They actively encourage people to deviate from one spiritual path onto another. The fact is that I view Christianity as an utterly invalid faith and utterly invalid ideology[, b]ecause their entire belief has been scientifically proven to be unfounded in that there is no need for a "redeemer" at all because there was never an Adam and Even [sic] and no "original sin" from which to be redeemed.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² *Adv Marc* 2.6.

⁵⁹³ *Inst* 2.2.

⁵⁹⁴ The fall brought ill effects upon man's environment as well, but in this study we must focus upon the effects of the fall upon the human creature.

⁵⁹⁵ Pseudonymous comment by DeweySayenoff on a web article, [Christian Fundamentalists Target Tibetans](#) . Accessed on October 20, 2015.

The writer who posted this comment is transparent about his or her *summum bonum*, and it is that of the true secular Humanist: personal autonomy. This person's real grievance against Evangelical Christianity is Christianity's insistence that man must not live by his own desires but must submit his life to the will of his Creator.

Let's set this person's underlying issue aside, however, and consider the claim that Christians' "entire belief has been scientifically proven to be unfounded." By making such a statement, he or she may have confused science with history. Though the Bible certainly speaks truthfully to a wide variety of scientific questions, and did, in fact, provide the philosophical basis for the pursuit of science in Western civilization, Christianity is not a scientific religion (like Darwinism), but a historical faith instead. Historical faiths are based on historical events, and stand or fall with the veracity of those events. Historical events, however, cannot be proven or disproven in a science lab like, let's say, the proposition that chocolate cures cancer. Instead, historical claims must be weighed against historical evidence, like the claim of a person in court who says he was born the king's rightful heir.

This means that no scientist has ever proven that "there was never an Adam and Eve."⁵⁹⁶ On the contrary, if the proposition that Adam and Eve existed is testable at all, it must be weighed by historians (of various sub-disciplines), and the result will not be "proof" but a tentative assessment that the evidence leans one way or the other. Furthermore, interpretive disciplines like archaeology or historical research, are susceptible to the presuppositions of the interpreter. The historian, archaeologist or anthropologist who holds a Darwinian world view, will undoubtedly conclude that Adam and Eve never existed, while the Evangelical historian will conclude that the evidence of history points to a real corruption of mankind, and that the Adam and Eve story provides the only viable account of such a corruption. Still, Evangelicals cannot "prove" that Adam and Eve existed, but neither can anyone prove that

⁵⁹⁶ Scientists have, however, provided evidence from recent studies of the human genome to support the biblical account of human origins. I refer the reader to "In Light Of Genetics ... Adam, Eve, And The Creation/Fall," by John C. Sanford, Ph.D. and Robert Carter, Ph.D., published in *Christian Apologetics Journal*, 12:2 (Fall 2014), by Southeastern Evangelical Seminary.

they did not. Therefore, if we are disposed to believe the Bible, we need not be intimidated by claims that science has invalidated the story of the fall.

5. AREN'T EVEN EVANGELICALS CONCLUDING THAT ADAM AND EVE NEVER EXISTED?

Sadly, [Evangelical](#) authors *are* beginning to deny the historicity of Adam and Eve, but this is a trend driven by academic exigency, not by biblical or scientific evidence.⁵⁹⁷ When we look at the biblical evidence (Gen 2), we see that the Garden of Eden, the original home of Adam and Eve, is described in historical terms, with a definite geography. With regard to Adam himself, the Bible relates the history of his stewardship in the garden, his marriage, the names of his children, and how long he lived. Scripture also states that Adam had kept a *written account* of his life (Gen 5.1 [NIVO](#)).⁵⁹⁸ Patriarchs and prophets referred to Adam's sin (Job 31.33; Hos 6.7), and [NT](#) authors recognized him as a historical figure, and as the one who brought sin and death into the world (Rom 5.14; 1Co 15.22,45; 1Ti 2.13-14; Jud 1.14). Eve, likewise, is referred to as a historical personage by Paul (2Co 11.3; 1Ti 2.13-14), and referred to as part of the first human pair by Jesus (Mat 19.4; Mar 10.6).

Theologians who view the Genesis story of the Fall as a non-historical myth, nevertheless consider it a metaphorical explanation of the human condition. This is absurd, however, for if the narrative is not historical it can hardly provide a useful explanation. Indeed, denying the historicity of the Genesis narrative of the Fall, leaves us with the empirical reality of human depravity, but no explanation for it whatsoever, unless we opt for the Darwinian view.

6. ISN'T MAN EVOLVING INTO A NOBLER BEING?

The “discipline” known as Humanist psychology is Darwinian and atheistic in its underlying assumptions, and so promotes the belief that human nature is perfectible and that the perfecting of it is presently within man's own ability to

⁵⁹⁷ As seminaries and Bible colleges struggle for survival, biblical scholars seek ways to compromise with the Darwinian fortress of academia in the hopes of future employment.

⁵⁹⁸ For a full explanation of Gen 5.1 see P. J. Wiseman, *Ancient Records & The Structure Of Genesis*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

accomplish.⁵⁹⁹ Corollary to this belief are the ideas that man is naturally good (or at least “neutral”) and that any evil in man is due to external influences. This evolutionary view of man’s nature is not only inherent to Humanistic psychology, but is of course also foundational to the larger field of secular anthropology. However, in this work I present a *biblical anthropology* not a humanistic one.

Nevertheless we should note two things:

- A. Were we to accept current Darwinian theory and its implications for anthropology, we would have to conclude that man is selfish to his core, even down to his very genes. This conclusion would force us to reevaluate “selfishness” and conclude that it is a good thing, as indeed Humanist psychologists like Erich Fromm have done.⁶⁰⁰
- B. Human history, littered as it is with failed attempts at achieving utopia — attempts that have cost millions of human lives —, along with current world and local news puts the lie to any hypothesis that mankind is in any way becoming more noble as a race.

Even Humanist psychologists, then, should open their eyes and recognize that the human race is more likely to destroy itself and become extinct than it is to perfect itself into a noble race living in a utopian society.

What Humanist psychologists like [Carl Rogers](#) have recognized is that they can hardly define the values, goals, methods and overall nature of their own discipline! After raising the question of whether Humanist psychology has “the skills actually to promote more effective and creative interpersonal relationships,” and after wondering what view Humanist psychologists should take regarding “what makes life worth living,” [Rogers](#) said,

I should like to make a final confession. When I am speaking to outsiders I present Humanist psychology as a glowing hope for the future. But within the bosom of our family [of psychologists] I have been

⁵⁹⁹ For an accessible summary of Humanist psychology, I refer the reader to David A. Noebel’s *Understanding The Times: The Religious Worldviews Of Our Day And The Search For Truth*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), ch. 15.

⁶⁰⁰ David A. Noebel, *Understanding The Times: The Religious Worldviews Of Our Day And The Search For Truth*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), p. 368.

trying to say that we have no reason whatsoever for feeling complacent as we look toward the future.⁶⁰¹

I encourage the reader, therefore, to not be intimidated by [Humanist psychology](#), and to forget Darwinian and secular ideas about man's innate goodness and perfectibility, and instead humbly embrace the Bible's teaching about man's fallenness. The first step toward being healed is to *recognize that we are sick*. The second step is to correctly assess the nature of the disease.

7. ISN'T EVIL BEHAVIOR A LEARNED PHENOMENON?

When we assess the disease of human sinfulness, we cannot help but observe that the evil tendencies of people are exacerbated by the bad influences of others. As [Menander](#) (c. 300 BC) said, "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1Co 15.33). Humanist psychologists have seized upon this phenomenon to bolster their doctrine that any evil in man is due to external factors. As [Carl Rogers](#) said, "Experience leads me to believe that it is cultural influences which are the major factor in our evil behaviors."⁶⁰² Abraham Maslow codified [Rogers'](#) belief in his aphorism, "Sick people are made by a sick culture; healthy people are made possible by a healthy culture."⁶⁰³ These assertions of Humanist psychology, however, beg the question: *What produces a sick culture?* The answer: sick cultures are formed by sick people!

So, yes, evil influences can and do hasten the corruption of previously obedient children or previously law-abiding citizens. However, only the corruptible can be corrupted. This is more than a truism. It is the fallenness within man, the fleshly bent toward selfish gratification, that allows external encouragements toward evil to have their effect. Furthermore, those bad influences, so far as they can be definitely identified, are always human. Someone may be corrupted by a corporate entity like a mafia or a government,

⁶⁰¹ Carl Rogers, "Some Questions And Challenges Facing Humanistic Psychology," in *Humanistic Psychology: A Source Book*, (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1978), p. 45.

⁶⁰² Carl Rogers, "Notes on Rollo May," p. 8. Cited in David A. Noebel, *Understanding The Times: The Religious Worldviews Of Our Day And The Search For Truth*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), p. 361.

⁶⁰³ Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward A Psychology Of Being*, p. 6. Cited in David A. Noebel, *Understanding The Times: The Religious Worldviews Of Our Day And The Search For Truth*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), p. 361.

but the character of the corporate entity reflects the character of the individuals within it, and particularly the character of the individual at the helm. Therefore, if a morally sick person blames an external influence (like, say, “gangsta rap”) for his evil behavior, that external influence will always trace back to another person or group of persons, who can in turn blame another person or group, and when the blame finally goes all the way back to its original source, that source will be a person. The problem of human evil does not begin on the outside of man but on the inside.

8. DON'T INSTANCES OF NOBILITY DISPROVE THE IDEA OF HUMAN FALLENNESS?

I thank God for the noble people in our world and for the virtuous individuals in my life. However, the most noble people I know will readily and humbly confess that ugliness and darkness hides within their souls, and that keeping this evil in check has required God's grace and a lifetime of vigilance. Only by overcoming their evil inclinations with God's help, have they become the selfless and generous people we know.

Yes, there have been other virtuous individuals in history who made no claim to dependency on God's grace, or who even disavowed the God of the Bible. Many who had an appearance of nobility, of course, were not as righteous as the public persona they maintained — biographers have always delighted in revealing the feet of clay of those deemed great in the popular imagination. Nevertheless, we can grant that there are some wonderful, non-Christian people in the world, but again, were they to give a transparent assessment of themselves, they would undoubtedly acknowledge their own sense of imperfection.

I do not miss the point that such individuals are *good people* so far as any public tribunal would judge. However, in this study we are not concerned with how one man compares to another, but with how human beings are assessed by their Holy Creator, and how they compare to that Creator's original blueprint for human nature. Furthermore, the biblical doctrine of human fallenness, like the Calvinist doctrine of *total depravity*, has never suggested that all fallen people are as evil as they can possibly be. Instead, these doctrines teach that our sinful condition “is complete in its

extensiveness, [if] not in its intensity.”⁶⁰⁴ In other words, our fallenness extends to every aspect of our human nature, but does not necessarily debauch all our faculties to the greatest possible degree: fallen man still has intelligence and conscience. Therefore, a noble atheist does not by his nobility disprove the biblical doctrine of fallenness, for in all his benevolent acts by which he may fulfill the highest ideals of secular man, he still breaks the greatest commandment of the Holy God. Sin still blinds and binds the secular “saint.”

9. ISN'T THIS THEORY OF FALLENNESS A PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF MANKIND?

I'm not pessimistic about the human race. On the contrary, man and his nature is the pinnacle of God's creation. As King David sang to the LORD, “You have made [man] a little lower than God, And you crown him with glory and majesty!” (Psa 8.5). God fashioned man in His own image, and destined redeemed humanity to become the bride of Christ (Rev 19.7-8)! By God's grace, a redeemed race will shine “like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12.3), having become all that God intended mankind to be.

Yes, I quoted [C. H. Spurgeon](#) above as having said, “You cannot slander human nature; it is worse than words can paint it.”⁶⁰⁵ However, Spurgeon spoke of human nature in its fallen condition, not of human nature in its created dignity. Likewise, my delineation of human fallenness is not an arraignment of human nature as God designed and created it, but only a synopsis of human nature's present diseased condition apart from [regeneration](#). Furthermore, the Bible does not make its declarations about man's moral sickness in order to condemn and dispirit its readers, but to encourage them to avail themselves of the cure.

⁶⁰⁴ Michael Horton, *For Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 15.

⁶⁰⁵ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars: A Collection of Proverbs & Quaint Sayings*, Vol. 2 — M To Z, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), p.8.

10. DOES FALLENNESS IMPLY AN ESSENTIAL CHANGE IN HUMAN NATURE?

Many have received the cure for human fallenness. They have been born again of the Spirit (Joh 3.5-7), and God has begun the good work in them of conforming their character to the character of Christ (Rom 8.29). God is repairing the damage in their nature by making them partakers of His own (2Pe 1.4). God is perfecting His own divine love within the [regenerate](#), enabling them to truly love Him and love others (1Jo 2.5; 4.12).

When we understand this sanctifying process, we realize that God has not abrogated His design of human nature, but is restoring it to health in His people. Furthermore, we recognize that the fall did not change or destroy the *essence* of human nature, but only vitiated it. Adam's sin only changed the condition of human nature.⁶⁰⁶ A tragic collision may have twisted and bent a Maserati, and left it electrically dead, but it is still a Maserati; it has not become an Edsel. Once completely repaired, and given a new battery, it will again be the luxurious sports car it was designed to be. Likewise, fallen man, though at times hardly recognizable next to the biblical picture of his original design, and though he has no spiritual vitality, still bears the imprint of his Maker, and still remains a breed apart from other creatures, both animals and angels. When God completes the good work He has begun in His people, their natures will be fully restored to their intended splendor (Rom 8.30), their vivified spirits pulsating with holy passion like the very flames of the LORD (Song 8.6-7).

11. DOESN'T "SPIRITUAL DEADNESS" IMPLY THAT OTHER HUMAN FACULTIES REMAIN INTACT?

If a Dodge Challenger lacks a driver, is it still a nice car? Yes, it can be a gleaming thing of beauty. However, while it sits empty *none* of its parts

⁶⁰⁶ The fall did not *essentially* change human nature, else the charge of Julian of Eclanum against the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, that the human nature of Adam's posterity was created by the devil, would hold some truth. Augustine, however, was careful to distinguish true human nature as created by God from what we commonly call human nature, namely, that impaired character with which we are born. See Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 31; 39-40.

function according to the designer's ultimate intent. It goes nowhere. It carries no one along winding roads on invisible wings as it was meant to do.

Well, then, in lieu of a driver, let us place a brick on the gas pedal, switch on the ignition and put the transmission in gear. Will the Challenger remain a nice car for long? No, it will destroy itself and possibly wreck lives.

The automobile in this analogy represents man's faculties, the empty driver's seat man's spiritual deadness, and the brick on the gas pedal the fleshly soul. The brick is blind, without direction and lacking moderation. Nevertheless, all the parts of the car function and have great potential for going places and providing service (even exhilaration). The brick on the gas pedal may actually enable the car to transport someone or something for some distance, across a salt flat, over a grassy field, or along an open beach. After a time, though, the rocks and trees, the traffic barriers and cliffs of life will take their toll on the beautiful automobile. The lack of a driver will limit the usefulness of all the car's features, and before long — if the car is permitted to roll — will bring about the complete destruction of those features.

So, yes, when a fallen man is born, most of his faculties are intact. However, his spiritual deadness results in a lack of spiritual perception, orientation and direction that immediately and continuously has a detrimental affect upon all his abilities. Sadly, there is no human faculty nor group of natural capabilities that can compensate for spiritual deadness and overcome its catastrophic impact upon fallen man.

12. IF OUR SPIRITS WERE DEAD, WOULDN'T OUR BODIES BE DEAD TOO?

James 2.26 reminds us that "the body **without** *the* spirit is dead," but this alludes to the departure of the immaterial soul from the physical body, at which moment the body does indeed expire (cf. Ecc 12.07; Luk 12.20). However, the spiritual deadness I describe in this study is the spiritual incapacity of the inner man while still in the body. We must recall that the spirit, or soul, cannot die in the absolute sense of completely ceasing to function or exist. Instead, the deadness of the human spirit in fallen man is the soul's profound impairment resulting from its separation from God's life-giving Spirit. The spirit (or soul) of fallen man still "lives" so far as its basic

functions are concerned, but it is dead so far as its ability to faithfully respond to its Creator and reflect His character.

13. IF WE ARE BORN NATURALLY SINFUL, THEN ISN'T SIN NATURAL?

Some have felt that to be naturally sinful implies that sin is natural and therefore not blameworthy. However, we must remember that we are born naturally sinful only because our human nature has been vitiated. Human nature was not originally sinful, and therefore, sin is not natural to it, but flows from human nature's corruption.

Infants of heroin addicts are sometimes born addicted and suffering a variety of related maladies. We would not say that these maladies are "natural" for these babies. Instead, we would express sorrow that parents have brought such serious problems upon their babies, and then we would do all in our power to cure the babies' ills. Likewise, the fact that we are born "addicted" to sin (due to the evil committed by our first parents), in no way makes the addiction and its consequences natural or harmless. The "addiction" to sin with which we are born is unnatural and its manifestations are evil. Therefore, we must address sin and its consequences as the *unnatural* evils that they are.

14. DOESN'T THIS DOCTRINE OF HUMAN FALLENNESS CONTRADICT THE IDEA THAT MAN HAS FREE WILL?

Generally, our sense of awareness tells us that the choices we make arise from within ourselves. We feel that our choices are our own and that no other entity is directing or coercing our minds. Therefore, [phenomenologically](#) speaking, that is, so far as we can observe with our senses, human fallenness does not seem to have destroyed our ability to make choices according to our own whims.⁶⁰⁷

However, if we accept the biblical worldview, we realize that external spiritual entities *do influence* our minds and wills, usually without our cognizance. Fallen man, in his hubris, assumes that because he *does not feel*

⁶⁰⁷ The question of free will is too involved to fully explore in this book. I hope to give this topic a thorough treatment in an upcoming book entitled *Voluntas Rex*.

any external influences working upon his thoughts, there really are none, but Scripture emphatically tells us otherwise. In spite of fallen man's confidence in the autonomy of his own volition, Paul tells us explicitly that "the god of this age [i.e., Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel" (2Co 4.3-4 ^{NIVO}). As already noted, Satan has had the right to do this ever since Adam despised God's authority,⁶⁰⁸ and thereby shifted the allegiance of the human race over to the Serpent.

How, then, can we claim that fallen man has free will when a supremely evil spirit blinds his mind and holds him in spiritual subjugation, blocking his awareness of the one choice that can save his eternal soul? We'd like to think that we humans can somehow drive Satan from our minds, and throw off his shackling of our thoughts, *but we don't even know he's there!* As Roger "Verbal" Kint said at the end of the film *The Usual Suspects*, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist." If people knew that Satan was blinding their minds, they might try to do something about it, but *he has blinded their minds*, and they can't see the light of the gospel, not just because they're blinded, but because *they don't know* they're blinded. The only way out of this bondage of thought and volition is by divine intervention (cf. Joh 9.39-41). Once having escaped, we will realize that it was God the Father who sovereignly "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1.12-13).⁶⁰⁹

Furthermore, as [Michael Horton](#) explains, even if the human will were free from external compulsion, it cannot be free from the person exercising it,⁶¹⁰ and that is the real issue here as we consider the effects of man's fallenness. A fallen man's will is not "independent of the mind, preferences, character and heart"⁶¹¹ of his own self, and that's the rub. Because of man's spiritual deadness, his mind and heart are ruled by the flesh, and the apostle Paul tells us that "the mind of the flesh [is] death" (Rom 8.6^{RG}). Lest we should

⁶⁰⁸ So Augustine in *De Civ* 14.15.

⁶⁰⁹ Notice that this rescue is not just a matter of removing our blinders, but of transferring our citizenship to a different kingdom in which we are no longer subject to "the god of this age." Fallen persons do not even think they need such a transfer of citizenship, much less can they accomplish it for themselves.

⁶¹⁰ Michael Horton, *For Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), pp. 43-44.

⁶¹¹ Op. cit., p. 44.

miss the point, Paul continues, saying, “the mind of the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not submit to the law of God, for neither is it able to” (Rom 8.7^{RG}). Paul only confirmed the words of Jesus who said, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (Joh 8.34^{NIVO}). The will of fallen man can only make choices within set volitional boundaries dictated by the slave master that is man’s own sinful flesh.⁶¹²

Therefore, though we may *feel* like we freely chose to seek God, or that we decided on our own to receive Christ, both [Calvinist](#) and [Arminian](#) believers understand that we are only able to choose Christ because of God’s grace working in us.⁶¹³ As Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (Joh 6.44). This drawing involves hearing and learning directly from the Father (Joh 6.45). The Father must draw a man, and the Spirit must give that man life, because “the flesh profits nothing” when it comes to enabling fallen man to believe for salvation (Joh 6.63,65). This is so because the essential truths about Jesus Christ and the gospel cannot be grasped by the natural, unaided mind of fallen man. As Paul wrote, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2.14^{NIVO}). Therefore, if we chose Christ, we did so by the working of the Father who extended His grace to us by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and this is true regardless of whether we perceived ourselves being drawn by divine agency or not. The apostle John confirmed that it is the grace of God that brings us to salvation, for in the prologue of his gospel he described those who receive Christ as “born, not ... of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Joh 1.13). Paul

⁶¹² Thus Luther wrote that, “free-will’ without God’s grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bonds-lave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good.” *De Servo*, §26. Here I quote the edition of Luther’s *Bondage Of The Will* cited in R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, electronic ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 94.

⁶¹³ Arminian theologian Roger Olson assures us that “Arminius rested every good in human life, including ability to respond to the gospel with faith, on prevenient grace....” Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths And Realities*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 142.

confirmed the same truth when he wrote that God's favor "does not *depend* on the man who wills ... but on God who has mercy" (Rom 9.16).⁶¹⁴

So, yes, the Bible teaches that in our natural state our spiritual deadness negatively affects all our faculties, including our volition. As R. C. Sproul puts it, fallen man "is spiritually dead, and his choices are spiritually bankrupt."⁶¹⁵ The Bible clearly teaches us that as a fallen race we retain the faculty of volition, and the responsibility to make choices, but our volition is not free from our bondage to our own sinful condition — *nor from the mostly unperceived influences of external spiritual entities*. Consequently, the Bible never mentions "free will" as an attribute of fallen man,⁶¹⁶ and teaches us instead that we are utterly dependent upon the agency of God's Spirit to embrace spiritual truth, and even to perceive it (Joh 3.3; cf. Psa 36.9).

15. WEREN'T PEOPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TIME SAVED WITHOUT THE AGENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Sadly, this question arises often. In this time of escalating biblical illiteracy, many church attenders in North America believe that people who lived before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost were saved or justified by a different means than post-Pentecost saints. Against this mistaken idea, the Bible teaches that:

- A. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Act 2) *was not* the first coming of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has constantly acted in our world since He brooded over the waters at the founding of the earth (Gen 1.2). Throughout the history of Israel, the Holy Spirit anointed prophets,

⁶¹⁴ Augustine interpreted this saying of Paul as meaning that "the whole work [of salvation] belongs to God, who both ... prepares [the human will] for assistance, and assists it when it is prepared." See *Enchi* 32. This idea that God's grace alone enables the will of fallen man to believe and be saved is the basis for the Reformation motto, *sola gratia*, grace alone.

⁶¹⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, electronic ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), p. 64.

⁶¹⁶ The phrase "free will" only appears in our English Bibles in Phm 1.14, where it translates the phrase "not by necessity" (μη ὡς κατὰ ἀνάγκην), and says nothing ontologically about human volition. Our English Bibles also use the adjective *freewill* to describe voluntary offerings given by the people of Israel (see Ex 35.29, etc.). The Hebrew words translated *freewill* derive from the verb נָדָב (nāḏāv) which means "to prompt." Again, *freewill* in these instances says nothing about the fundamental nature or condition of human volition.

priests and kings (1Sa 16.13), empowered God's warriors (Jdg 6.34), and gave spiritual gifts to individuals (Ex 31.1-3; Num 11.25-26).⁶¹⁷

- B. From the beginning, God has given only one means by which man can be justified, and that is *by grace through faith in the atoning work of Messiah*. If people after Pentecost had been justified by a different means than those of preceding generations, Paul would not have appealed to the example of Abraham (Rom 4) as his proof that we are justified by faith.
- C. Ever since the sin of Adam and Eve, i.e., from the moment of the fall of man, the only way for sinful man to regain spiritual life has been through new birth by the Holy Spirit. OT Prophets like Ezekiel understood and taught this (Eze 18.31). Isaiah understood not only man's need for new birth by the Holy Spirit, but also understood Israel's failed commission to facilitate new birth for the other peoples of the world (Isa 26.18). The OT prophets taught man's need for new birth under multiple motifs like *circumcision of the heart* (Jer 4.4), the need to *live*, i.e., *come to life* by divine agency (Eze 16.6), and *resurrection of the whole man* (Eze 37). No wonder Jesus reproved Nicodemus for calling himself a "teacher of Israel" while failing to understand what it means to be "born again" (Joh 3.3-10).
- D. Since new birth by the Holy Spirit has always been fallen man's only means of regaining spiritual life, intimate relationship with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit was as available to believers before Pentecost as it is to believers since (to which fact the Psalms give ample testimony).⁶¹⁸

In summary, no human being has ever been saved, justified, born again or received any other spiritual benefit, including intimate fellowship with God, apart from the agency of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit has been an

⁶¹⁷ For an explanation of what changed in the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers after Pentecost, I refer the reader to my forthcoming book, *The Pentecost Twist*.

⁶¹⁸ The promise of Jesus to His disciples regarding the Holy Spirit, "He abides with you and will be in you" (Joh 14.17) was *not* about rebirth and the spiritual intimacy with God that new birth makes possible, but was instead about the abiding gift of the Spirit's charismatic empowering. On this point, I refer the reader to my forthcoming book, *The Pentecost Twist*.

active participant in God's redemptive work among mankind from the beginning.

16. HOW CAN A PERSON BE BORN AGAIN?

If new birth by the Spirit has always been the only way for fallen man to obtain spiritual life, then how can a man get himself spiritually reborn? The answer is, *He cannot*. Fallen man can no more give spiritual birth to himself than a human being can conceive himself in his mother's womb. Just as no man has chosen to be born, fallen man cannot and does not "choose to be born again."⁶¹⁹ The Bible makes this very clear. Those who become children of God by faith in Jesus' name, are "born not ... of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Joh 1.12-13). The new birth involves replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh, and is in fact a "new creation" (Gal 6.15; cf. 2Co 5.17). When Paul speaks of this creation in Eph 2.10 and Eph 4.24, he uses the same [Grk](#) term κτίζω ('ktē-zō) as he does for the creation of all things *ex nihilo* (cf. Eph 3.9). In other words, when God makes man a "new creation" by new birth, He does this without any pre-existing raw materials or intangible ingredients supplied from a source external to Himself; He accomplishes man's [regeneration](#) all by Himself and from Himself.

Our venerable American evangelist, [Billy Graham](#), has inadvertently contributed to the confusion on this matter, perhaps not so much by his beliefs as by the imprecise articulation of them. On the positive side, and unlike lesser evangelists today, brother [Graham](#) retained the vital message of repentance in his preaching, and taught that a person must repent of their sins as well as "believe in the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior."⁶²⁰ Furthermore, Graham acknowledges that "A person cannot turn to God to repent, or even to believe, without God's help," and taught that "God must do the turning," citing Jer 31.18.⁶²¹ Again Graham writes, "The Scripture teaches that we are dead in trespasses and in sins. A dead man can do nothing; therefore we need God's

⁶¹⁹ Contra Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, Ch. 61.

⁶²⁰ Billy Graham, *How To Be Born Again*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group (Thomas Nelson), 1989), p. 156.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

help even in our repenting.”⁶²² Brother [Graham](#) understands fallen man’s dependency upon grace to prompt repentance and faith.

[Graham](#) confuses the issue, however, when he says, “In order to not be condemned you must make a choice — you must choose to believe,”⁶²³ and then, “Faith in Christ is ... voluntary. The Holy Spirit will do everything possible to disturb you, draw you, love you — but finally *it is your personal decision*.”⁶²⁴ Thus, after acknowledging that God’s grace must grant us repentance and faith, [Billy Graham](#) puts the emphasis back on the “dead” man’s responsibility to “choose to believe.” He does clarify that faith is not *just* a decision, but writes that it involves emotional and intellectual responses as well: “faith is all-inclusive [involving] the intellect, the emotion and the will.”⁶²⁵ Still, [Mr. Graham](#) must have sensed that his readers might wonder who it is exactly that finally brings about our salvation. He writes, therefore, that in the course of our turning to Christ,

...the point we are heading for is a point where God Himself is going to do something; He is the one who converts us when we repent and believe in Christ. “Salvation is of the Lord.” [However, God’s] help starts coming long before that point.⁶²⁶

According to [Graham](#), then, God by His Spirit and grace begins wooing the unbeliever, then finally helps them repent and believe, and finally converts them upon that repentance and belief.⁶²⁷ Why then the aforementioned emphasis upon the as-yet-unsaved person making a decision to believe? Isn’t belief something that a person either has or has not? Can a person really “choose to believe” in the truth of the gospel when he or she is still in a fallen state and in bondage to the flesh?

⁶²² Op. cit., p. 158.

⁶²³ Op. cit., p. 161.

⁶²⁴ Op. cit., p. 162, emphasis added.

⁶²⁵ Op. cit., p. 162.

⁶²⁶ Op. cit., p. 163.

⁶²⁷ The reader is all the more confused by Billy’s quoting of Oswald Chambers to the effect that conversion “is not salvation [but] the effort of a roused human being” whose “eyes are opened” but have not yet received new birth. Billy Graham, *How To Be Born Again*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group (Thomas Nelson), 1989), p. 150.

Let us consider how [Billy Graham](#) speaks about the new birth itself. Sadly, even [Graham's](#) book title on the subject is misleading: *How To Be Born Again*. The purchaser or recipient of this book immediately recognizes it as a "Self Help" book, which psychologically predisposes the reader to believe that he or she can take steps in order to be born again. Then inside, Graham writes, "the new birth is something that God does for man when man is willing to yield to God."⁶²⁸ Wait! As we have seen, spiritual deadness renders fallen man both unwilling and unable to yield to God. How, then, does fallen man become "willing to yield to God"? Graham does not explain. He does say,

We have seen that the Bible teaches that man is dead in trespasses and sins, and his great need is life. We do not have within ourselves the seed of the new life; this must come from God Himself.⁶²⁹

This leaves the reader with the impression that while new birth is new life that must come from God, man must first become willing to yield to God in order to receive this gift. But how can a person who is dead become willing to receive new life? Graham writes, "Any person who is willing to trust Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord can receive the new birth now."⁶³⁰ Again, how can a person who is spiritually dead become willing to trust Jesus Christ *before* receiving the new birth?

At the very end of his book on *How To Be Born Again*, [Graham](#) writes,

If you are willing to make this decision and have received Jesus Christ as your own Lord and Savior, then you have become a child of God in whom Jesus Christ dwells....You are born again. You are alive!⁶³¹

The overall impression that brother [Graham](#) communicates is that individuals receive the gift of new birth *in response* to their personal decision to repent and believe (albeit, God has helped the sinner come to repentance and faith). This puts the cart before the horse and gives new Christians a [Semi-Pelagian](#) foundation to their [soteriology](#).

⁶²⁸ Op. cit., p. 150.

⁶²⁹ Op. cit., p. 150.

⁶³⁰ Op. cit., p. 152.

⁶³¹ Op. cit., p. 169.

It also transposes our responsibility (to respond to the gospel) with God's work (of [regeneration](#)). Biblically, [regeneration](#) comes first and then we are able to respond to the gospel. Therefore, there are no self-help steps by which a person can get himself or herself born again; new birth is completely a work of God. These facts should forever lay to rest the idea that baptism [regenerates](#), because no one requests Christian baptism — having coming to true faith and repentance — unless the Holy Spirit has already [regenerated](#) them.⁶³²

17. WHY PREACH THE GOSPEL IF THE NEW BIRTH IS A SOVEREIGN WORK OF GOD?

As Wayne Grudem puts it,

*[Regeneration](#) is a secret act of God in which [H]e imparts new spiritual life to us. ... in the work of [regeneration](#) we play no active role at all. It is instead totally a work of God.*⁶³³

However, Jam 1.18 [NIVO](#) tells us that God “chose to give us birth through the word of truth...,” and 1Pe 1.23-25 tells believers that they “have been born again ... through the living and enduring word of God. ... And this is the word which was preached to you.” We see that God speaks life into fallen man, making him a “new creation,” by means of His word conveyed in the preaching of the gospel. As we know from Paul, “faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10.17). As [Grudem](#) writes, “the gospel comes to us, [and] God speaks through it ... to give us new spiritual life ([regeneration](#)) so that we are enabled to respond in faith.”⁶³⁴ In other words, God's gift of faith wells up in us immediately upon our being born again,⁶³⁵ and God has chosen

⁶³² Of course there are unregenerate people who request baptism without having a true faith, and then there is the Lutheran belief that infants can experience regeneration and faith passively and unconsciously in their baptisms, but neither of these scenarios conform to the NT teaching and practice.

⁶³³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), p. 699, italics original.

⁶³⁴ Op. cit., p. 700.

⁶³⁵ New birth and believing are so nearly synchronous, that *the fruit of new birth* is generally experienced after we have become conscious of faith, and so it *seems as though* faith preceded new birth.

to initiate this process by the proclamation of the gospel. Man's responsibility is to respond to this [regenerating](#) and faith-producing act of God by repentance and obedience (Act 17.30; 1Pe 4.17).

Understanding God's sovereign work in [regenerating](#) fallen man causes us to realize two very important things:

- A. Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel (cf. 1Co 9.16)! We must proclaim God's word to fallen man, or fallen man will not be saved.
- B. The Holy Spirit brings about the cleansing of new birth by the agency of *God's word*, not through baptism (see the [section about Eph 5.26](#) above).

HUMAN FALLENNESS AND BAPTISM

The examination of "Key Passages For Our Understanding Of Baptism" (in [Part I](#) of this book) showed us that no religious ritual, nor any other human deed accomplishes a man's salvation, but that instead God Himself in Christ saves, and only the Holy Spirit [regenerates](#). Now, a review of the Bible's teaching about human fallenness has reemphasized that [unregenerate](#) man can do nothing of himself to advance his moral or judicial standing before God. Fallenness is a congenital deadness of spirit that distorts every aspect of human personality and puts fallen man, by his vitiated nature, at enmity with God (Rom 8.8; Eph 2.3). *Clearly, then, man cannot solve his spiritual problem by an external rite.*

If salvation were only a matter of the forgiveness (= remission) of sins, then we could imagine it occurring ritually or ceremonially. In such a case, salvation would amount to nothing more than one party becoming willing to forgive another, and a ceremony or ritual to mark the moment when forgiveness is granted would be fitting. We can imagine a human scenario in which a king might decree a ceremony in which to publicly vouchsafe forgiveness to a nobleman who had transgressed politically. Assuming the nobleman had credibly repented, a ceremony or ritual of pardon would suffice to effectively reconcile the parties. We can imagine a ceremony in which the malefactor is required to approach the king, barefoot and hatless, taking the final ten steps on his knees. In such a scenario, the ceremony *itself*, by virtue of

its humbling nature, might effect the full repentance of the wrongdoer *and* the softening of the king's heart, inclining the sovereign to extend forgiveness.

Thus, with baptism, if salvation were only a matter of receiving forgiveness of sins from a God less than infinitely holy, then we can imagine the (somewhat) humbling and (in some circumstances) costly act of ritual immersion *itself* effecting the final repentance of the sinner, and inclining such a God to mercifully forgive. However, when salvation requires atonement before an infinitely holy God by a perfectly holy substitute, and requires of the sinner the effectual death of the old man in an actual rebirth that produces a new creation, any external ritual can *at best* only commemorate the antecedent event of such a salvation. In this real scenario, the purpose of the ritual can only be to throw attention back upon the true agent(s) of salvation, as the ritual itself falls into the background.

Let's consider the problem from another angle: Were man's problem simply a wrong way of thinking, or a bad habit he had picked up from his peers, then perhaps a ritual could be designed to bring about a psychological adjustment or a modification of behavior. But man's problem is not so shallow; it is a deadness of the soul and no material substance like water nor external ritual like baptism can resurrect a person who is dead in their sins. Granted, God uses means in accomplishing aspects of His redemptive work. We have just reminded ourselves that God [regenerates](#) and produces faith in conjunction with the hearing of the gospel. Let us see clearly, though, that even when God works through a declaration like, "repent and believe in the gospel" it is still God working. It is neither the sound of words vibrating the eardrums nor the arrangement of words on a printed page that change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh and cause faith to well up in it — it is the power of God behind those words applying them effectually to the inner being of the hearer or reader, and the Spirit of God within the person regenerating the soul and making it receptive to the message.

Therefore, *even if* Scripture said (which it does not!) something like, "[regeneration](#) comes by baptism," we would understand that it was the power of God working synchronously with baptism that was the effectual cause of [regeneration](#), not baptism itself. Consider again Paul's words, "faith comes

from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10.17^{RG}). This does not mean that everyone who hears believes — if only it were so! Not everyone who hears believes because there is no *mystical* power innately within the words nor in the hearing of them. The hearing of Christ’s words only provides the setting within which God chooses to work. It is instructive, therefore, that Scripture never gives baptism significance even equal to Christ’s words. Nowhere does the Bible declare that faith, *regeneration*, justification or salvation “comes from baptism” (except in a typological manner, 1Pe 3.21).

Not only is baptism never named in Scripture as a source of faith (or of any other aspect of salvation), but neither is it (or any other rite) ever taught as a necessary accompaniment of salvation. Certainly God *could* decree that a specific ritual or the physical application of some material substance must accompany spiritual *regeneration*, but He knows very well that even the symbolic or didactic use of rituals and material objects in the bringing about of some benefit puts an almost irresistible temptation before people to attribute the power to the ritual, and give worship to the object (as in the problem with the brazen serpent, Num 21.4-9 and 2Ki 18.4). Therefore, in accordance with His divine wisdom, God has never in Scripture made *regeneration* dependent, directly or indirectly, upon baptism or any other external rite. This is true in spite of the *Fathers’* early and persistent misinterpretation of Joh 3.5 and the mistaken application of other *NT* passages ever since.

So, I reiterate that man’s problem is not a surface malady, but a death that goes to the core of his being. Does this sound like bad news? It would certainly be bad news if we heard the report of a new plague spreading over the earth, a plague that caused people to die a slow and excruciating death. However, were the report of such a plague to include the assurance that a successful cure (providing instant relief for those afflicted) was readily available, we would no longer regard the report as bad news but as a cause for rejoicing.

By analogy, this is fallen man’s situation. The disease is lethal, and too systemic and acute to respond to surface therapies. The sin problem is too profound for the solution to come from an external therapy like baptism, but a

cure has been found! If we cry out with Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” we receive the same answer he found, “Jesus Christ our Lord!” The problem is spiritual death, but Jesus is the Life (Joh 14.6; 1Jo 5.11-12), the Prince of life (Act 3.15), the One whose voice the dead hear and live (Joh 5.25), the One who tasted death for everyone (Heb 2.9), Himself the “firstborn of the dead” (Rev 1.5), Who holds “the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1.18), “the resurrection and the life,” in whom those who believe “**will never die**” (Joh 11.25-26). Our bad news about the world’s most horrendous plague has been turned into good news by God’s gracious provision of the cure, a cure most costly, but made available freely to all who will receive by faith, requiring neither works nor ritual for its acquisition, as the crucified thief on Golgotha found to his eternal joy (Luk 23.39-43).

Jesus Christ is God's everything for man's total need.

Richard Halverson

I have a great need for Christ;
I have a great Christ for my need.

Charles H. Spurgeon

PART IV: THE INVENTION OF ORIGINAL SIN

For though Adam first sinned and brought untimely death upon all,
Yet of those who were born from him each one of them has prepared
for his own soul torment to come....

Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul,
But each of us has been the Adam of his own soul.

2Ba 54.15,19

Babies are proven to be guilty, because they are wretched.

Augustine, *Op Imp* 6.27

He that is begotten is no sinner as yet in act,
and is still new from his birth; but in guilt he is old.

Augustine, *De Nup* 1.21 [XIX]

We are all ... tainted from birth with a tendency towards what we know as evil. But the dogma of original sin so extended as to embrace inherited guilt is a pure fabrication of occidental theology.

Paul Elmer More, *The Catholic Faith*.

SYNOPSIS OF PART IV

The phrase *original sin* expresses the idea that aside from people's actual sins, they are born with a kind of sin that derives from their origin. The idea that people are born with *original sin* has profoundly affected the Church's understanding of baptism through the centuries. However, the idea of *original sin* derives *not from Scripture*, but stems from the presuppositions of early Christianity's *Hellenistic* milieu.

Origen (c. AD 185-254) gave the Church its earliest idea of *original sin*, and he proposed it in defense of trending infant baptism. *Origen's* idea did not persist in the early Church, however, because it involved the unbiblical idea that people are born with guilt from sins they committed in a heavenly preexistence. Instead, the early Church took up the idea of *Origen's* contemporary, *Cyprian of Carthage* (c. AD 200-258), who taught that infants need remission for "the sins of another." Subsequent theologians taught more explicitly that all men are born guilty, not for their own sins but for Adam's, by virtue of having participated in Adam's sin while still seminally in his loins. This idea reached its culmination in the teaching of *Ambrose of Milan* (c. AD 337-397), and was finally codified by *Augustine* who fathered an organized doctrine of *original sin* in response to the *Pelagian* claim that men are born innocent. *Augustine* countered the *Pelagians* by teaching that all men are born in need of remission because of the *original sin* transmitted through the concupiscence (sexual lust) that parents experience in the act of conceiving their children. One of *Augustine's* arguments in support of his doctrine of *original sin* was the Church's tradition of baptizing infants, and so *Augustine* together with *Origen* produced a circular argument spanning centuries: We baptize infants because of *original sin*, and we know that *original sin* exists because we baptize infants.

In spite of its many faults, *Augustine's* doctrine of *original sin* remained largely intact in the teaching of the Church for nearly 700 years. In the twelfth century, however, *Anselm of Canterbury* (c. AD 1033-1109) rejected the idea of *concupiscence*-based *original sin* and convinced the Catholic church to adopt the idea that *original sin* has to do with the loss of an *original righteousness* which God had *superadded* to Adam's nature. Thus, to this day the Roman Catholic church teaches that God holds all people accountable for the *superadded gift* of *original righteousness* which they *should possess*, but lost in Adam. The corollary of this doctrine is that

since in the **Fall** man only lost a **superadded gift**, his essential nature remains intact and he still retains the capacity to do good if he will only discipline himself to do so.

Martin Luther (AD 1483-1546) countered the Roman Catholic doctrine by emphasizing the utter corruption of human nature, even to the point of the bondage of the will. **John Calvin** (AD 1509-1564) followed suit, defining original sin as “a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all parts of the soul” Interestingly, **Calvin** denied that **original sin** was “liability for another’s fault.” However, he was among the first to articulate the idea of the **imputed righteousness of Christ**. Building on **Calvin’s** language of **imputation** and his emphasis upon the idea of covenant, subsequent theologians developed a **federal theology** positing Adam as humanity’s federal head, and (in contrast to Calvin) the **imputation** of Adam’s sin to all his posterity. Now, the reformed theology codified in the Westminster Confession (AD 1646) and articulated still in Presbyterian, Reformed, and even to a degree in **Evangelical** and **Charismatic** churches, teaches that **original sin** consists of the double problems of Adam’s **imputed** sin and the complete corruption of human nature, such that the **imputation** of **Christ’s righteousness** together with **regeneration** is the necessary double cure.

Upon making a thorough assessment of the evolution of the doctrine of **original sin** and its now varied expressions, several things become evident:

1. The development of the doctrine of **original sin** has required the advancement of innovative, unbiblical propositions such as (a) people committed moral infractions while in a heavenly preexistence, (b) people need remission for someone else’s sins, (c) parents pass down moral-spiritual corruption to their children by the lust they experience during sex, (d) God gave Adam a **superadded gift** of **original righteousness** which Adam lost, and (e) God **imputes** Adam’s sin to all Adam’s posterity.
2. The doctrine of **original sin**, whether emphasizing a mystical participation in Adam’s sin *by* his posterity or an imputation of Adam’s sin *to* his posterity, is superfluous: the Bible clearly teaches that all people apart from Christ have a vitiated nature and enough *actual* sin to necessitate **regeneration**, repentance, and belief in the gospel.

3. The teaching of [original sin](#) has persisted in spite of the doctrine's faulty premises and propositions mostly because it supports the practice of infant baptism.

Therefore, while the Bible's teaching that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3.23) remains beyond question, and while the reality of a vitiation of human nature that stems from Adam's sin remains well attested by Scripture and human experience, we should dispense with any and all ideas that God holds us accountable for Adam's or anyone else's sin. We have enough sin of our own to worry about. Thankfully, there is good news — not baptism, but the Good News of the gospel, which "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1.16).

In [Part I](#) of this book, we studied the Bible's most important passages about baptism. We saw that while baptism has a vital purpose in the life of the Christian, that purpose is symbolic and didactic, not salvific. In [Part II](#), we traced the historical enchantment of baptism. We saw that ideas about the innate, [mystical](#) efficacy of baptism did not derive from Scripture but from the [magical](#) presuppositions of pagan [Hellenism](#), and that we should therefore repudiate those ideas. In [Part III](#), we saw from the biblical teaching about human fallenness that man's spiritual problem is far too radical for any external rite to remedy, and therefore — again without diminishing baptism's importance for the believer — we affirmed that only the Holy Spirit, not baptism, can give life. We might have now concluded our inquiry into the subject of baptism, except for one remaining problem, namely, the doctrine of [original sin](#).

The phrase [original sin](#) expresses the idea that along with people's actual sins, they have a kind of sin that derives from their origin.⁶³⁶ *The idea of [original sin](#) has had such an effect upon the understanding of baptism through the centuries, that we must trace the idea's historical development, and identify the problematic implications of its doctrinal formulations.* To that task we now turn.

⁶³⁶ *De Pec* 1.11 [X].

ORIGINAL SIN ORIGINATES

The idea of [original sin](#), like the idea that baptism has [mystical](#) efficacy, *does not derive from Scripture* but stems from the presuppositions of early Christianity's [Hellenistic](#) milieu. As we shall see, the idea of [original sin](#) evolved from an antipathy toward the material world, an aversion which for some groups focused upon the phenomena of procreation and birth. The Bible, of course, teaches no such negative view of physical things, but instead speaks of the material world as inherently good, by virtue of having been created by a good God; the world may be marred but only by something extraneous to itself, namely, sin and sin's consequences.⁶³⁷ Greek philosophers and mystics,⁶³⁸ on the other hand, tended to view the material realm as a prison.

This [Hellenistic](#) disparaging of the material world emerged from evolving versions of ancient Greek myths. The most important of those myths was [Hesiod](#)'s poem about the origins of the gods, the *Theogonia* (c. 800 BC), in which the sexual union between *Uranos* (Heaven) and *Gaia* (Earth) produces the Titans (a combination of the heavenly and earthly) who bring horrible conflict into the cosmos.⁶³⁹ In later [Orphic](#) legend, the Titans roast and eat Dionysos, son of Zeus, then Zeus reduces the Titans to ashes by lightning bolt, and from those ashes springs mankind, creatures of mixed earthly and divine elements.⁶⁴⁰ By [Plato](#)'s time (c. 428-348 BC), these myths had provided a template for two associated ideas:

- A. The essence of the human predicament consists in having a heavenly soul bound to an earthly body.⁶⁴¹
- B. All evil arises "from the connection of the divine element in man with matter."⁶⁴²

Hence, the supremely influential [Plato](#) taught that the human soul is an eternal, transmigrating spark of divine substance (i.e., intelligence) that has

⁶³⁷ This includes the curse upon the ground (Gen 3.17) which God pronounced for man's good.

⁶³⁸ In contrast to the Greek sculptors who glorified the human body.

⁶³⁹ *Theo* 132-138.

⁶⁴⁰ ABD, vol. 5, p. 49.

⁶⁴¹ See Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 326, note 35.

⁶⁴² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Vol. 1, p. 325.

“fallen” and been forced into a human body.⁶⁴³ Plato felt that “[t]he soul [can] be purified through philosophy, ... and the denial of bodily pleasures,” but as for the body, he fell back on the Orphic explanation that the word for body (σῶμα, 'sō-mə) denotes a safe or prison (in which the soul “is undergoing punishment”).⁶⁴⁴

Four hundred years after Plato, the various gnostic sects (that posed such a challenge to Christianity in the second to fourth centuries AD) adapted some of his ideas about human existence to suit their own religious agendas.⁶⁴⁵ While gnostic teaching varied from sect to sect, generally the Gnostics believed in a cosmic conflict between a transcendent God and an evil demiurge. It was this demiurge (which some sects identified with the Creator of the OT) who made the material realm and imprisoned divine souls in human bodies. Most gnostic sects agreed, therefore, that the material creation was evil, while the divine and transcendent was good. For the imprisoned soul, salvation involved coming to a knowledge (*gnosis*) of one’s true, divine essence, and eventually escaping the realm of matter.⁶⁴⁶

An interesting dichotomy arose as various gnostic sects applied, in opposite ways, the principle of antipathy between the material and the

⁶⁴³ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 326, note 35. Plato’s argument for the preexistence of the soul was his doctrine of the eternal Forms (or Ideas) after which material things are modeled. How do we know these Forms exist? We remember them! Socrates demonstrated this phenomenon of latent memory by eliciting principles of geometry from an untaught slave boy (Plato, *Meno* 81a ff.). But if we remember things that we were never taught, we must have acquired the knowledge of them in a previous life (*Meno* 85d ff.).

The idea of the transmigration of the soul, along with an underlying dualism between positive and negative cosmic principles, Plato seems to have inherited from Empedocles and other earlier philosophers. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Edited by R. D. Hicks, (Kansas City, MO: Harvard University Press, 2005), lines 76-77. See also, “Greece and The Hellenistic World,” <http://cyberspacei.com/jesusi/inlight/religion/belief/dualism.htm>, viewed on July 24, 2014.

⁶⁴⁴ Plato, *Crat* 400c. See also, Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 326, note 35.

⁶⁴⁵ Shedd comments that medieval Scholasticism resulted from a selective application of Aristotle, as Gnosticism had resulted from a selective application of Plato. William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 1, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), pp. 84-85.

⁶⁴⁶ The idea of getting in touch with one’s own divinity was, of course, revived in the New Age Movement (and has now even crept into the “Evangelical” church). Rather than adopt the gnostic antipathy toward creation, however, the New Age Movement adopted a druidic-like veneration — and even worship — of nature.

spiritual. Some groups shunned the material and physical, and so developed ascetic practices of fasting and chastity.⁶⁴⁷ Other groups taught that the divide between the material and the spiritual is so complete, that nothing done in the body has any effect whatsoever on the soul. These latter groups indulged in every sensual pleasure.⁶⁴⁸

The [Church Fathers](#) vigorously combatted the [gnostic](#) sects of their time. Ironically, though, the [Fathers](#), with their [Hellenistic](#) backgrounds, were often blind to the underlying perspectives — or at least to the peril of those perspectives — which they shared with their [gnostic](#) enemies. *This unawareness of their own pagan presuppositions (including their belief in the magical efficacy of baptism) became the doorway for the seed thoughts of “original sin” to enter the Church’s theology.*

[Origen](#), for example, wrote against the [gnostic](#) ideas of [Basilides](#), [Valentinus](#), and also against those of the “semi-Gnostic” [Marcion](#).⁶⁴⁹ However, when called upon to provide a rationale for the emerging practice of infant baptism, [Origen](#) appealed to the guilt that attaches to infants from a pre-mundane fall from the heavenly realm.⁶⁵⁰

I quoted [Origen](#) above (in the section, [The Necessary Rationale Of Infant Sinfulness](#)) as having written:

To these things can be added the reason why it is required, since the baptism of the Church is given for the forgiveness of sins, that, according to the observance of the Church, that baptism also be given to infants; since certainly, if there were nothing in infants that ought to pertain to forgiveness and indulgence, then the grace of baptism would appear superfluous.⁶⁵¹

And also as having written:

⁶⁴⁷ Among the ascetics were the Encratites and the semi-Gnostic Marcion.

⁶⁴⁸ Among these groups were the followers of Basilides and Carpocrates (Irenaeus *Adv Haer* 1.28).

⁶⁴⁹ Donald K. McKim, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 53.

⁶⁵⁰ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volumes 1-3*, (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), Vol. 2, p. 75.

⁶⁵¹ *Origen, Homilies On Leviticus 1-16*, ET by Gary Wayne Barkley (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), Homily 8, p. 158.

...the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to little children. For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed were aware that in everyone was *sin's innate defilement* [*genuinae sordes peccati*], which needed to be washed away through water and spirit.⁶⁵²

Notice the phrase, *sin's innate defilement*, in the second passage. Quasten translated this phrase of Origen's with the words *original sin*, though Scheck's translation, *sin's innate defilement*, is truer to the original Latin.⁶⁵³ What we need to know, however, is that by *sin's innate defilement*, Origen meant guilt and pollution from an infraction committed during a *premundane* existence. Origen believed that people have an angelic preexistence, and that if they sin in this previous state, they "fall" to earth as human beings, the soul being "fashioned into the [physical] body of sin, [i.e.,] the body of death and lowliness,"⁶⁵⁴ and so are born with that lingering "innate defilement."⁶⁵⁵ Origen defended the baptism of newborn children on the basis of this posited fall to the material realm: babies needed to wash away *the sin of their previous life!*⁶⁵⁶

Yes, Origen also believed that humanity had inherited a problem from Adam. In the same commentary on Romans already referenced, Origen said,

⁶⁵² Origen, *Commentary On Romans* 1-5, ET by Thomas P. Scheck, (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), p. 333, emphasis mine. Notice the mystery language of Origen's statement, and that this is the first evidence of the belief that the apostles taught the baptism of infants.

⁶⁵³ *Com Rom* 5.9, quoted in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. II, (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1992), p. 83. The original Latin, *genuinae sordes peccati*, is taken from J. P. Migne, *Origenes Opera Omnia*, (1862), §565.14, p. 1047.

⁶⁵⁴ *Com Rom* 5.9.11. Methodius of Olympus wrote against these ideas of Origen's in *Resur*, especially 3.1-4.

⁶⁵⁵ See *De Prin* 1.6.2-3 and 3.5.4, along with fragment 2 from *De Prin*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume IV: Fathers of the Third Century*, p. 267. See also Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), pp. 325-326. Though Origen believed in the soul's preexistence, he rejected Basilides' doctrine of μετενσωμάτωσις (mē-tēn-sō-'mā-tō-sēs, reincarnation): *Com Rom* 1-5, 5.1.27, ET by Thomas P. Scheck, (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), pp. 318-319.

⁶⁵⁶ Augustine would reject the idea of sins from a preexistence, attributing the belief to "certain Platonists," likely alluding to Plotinus (*De Grat* 2.36 [XXXI]), but he eventually denounced this belief explicitly as held by Origen (*De Civ* 11.23). Augustine argued from Rom 9.11 where "the Apostle Paul says most plainly, that before they were born they did neither good nor evil."

And all men who were with [Adam], or rather in him, were expelled from paradise when he was himself driven out from there; and through him the death which had come to him from the transgression consequently passed through to them as well, who were dwelling in his loins; and therefore the Apostle rightly says, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”⁶⁵⁷

We must note, however, that for [Origen](#) it is *death* that derives from Adam, rather than the *inherent defilement* he speaks of elsewhere. As [Beatrice](#) says,

[Origen](#) can elucidate the mystery of the fall of humanity in two different ways. He may resort to the traditional explanation of the “seminal identity” of Adam and humanity, that is, of the presence of humanity in the loins of Adam when he committed his transgression. Or he may employ the hypothesis ... of a precosmic sin of souls.⁶⁵⁸

[Beatrice](#) is correct, but we must maintain the distinction: [Origen](#) pointed to our connection with Adam for the explanation of universal death, but referred to sin in a previous existence as the reason for the *innate defilement* with which we are born. As [Beatrice](#) makes abundantly clear, [Origen](#) would not accept the idea that infants bore responsibility for Adam’s sin,⁶⁵⁹ but to maintain the necessity of infant baptism for remission of sin, [Origen](#) proposed that infants were defiled by their own sins committed in a previous life — the [Platonic-Gnostic](#) influence behind such an idea is obvious.⁶⁶⁰

Though most of the [Church Fathers](#) were influenced by the pagan and [Platonic](#) presuppositions of their [Hellenistic](#) milieu, not all of them were so desperate as [Origen](#) to find a rationale for infant baptism. A generation before

⁶⁵⁷ *Origen: Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans Books 1-5*, ET by Thomas P. Scheck, (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), p. 311.

⁶⁵⁸ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 182.

⁶⁵⁹ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 183.

⁶⁶⁰ In his *Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans*, Origen said in connection with Rom 5.12, “... the Savior, although he did not himself sin, nevertheless by the assumption of human flesh is said to have become sin!” The idea that the Son of God “became sin” simply by his incarnation, shows the influence of the anti-corporeal sentiment of the Gnostics, and perhaps of the Encratites, upon Origen’s thought. See Gerald Lewis Bray, *Romans, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, NT 6, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 136.

Origen, Tertullian of Carthage (c. AD 200), in spite of his mystical view of baptismal water, resisted the baptism of children, urging parents and “sponsors” to wait until the candidates for baptism had “become able to know Christ” and themselves “ask for salvation.”⁶⁶¹ Parents of Tertullian’s day asked that their children be baptized, and I find it interesting that when the clergy hesitated to comply, the insistent parents put forward *the same arguments* that paedobaptists still employ. People reminded Tertullian that Jesus had said of little children, “Forbid them not to come to me,” and so Tertullian was compelled to respond, “Let them ‘come,’ then, while they are growing up; let them ‘come’ while they are learning, while they are learning wither to come....”

In view of Tertullian’s resistance to infant baptism, it should not surprise us that though he had a strong sense of natural man’s fallen state, he never quite articulated a theory of original sin.⁶⁶² Though the Roberts and Donaldson 1885 edition of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* credits him with speaking of “original sin,” in their heading of ch. 41 of his “Treatise On The Soul,”⁶⁶³ in this chapter Tertullian only wrote about the “corruption of our nature” by the devil, a corruption which obscures the divine deposit of good in man but does not extinguish it. Apparently then, while Tertullian and others in the subapostolic church rightly understood that human beings are corrupt from birth and that the corruption roots back to the time of human origin, they did not speak of any such *thing* as “original sin” — until Origen.

Origen’s writings record the earliest use of the *idea* of “original sin,” even if not the exact phrase. Very soon after Origen, Victorinus, in his commentary on the Revelation (c. AD 300), may refer to “original sin” with the

⁶⁶¹ Bap 18.

⁶⁶² Tertullian believed that the defilement of children at birth, at least with regard to the children of pagan parents, arose from evil spirits that cleave to newborns due to their parents’ superstitious calling upon the pagan gods for help in childbearing. *Anima* 39. Betz translates a magical prescription “For [help in] childbearing” from the early Christian era; it involves placing “a potsherd on the right thigh” inscribed with the words “Come out of the tomb, Christ is calling you.” While this prescription did not involve calling upon a pagan god (as in those spells to which Tertullian alluded), it does illustrate the two-way influence between Christianity and paganism, by which the former absorbed magical ideas and practices. See Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri In Translation Including The Demotic Spells*, (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 319.

⁶⁶³ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), p. 220.

words *peccatum pristinum* (not with the phrase later coined by Augustine, *peccatum originale*). Victorinus speaks of a *peccatum pristinum* “which is taken away in baptism....”⁶⁶⁴ He did not explain what he meant by “*peccatum pristinum*” in the passage where he used the phrase. Since the Latin adjective *pristinus* can mean simply *former*, Victorinus may have only meant that all of a person’s *antecedent* sins are washed away in baptism.⁶⁶⁵ However, since Victorinus was especially influenced by Origen,⁶⁶⁶ he may have referred to a primordial defilement in this passing reference. Be that as it may, let us take note: the longstanding Platonic *idea* of guilt or defilement stemming from our origin seems to have first made its way into the Christian community’s consciousness by way of the writings of Origen, and Origen brought the idea forward to defend the baptism of infants.⁶⁶⁷

THE IDEA TAKES SHAPE

Cyprian, a contemporary of Origen and a disciple of Tertullian, stated what would soon become the underlying principle of the doctrine of original sin for the Western Church (though like Victorinus he never used the exact phrase

⁶⁶⁴ *Com Apoc* 1.16.

⁶⁶⁵ Weinrich *et al* update the Roberts and Donaldson translation “original sin” to “that first sin which is taken away in baptism....” William C. Weinrich (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, New Testament XII, Revelation*, (Downers Grove, IL, 2005), p. 10.

⁶⁶⁶ NIDCC, p. 1017.

⁶⁶⁷ By Origen’s time the idea that baptism washed away sin and effected new birth was axiomatic for many, but not all Christian communities had yet adopted the practice of infant baptism. Infant baptism would not become a universal practice until after Augustine and the codification of a doctrine of original sin.

N. P. Williams wrote,

... our study of Origen and Cyprian, it will be remembered, led us to the conclusion that whether or not there be a logical connexion between the practice [of infant baptism] and the doctrine [of original sin], there is undoubtedly a historical and psychological connexion in the sense that the former [infant baptism] was very largely responsible for the growth of the latter [i.e., the doctrine of original sin]. The difficulty may be expressed as follows: “If newly born infants, who in the nature of things cannot have committed actual sin, are also free from any kind of birth sin, what is the use of infant baptism?”

Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 344.

peccatum originale). Cyprian departed from the policies of his mentor Tertullian and joined the trend in favor of paedobaptism, urging the prompt baptism of newborn infants. He counseled that the baptism of infants need not be delayed until the eighth day, dismissing the need to maintain an analogy to Jewish circumcision. In support of his position, Cyprian argued that “if even to the greatest sinners, and to those who had sinned much against God, when they subsequently believed, remission of sins [in baptism] is granted ... how much rather ought we to [baptize] an infant...”

Why? we ask. Why did Cyprian feel it was more appropriate to baptize newborn infants than to baptize great sinners who came to faith? Furthermore, in view of Cyprian’s adherence to baptismal remission, we might ask the question put to Origen: For what sins do infants need forgiveness? Cyprian answered,

...an infant ... 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, [and receives] the forgiveness of sins — that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another.⁶⁶⁸

With this statement Cyprian leapt a doctrinal boundary, and perhaps breached it for subsequent theologians. He said that infants received remission *for someone else’s sins!* He did not explicitly state to whom the remitted sins actually belonged, but the only name mentioned in the context is Adam’s. Also, Cyprian tied the infant’s “contracted” sinfulness to “the ancient death,” referring presumably to the first death pronounced upon Adam and Eve. It appears, then, that Cyprian believed infants most worthy to receive baptismal remission because their only guilt was that which they had inherited for the sins of Adam. The idea that *guilt can be inherited*, was a radical innovation. Unprecedented as it was, however, Cyprian’s idea that *all human beings — in some way or another — inherit guilt for Adam’s sin* would become the essence of, or at least an essential component of, all subsequent Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of original sin.

⁶⁶⁸ Cyprian, *Epi* 85.5: *To Fidus, On The Baptism Of Infants*.

SINNING IN A LUMP

[Cyprian](#) died in AD 258. Over the course of the next century and a half, the political status of Christianity in the empire changed radically. Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity (AD 313), and then Emperor Theodosius made it the official religion of the Roman empire (AD 380). As Christianity thus came into public favor, the institutionalized church became both more prosperous and more pagan. It also became more Roman, with Western theologians beginning to superimpose a *legal hermeneutic* over the *mystical* one they had inherited from [Hellenism](#).⁶⁶⁹

Indeed, by AD 370, an anonymous Italian author, later dubbed “[Ambrosiaster](#)” by scholars, wrote a complete set of commentaries on Paul’s epistles, in which he related “Pauline teaching to contemporary legal institutions.”⁶⁷⁰ This [Ambrosiaster](#) did not take up [Cyprian’s](#) idea of guilt inherited from another, but instead implied an idea just as novel in his comments on Rom 5.12: all men are born guilty because *they all sinned while “in Adam as though in a lump [Lat, massa].”*⁶⁷¹ In other words, the whole human race sinned while it was still packed into the divine Potter’s lump of clay named Adam (cf. Rom 9.21). The reader will recall that [Origen](#) similarly thought of all mankind as “[dwelling in \[Adam’s\] loins](#),” but [Origen](#) concluded from this only that Adam’s *death* passed down to all, not Adam’s *guilt*.

Though [Ambrosiaster’s](#) idea of sinning while still in Adam was novel, some of his contemporaries also leaned toward his thinking on this matter. Still other Latin voices, disposed to express redemptive truth in the juristic

⁶⁶⁹ The Roman Christian community had already given a legal flavor to theology, particularly since the time of the lawyer-Father Tertullian (see Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Volume 5, edited by T. K. Cheyne and A. B. Bruce, translated by Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), pp. 16-17). Christian writers seem to have become even more interested in the legal aspects of the faith when it became possible to influence legislation in favor of the Church. We begin to see Roman legislation favoring Christianity and penalizing paganism c. AD 340.

⁶⁷⁰ “[Ambrosiaster](#),” in the NIDCC, which cites Heggelbacher.

⁶⁷¹ Gerald Lewis Bray, *Romans: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 6*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 136, emphasis added. Tertullian had used the term *massa* in the sense of unrefined ore, in his *Apology*, ch. 12. Augustine would take it up as a key idea in his doctrines of original sin and predestination, and use the term *massa* as the foundation for phrases like “mass of perdition ... from Adam,” (*massa illius perditionis ... ex Adam*) in *Epi* 214.

framework of legal demands and stipulated rewards, of satisfaction and merit, drew attention to the “sentence” passed upon mankind because of the race’s connection to Adam. [Hilary of Poitiers](#) (c. AD 315-368), for example, taught that, “In the person of Adam God created all mankind, and all are implicated in his downfall,” and “Because of the sin of one, sentence is passed upon all.”⁶⁷² [Hilary](#) even came close to using the phrase “original sin” in his commentary on Matthew. In that work he said,

And so when we are renewed by the water of baptism through the power of the Word, we are separated from *the sins and ancestors of our origin...*⁶⁷³

In this passage [Hilary](#) emphasized the separation *from our ancestors* brought about by our [regeneration](#) (he was expounding upon Mat 10.35, and the enmity Jesus had predicted would arise between children and parents), but we see the embedded reference to “*the sins ... of our origin.*”

Likewise, [Ambrose of Milan](#) (c. AD 337-397), upon the death of his devoted brother Satyrus, wrote,

For death is alike to all, without difference for the poor, without exception for the rich. And so although through the sin of one alone, yet it passed upon all; that we may not refuse to acknowledge Him to be also the Author of death, Whom we do not refuse to acknowledge as the Author of our race; and that, as through one death is ours, so should be also the resurrection; and that we should not refuse the misery, that we may attain to the gift. For, as we read, Christ “is come to save that which was lost,” and “to be Lord both of the dead and living.” *In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died;*⁶⁷⁴ *how shall the Lord call me back, except He find me in Adam; guilty as I was in him, so now justified in Christ.*⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷² E. W. Watson, *St. Hilary of Poitiers: Introduction*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume IX: St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus, vol. 9a*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1899), p. lxxxvi.

⁶⁷³ Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 1a, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 211, emphasis added. The Latin is: “Cum ergo innovamur baptismi lavacro per verbi virtutem, *ab originis nostrae peccatis atque auctoribus* separamur...” Sancti Hilari, *In Evangelium Matthei Commentarius* (written c. AD 355), ch. X, §24, emphasis added.

⁶⁷⁴ This statement of Ambrose shows the influence of Origen who wrote about the effects of the curse upon the earth for “every man who died in Adam,” and “who in Adam were driven out of paradise”; *Celsus* 7.28.

⁶⁷⁵ *Sat* 2.6, emphasis added.

Ambrose wrote even less ambiguously in another place, “Assuredly we all sinned in the first man, and by the inheritance of his nature there has been transfused from that one man into all an inheritance of *guilt* ... So then Adam is in each one of us; for in him *human nature itself sinned*.”⁶⁷⁶

Ambrose’s teaching, then, was consistent with Ambrosiaster’s idea that we all sinned “in a lump” while we were still biologically in Adam. Therefore, instead of Cyprian’s idea that we are born guilty for “the sins of another,” these subsequent thinkers decided that we are born guilty for *our own sin* (pro Origen), though not sin committed in a heavenly preexistence (contra Origen), but sin we committed with Adam while still biologically within Adam. For these teachers, the first sin was both Adam’s and ours, and thus we are born sharing in its guilt.

CONTROVERSY BEGINS

So far in this investigation of the doctrine of [original sin](#), we have traced the historical development of a very specific idea as it evolved in the thinking of urban theologians during the third and fourth centuries: the idea that Adam’s guilt is somehow inherited by his posterity. Another idea developed during the same era, namely, the notion that a Christian’s attainment of spiritual perfection requires at least temporary withdrawal from civilization, and this belief began to lead individuals out of their urban centers. Thus, the late third century saw the birth of [monasticism](#) in Egypt. [Monasticism](#) was a reaction to the growing worldliness of the prospering institutionalized church, and in its early days the movement pursued a heroic spirituality that contrasted sharply

⁶⁷⁶ Ambrose of Milan, *Apologia David Altera*, 71, quoted in Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 305. As Williams notes,

[For Ambrose,] the identity of mankind with Adam is ceasing, in his mind, to be a merely material or ‘seminal’ identity, and is becoming a logical or metaphysical identity; following, we may suppose, the lead of those Fathers who had recognised that the Hebrew *’Ādhām* simply means ‘man,’ he seems to think of Adam as (so to speak) the Platonic Idea of man, as hypostatized ‘human nature,’ *conditio humana*.

In other words, influenced by his Platonic worldview, Ambrose began to think of Adam as the timeless Idea (or archetype) of human nature now made concrete. For the Neo-Platonist Christian, such an archetype would be timeless or eternal because it is an idea that exists in the mind of God. Illogically, therefore, Ambrose suggested that the Idea of human nature was *changed* by Adam’s sin such that now all inheritors of human nature get the bad version of the Idea!

with the religiosity of the increasingly professionalized priesthood.⁶⁷⁷ Though the [monastic](#) movement was a reproof to the urban spirituality of the time, [monasticism's](#) principles were nevertheless fully in line with the current legal mindset in the Church, a mindset that emphasized satisfaction for sin and rewards for merit. The [anchorite](#) hermit [Antony](#) (AD 251-356, about whom [Athanasius](#) published a biography, c. AD 360), and the [cenobite](#) [Pachomius](#) (d. AD 346), along with their admirers and imitators, abandoned their cities for solitary or communal lives in the desert, where they dedicated themselves to mortification of the flesh in the pursuit of personal perfection and effective intercession for the world.⁶⁷⁸

I mention this rise of asceticism in the fourth century, because the two contemporaneously developing ideas, i.e., man's guilt in Adam *and* perfection in the wilderness, stirred a spiritual tension in the Church. The theologians' growing emphasis on "guilt and condemnation inherited from Adam" seemed at odds, for some, with the Bible's demands to keep the commandments and be perfect. Why would anyone work hard to attain spiritual perfection if they are taught that they are condemned and bent toward sin from birth?

Just such a concern caused a lawyer named [Pelagius](#) to react against the idea of man's sinfulness in Adam. [Pelagius](#) decided to lead an ascetic movement of his own — not in the desert but in Rome (c. AD 380⁶⁷⁹) —, in which he taught "Christian perfection to aristocratic circles."⁶⁸⁰ As an ascetic, it seemed to him that the teaching of sinfulness in and from Adam provided an excuse for spiritual complacency. The doctrine that would soon become known as [Pelagianism](#), emerged from this ascetic reaction to a perceived theological fatalism. [Adolph von Harnack](#) wrote that [Pelagius](#), "[r]oused to anger by an inert Christendom, that excused itself by pleading the frailty of the flesh and the impossibility of fulfilling the grievous commands of God, ... preached that

⁶⁷⁷ See NIDCC, "Monasticism."

⁶⁷⁸ Evangelicals may tend to disdain withdrawal from the world as contra-biblical, but the Desert Fathers were spiritual warriors who went to the wilderness in order to prepare themselves to intercede for and bring healing to their contemporaries in the world. I highly recommend to the reader Benedicta Ward's *The Lives Of The Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980).

⁶⁷⁹ AD 409-411 according to Shedd, but this is when Rome was menaced by the Goths, and Pelagius left for Africa and Palestine (see "Pelagianism" in the ODCC).

⁶⁸⁰ NIDCC, "Pelagianism."

God commanded nothing impossible, that man possessed the power of doing the good if only he willed, and that the weakness of the flesh was merely a pretext.” Von Harnack quoted Pelagius as saying, “In dealing with ethics and the principles of a holy life, I first demonstrate the power to decide and act inherent in human nature, and show what it can achieve, lest the mind be careless and sluggish in pursuit of virtue in proportion to its want of belief in its power....”⁶⁸¹ In other words, Pelagius believed and taught that man was neither morally ruined in the fall, nor hindered by inherited sin, but instead retains the power of free will to do either good or evil such that he does not need grace, but can live a righteous life if he simply chooses to do so.⁶⁸²

Pelagius’ followers, Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum, championed his teaching in Church debate. Caelestius presented the following six tenets in the council of Carthage of AD 411:

1. Adam would have been subject to death whether he had sinned or not.
2. His sin harmed himself, not the human race.
3. Newborn infants are in the same state as Adam was before his sin.
4. It is not through the death of Adam that all men die; nor do all men rise again through the resurrection of Christ.
5. The Law is able to guide people to the kingdom of heaven, just as is the Gospel.
6. Even before the coming of the Lord, there were just men who lived without sin.⁶⁸³

Julian would later say,

⁶⁸¹ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma, Volume 5*, ed. T. K. Cheyne and A. B. Bruce, trans. Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), p. 174.

⁶⁸² Many had emphasized the idea of human free will before Pelagius, but not in such a way as to so clearly deny the necessity of grace. See Philip Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume V: Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), pp. xiii-xiv.

⁶⁸³ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 29, citing Marius Mercator, *Commonitorium super nomine Caelistii* 36 and Augustine, *De Gestis* 11.23. The six points are also given by Peter Holmes in Philip Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume V: Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), p. 4.

You ask me why I do not consent to the idea that sin is inherent to human nature. I reply: it is completely improbable and false, it is unjust and impious ... It invalidates and destroys free will ... by saying that human beings are so incapable of virtue that even in the womb of their mothers they are stained with sins from times past. You attribute to this sin a power so great that ... it also constitutes a permanent inducement to all kinds of vices throughout life⁶⁸⁴

Such a statement confirms the pious motive of the [Pelagian](#) movement, namely, the desire to combat what they perceived as a doctrine that undermined the pursuit of virtue. Nevertheless, the fully institutionalized Church of the time, with its growing monopoly on salvation, could never accept [Pelagian](#) teaching. To teach that human beings are *not* born sinners, is to imply that people *don't* need the sacraments of the Church!

Mind you, [Pelagius](#) and his followers were not so foolhardy as to deny all value to infant baptism. They agreed that “[e]ven little children ... despite their state of innocence, have need, as do all people, of the special grace of adoption and spiritual elevation that only baptism confers.”⁶⁸⁵ [Julian](#) attempted to clarify the [Pelagian](#) position on baptism, writing,

We testify that all human beings need to be [reborn](#) through baptism. This is not to say that they may be thought to be, by the conferral of this gift, liberated from the authority of the devil, but so that, as creatures of God they may become his children; and so that having had a lowly though not culpable birth, they might attain, without prejudice to that birth, a most precious [rebirth](#). It is necessary, that is, that those who are created according to the plan of God be improved by the [sacraments](#) of God and that the gifts of grace be added to the works of nature. In this way the Lord, who in fashioning them made them good, makes them even better in recreating them and adopting them as children.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁴ Cited by Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 32.

⁶⁸⁵ In this detail, the Pelagians seem to have agreed with John Chrysostom who said (according to Beatrice) that “little children receive baptism, even if they are without sin, so that they might have a share in the grace of adoption.” Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 33 and 87.

⁶⁸⁶ Cited by Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 34. See also pp. 26-27

In other words, people are born with a capacity for good such that they don't absolutely need grace, but baptism is nice because it makes good people even better and provides other benefits as well. This double-speak could never assure the Church that [Pelagianism](#) would not undermine the episcopacy and its [sacraments](#), so the movement and its teachings were officially condemned at Carthage in AD 411, [Pelagius](#) and [Caelestius](#) were excommunicated in AD 417, and [Caelestius](#) was condemned again at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431.

These condemnations of [Pelagian](#) teaching resulted from a theological counterattack famously led by [Augustine](#) of Hippo. Before we turn to some of [Augustine's](#) thoughts, however, let me emphasize that the focus of the [Pelagian](#) teaching and of [Augustine's](#) rebuttals was not baptism or the [sacraments](#), per se, but the issue of free will. [Pelagius](#), on the one hand, wanted people to understand that they had free will and that they could and should contribute to the process of their own salvation. [Augustine](#), on the other hand, wished to show that all Adam's posterity are born with their wills bound by sin and that they have no choice but to depend upon the grace of God for salvation. My references to their controversy in this present volume, however, are not for the sake of sorting out questions pertaining to free will, but only for the purpose of bringing to light the important ideas about [original sin](#) and infant baptism that emerged from [Augustine's](#) part in the theological debate. With this in mind, patient reader, let us proceed.

AUGUSTINE DEFINES THE DOCTRINE

As a young man, [Augustine](#) (AD 354-430) excelled in the study of rhetoric.⁶⁸⁷ He soon became a teacher of the subject, both in his home town of Tagaste (a Numidian, Roman city in what is now Algeria), and at Carthage. His devout mother, Monica, exposed him to Christianity from infancy, but as an adult [Augustine](#) instead developed an appetite for the theater and for a concubine. He also fell in love with philosophy, which made him susceptible to the intellectual pretensions of the [gnostic Manichaeans](#) with whom he became

⁶⁸⁷ In spite of his scholarliness, he disliked reading the Greek classics, and so seems to have never mastered the Greek language.

involved. The [Manichaeans](#) saw matter as intrinsically evil and disdained sex and marriage, so their doctrine must have produced a certain ambivalence within [Augustine](#) regarding his concubine. Nevertheless, he remained connected with the [Manichaeans](#) for a decade, until his career took him to Milan. There he came under the influence of [Ambrose](#), the bishop of that city. Philosophical and theological influences in Milan brought [Augustine](#) to a definite break with [Manichaeism](#) and led to his conversion. He was baptized by [Ambrose](#) in AD 387, and was consecrated the bishop of Hippo in AD 395.

Historians consider [Augustine of Hippo](#) “the father ... of the doctrine of [original sin](#).”⁶⁸⁸ This does not mean that [Augustine](#) was the first to verbalize *the idea* of [original sin](#), but as we shall see, he was the one to finally shape the evolving idea into a coherent doctrine.⁶⁸⁹ Beatrice contends that [Augustine](#) had already “worked out a clear conception and terminology regarding [original sin](#), its causes, and its effects,” before the [Pelagian](#) controversy began,⁶⁹⁰ but that controversy certainly forced [Augustine](#) to refine and deepen his beliefs.⁶⁹¹ By AD 413, [Augustine](#) had rightly taken issue with [Pelagius](#)’ teaching, for the bishop of Hippo knew that Scripture and history contradicted [Pelagius](#) on a number of points regarding man’s sinfulness. He reminded the [Pelagians](#) that:

1. Except for the Son of God (Heb 4.15), all have sinned (Rom 3.23).⁶⁹²
2. Sin is not just a bad choice, but an enslaving power (Joh 8.34).
Augustine would repeatedly cite 2Pe 2.19, “For by what a man is overcome, to the same is he delivered as a slave.”⁶⁹³ He also argued, “Since therefore, ‘the whole need not the physician, but only they that be

⁶⁸⁸ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 6.

⁶⁸⁹ Peter Sanlon quotes Jesse Couenhoven’s statement that, “While Augustine was the great systematizer, developer, and defender of the doctrine of original sin, he was not its inventor.” Peter Sanlon, “Original Sin in Patristic Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 95. Still, that the doctrine of original sin was not clearly formulated until 400 years after Christ should arouse our suspicions as to its apostolic basis.

⁶⁹⁰ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 58.

⁶⁹¹ Op. cit., p. 84.

⁶⁹² *De Pec* 1.43 [XXVII]. Also in *Con Dua* 1.13.

⁶⁹³ *De Spiritu* 52.

sick;’ so likewise it is not the free that need the Deliverer, but only the enslaved.”⁶⁹⁴

3. People don’t learn sin by watching the example of others, but commit sin on their own initiative from the earliest moments of life. Children don’t need to be taught how to be selfish and rebellious, they just are! Sinfulness does not enter man from without, but demonstrably emerges from an inner corruption.

With these three observations in mind, and knowing that they undergirded the truth that all men depend upon God’s grace for salvation, [Augustine](#) developed a doctrine of [original sin](#) comprised of the following three principles:

1. Before men commit actual and personal sins, they are born with guilt from (a) having sinned while still biologically in Adam,⁶⁹⁵ and (b) from being infected with the concupiscence (lust) that their parents experienced in copulation.⁶⁹⁶ The combined guilt from the sin of Adam and the sin of our parents constitutes the first part of the [original sin](#) with which all men are born.⁶⁹⁷
2. In the act of copulation, (a) the human father passes down an impaired seed,⁶⁹⁸ and (b) the parents pass down a sinful inclination (because of their unavoidable concupiscence), to the children conceived.⁶⁹⁹ In other

⁶⁹⁴ *Perf* 4.9.

⁶⁹⁵ *De Pec* 3.14 [VII].

⁶⁹⁶ *Hom 1Jo* 4.11: “With lust itself we were born; even before we add our sins we have that condemnation from our birth.” Also, *Enchi*, ch. 46: “there are sins of the immediate parents which though they have not the same effect [as that of Adam] in producing a change of nature, yet subject the children to guilt unless the divine grace and mercy interpose to rescue them.” Also *De Corr* ch. 9 [VI]: “Those original sins, indeed, are said to be the sins of others, because individuals derived them from their parents; but they are not unreasonably said to be our own also, because in that one, as the apostle says, all have sinned.” See von Harnack’s summary of Augustine’s teaching of guilt for the sins of the parents: Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma, Volume 5*, edited by T. K. Cheyne and A. B. Bruce, translated by Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), p. 227.

⁶⁹⁷ *De Corr* 9 [VI].

⁶⁹⁸ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 68-69, citing Augustine’s *Op Imp*.

⁶⁹⁹ *De Nup* 1.27 [XXIV]; *De Pec* 2.11 [IX]. Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 65, citing Augustine’s *Con Jul* 5.3.8 and *Op Imp*. 6.17. Augustine’s understanding

words, [Augustine](#) taught inherited corruption alongside inherited guilt. This inherited corruption consisted of “the unbridled and inordinate tyranny of concupiscence over the rest of man’s interior microcosm.”⁷⁰⁰ Jesus did not have this corruption because Mary conceived without concupiscence, and without the involvement of an impaired human seed.⁷⁰¹

3. Baptism is the means by which the Church remits the guilt of original sin inherited from Adam and from our parents, and blots out all sins antecedent to our baptism, “whether original or added.”⁷⁰² Baptism is therefore that which effects the salvation of man, and delivers infants from damnation.⁷⁰³ Baptism, however, does not remove our sinful inclination,⁷⁰⁴ nor make it possible for baptized spouses to conceive children without [original sin](#).⁷⁰⁵

Having understood these three points, we can summarize Augustine’s doctrine of [original sin](#) in this manner:

[Original Sin](#) is the combined sinfulness and guilt that is ours at birth because of our Adamic and concupiscent origin; the guilt of [original sin](#) is remitted by Baptism so that our [actual sinfulness](#) can be gradually healed by the renewal of the inner man.⁷⁰⁶

[Augustine](#) set forth the following arguments⁷⁰⁷ in support of his doctrine:

of original sin evolved, and so not all scholars agree that he believed, at least in his mature doctrine, that “sexual concupiscence is causative.” See Paul Rigby, “Original Sin,” edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 609.

⁷⁰⁰ Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 365.

⁷⁰¹ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 71.

⁷⁰² *Con Dua* 3.5. Cf. the quote from Sermon 213.9, given in William Harmless, “Baptism,” Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 88.

⁷⁰³ *De Pec* 3.7 [IV].

⁷⁰⁴ *Con Dua* 3.5; *De Nup* 1.28 [XXV].

⁷⁰⁵ *De Pec* 3.16 [VIII] -17 [IX].

⁷⁰⁶ The phrase *Original Sin* never referred directly to Adam’s or Eve’s first sin, but rather to humanity’s sinfulness and guilt due to our Adamic *origin*.

⁷⁰⁷ Paul Rigby summarizes Augustine’s Five Proofs for original sin as:

1. Scripture.

1. We know that we are guilty for the sin we committed while still physically and spiritually undifferentiated from Adam, because Rom 5.12 speaks of the one man Adam “in whom all sinned.”⁷⁰⁸ Just as Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek while still in the loins of Abraham (Heb 7.4-10), we sinned while still seminally in Adam.⁷⁰⁹ Nor should we think it strange that God holds us accountable for what our forefather did, because God visits the iniquity of the fathers “on the children, on the third and fourth generations” (Ex 20.5; Deut 5.9).⁷¹⁰

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2. Tradition.
 3. Liturgy (the baptism of infants).
 4. Augustine’s reflection on his own experience.
 5. The suffering of children.

Rigby’s Proof number 1 corresponds to the first three arguments that I describe, Proof 2 corresponds roughly to argument 6, Proof 3 to arguments 5 and 6, and Proof 5 to argument 4. Paul Rigby, “Original Sin,” edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 607-608

⁷⁰⁸ *De Pec* 1.10 [IX] -11 [X]. In his *De Nup* 2.8, 15, 20, 24, and 45, Augustine quotes the final clause of Rom 5.12 as “for *in him* all have sinned.” He worked from the Latin versions of his day and took the rare adverbial phrase *in quo* (“in that,” e.g., Rom 8.3 in the Vulgate) in its more common use as a pronominal phrase (“in whom,” or “in which,” e.g., Eph 1.07,11,13; 2.21-22, etc.)! In Augustine’s *A Treatise Against Two Letters Of The Pelagians*, Book 4, ch. 7, he bolsters his case for this reading saying, “For thus also the sainted Hilary understood what is written, ‘wherein all have sinned;’ for he says, ‘wherein,’ that is, in Adam, ‘all have sinned.’ Then he adds, ‘It is manifest that all have sinned in Adam, as it were in the mass; for he himself was corrupted by sin, and all whom he begot were born under sin.’ When he wrote this, Hilary, without any ambiguity, indicated how we should understand the words, ‘wherein all have sinned.’” Augustine insisted, “This indicates propagation, not imitation; for if imitation were meant, [Paul] would have said, ‘By the devil.’ But as no one doubts, he refers to that first man who is called Adam: ‘And so,’ says he, ‘it passed upon all men.’” *De Pec* 1.10 [IX].

⁷⁰⁹ See Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 99-100.

⁷¹⁰ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 96. Augustine’s teaching on this point was very near to that of his mentor Ambrose, who said that in Adam “*human nature itself sinned*.” Augustine wrote that “all ... sinned in Adam, when in his nature,” (*De Pec* 3.14 [VII]) and “already the seminal nature was there from which we were to be propagated; and this being vitiated by sin, and bound by the chain of death, and justly condemned, man could not be born of man in any other state” (*De Civ* 13.14). In more recent times, William G. T. Shed and James Henry, subscribed in essence of Augustine’s theory. They proposed that,

Adam possessed the entire human nature and that all mankind, being present in Adam as generic humanity, corrupted itself by its own apostatizing act in Adam. Individual men are not separate substances, but manifestations of the same generic substance. They are numerically one in nature. The reason that all men are

2. The threat of perdition for the uncircumcised (Gen 17.14) and the requirement of a sin offering after the birth of a child (Lev 12.6), prove [original sin](#).⁷¹¹
3. Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5.6), so how could he have died for infants who “never did an ungodly act” if they have no [original sin](#)?⁷¹² Augustine argued further that since Christ came to call sinners to repentance (Luk 5.32), infants are not called if they are not guilty of [original sin](#), and it would be wicked to baptize those who are not called.⁷¹³
4. If infants had no [original sin](#), they would not suffer the innumerable ills that they do, for God would be unjust to allow the truly guiltless to suffer.⁷¹⁴
5. Infants not yet united to Christ by baptism would not be liable to damnation — which they plainly are, though they have committed no personal sins — if they had not inherited [original sin](#).⁷¹⁵
6. Finally, it is obvious that all are born with [original sin](#), since everyone admits that we must baptize infants for salvation, even though infants

accountable for Adam’s sin is because they *actually* (really) sinned in Adam before the individualizing of human nature began.

Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology Of The Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 436.

⁷¹¹ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 95-96. Beatrice quotes the following from *Op Imp* 2.201:

Si en lege non ostenditur originale peccatum, cur ergo in lege anima parvuli octavo die non circumcisi de genere suo dicta est interire (Gen 17.14)? Cur infante nato offerebatur sacrificium pro peccato (Lev 12.6)?

I would roughly translate these lines as follows:

If the condition does not prove original sin, why, then, in the law of its kind is it said [that] the soul of a child not circumcised the eighth day shall perish (Gen 17.14)? Why was this sacrifice for sin offered for the birth of the infant (Lev 12.6)?

See also *De Civ* 16.27; *De Nup* 2.24.

⁷¹² *De Pec* 1.23 [XVIII].

⁷¹³ *De Pec* 1.24 [XIX].

⁷¹⁴ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 78-80.

⁷¹⁵ *De Pec* 1.28 [XX]; 3.7 [IV].

have not yet committed personal transgressions.⁷¹⁶ If we are born without any sin, why do we rush to baptize our infants?⁷¹⁷ No one can contravene the authority of the universal Church which teaches that even infants must be washed of guilt, the source of which can only be [original sin](#).⁷¹⁸ The “catholic Church ... truly baptizes infants for the remission of sins ... which they have contracted by their very birth, owing to the corruption of their origin.”⁷¹⁹

These arguments helped win the day against the [Pelagians](#), and allowed [Augustine’s](#) doctrine of [original sin](#) to stand more or less intact in the Catholic church for 700 years. However, the doctrine *itself* was too speculative to remain unchallenged by the later reasonings of the [Scholastics](#).

THE ANSELMIC WATERSHED

ANSELM’S REFORMULATION

The [Second Council of Orange](#) (AD 529) condemned [Pelagian](#) and [Semi-Pelagian](#) teaching, but endorsed only “a qualified Augustinian theology.”⁷²⁰ By this time the Catholic church was already retreating from the more radical aspects of [Augustine’s](#) doctrine, and the Council remained silent on the question of how [original sin](#) is transmitted.⁷²¹ This left the door open for the subsequent reformulation of the doctrine of [original sin](#) by subsequent scholars, for whom [Anselm of Canterbury](#) (d. AD 1109) served as the watershed. [Anselm](#), acknowledged by many as “the first [Scholastic](#),” was also the first to steer catholic thinking away from [Augustine’s](#) focus upon transmitted [concupiscence](#).⁷²² He recast the idea of [original sin](#) in terms of

⁷¹⁶ *De Pec* 1.39 [XXVI]. See Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 80-85.

⁷¹⁷ *Hom 1Jo* 4.11; *De Pec* 1.23 [XVIII].

⁷¹⁸ *De Pec* 1.39 [XXVI].

⁷¹⁹ *De Grat* 2.17 [XVI].

⁷²⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 636.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*

⁷²² Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 66-67. Besides spearheading the departure from Augustine’s doctrine of original

what was lost when Adam sinned, rather than in terms of *what was passed down*.

[Anselm](#) may have found inspiration for his perspective in the teaching of [Irenaeus](#) who had written,

the Son of God ... furnished us ... with salvation; so that *what we had lost in Adam* — namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God — that we might recover in Christ Jesus.⁷²³

And in another passage,

[Adam says,] I have by disobedience *lost that robe of sanctity* which I had from the Spirit...⁷²⁴

Well versed in [Augustine's](#) writings as well, [Anselm](#) presumably knew that [Augustine](#) himself had implied that a “gift of [resistible grace](#) [had been given] to Adam, before the fall,” a gift that “made Adam able to choose the good and preserve his will in its pristine integrity.”⁷²⁵

[Anselm](#) certainly respected [Augustine](#) and derived theological support from his writings. Nevertheless, he departed from [Augustine's](#) *emphases*, and taught that:

1. Adam's first sin was unique in that it lost man's “[original justice](#)” (also called [original righteousness](#)) and this loss vitiated human nature.⁷²⁶

sin, Anselm's casting of his doctrine of atonement in Roman and Germanic legal terminology also paved the way for the later Reformers' doctrine of forensic imputation.

⁷²³ *Adv Haer* 3.18.1, emphasis mine.

⁷²⁴ *Adv Haer* 3.23.5, emphasis mine. H. D. McDonald says, “Irenaeus first introduced the distinction between the “image” (Heb. *selem*; Lat. *imago*) and “likeness” (Heb. *dēmût*; Lat. *similitudo*). The former he identified as the rationality and free will which inhere in man *qua* man. The likeness he conceived to be a superadded gift of God's righteousness which man, because of his reason and freedom of choice, had the possibility to retain and advance by obedience to the divine commands. But this probationary endowment was forfeited by acts of willful disobedience by Adam and Eve and their descendants. This thesis of Irenaeus was generally upheld by the scholastics and was given dogmatic application by Aquinas.” See Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), “Mankind, Doctrine Of”.

⁷²⁵ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 96. See *City* 14.27.

⁷²⁶ William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2., (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), p. 116.

2. No other sin, whether of Adam or of his posterity, vitiated human nature, because Adam's first sin had accomplished that catastrophe. All subsequent sins do not further corrupt human nature, but only add to the sins of the individual perpetrator.⁷²⁷
3. Propagation can only convey human nature as it exists, therefore all Adam's progeny are born with Adam's vitiated nature (i.e. his human nature sans [original justice](#)), since parents can no longer bequeath to their offspring what they themselves do not have.
4. Consequently, "all infants are equally unjust in that they do not have the justice which every human being ought to have,"⁷²⁸ for "God does rightly demand from a nature what He bestowed on it and what is rightly owed to Him."⁷²⁹ Therefore, "all who are propagated by the operation of the nature that Adam had received are born obligated by his debt."⁷³⁰ Indeed, "Human nature is born in infants ... with the obligation to make satisfaction for the sin of Adam."⁷³¹
5. Furthermore, Adam's first sin having corrupted human nature, human nature has ever after corrupted the person and produced sin.⁷³²

For [Anselm](#), then, [original sin](#) consisted of (a) the absence of an "[original justice](#)" that was lost by human nature when Adam sinned,⁷³³ and (b) the debt borne by all for the loss of that [original justice](#).⁷³⁴ [Original sin](#) in this formulation, therefore, is not a substance that is passed down physically (like a germ), but is more *the absence of something*, or rather the corruption and debt incurred by *that something's loss*. The absence of [original justice](#) explains

⁷²⁷ William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2., (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), pp. 122-123. See *De Virg* ch. 24.

⁷²⁸ *De Virg* 24.

⁷²⁹ *De Virg* 28.

⁷³⁰ *De Virg* 10.

⁷³¹ *De Virg* 8.

⁷³² William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volumes 1-3*, (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), Vol. 2, p. 76.

⁷³³ Anselm wrote, "I can understand this sin (which I am calling original sin) to be nothing else in these infants except the above-mentioned deprivation of required justice which was caused by Adam's disobedience and through which all men are sons of wrath." *De Virg* 27.

⁷³⁴ Anselm wrote, "Original sin in infants can be seen to be this [condition of obligation and inability]." *De Virg* 2.

man's sinfulness: actual sins promptly flow from human nature because that nature is now disordered by its lack of superadded grace.

AQUINAS AND THE *DONUM SUPERADDITUM*

At the zenith of the [Scholastic](#) era, [Thomas Aquinas](#) (AD 1224-1274) also emphasized that, “the formal element of original sin is to be explained as ‘privatio originalis iustitiae per quam voluntas subdebatur Deo,’” i.e., “the privation of original justice, whereby the will was subject to God,” and he “explicitly rejected the [Augustinian](#) equation of [original sin](#) with [concupiscence](#).”⁷³⁵ [Aquinas](#) reinforced the idea of a [superadded gift](#) of [original righteousness](#), writing that,

in the state of perfect nature man needs a gratuitous strength superadded to natural strength for one reason, viz., in order to do and wish supernatural good; but for two reasons, in the state of corrupt nature, viz., in order to be healed, and furthermore in order to carry out works of supernatural virtue, which are meritorious. Beyond this, in both states man needs the Divine help, that he may be moved to act well.”⁷³⁶

For [Aquinas](#), [original righteousness](#) was a [superadded gift](#) in that it was not an essential part of human nature.⁷³⁷ He said that “the defect transmitted to us through our origin, and having the character of sin does not result from the withdrawal or corruption of ... human nature ..., but from the withdrawal or corruption of something that had been superadded to nature.”⁷³⁸ The lack of this [superadded gift](#), however, brought corruption to human nature because human nature (supposedly) has within it an opposition between the flesh and the spirit which inevitably produces sin if not restrained by [original righteousness](#).

⁷³⁵ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 66-67.

⁷³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Summa Theologica*, Complete English ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), Q. CIX, Art. 2.

⁷³⁷ Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), Vol. 10, p. 436.

⁷³⁸ *Summa* App 1, Q 1, Art 1.

SCOTUS AND NATURAL CONCUISCENCE

[John Duns Scotus](#) (AD 1265-1308) took up this supposed “opposition of the flesh and the spirit [which] belongs to the original nature of man,” and made it the very definition of *concupiscence*.⁷³⁹ He believed, contrary to [Augustine](#), that this *concupiscence*, as an element of man’s created nature, could not be the basis of *original sin*. In fact, [Scotus](#) did not think of *concupiscence* *itself* as sin, but only as the fomenter of sin.⁷⁴⁰ He thought of *concupiscence* as something that would only degenerate into sin when the restraining bridle of the supernatural and superadded habit of grace is removed.⁷⁴¹ [Scotus](#) agreed with [Aquinas](#), therefore, in rejecting the *Augustinian* theory that *original sin* is something physically transmitted by the *concupiscence* (lust) of parents. Instead, he understood *original sin* to consist of two things: “the lack of *original righteousness* ... [i.e.,] the supernatural righteousness originally imparted to the first man,” and the indebtedness before God for that lack.⁷⁴²

[Scotus](#) did diverge from [Aquinas’](#) idea of the *donum superadditum* of *original righteousness* in regard to how it was obtained. [Aquinas](#) believed that God had given *original righteousness* to Adam immediately upon his creation as an unmerited gift, and that therefore, after the fall no one can regain the *donum superadditum* by merit. [Scotus](#), however, held what would become the more prevalent view of Franciscan theology, namely, that God had given the *donum superadditum* of *original righteousness* *as a reward* to Adam “for the proper use of his natural powers,”⁷⁴³ i.e., for the “first act of obedience on the part of Adam performed by Adam according to his purely natural capacities (*ex puris naturalibus*).”⁷⁴⁴ The corollary to the idea that Adam earned the *donum*

⁷³⁹ Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), Vol. 4, p. 29.

⁷⁴⁰ Technically, Augustine taught that *concupiscence* was *not* sin in the proper sense, but could not help but give his readers the impression that it *was*. See Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 64.

⁷⁴¹ Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), Vol. 4, p. 29.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), p. 105.

⁷⁴⁴ I.e., “by pure nature.” Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 96-97.

superadditum is the belief that, “Since Adam could, by doing a minimal or finite act, merit the initial gift of God’s grace, fallen man might, by doing a minimal act, also merit the gift of first grace”⁷⁴⁵

TRENT CONCLUDES THE DISCUSSION

The development of the Roman Catholic doctrine of *original sin* effectively came to its conclusion at the *Council of Trent*. That council, convened from AD 1545 to 1563 to counter the growing influence of the Protestants, formulated what remains the essence of the Catholic church’s teaching on the topic of *original sin*. However, the *Council of Trent* addressed the matter of *original sin* only in the most traditional and general way, even as the Catholic Catechism does today. The Fifth Session of the *Council of Trent*, held on June 17, 1546, decreed that,

1. Adam, when he had transgressed the commandment of God in Paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice wherein he had been constituted; and ... incurred ... death, [and] captivity under ... the devil, [being] changed, in body and soul, for the worse....⁷⁴⁶
2. ... the holiness and justice, received of God, which [Adam] lost, he lost for himself ... and ... for us also; [and] he, being defiled by the sin of disobedience, has [not] only transfused death and pains of the body into the whole human race, but ... sin also, which is the death of the soul.⁷⁴⁷
3. ... this sin of Adam ... is ... transfused into all by propagation, not by imitation, [and] is taken away ... by [no] other remedy than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, ... and ... the said merit of Jesus Christ is applied, both to adults and to infants, by the *sacrament* of baptism rightly administered in the form of the Church....⁷⁴⁸
4. ... infants, newly born from their mothers’ wombs, even though they be sprung from baptized parents, are to be baptized.... For, by reason of

⁷⁴⁵ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 97.

⁷⁴⁶ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations*, vol. 2, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), pp. 84-85.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

this rule of faith, from a tradition of the apostles, even infants, who could not as yet commit any sin of themselves, are for this cause truly baptized for the remission of sins, that in them that may be cleansed away by regeneration, which they have contracted by generation [i.e., that they may be cleansed of “[original sin](#) from Adam”].⁷⁴⁹

5. ... by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; ... But ... in the baptized there remains [concupiscence](#), or an incentive (to sin); which ... can not injure those who consent not, but resist manfully by the grace of Jesus Christ; ... This [concupiscence](#), which the apostle sometimes calls sin,⁷⁵⁰ the holy Synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood it to be called sin, as being truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is of sin, and inclines to sin.⁷⁵¹

In summary: Adam fell, losing [original justice](#) and bringing death and spiritual captivity to himself and his posterity, “transfusing” [original sin](#) by propagation, the only remedy for which is the merit of Christ applied in baptism; baptism remits [original sin](#), but an incentive to sin remains which those can resist who strive manfully against it. In other words, the [Council of Trent](#) did not define [original justice](#) nor [original sin](#), nor did it define how [original sin](#) is “transfused,” but only emphasized that [original sin](#) is real, that it is propagated rather than learned by imitation, and that baptism is absolutely necessary for its remission.

BELLARMINE’S CLARIFICATIONS

Soon after the [Council of Trent](#), it fell to the Jesuit theologian [Robert Bellarmine](#) (AD 1542-1621) to clarify (also in opposition to the Reformers) that,

the Roman Catholic Church distinguishes between [the] “image” and [the] “likeness” [of God]. The former refers to nature, the latter to the supernatural, and denotes some “ornaments of wisdom and righteousness” which man received in creation but lacks now. As man

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁷⁵⁰ Rom 6.12; 7.8.

⁷⁵¹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations*, vol. 2, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), pp. 87-88.

came forth from the creator's hand, he consisted of flesh and spirit, and stood related both to the animals and to the angels. On the latter side he had intelligence and will; on the former, senses and appetites. A conflict arose, and from the conflict "a terrible difficulty in doing well." *This was the "disease of nature" which inheres in matter, hence God added the gift of original righteousness. It was this perfection of the divine image, and not the image itself, which man lost at the fall.*⁷⁵²

Current Roman Catholic statements of the doctrine of [original sin](#) follow the example of the [Council of Trent](#), skipping over all the subtleties and simply presenting the idea of original sin dogmatically. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for example, says,

All men are implicated in Adam's sin.... Because of this certainty..., the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin. ... the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received [original holiness and justice](#) not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of [original holiness and justice](#). ... [original sin](#) ... is a deprivation of [original holiness and justice](#), but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin - an inclination to evil that is called [concupiscence](#). Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases [original sin](#) and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.⁷⁵³

[Abraham Kuyper](#) goes back to [Bellarmine](#) to provide us with this straightforward summary of the Roman Catholic teaching relating to [original sin](#):

Rome teaches that the [original righteousness](#) does *not* belong to the divine image, but to the human nature as a [superadded grace](#). Quoting [[Bellarmine](#)],

⁷⁵² Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), Vol. 10, p. 38, emphasis added.

⁷⁵³ CCC, sections 402-405.

- *first*, man is created consisting of two parts, flesh and spirit;
- *second*, the divine image is stamped partly on the flesh, but chiefly on the human spirit, the seat of the moral and rational consciousness;
- *third*, there is a conflict between flesh and spirit, the flesh lusting against the spirit;
- *fourth*, hence man has a natural inclination and desire for sin, which as desire alone is no sin as long as it is not yielded to;
- *fifth*, in His grace and compassion God gave man, independently of his nature, the [original righteousness](#) for a defense and safety-valve to control the flesh;
- *sixth*, by his fall man has willingly thrust this [superadded righteousness](#) from him: hence as sinner he stands again in his naked nature (*in puris naturalibus*), which, as a matter of course, is inclined to sin, inasmuch as his desires are sinful.⁷⁵⁴

REFORMERS AGAINST JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

LUTHER EMPHASIZES PROFOUND CORRUPTION

[Augustine](#) set forth his doctrine of [original sin](#) to prove that all men need God's grace, and thereby to counter the presumption of the [Pelagians](#) who taught that man has the ability to save himself. Likewise, the [Reformers](#) emphasized [original sin](#) as referring to man's total corruption, to counter the Roman Catholics (with their [semi-Pelagian](#) leanings) who said that only man's [superadded gift](#) was lost in the fall, and that therefore all should exercise their will to overcome [concupiscence](#) and merit eternal life. In the Augsburg Confession of 1530, [Luther et al.](#) said that,

after Adam's fall, all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin; that is, without the fear of God, without trust in him, and with fleshly appetite; and that this disease, or original [defect] (*vitium originis*), is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death now also upon all that are not born again by baptism and the Holy Spirit.

[Our churches] condemn the [Pelagians](#), and others, who deny this original fault to be sin indeed; and who, so as to lessen the glory of

⁷⁵⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), p. 227, formatting added.

the merits and benefits of Christ, argue that a man may, by the strength of his own reason, be justified before God.⁷⁵⁵

Luther's Smalkald Articles of 1537 declared further that "the corruption of nature is so profound and dark as to be past human comprehension, but must be received as matter of revelation and faith."⁷⁵⁶

Likewise, after Luther's death, the Lutheran Formula Of Concord, finalized in 1584, declared that,

Original Sin is no trivial corruption, but is so profound a corruption of human nature as to leave nothing sound, nothing uncorrupt in the body or soul of man, or in his mental or bodily powers.⁷⁵⁷

As to the essence of original sin, the Formula rejected the ideas,

- "that Original Sin is merely the liability and debt of another's transgression, transmitted to us apart from a corruption of our nature."
- "that depraved concupiscences are not sin, but ... essential properties of nature...."
- "that man's nature and essence are not utterly corrupt, but that there is something of good still remaining in man...."

While not exactly defining original sin, therefore, the Formula Of Concord identified it with the profound corruption of human nature. By the points which the Formula rejected, it combatted the Roman Catholic teaching that (1) man is indebted to God for Adam's loss of the superadded righteousness and (2) that the Fall did not corrupt human nature but only lost the supernatural help to that nature which God had given to Adam. The Lutherans wished it understood that concupiscence was not a divinely created element of human

⁷⁵⁵ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), vol. 3, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁵⁶ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volumes 1-3*, (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), vol. 2, pp. 77-78.

⁷⁵⁷ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), vol. 3, p. 101.

nature that fomented sin, but was in itself a sinful inclination of the *ruined nature*.

CALVIN INTRODUCES IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

In harmony with the Lutheran understanding, John Calvin had already defined *original sin* explicitly as “a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh.”⁷⁵⁸ By saying this, he denied the Catholic teaching that the fall only removed man’s *superadded righteousness*. For Calvin, “those who have defined *original sin* as the want of the *original righteousness*” were on the right track, but had failed to understand the scope and evil power of man’s fallen state.⁷⁵⁹ The fall had *not* left man’s essential nature and higher faculties intact while only making him vulnerable to the urges of *concupiscence*; rather it had rendered the whole man “nothing else but *concupiscence*.”⁷⁶⁰

Calvin also explicitly said that *original sin* “is not liability for another’s fault.”⁷⁶¹ With this statement, he denied the *Scholastic* teaching that God hold’s all men guilty for their lack of the *superadded righteousness* which Adam had lost. Instead, while explaining clearly that the utter corruption of human nature occurred in our progenitor, Adam, and is inherited from him, Calvin insisted that each man is guilty for his own depravity.⁷⁶² Thus, while recognizing Adam as the source of our vitiated nature and fallen condition, Calvin *did not* teach that God had *forensically imputed* Adam’s sin to the human race.

Nevertheless, John Calvin was among the first to articulate the idea of the *imputed righteousness of Christ* in a way that still sounds contemporary to today’s *Evangelical*. Calvin wrote,

... a man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the *righteousness of*

⁷⁵⁸ *Inst* 2.1.8.

⁷⁵⁹ *Inst* 2.1.8.

⁷⁶⁰ *Inst* 2.1.8.

⁷⁶¹ *Inst* 2.1.8.

⁷⁶² *Inst* 2.1.6.

Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.⁷⁶³

Therefore, though Calvin did not teach the forensic imputation of Adam's sin as an aspect of original sin, Calvin's language of *imputation*, together with his extensive development of the ideas of covenant, laid the foundation for the subsequent development of federal theology.⁷⁶⁴

FEDERALISTS INTRODUCE IMPUTED SIN

In federal theology, also called federalism or covenant theology, the forensic imputation of *both* Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness would become central tenets. According to this theological system, God entered into a covenant (Lat *foedus*) with Adam, and made Adam the covenantal representative (federal head) of all his posterity. Therefore, when Adam sinned, God held guilty both Adam and those he represented, i.e., God *imputed* Adam's sin to all mankind. By virtue of the federal union between Adam and his posterity, "his sin, although not their act, is so imputed to them that it is the judicial ground of the penalty threatened against [Adam] coming also upon [his posterity]." ⁷⁶⁵ Therefore, according to Federalism, the solution for humanity is to attach themselves by faith to a new federal head, namely, Jesus Christ "the last Adam" (1Co 15.45), so that God may impute Christ's righteousness to them. The Westminster Confession (completed in 1646) codified the principles of federalism, allowing its ideas to gain important standing in the theology of Scotland and New England.⁷⁶⁶ Hence, not only the majority of today's Calvinist and Reformed denominations, but even non-Calvinistic Evangelicals and Charismatics speak fondly of God looking upon believers as having been clothed in "the imputed righteousness of Christ."

⁷⁶³ *Inst* 3.11.2.

⁷⁶⁴ Two students of Calvin, Zacharias Ursinus (AD 1534-1583) and Caspar Olevianus (AD 1536-1587), developed the ideas of a pre-fall covenant of works and a pre-temporal covenant of redemption. "These ideas coupled with the covenant of grace resulted in the federal theology of men such as Johannes Cocceius (AD 1603-1669)." Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 175.

⁷⁶⁵ *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1989), pp. 312, 313.

⁷⁶⁶ Roderick Graciano, *Alien Righteousness?* (Timothy Ministries, 2011), p. 148.

With its emphases upon covenant and [imputation](#), [federal theology](#) never seems to have conclusively explained the vitiation of human nature. While [Calvinist](#) theologians correctly assert the corruption of human nature, they do not explain the mechanics of that corruption, nor how it passes down through the generations. [Calvin](#) himself wrote that “the impurity of parents is transmitted to their children, so that all, without exception, are originally depraved,” but he did not explain *how* the impurity is transmitted.⁷⁶⁷ A current [Reformed](#) theologian, [Michael Horton](#), writes that Adam and Eve

are discovered fleeing the scene of the crime, covering up the evidence. After this, all human beings will be born into the world “dead in ... trespasses and sins” and “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2.1,3).⁷⁶⁸

[Horton](#) leaves the question of *how* Adam’s posterity become children of wrath “by nature” unanswered. Similarly, [Evangelical Calvinist Wayne Grudem](#) asserts that we “inherit a sinful nature because of Adam’s sin,” but does not explain *how* we inherit that sinful nature.⁷⁶⁹

[Calvin](#) made it sound as though the corruption of human nature was a divine punishment. He wrote that,

not only was [Adam] *punished* by a withdrawal of the ornaments in which he was arrayed, viz., wisdom, virtue, justice, truth, and holiness, and by the substitution in their place of those dire pests, blindness, impotence, vanity, impurity, and unrighteousness, but he involved his posterity also, and plunged them in the same wretchedness. This is the hereditary corruption to which early Christian writers gave the name [Original Sin](#), meaning by the term the depravation of a nature formerly good and pure.⁷⁷⁰

By these words, [Calvin](#) implied that the vitiation of human nature occurred as a divine punishment! Indeed, [Calvinist](#) scholar [Zacharias Ursinus](#) wrote more explicitly, “On account of the transgression of our first parents God, even

⁷⁶⁷ *Inst* 2.1.6.

⁷⁶⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 412.

⁷⁶⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), pp. 496-497.

⁷⁷⁰ *Inst* 2.1.5, emphasis added.

whilst he creates the soul, at the same time deprives it of [original righteousness](#).... [T]his want of righteousness in respect of God, who inflicts it on account of the sin of our first parents, is no sin, but a most just punishment.”⁷⁷¹ Subsequent theologians took up the same idea, teaching clearly that human corruption is a divine punishment. The Reformed “Formula Consensus Helvetica,” composed in 1675, “stated unambiguously that the corruption of our nature could not be understood otherwise than as the penalty of imputed guilt...”⁷⁷² A little nearer our time, Presbyterian theologian, [Charles Hodge](#), wrote that the evils which men suffer, as [federally](#) related to Adam and “by nature children of wrath,” are “judicial inflictions” from God, and that these inflicted evils include the “loss of [original righteousness](#).” This is tantamount to saying that God, in response to Adam’s sin, punished Adam’s posterity by removing the Godward inclination from human nature. Absurd! This is to portray God as “cutting off His nose to spite His face.” Surely God did not say to Himself, “Since Adam has offended me by committing a heinous sin, I’m going to make all his descendants sinners like him.”⁷⁷³

The fact is that [Calvinists](#) have struggled with explaining the propagation of fallenness. As [Nathaniel William Taylor](#) noted in the 19th century, [Calvinists](#) have “held a ‘great diversity’ of views as to how to account for the certainty of sin in Adam’s descendants [i.e. how to account for the transmission of corruption]. Some Calvinists ... would regard it as the result of the imputation of Adam’s sin ... others would give different interpretations.”⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷¹ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 41, quoted in Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 142.

⁷⁷² The wording of Canon X reads, “... [there] appears no way in which hereditary corruption could fall, as a spiritual death, upon the whole human race by the just judgment of God, unless some sin (*delictum*) of that race preceded, incurring (*inducens*) the penalty (*reatum*, guilt) of that death. For God, the supremely just Judge of all the earth, punishes none but the guilty.” Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology: Rewritten and Enlarged*, (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878), pp. 658-659.

⁷⁷³ As Macleod comments, “Our moral sense recoils from this. Would anyone *preach* it?” Donald Macleod, “Original Sin in Reformed Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 145.

⁷⁷⁴ H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin: A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 92. See also Pope’s comment that “Calvin and the Reformed Confessions make no distinction between the imputed guilt, and the inherent depravity of man’s fallen estate.” William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of*

Taylor himself believed in “a connection between Adam’s sin and that of his posterity, ... [but] was never able to specify the exact nature of that connection.”⁷⁷⁵ A contemporary of Taylor’s, Bennet Tyler, “maintained that the fall brought upon mankind a morally contaminated nature which, like a mental property, is hereditarily transmitted from parent to child.”⁷⁷⁶ This would seem to make the corruption of human nature a physiological trait carried in DNA.

Of all Calvinist theologians, the great Jonathan Edwards, the theological predecessor of Taylor and Tyler, perhaps came closest to understanding the mechanics of the corruption of human nature. In H. Shelton Smith’s synopsis, Edwards in his book on *Freedom Of The Will* proposed that,

When God created Adam he implanted in him two kinds of principles, inferior and superior. The first are principles of “mere human nature,” and manifest themselves in terms of self-love and the natural appetites and passions. The second are “spiritual, holy, and divine, summarily comprehended in divine love,” and are “immediately dependent on man’s union and communion with God.” They “were given to possess the throne and maintain an absolute dominion in the heart; the other [inferior principles] to be wholly subordinate and subservient.”

As long as both kinds of principles operated within Adam’s nature, he was *one integrated whole* and enjoyed a happy existence in communion with God. But, alas, when he sinned and broke God’s covenant, the “superior principles left his heart,” *the Holy Spirit forsook him*, and communion with God “entirely ceased.” As a room is left in darkness when the candle is withdrawn, so Adam “was left in a state of darkness, woeful corruption and ruin; *nothing but flesh without spirit*.” This moral catastrophe was in no way the result of a bad principle or corrupt taint having been infused into Adam’s natural constitution; it all came about through his willful violation of a divinely established covenant or constitution. To be sure, God withdrew his presence from rebel Adam, but that was only just since Adam set up his own natural affections and appetites in the place of God.⁷⁷⁷

Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volumes 1-3, (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), Vol. 2, p. 78.

⁷⁷⁵ H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin: A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 121.

⁷⁷⁶ H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin: A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 120.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33, emphasis added.

Notice that [Edwards](#) envisioned two components of human nature that formed “one integrated whole.” Also, as had the medieval [Scholastics](#), [Edwards](#) understood that the vitiation of human nature had to do with the loss of something, rather than the addition of some negative thing “infused” from without. Finally, [Edwards](#) knew that the deprivation had to involve the Holy Spirit departing from Adam in some sense.⁷⁷⁸ Sadly, [Edwards’](#) ideas did not lead to any consensus among [Calvinists](#) (the majority of whom are also [Federalists](#)) on how human nature was vitiated and how the corruption is passed down. Nevertheless, today’s [Calvinists](#) remain very clear about the *fact* of the complete corruption of human nature, and the *fact* that this depravity has passed down through the generations by propagation.

The impetus behind the developments in the [Reformers’](#) thinking about [original sin](#) was the desire to overwhelmingly negate the implied justification-by-works of Roman Catholic theology. [Calvin](#) developed his ideas of covenant, in part, to say that the Roman Catholic church had broken covenant with God, and therefore should be repudiated as an institution. He stressed the total depravity of fallen human nature in order to undermine the Catholic thinking that man could of himself combat his natural [concupiscence](#), and pursue righteousness and merit before God (which the Roman church insisted anyone could do who availed themselves of the [sacraments](#)). With the advent of [Federal Theology](#), the idea that God [forensically imputes](#) Adam’s sin to all Adam’s posterity presents a double barrier to man saving himself: Not only is man’s nature totally depraved from birth, but every descendant of Adam (except Jesus) is born under a [forensic](#) sentence of guilt before God.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁸ All of these ideas enter into my explanation of fallenness given above.

⁷⁷⁹ Of course, a forensic sentence of guilt for Adam’s sin is only subtly different from Anselm’s idea that God holds men responsible for Adam’s loss of the *donum superadditum*.

Cf. H. Shelton Smith’s explanation of how the federal-covenant view came to the aid of the American Puritans:

The Puritans thus sought to fix a double grip upon the doctrine of original sin. If the Augustinian idea should prove to be groundless — and it was already on the defensive — they still could defend orthodoxy on the federalist claim that Adam was “a public person,” or “a Parliament man,” for whose conduct all men are responsible. In the course of time the Augustinian element did lose its force...

H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin: A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 3.

Therefore, all men depend utterly upon God's grace for salvation, and no one can dream of saving himself by the human pursuit of good works and spiritual merit.

The advent of [Federalism](#) thus brings us to the final development of the Protestant doctrine of [original sin](#). Building on [Calvin's](#) definition, [Federal theology](#) tells us that [original sin](#) consists of two things: the complete [depravity](#) of human nature *and* [forensically imputed](#) guilt. We inherit both of these problems from Adam, the first by propagation and the second by divine decree.

In more recent times, both the Catholic and Protestant doctrines of [original sin](#) have — by various groups — been simplified, liberalized, allegorized, or simply ignored. No established Christian movement, however, has been unaffected by the language, perspectives and implications of these doctrines and their historical development. *Today, the more historically rooted a denomination, the more apt it is to believe in [original sin](#) and in infant baptism as [original sin's](#) ideal remedy.*

ASSESSMENT OF THE DOCTRINAL EVOLUTION

THE NON-ISSUE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

We would have much less difficulty understanding [the fall](#) and [original sin](#) today if the apostolic Church had been more concerned about these topics. However, the Apostles focused instead upon their Great Commission. In their teaching and writing, they obediently emphasized the Lordship of Christ and the salvation made available through faith in Him. When the principles of this gospel were clouded by those in the Church who strayed (into libertinism on the one hand and legalism on the other), the apostles addressed *those* moral and doctrinal issues, rather than the more esoteric questions about sin's origin. Among the apostles, only Paul in his epistles touched explicitly on the matter of universal human corruption and its connection to Adam, and then only to support his arguments regarding justification by faith in Christ.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁸⁰ Likewise, "While taking for granted humankind's sinful nature, the Hebrew Bible shows little interest in sin's origin." Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), Vol. 3, p. 1321.

Generally speaking, in the apostolic era it was enough to know that Jesus is Lord, and that all men are sinners and need His salvation.

Indeed, in the Christian writings of the hundred years following Paul's time, we find only vague passing references to an Edenic crisis that brought mortality and moral disaster upon the human race.⁷⁸¹ Not until the late second century and the writings of [Irenaeus](#) do we find specific references to a catastrophic change in the human race that came through Adam and Eve. In these references, [Irenaeus](#) didn't speak of [the fall](#), as such, but instead taught (usually in direct dependence upon Paul's writings) about what we had lost in Adam and have gained in Christ.⁷⁸² [Irenaeus](#) spoke of these things for the purpose of combatting [gnostic](#) mythology and [Docetism](#). In fact, [gnostic](#) heresies in the second century drowned out any theological concern about [the fall](#) by forcing the Church to focus instead on issues of authority (ecclesiastical and scriptural) and Christology. Then, in the third century, the Church became embroiled in controversies over how to deal with the lapsed who had denied the faith in times of persecution and who now wished to return to the fold. All these practical and doctrinal concerns were more pressing to the early Christians than questions about sin's *origin*. We should be wary, therefore, of dogmatic statements about [original sin](#), since there is no doctrine of [original sin as such](#) in the [NT](#) (Rom 5 notwithstanding) — sin was an essential element of the apostles' doctrinal teaching, but not "[original sin](#)."

THE PAGAN BEGINNINGS

We should become all the more wary upon discovering that the first mention of something like [original sin](#) in early Christian writings appeared in an overtly pagan teaching. I refer to [Origen's](#) teaching (of c. AD 240) that human beings committed sins in a heavenly preexistence and were punished by being incarnated in their earthly bodies. This teaching of [Origen's](#) is obviously [Platonic](#) and [gnostic](#), so we need not examine it biblically. Nevertheless, we must make three important observations about it before assessing the next theological development.

⁷⁸¹ E.g., *Dial* 88, 100.

⁷⁸² *Adv Haer* 3.18.1, 21.10, 22.4, 23.8.

First, we must not forget that [Origen](#) offered this pagan notion (of an “innate defilement” from a cosmic preexistence) as a rationale for *infant baptism*. Proponents of infant baptism should not ignore the historical implication of this fact: *if there had been a long-standing, scripturally-based practice of infant baptism, no one would have felt the need to propose such a bizarre justification for it in the early third century*. Obviously there had *not* been a long-standing practice of infant baptism antecedent to [Origen’s](#) day. Instead, at that time infant baptism was a recent, pagan innovation that had emerged around AD 200,⁷⁸³ and the Church was just beginning to cast about for a basis upon which to defend it.

Second, [Origen’s](#) teaching that there *was* something in infants that needed ritualized remission was a departure from the sense among the earliest Christians that little children were “innocent” (see [The Natural Corollary: Infant Baptism](#), above). The fact of his departure from earlier cultural assumptions does not disprove [Origen’s](#) belief in the sinfulness of infants, but only underscores the novelty of his making it ritually relevant. The novelty of [Origen’s](#) theory implies the felt need at the time to rationalize infant baptism.

Finally, the anti-materialism implied in [Origen’s](#) doctrine of the fall was a [Platonic-gnostic](#) principle that would become a philosophical poison in the Church, persisting to this present day. [Origen](#) did not originate the anti-materialism that has long poisoned the Church, but neither did his doctrine of a fall (involving angelic persons punished by being fashioned into material bodies) do anything to curb anti-materialism’s insidious advance in the minds of early and medieval Christian thinkers. By the fourth century, this anti-materialism, and the pagan dualism of which it is an expression, became the “major influence” giving rise to the Roman Catholic church’s imposition of celibacy upon its clergy,⁷⁸⁴ and thus has caused the ruin of countless lives at the hands of unnaturally repressed priests. By way of [Manichaeism](#), this pagan thinking infected [Augustine](#), in whose equation of [original sin](#) with [concupiscence](#) anti-materialism would find its ultimate doctrinal expression.

⁷⁸³ Kurt Aland, ET by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 103.

⁷⁸⁴ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 217.

THE INNOVATION OF INHERITED GUILT

To continue, though, with our assessment of [original sin's](#) doctrinal evolution, let's pass over the ambiguous allusions to original corruption, or antecedent sin, by writers like [Tertullian](#) (c. AD 200) and [Victorinus](#) (d. c. AD 303), and proceed to the teachings of [Cyprian](#) (c. AD 250). We must give careful scrutiny to [Cyprian's](#) idea of baptismal remission for *inherited guilt*, for this idea presents us with another novel innovation. Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever taught the granting of remission to one person for the sins of another, nor did they ever hint of the need for such a thing, as though the God of truth held individuals responsible for sins that they themselves had never committed. John the Baptist called people to receive forgiveness of *their* sins, not someone else's (Luk 1.77). Jesus extended God's forgiveness with the words, "**Y**our sins are forgiven" (Mat 9.2; Luk 7.48 [NIVO](#)), with no hint of simultaneously remitting inherited guilt. Peter called his fellow Jews to repentance and faith in Christ "for the forgiveness of **y**our sins" (Act 2.38; 3.19), not those of "another." From the beginning of time, who had ever heard of a person receiving remission for someone else's sins? Who had ever imagined themselves culpable for someone else's transgressions? To our knowledge, no one. Yet this is what [Cyprian](#) said was remitted for infants by their baptism: "the sins of another."⁷⁸⁵

If we search the scriptures for hints of accountability for someone else's sins, we might hit upon God's pronouncement of the ten commandments in Ex 20 and Deut 5. In these passages, according to the New International Version (1984), God said, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Ex 20.5 [NIVO](#)). The casual reader might interpret this declaration to mean that God punishes people for sins committed by their great grandparents. However, the [NIVO](#) does not provide the best translation of this passage.⁷⁸⁶ In the Hebrew text, God's parenthetical self-characterization as a "jealous God" is elaborated with a proverb-like contrast. Think of the many antithetical proverbs in the book of Proverbs, like Pro 15.25:

⁷⁸⁵ *Cyp Epi 58.5: To Fidus, On The Baptism Of Infants.*

⁷⁸⁶ Far less does the NIRV which reads, "I punish the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who hate me"!

The LORD will tear down the house of the proud,
But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

In the midst of declaring the core commandments of His covenant with Israel, God used this proverb-like structure to describe what He means when He says that He is a jealous God. I would translate Ex 20.5-6 like this:

You shall not bow down to [idols] and you shall not serve them,
(because I, YHVH your God, *am* a jealous God,
calling to account the sin of the fathers upon the sons of the third and
fourth generations of those hating me,
but doing kindness to thousands of *generations*, to those loving me and
keeping my commandments).

See the essential, proverb-like antithesis:

I call to account the sin ... of those hating me,
but do kindness ... to those loving me.

This antithesis is filled out to explain that, on the one hand, God holds those hating Him accountable for their sins within the timeframe of their living generations (Ex 20.5),⁷⁸⁷ while on the other hand, He shows His kindness for a thousand generations (i.e., forever) to those who love Him (Ex 20.6).

Furthermore, we must note that this divine self-characterization:

1. Says nothing about anyone being held accountable for sin committed by Adam.
2. Aims its implicit warning at “those hating me,” not to descendants who do not follow in the rebellious footsteps of their iniquitous ancestors.
3. Emphasizes that it is sin that is punished, not children. In other words, God punishes sin whether in children or adults, but doesn’t punish children regardless of innocence or guilt. In Ex 20.5 as in Ex 34.7, it is *sin* (עֲוֹן, ə-’vōn) that is the nearest object of the participle *punishing* or *calling to account* (פָּקַד, pō-’qād, literally, *supervising*), not the *children* (בְּנֵי, bā-’nēm). Thus, the [NAU](#) correctly interprets, in Ex 34.7, that it is only “the guilty” whom God will not leave unpunished.
4. Teaches nothing about remission of sin.
5. Says absolutely nothing about baptism.

⁷⁸⁷ “The third and fourth generation is ... a way to refer to all living members of the family.” Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Therefore, we cannot look to Ex 20.5 as a basis for Cyprian's teaching that in baptism infants receive remission for "the sins of another."

Could Lev 26.40 provide that basis? The Law urged Israelites who found themselves under God's judgment to "confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers." Does this imply guilt for the sins of one's forefathers? No, in this passage God simply calls upon the Israelites to humble themselves in times of crisis, to recognize iniquity for what it is in God's eyes, and to agree with Him about their sin and the sins of their ancestors.⁷⁸⁸ Even so, let us note that this passage, like Ex 20.5, refers to adjoining generations, not to primordial history or the sin of Adam. Therefore, Cyprian could hardly have had Lev 26.40 in mind when he wrote that infants receive remission for "the sins of another."

Might Cyprian have made an inference from the fact that Jesus died for our sins (1Co 15.3) rather than for His own? Probably not, since a proper understanding of Jesus' atonement for our sins tells us that we need no other means to remit those sins; if Jesus atoned for them, we don't need baptism to wash them away. Nevertheless, could Cyprian have contemplated an analogy between Christ and infants? Did he think that as God held Jesus accountable for our sins, God holds infants accountable for "the sins of another"? Again, probably not, for the simple reason that God *did not* hold Jesus accountable for our sins. Nowhere does Scripture teach such a thing. On the contrary, Jesus could only atone for our sins if He Himself were entirely guiltless. Christ could not have died for our sins if God thought of Him as guilty of those sins.⁷⁸⁹ Realizing this should help us see that the way Jesus bore our sins, and the way Cyprian imagined infants bearing "the sins of another," are phenomena in two different conceptual categories.

Regrettably, I've yet to find a passage in Cyprian's available writings that specifies the basis for his idea that infants receive remission for "the sins

⁷⁸⁸ There are times when it is appropriate to acknowledge the sins of our parents or grandparents before God, as an expression of our personal renunciation of those sins. However, such a confession and renunciation does not imply personal culpability for the deeds of one's ancestors.

⁷⁸⁹ There is much confusion among Evangelicals on this point. I refer the reader to my book *Alien Righteousness?*, (Tacoma, WA: Timothy Ministries, 2011), pp. 116-120. This book is available free of charge at: <http://www.tmin.org/tminpages/books.html>.

of another.” Nor can I find any expression of such an idea in the writings of the earlier [Fathers](#). Therefore, since Scripture nowhere states the need for anyone to receive remission for “the sins of another,” but on the contrary teaches explicitly that, “the LORD is a God of justice” (Isa 30.18), that God abominates pronouncing the just unjust (Pro 17.15 [LXA](#)), that “it is not good to punish an innocent man” (Pro 17.26 [NIVO](#)), and that “The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity,” but that “the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself” (Eze 18.20; see all of Eze 18 and Deut 24.16), and furthermore shows us that, precisely because God does not hold one person accountable for the act of another, we can effectively intercede for innocent bystanders (Gen 18.16-33; Num 16.20-24; 2Sa 24.17), *we must conclude that [Cyprian’s](#) teaching of baptismal remission “for the sins of another,” implying that guilt is inherited, was a truly radical innovation, and should be repudiated.*⁷⁹⁰

Considering next the writings of [Ambrosiaster](#), [Hilary](#) and [Ambrose](#), (whose relevant works were all composed within 25 years of each other, AD 355-380), we can for the moment pass over [Hilary’s](#) ambiguous statement about “the sins ... of our origin.” Regarding [Ambrose](#) and [Ambrosiaster](#), however, remember that they both taught that we all sinned “[in a lump](#)” while we were still biologically in Adam, and that therefore we are born with guilt for our own participation in Adam’s primordial sin. We will examine this “seminal theory” of [original sin](#) shortly, and in depth, since it became a cornerstone of [Augustine’s](#) doctrine. Before proceeding to that examination, however, we must observe two things.

First, by the fourth century the [Fathers](#) were being misled by a faulty understanding of Rom 5.12 as translated in the Old Latin versions of the Bible. Our standard English versions of Rom 5.12 read:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, **because** all sinned—

⁷⁹⁰ There are biblical examples of the sin of a leader bringing guilt upon the people (Lev 4.3; 2Sa 24), but this had to do with the complicity of contemporaries, and not with guilt that was heritable from one generation to the next.

However, where English translations say, “because,” the Old Latin Bibles said, “*in quo*,” which can mean “in that,” “in which,” or “*in whom*.”⁷⁹¹ Thus, the Latin Bible could be understood as saying that, “by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men **in whom** all have sinned,” with the *in whom* referring back to Adam.⁷⁹²

However, in the [GNT](#), the clause at the end of Rom 5.12, ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον (ēf’ ō ‘pān-dēs ‘ē-mār-tōn), does not mean “in whom all sinned,” but “because all sinned,” or “with the result that all sinned.”⁷⁹³ Therefore, the verse does not support the idea that we sinned while in Adam, nor that all humanity participated in Adam’s sin while they were as yet undifferentiated from him in nature. [Ambrose](#) said, “Adam existed, and in him we all existed. Adam perished, and in him all perished,” and “I fell in Adam, in Adam I was expelled from Paradise, in Adam I died, ... I was rendered subject to guilt, and the destined prey of death in the first Adam.”⁷⁹⁴ However, while we could accept such statements if [Ambrose](#) meant them in a metaphorical sense (that *as a result of* Adam’s sin we are fallen, alienated from God, and subject to death), we see that Rom 5.12 does not support his statements in any literal sense.

Second, let’s observe that [Ambrose’s](#) idea (still sometimes held by modern theologians) that in Adam “human nature itself sinned” is an absurd personification of an abstract idea. Personal beings like angels and human beings sin, but abstract things like human nature do not sin; it is the man himself, not his “nature” whom God holds accountable. Perhaps when Ambrose

⁷⁹¹ The rare adverbial phrase *in quo* means “in that” in Rom 8.3 of the Vulgate, but “in whom,” or “in which” in its more common use as a pronominal phrase (Eph 1.07,11,13; 2.21-22, etc.).

⁷⁹² This is how Augustine understood Rom 5.12, as he makes apparent in *De Pec*, Book 1, chs. 10 [IX] -11 [X]. See also, *De Nup*, Book 2, chs. 8, 15, 20, 24, and 45. In Augustine’s *Con Dua*, Book 4, ch. 7, he bolsters his case for this reading saying, “For thus also the sainted Hilary understood what is written, ‘wherein all have sinned;’ for he says, ‘wherein,’ that is, in Adam, ‘all have sinned.’ Then he adds, ‘It is manifest that all have sinned in Adam, as it were in the mass; for he himself was corrupted by sin, and all whom he begot were born under sin.’ When he wrote this, Hilary, without any ambiguity, indicated how we should understand the words, ‘wherein all have sinned.’”

⁷⁹³ For a thorough treatment of the Grk clause, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Consecutive Meaning of ἐφ’ ᾧ in Romans 5:12,” in *To Advance The Gospel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

⁷⁹⁴ Ambrose of Milan, *Expositio Evangelii Secundam Lucam* 7.234 and *De Excessu Fratris* 2.6, quoted in Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 306.

said that “human nature itself sinned” he did not mean it as a precise philosophical statement; perhaps he really meant something like “human nature itself *was damaged by sin*.” Nevertheless, the absurdity of Ambrose’s wording does not give us confidence in his preceding words, “by the inheritance of his nature there has been transfused from that one man into all an inheritance of *guilt*.” Still, we will revisit [Ambrose’s](#) words when we look again at the teaching of [Anselm of Canterbury](#).

Coming chronologically, then, to [Augustine](#), the acknowledged “father of the doctrine of [original sin](#),” we must now examine, one by one, the three principles of his doctrine, as well as his arguments for them.

ASSESSMENT OF [AUGUSTINE’S FIRST PRINCIPLE](#)

The principle that all humanity sinned in an Adamic preexistence⁷⁹⁵ is as absurd as [Origen’s](#) speculation that all people sinned in a cosmic preexistence. Human beings have no preexistence.⁷⁹⁶ Having no preexistence, a person not yet conceived cannot sin. A supremely rational and perfectly just God does not hold nonexistent people responsible for *anything*, and therefore, He does not hold anyone guilty for something that occurred before their conception.⁷⁹⁷

Not only is the idea that Adam’s posterity sinned while still in his loins absurd, it begs a very important question. [Reymond](#) correctly observes that “this view ... cannot explain why Adam’s descendants today are held

⁷⁹⁵ One might argue that Augustine’s doctrine did not imply a *preexistence* but an *actual existence* in Adam’s loins. What actually existed, however, was elemental, biological and undifferentiated, not whole, spiritual and personal. In other words *no person* actually existed in Adam’s loins, and so if his individual progeny existed in Adam at all it was in the abstract sense of a preexistence, and God does not hold people accountable for anything while they preexist in this sense.

⁷⁹⁶ God perfectly and completely foresees all men, but what exists in His mind is the *thought* of a person, not the person himself.

⁷⁹⁷ It’s true that God “calls things that are not **as though** they were” (Rom 4.17 ^{NIVO}). However, by this expression Paul simply means that God’s promises are so certain that in the moment God makes a promise He can speak of its fulfillment *as though* already accomplished. Paul does not mean that God says something *actually* exists before it exists; rather, He speaks of things that will exist *as though* they already did. In other words, God might foretell that a person will be born and that said person will sin, but God would never say, as Augustine’s teaching implied, that an as-yet non-existent person is *already sinning*.

That God “calls things that are not **as though** they were” is the reason why people could be saved by faith in Messiah *before* His crucifixion and resurrection. Once God had decreed the atoning sacrifice of His Son (see Act 2.23; 1Pe 1.18-20), mankind could “bank on it” though the atonement did not actually occur for millennia.

responsible for his *first* sin only ... and not for all of his subsequent sins as well, not to mention the sins of all the generations of forefathers that followed Adam and that precede any particular man today.”⁷⁹⁸ In other words, if we were to accept that all Adam’s posterity sinned *with him*, while still biologically *in him*, wouldn’t that imply that every man is also guilty of *all the sins of all his ancestors*, and that even Jesus, a true descendant of Adam, was guilty of all the sins of his forefathers?⁷⁹⁹ This question haunted [Augustine](#) himself, who wrote,

But about the sins of the other progenitors who intervene between Adam and a man’s own parents, a question may very well be raised. Whether every one who is born is involved in all their accumulated evil acts, in all their multiplied original guilt, so that the later he is born, so much the worse is his condition; or whether God threatens to visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations, because in His mercy He does not extend His wrath against the sins of the progenitors further than that, lest those who do not obtain the grace of regeneration might be crushed down under too heavy a burden if they were compelled to bear as original guilt all the sins of all their progenitors from the very beginning of the human race, and to pay the penalty due to them; or whether any other solution of this great question may or may not be found in Scripture by a more diligent search and a more careful interpretation, I dare not rashly affirm.⁸⁰⁰

This question, that [Augustine](#) himself could not answer, eventually contributed to the abandonment of his “[seminal theory](#)” of original sin by both Catholics and Protestants.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁸ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), p. 437.

⁷⁹⁹ “The weakness of this approach is that if all are guilty of Adam’s sin through this organic connection, are they not also guilty of the subsequent sins of all their ancestors?” — *New Dictionary Of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), p. 642.

⁸⁰⁰ *Enchi* 47. See also *Enchi* 46 in which Augustine finds support for the idea of cumulative participation in the sins of our ancestors in God’s declaration that (in Augustine’s words) “I shall visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children” (cf. Ex 20.5; Deut 5.9).

⁸⁰¹ Nevertheless, a variation of the seminal theory of Ambrose and Augustine has come forth in the recent “realist view” of William G. T. Shed and James Henry. Their view “proposes that Adam possessed the entire human nature and that all mankind, being present in Adam as generic humanity, corrupted itself by its own apostatizing act in Adam. Individual men are not separate substances, but manifestations of the same generic substance. They are numerically one in nature. The reason that all men are accountable for Adam’s sin is because they *actually* (really) sinned in Adam before the individualizing

Augustine's second proposed source of congenital guilt, namely the **concupiscence** (lust) with which infants are infected during their parents copulation, shows Augustine's residual **Manichaeism**,⁸⁰² i.e., his latent contempt for sex and marriage. Augustine condescendingly thought "continence better than marriage; but marriage better than fornication,"⁸⁰³ believed that marital sexual pleasure was a necessary evil that needed forgiveness,⁸⁰⁴ and said that even "polygamy for the sake of propagation was better than monogamy for pleasure."⁸⁰⁵ In all of these sentiments his thoughts were most unbiblical and *un-Hebraic*, showing the influence of **Gnosticism** (and perhaps of some residual self-reproach) upon his thinking.

We can reject the idea of the sexual transmission of guilt as unbiblical, but we must also reject it as a serious **category mistake** (a mistake noticed later by the **Scholastics**). Guilt is not in the category of physical things, and therefore it cannot be physically transmitted. According to **Beatrice**, this problem would torment Augustine "for the rest of his days," since he was never able to solve it.⁸⁰⁶ As **B. B. Warfield** wrote, Augustine is sure of "the fact of original sin, But how we are made partakers of it, he is less certain."⁸⁰⁷ Augustine understood that for original sin to pass "not just from one body to another ... but from one soul to another ... it would need to transcend the physical sphere of procreation so as to involve the spiritual dimension of the

of human nature began." Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology Of The Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 436.

⁸⁰² "Manichæan also is the opinion that sexual desire is sinful, and that inherited sin is explained simply from procreation as the propagation of a vitiated nature (*natura vitiata*)." Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), Vol. 5., p. 219. See also Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 220. Augustine was repeatedly accused of Manichaeism by the Pelagian, Julian of Eclanum.

⁸⁰³ *De Nup* 1.18 [XVI].

⁸⁰⁴ *De Nup* 1.16 [XIV].

⁸⁰⁵ *De Doc* 3.18.

⁸⁰⁶ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 71.

⁸⁰⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Introductory Essay on Augustin and the Pelagian Controversy," in *Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, edited by Philip Schaff, Vol. 5, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), p. lxvii.

human person.”⁸⁰⁸ In spite of this unsolved problem, Augustine resolutely maintained his doctrine of the sexual transmission of original sin (both its guilt and corruption) against all assailants. We, however, must repudiate it as a counter-rational idea.⁸⁰⁹

ASSESSMENT OF AUGUSTINE’S SECOND PRINCIPLE

Augustine’s theory that the *corruption* of original sin is also sexually transmitted makes the same *category mistake* just mentioned. Moral corruption is not in the category of physical things, and therefore cannot be transmitted physically. However, Augustine proposed a combination of physical and spiritual factors in the propagation of corruption. He said that by the father passing down an impaired seed (physical) and by the parents experiencing lust (spiritual) in copulation, a sinful inclination (spiritual) is passed down to the child conceived in the (physical) process of human procreation. Granted that this formulation includes a *spiritual* element (lust), it still requires that all elements be conveyed in the *physical* act of procreation; to mix physical and spiritual elements and transmit them by a physical event, still commits a *category error*. A physical act simply cannot convey a preexisting spiritual corruption.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 71.

⁸⁰⁹ Currently, the CCC, § 404, states that “the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But ... [i]t is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind”

⁸¹⁰ This problem touches on Augustine’s earlier traducianism. Traducianism is the belief, taught by Tertullian and held by many others down to this present day, that human procreation generates children’s souls as well as their bodies. Early in his career, Augustine seems to have wavered on just how human souls originate (Beatrice, p. 72), and to have leaned toward traducianism (Beatrice, p. 73; see also Von Harnack, *History of Dogma* Vol. 5, p. 217), but as Beatrice explains, Augustine would ultimately deny “ever having taught traducianism...” (Beatrice, p. 74).

Of the many objections that have been raised against traducianism, including the implicit teaching of Scripture that God gives the human soul (i.e., spirit, Ecc 12.7) and “forms the spirit of man within him” (Zec 12.1), perhaps the chief conceptual one is that it “invites a material understanding of the soul” (EDT2). “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Joh 3.6 ^{NET}). If the soul is propagated by parents in the physical substances involved in human procreation, did it not imply that the soul was something material? Augustine didn’t believe that, and so would have to distance himself from traducianism, although at first that belief seemed to help explain how corrupt parents gave birth to corrupt children.

Perhaps for this reason, [Augustine](#) ultimately put more emphasis on [concupiscence](#) (spiritual) than on the “impaired seed” (physical), as the vehicle of transmitting original sin.⁸¹¹ As [Beatrice](#) puts it, for Augustine “[concupiscence](#) is the sole cause of the transmission of [original sin](#) from parents to children, and is, as it were, the guardian demon of original sin.”⁸¹² I find this interesting in light of modern medical procedures such as SSC and IVF. Technicians can now produce embryos without the phenomenon of parental “lust.” Had [Augustine](#) been right about [concupiscence](#), I dare say we would be seeing some saintly people around us today as more and more parents clamored for medical help in producing sinless children!⁸¹³

Returning, though, to [Augustine’s](#) two-pronged theory of transmission, it helps to know that he developed it in order to explain the sinlessness of Jesus. Since the conception of Jesus involved neither an “impaired seed” from His Father, nor [concupiscence](#) (lust) on the part of His mother,⁸¹⁴ it would explain why He alone of all our race was born without a sinful inclination.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹¹ See *De Pec* 2.11 [IX], and *De Nup* 1.27 [XXIV] cited by Thomas Aquinas, *Of The Sanctification Of The Blessed Virgin*, P(3)-Q(27)-A(3), in Vol. 5 of *Summa Theologica* (Albany: AGES Software, 1997).

⁸¹² Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 65.

⁸¹³ “It is a pity that Augustine was not right as we would otherwise now have a way to abolish original sin, namely In Vitro Fertilization.” A. N. S. Lane, “Lust: The Human Person as Affected by Disordered Desires,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 78.1, quoted in, Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 104.

⁸¹⁴ Augustine wrote that Jesus “bore no trace of original sin” because “he was begotten and conceived in no pleasure of carnal appetite” (*Enchi* 41).

⁸¹⁵ Interestingly, though, Rome still felt a need to elevate “the mother of God” to make her worthy of bearing God’s son, and so devised the doctrine of *The Immaculate Conception of Mary*. According to this doctrine, made official dogma in 1854, Mary of Nazareth was immaculately conceived in *her* mother’s womb, and supernaturally kept from the taint of inherited sin so that she could bear the sinless Jesus.

As creative as this theory is, it calls into question God’s efficiency in the work of redemption, for if God could righteously do a miracle to keep Mary from inherited sin (or fallenness), God could have done that same miracle for all of us so that we would all be born ready to love and serve him with the same faith and purity that the virgin Mary had. Regardless of its implications, though, there is simply no biblical foundation for the dogma of *The Immaculate Conception*. (Two verses are offered in support of the dogma, Gen 3.15 and Luk 1.28, passages which provide no explicit evidence.)

In his explanation of Mary’s sinlessness, Catholic author Peter J. Kreeft, perhaps inadvertently, helps perpetuate a germ-disease analogy of fallenness. He writes in *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism Of Catholic Beliefs* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2001), p. 410, “Mary ... was saved before she sinned, while we were saved

However, while this theory explained Christ's lack of corruption, it did nothing to explain away the apparent guilt of our Lord implied by Augustine's first principle that all have sinned "in Adam." If we all sinned while still seminally in Adam, then Jesus sinned too, for though His father was God, He was also a true biological descendant of Adam (see Rom 1.3 and Luke's genealogy of Luk 3.23-38).

The second principle of Augustine's doctrine fails, therefore, because it is philosophically fallacious, it created as many doctrinal problems as it solved, and (with the continuing development of reproductive technology) it has become scientifically untenable.

ASSESSMENT OF AUGUSTINE'S THIRD PRINCIPLE

I don't wish to belabor Augustine's belief in baptismal remission. We have already seen in our preceding study of baptism that the rite of Christian immersion does not take away sin at all, so we will hardly imagine that baptism takes away a certain kind of sin, i.e., *original sin*, that the Bible never mentions! However, Augustine's baptismal doctrine involves a subtlety that we need to understand. Augustine taught emphatically that baptism washes away *original sin*,⁸¹⁶ but clarified that though baptism remits the *guilt* (*Lat culpa* or *reatus*) of *original sin*,⁸¹⁷ the corrupt driving impulse (*Lat actus*) of *concupiscence* remains.⁸¹⁸

after we sinned. It is like one person being saved from a disease by an inoculation to prevent it, and another person being saved from the same disease by an operation to cure it"

To support the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception, which implies she was not subject to the curse with its sentence of death, Pope Pius XII in 1950 established the dogma of *The Assumption of Mary*. According to this doctrine, Mary went to heaven directly at the end of her life, i.e., she was "assumed" body and soul into God's presence.

⁸¹⁶ *Con Dua* 3.5: "Therefore the salvation of man is effected in baptism, because whatever sin he has derived from his parents is remitted...." *Ser* 213.9: "...you will be without any sin at all as you come up from that bath. All the things that were plaguing you in the past will there be blotted out," cited in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 88.

⁸¹⁷ "When he comes to speak of the effects of baptism, Augustine affirms on various occasions that in the sacrament of rebirth what is forgiven is the sin or guilt of concupiscence (*reatus concupiscentiae*)." Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 66.

⁸¹⁸ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 66, 201.

We are forced to the conclusion, therefore, that baptism as understood by [Augustine](#) and the Catholic church of his time effected *nothing* observable or verifiable!⁸¹⁹ Supposedly, baptism took away the *impalpable* guilt from a person's *unprovable* participation in the [concupiscence](#) of his parents and in the sin of Adam, gave him an *imperceptible* spiritual new birth, and made him a member of the *invisible* Church. Such a doctrine of [baptismal regeneration](#) has all the earmarks of a scam. I can imagine a clerical huckster in a Rob Reiner spoof of the Middle Ages shouting,

Step right up, Mom and Dad, and get your baby baptized here! Our baptism will wash away all his guilt, and save him from damnation! He'll be born again of the Holy Spirit! Yes, he'll grow up to act like any other sinful child (we can't take away his concupiscence), but he'll be a member of the mother church, outside of which he wouldn't be able to do penance for his many future sins. Make him a member of the body of Christ now, before he has any say in the matter!

Thinking Christians and intelligent skeptics alike must find such a suspicious doctrine of [original sin](#) and its baptismal cure revolting. It evokes those "teachings of men" that Paul said have "no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col 2.22-23).

If the main principles of [Augustine's](#) doctrine of [original sin](#) fail, what then of his arguments, particularly the biblical ones, in support of those principles? We must look at his defense for his doctrine now, and sort truth from error.

ASSESSMENT OF [AUGUSTINE'S FIRST ARGUMENT](#)

In saying that all sinned "in Adam," [Augustine](#) echoed the view of his mentor [Ambrose](#). To support this teaching, [Augustine](#), like his mentor, relied upon a faulty interpretation of Rom 5.12, as translated in the [Lat](#) versions of his time.

⁸¹⁹ See Augustine's long list of baptism's benefits, all of which are unverifiable, at least for infants, in *De Pec* 1.39 [XXVI]. As William Harmless summarized the list, "By their baptism, infants came to enjoy the 'benefits of the Mediator': they were delivered from evil, reconciled with God, enlightened by the Spirit, and incorporated into the body of Christ, the church." William Harmless, "Baptism," ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 90.

Quoting the Old Latin Bible,⁸²⁰ Augustine wrote, “by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men **in which** all have sinned.”⁸²¹ Augustine interpreted the masculine pronoun *quo* (= *which* or *whom*) of the Latin rendering as referring to Adam, and taught that all men sinned while still in Adam’s loins.

As we have just seen, though, the clause at the end of Rom 5.12 in the GNT, ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον (ēf’ ō ‘pān-dēs ‘ē-mār-tōn), does not mean “in whom all sinned,” but “because all sinned,” or “with the result that all sinned.”⁸²² Therefore, Rom 5.12 does not support the idea that we sinned while in Adam, nor that all humanity participated in Adam’s sin while they were still “in that one man,” as yet undifferentiated from him in nature.⁸²³

However, Augustine also appealed to Heb 7.9-10 to support the idea of sinning “in Adam,” so let’s look at that passage. The writer to the Hebrews said,

And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

⁸²⁰ Which used the words “*in quo omnes peccaverunt*.” The subsequent Vulgate version retained this wording.

⁸²¹ *De Pec*, Book 1, chs. 10 [IX] to 11 [X]. See also, *De Nup*, Book 2, chs. 8, 15, 20, 24, and 45 where Augustine quotes the final clause of Rom 5.12 as “for *in him* all have sinned.” In Augustine’s *Con Dua*, Book 4, ch. 7, he bolsters his case for this reading saying, “For thus also the sainted Hilary understood what is written, ‘wherein all have sinned;’ for he says, ‘wherein,’ that is, in Adam, ‘all have sinned.’ Then he adds, ‘It is manifest that all have sinned in Adam, as it were in the mass; for he himself was corrupted by sin, and all whom he begot were born under sin.’ When he wrote this, Hilary, without any ambiguity, indicated how we should understand the words, ‘wherein all have sinned.’”

⁸²² As Philip Schaff said: “Augustin based his view of a quasi pre-existence of all men in the loins of Adam on a false exegesis of Rom. 5.12, ἐν ᾧ, by following the Vulgate rendering *in quo* (*in whom*), and referring it back to Adam; while it has the meaning *because* (ἐπὶ τούτῳ ὅτι = διότι), or *on condition that* (ἐπὶ τούτῳ ὥστε, *ea ratione ut, inasmuch as*). It is neuter, not masculine.” Philip Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church*, Vol. 8, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1910), ch. 14 §112, footnote 1 on p. 543.

⁸²³ *De Civ* 13.14. See Augustine’s argument in *De Pec*, 1.11 [X] and following, and 3.14, and also *De Grat* 2.47 [XLI] See also Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 68-69, as well as Ambrose of Milan, *Expo Luc* 7.234, and *De Excessu Fratris* 2.6, quoted in Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 305.

[Augustine](#) (and his supporters) argued from this text that as Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek while still biologically within his ancestor Abraham, we sinned while still biologically within our ancestor Adam.⁸²⁴ However, the writer to the Hebrews does *not* teach that people commit the acts, good or bad, of their ancestors while still in their loins, but only uses a rabbinical argument to prove the existence of a greater priesthood than the Levitical one.⁸²⁵ Furthermore, the writer alerted his audience that he speaks figuratively by using the [Grk](#) phrase, ὥς ἔπος εἰπεῖν (ōs 'ēp-ōs ē-'pēn), “so to speak,” at the beginning of Heb 7.9,⁸²⁶ and we cannot base a literal principle (i.e., the idea that people literally act while still biologically in their ancestors) upon a figurative statement (i.e., that *figuratively* Levi paid tithes while still biologically in his ancestor).

Regarding [Augustine's](#) use of passages like Ex 20.5 and Deut 5.9, we have already seen above, in connection with [Cyprian's](#) teaching, that God's declarations about the generations in the pronouncement of the Decalogue say nothing about infractions going back to sin's primeval origin.

We see, therefore, that when we properly interpret [Augustine's](#) proof texts for his [first argument](#), the argument dissolves: the Bible provides no basis for the idea that we sinned while still biologically in Adam.

ASSESSMENT OF [AUGUSTINE'S SECOND ARGUMENT](#)

It seems odd that [Augustine](#) would appeal to the covenant of circumcision and the law of postpartum purifications as proof of [original sin](#), since Jesus was circumcised and the virgin Mary offered the sacrifices for ritual purification.

⁸²⁴ Some of the Fathers also drew attention to the fact that in Hebrew *Adam* means “man,” and by this suggested that Adam embodied within his person all *mankind*, or at least the human nature of the whole race.

⁸²⁵ Hebraically speaking, godly ancestors are considered greater than their descendants. If one of the patriarchs honored someone as greater than himself, then it was even more incumbent upon the descendants of that patriarch to acknowledge the greatness of said individual. Since Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, it proves that Levi, Abraham's descendant would have also tithed to Melchizedek had he been present. Thus, from antiquity there was a greater priesthood than that of Levi. Jesus makes use of the “ancestor is (normally) greater” principle in His query to Pharisees in Mat 22.41-46.

⁸²⁶ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Broadman Press, Nashville, 1932), pp. 382-383, explains ὥς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, as an “old idiom” meaning that “this could only be true of Levi ‘so to speak.’” He summarizes the argument of Heb 7.9-10 as “a rabbinical imaginative refinement appealing to Jews.”

Just as the baptism of Jesus refutes the idea that baptism washes away sin, so the circumcision of Jesus and the purification of Mary cast doubt on the idea that these rites pointed to [original sin](#).

I concur with [Augustine's](#) belief that all descendants of Adam, apart from Christ, are born with sin and guilt. However, what Augustine called [original sin](#) was a doctrinal package that included a certain kind of sin, and a certain kind of guilt. The sin in [Augustine's](#) doctrinal package was Adam's sin and the guilt was guilt for both a person's own sin (supposedly committed while still in Adam) and for the concupiscence of each person's own father and mother. It is this complex idea of primordial sin and inherited guilt that I reject as unbiblical.

With this clarification in mind, let's return to the question of a connection between circumcision and [original sin](#). As I have explained above (in the section "[The Spiritual Meaning Of Circumcision For All](#)"), circumcision pictures the need to free the heart of fallen man from the tyranny of the flesh. Therefore, the rite does testify to the natural fleshliness of our race, but it says nothing about *guilt* for sin committed in Adam or by our parents. Circumcision was eminently appropriate for Jesus, because He was the one man whose heart was *never* dominated by the flesh (Jesus is the ultimate expression of what living with a circumcised heart looks like; Deut 30.6; Jer 4.4; Rom 2.29). However, the circumcision of Jesus most certainly *did not* indicate that He was born with sin and guilt, and therefore circumcision cannot serve as proof of [original sin](#).

With regard to the laws of motherhood in Lev 12, let us note that the sacrifices of atonement were for the mother (Lev 12.6-8), not for the infant.⁸²⁷ The burnt offering and the sin offering had no direct reference to the newborn, and so could not point to any kind of sin in the infant. The offerings do relate to sin, but as R. Laird Harris wrote, "The [OT](#) does not state that conception and birth are sinful; but [only that] all who conceive and bear are sinners...."⁸²⁸

⁸²⁷ Contra Origen in *Com Rom Books 1-5*, translated by Thomas P. Scheck, (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), pp. 366-367.

⁸²⁸ R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein, Vol. 2., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), p. 574.

As to what the offerings after childbirth did teach, W. A. Van Gemeren explains, “The association between the sin and the burnt offerings suggests that before the worshiper can fully devote himself to the Lord (symbolized by the burnt offering), he must know that his sins have been atoned for (symbolized by the sin offering).”⁸²⁹ In other words, the offering of these two sacrifices allowed the new mother to resume her family relationships and religious obligations with the confidence of God’s blessing upon her.

Let us also note that [Augustine](#) — as we might expect — was quite un-Jewish in his perspective on childbirth. For Jewish people, the sacrifices of the new mother were fulfilled with joyful gratitude for the *conception given by God* (Rut 4.13; cf. Gen 29.31; 30.22), and for the new life that was His gift (Psa 113.9; 127.3); neither the sacrifices nor the offerers focused at all upon the sin and guilt of the infant.⁸³⁰ In fact, the rabbis understood a woman’s ritual “uncleanness” after giving birth, as they did her “uncleanness” in menstruation (Lev 12.2), namely, as having to do with her being *excluded* from — not her participation in — acts of procreation. Rather than pointing to some negative aspect of birth, they marked the interruption and resumption of the procreative cycle.⁸³¹

ASSESSMENT OF [AUGUSTINE’S THIRD ARGUMENT](#)

With his third argument, [Augustine](#) utilizes logical reasoning rather than explicit biblical support for his thesis. In effect, he presents us with a syllogism. He begins with the biblically sound premise that,

A. Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5.6).

⁸²⁹ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*: Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 856.

⁸³⁰ This was particularly true for the birth of a son, which was seen as an expression of divine favor. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth*, First edition, JPS Tanakh Commentary, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2011), pp. 87-88.

⁸³¹ Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000), Vol. 3, pp. 1110-1112. Interestingly, the rabbis “did not account a heathen woman unclean by childbearing, because she was not yet under the law that concerned uncleanness.” John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew, 1 Corinthians, Luke-John*, Vol. 3, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), pp. 37-38.

Then he follows with a two-pronged minor premise that is part inference and part observation:

B. Christ died for infants who haven't done ungodly acts.

The Scripture nowhere asserts (in so many words) that Christ died for infants, but we can reasonably infer it from passages like 2Co 5.14-15 where Paul, referring to Christ, tells us that "one died for all." If Christ died for "all," then He must have died for people regardless of their age. Regarding infants not having done ungodly acts, we can grant that this is a fair observation.

Finally, [Augustine](#) draws the conclusion from his major and minor premises that,

C. *Therefore*, infants are "ungodly" because of [original sin](#).

This is an awkward conclusion because the Bible never uses the word *ungodly* (ἀσεβής, ä-sě-'vēs) in connection with children, let alone with infants. Instead, Scripture usually reserves this term for those who act overtly in a wicked manner. This does not mean that [Augustine](#) erred in his belief that infants are sinners for whom Christ died. The fatal flaw in his [third argument](#), however, is the assumption that infants cannot sin *actually*. If that assumption were true, then their sinfulness would have to consist of something other than actual sins, and the existence of some kind of [original sin](#) might be a reasonable inference.

As I have shown above in the section, "[The Implications Of Human Fallenness](#)," however, infants do sin *actually*, and are properly considered sinners *because they sin*. A more biblical syllogism than [Augustine's](#) would state:

A. "Death spread to all men **because** all sinned," (Rom 5.12).

B. Even infants die.

C. *Therefore*, even infants sinned.

See that the verb *sinned* of Rom 5.12 speaks of actuality: "all men [actually] sinned." We know this because the antecedent nouns for *sin* in the verse refer to Adam's sin which was actual. There is no contextual basis for interpreting

the verb *sinned* as referring to anything other than actual sin.⁸³² This fact is fatal for Augustine's doctrine, and so he took great pains to distinguish between "original sin" and "actual sins."⁸³³ For example, in the *Enchiridion*, Augustine's "handbook" on the Christian life, he made certain his readers understood that when the Church says that "infants are baptized for the remission of *sins*, instead of saying for the remission of *sin* ... the plural number is put in place of the singular [as a figure of speech]..." but it is still *original sin* (singular) that is meant, not actual sins (plural).⁸³⁴ The Bible makes no such distinction, however, and so Augustine's *third argument* also fails: Christ certainly died for infants, but He did so because infants sin, not because they are infected with *original sin*.

ASSESSMENT OF AUGUSTINE'S FOURTH ARGUMENT

Augustine's argument based on the suffering of infants fails because of the same false premise underlying his third argument. Just as Christ died for infants because they *actually* sin, so infants suffer and die because they *actually* sin. Once we understand that infants do sin *actually*, then we have no need to propose a speculative theory of *original sin* to explain why infants are included in both the sufferings of our fallen race, and also in the redemptive work of Christ.

ASSESSMENT OF AUGUSTINE'S FIFTH ARGUMENT

Only those committed to a doctrine of *baptismal regeneration* will accept the premise of Augustine's argument for *original sin* based on the damnation of unbaptized infants. Nevertheless, even if we were to accept as true the despicable premise that infants are damned if they die unbaptized, we would attribute their damnation to their *actual sins*, not to *original sin*, *nor* to their unbaptized state. Again, we need not resort to a theory of *original sin* when

⁸³² Contrary to the teaching of Federalism that interprets the final clause of Rom 5.12 as saying that "all sinned *judicially*."

⁸³³ *De Civ* 16.35; *Enchi* chs. 29, 33, 44, 64, 93; *De Pec* 1.11 [X]; 1.14 [XI]; 1.16 [XIII]; 1.20 [XV]; 1.24 [XIX]; 1.39 [XXVI]; 1.64 [XXXIV]; 2.51 [XXXI]; 2.57 [XXXV]; *De Corr* 30 [XI].

⁸³⁴ *Enchi* 44.

infants have actual sins by which to merit their supposed condemnation (should they die), and so this argument of [Augustine's](#) also fails.⁸³⁵

ASSESSMENT OF [AUGUSTINE'S SIXTH ARGUMENT](#)

[Augustine's](#) final argument for [original sin](#) is the most telling, first in regard to the great theologian's willingness (perhaps unwittingly?) to resort to fallacious argument. The argument that the "catholic Church ... baptizes infants for the remission of sin," and that therefore people are obviously born with [original sin](#), is of course an *argumentum ad antiquitatem*, an appeal to tradition, the tradition of infant baptism. The problem with the "this is true because we've always done it that way" argument, however, is that the longstanding practice of the "we" in view may have always been in error. In other words, though [Augustine](#) found it unthinkable, the Catholic church may have practiced infant baptism in error. [Augustine](#) assumed that the Catholic church could not err regarding infant baptism, and so appealed to the church's traditional practice, but nevertheless, the form of his argument is fallacious.

This [sixth argument](#) of [Augustine's](#) is also telling with regard to his ignorance (or blind faith?) regarding the history of infant baptism. [Augustine](#) appealed to the Catholic church's tradition of baptizing infants for the remission of sin, but the problem is that the Church hadn't *always* baptized infants for the remission of sin. As I've mentioned above, the earliest Christians didn't think infants needed remission. Instead the [Apostolic Fathers](#) had assumed [the innocence of children](#) (until they reached some age of accountability). This assumption was maintained until the [subapostolic](#) Church felt the need to offer a rationale for infant baptism — then the cultural sense of little children's innocence began to erode. As the commitment to infant baptism increased in the early Church, the assumption of childhood innocence decreased and finally disappeared. As [Kurt Aland](#) observed, regarding [Augustine's](#) appeal to baptismal tradition,

... [Augustine](#) [argued]: If children have no sin when they are born, why are they baptized? Here the original position [of childhood innocence

⁸³⁵ I reiterate that the real sinfulness of infants does not imply that babies who die go to hell. The Bible provides clues suggesting that children who die before they are old enough to *consciously* respond to God are saved by God's grace (2Sa 12.18-23; Mat 18.1-6; 19.14).

maintained by the [Apostolic Fathers](#)] has been reversed — the guns have been turned round!⁸³⁶

My point, though, is not about the reversal of sentiment regarding childhood innocence, but about the parallel rise of infant baptism that the reversal underscores. The fact that the practice of infant baptism *arose*, even against the tide of early Christian attitudes, provides compelling evidence that infant baptism was itself an innovation. [Augustine](#) had the advantage that by his time the church had for two centuries been baptizing infants for remission of sin, and on the basis of that history he rightly called infant baptism a tradition. However, if anyone in [Augustine's](#) time had cared to research the tradition, they would have discovered that infant baptism “for the remission of sin” represented *a reversal* of the earliest Christian thinking, and was not a tradition that went back to the apostles (contrary to [Origen's claim](#)). Therefore, [Augustine's](#) argument based on the ecclesiastical tradition of infant baptism “for the remission of sin” does not inspire confidence in his doctrine of [original sin](#).

Particularly since [Augustine](#) appealed to a church practice that he himself was in the very process of shoring up! He defended [original sin on the basis](#) of the church's baptism of infants, but he himself was systematizing the doctrine of [original sin as the basis](#) for the church's baptism of infants. (Why do we believe in [original sin](#)? Because the church baptizes infants. Why does the church baptize infants? Because of [original sin](#).) The circularity of argument here echoed that of [Origen](#). 150 years earlier, [Origen](#) had [argued for infant baptism](#) on the basis of [original sin](#) (i.e., “innate defilement”), and he had also argued — in a somewhat vague and circular manner — for the universal sinfulness of man [on the basis of the church's practice of baptizing infants](#). Now, by defending [original sin](#) with an appeal to the church's tradition of infant baptism, [Augustine](#) made [Origen's](#) earlier circular reasoning clear and explicit. Together, these two great church fathers produced a circular argument spanning centuries: *We baptize infants because of [original sin](#), and we know that [original sin](#) exists because we baptize infants*. The historical

⁸³⁶ Kurt Aland, ET by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), pp. 104-107.

reality of this circular reasoning should give pause to proponents both of infant baptism and of [original sin](#). Historically, both doctrines are components of a theological construct that has no foundation outside of itself.⁸³⁷ The Emperor “isn’t wearing anything at all!”⁸³⁸

ASSESSMENT OF AUGUSTINE’S DOCTRINE: CONCLUSION

I do not doubt [Augustine’s](#) godly motives and sincere belief in his own teaching. On the contrary, [Augustine](#) commendably developed his doctrine of [original sin](#) in order to defend the truth of *salvation by grace* against the [Pelagian](#) heresy of self-justification by one’s own works. Unfortunately, [Augustine’s](#) unfamiliarity with [Hebraic](#) culture and his hatred of [Grk](#)⁸³⁹ limited his understanding. The [mystical-sacramental](#) presuppositions of his [Hellenized](#) religious milieu also misled him, and he never fully escaped his [Manichaeian](#) disapproval of human sexuality (see [Fig. 11](#) below).⁸⁴⁰ In the end, [Augustine’s](#) many [category mistakes](#) and exegetical errors left the doctrine of [original sin](#) that he “fathered” vulnerable to reformulation by the [Scholastics](#), begging for complete overhaul by the [Reformers](#), and disintegrating under the scrutiny of current biblical studies.

⁸³⁷ N. P. Williams underscored the circular interdependency of the two doctrines when he explained why Scotus, while diverging from the thought of Thomas Aquinas, did not deny original guilt:

Frankly to throw over the conception of original guilt would have seemed to the thought of the Middle Ages to involve the condemnation of the practice of infant baptism. Once more the actual practice of the Church, as in the fifth century [with Augustine], exercised an irresistible influence over the development of thought. The Church actually does baptise newly born infants, and we cannot suppose that the Church has acted wrongly or without good reason; therefore infants, even of a day old, stand in urgent need of baptism. But in the ‘Nicene’ Creed, we profess our belief in ‘one baptism,’ which is ‘for the remission of sins.’ There are not two different kinds of baptism, one of adults conveying remission of sins, and the other of infants conveying no remission of sins; *therefore*, infants are baptised ‘for the remission of sins,’ and must accordingly be supposed to have some real sin, in the sense of guilt, which can be remitted.

Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), pp. 411-412.

⁸³⁸ Hans Christian Andersen, “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

⁸³⁹ *Conf* 1.14. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Translated by E. B. Pusey, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

⁸⁴⁰ Adolf Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), Vol. 5, p. 102.

Influences Upon Augustine's Doctrine Of Original Sin

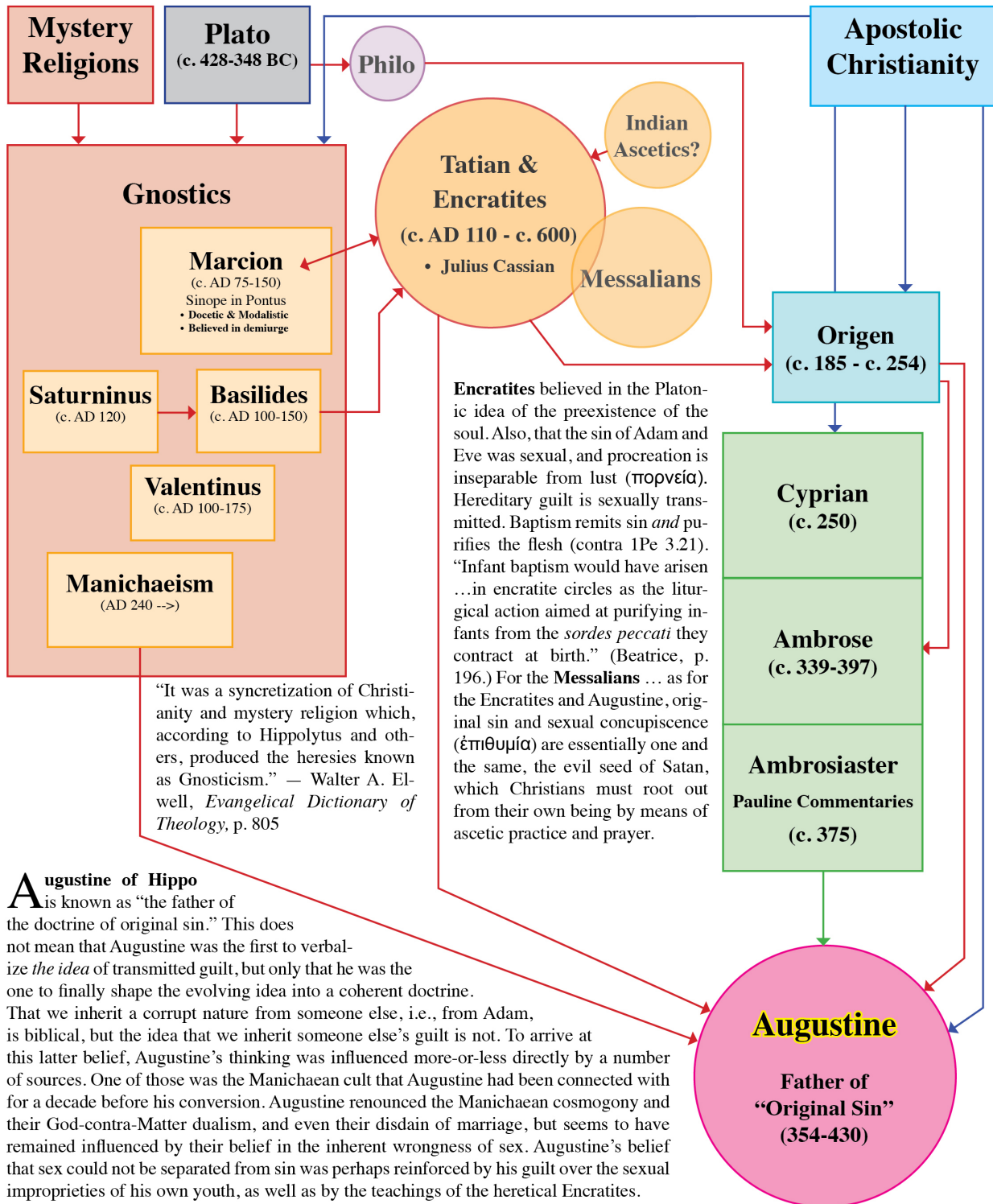


Figure 11

Seven False Assumptions Behind The Early Practice Of Infant Baptism

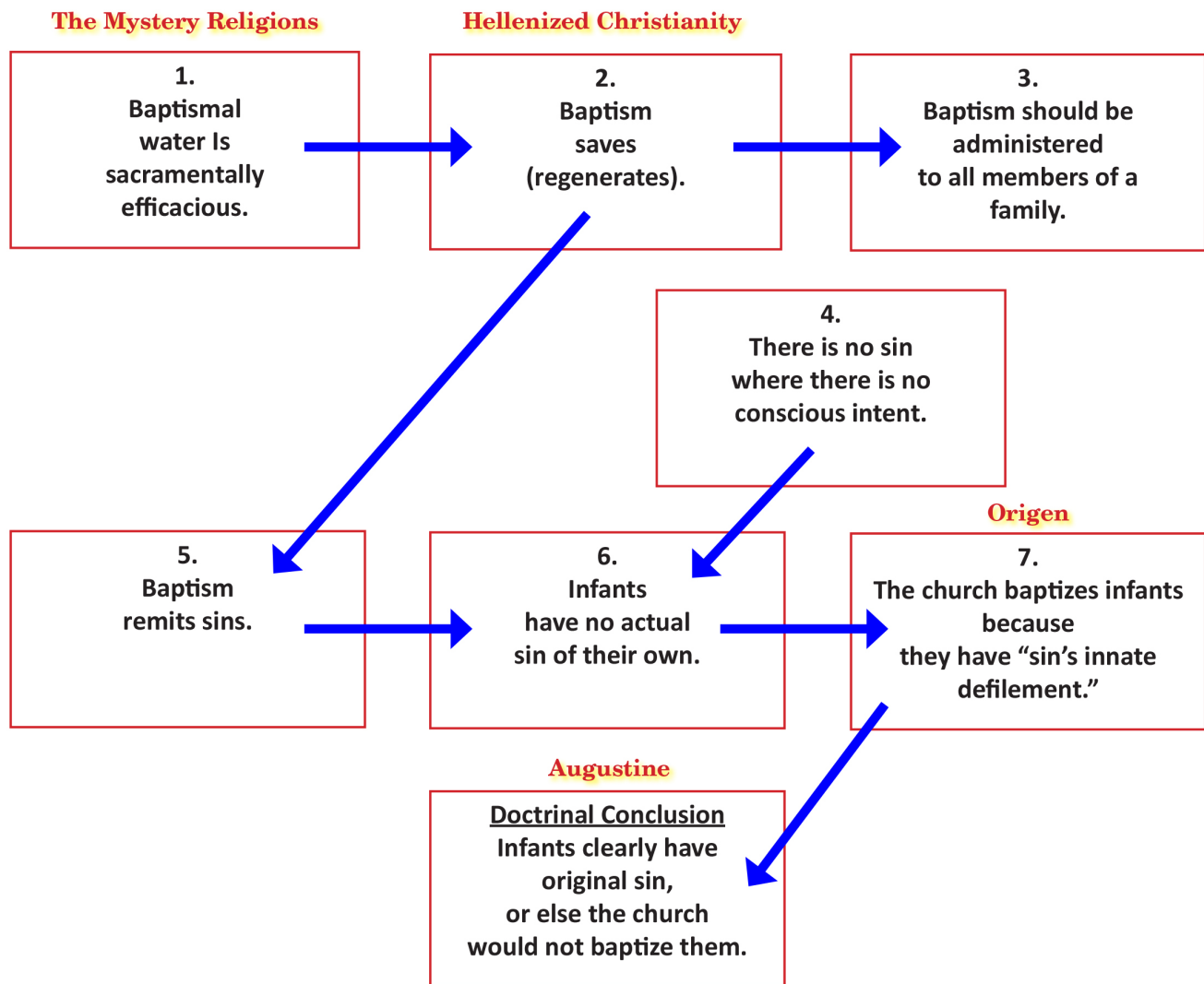


Figure 12

THE SCHOLASTIC NEAR MISS

As the [Scholastics](#) brought [Aristotelian](#) logic to bear upon the theology of the medieval church, they quickly recognized that [original sin](#) could not be a substantive thing that is transmitted like a germ. Instead, they adopted the more biblical perspective of identifying [original sin](#) with the “loss of something.” Indeed, when the [Scholastics](#) thought of the thing lost in terms of [Irenaeus](#)’ “sanctity ... from the spirit,”⁸⁴¹ or [Augustine](#)’s “gift of resistible grace,”⁸⁴² or [Aquinas](#)’ “gratuitous strength,”⁸⁴³ they came very near to the truth (explained above in “[The Mechanics Of The Fall](#)”) that man as originally constituted had an essential link to God via the Holy Spirit’s gracious working in human nature. Furthermore, when [John Duns Scotus](#) contemplated the “opposition of the flesh and the spirit [which] belongs to the original nature of man,” he came close to understanding that fallenness has to do with [a misalignment between the components of human nature](#). Finally, with the decrees of the [Council of Trent](#) and [Bellarmine’s clarifications](#), the Roman Catholic Church came very close to the truth again in confirming that the human soul and spirit are in terrible disarray because of the lack of a *third component* of the original human constitution, a component lost to humanity when Adam sinned.

Nevertheless, the [Scholastic](#) and [Tridentine](#) reformulation of the doctrine of [original sin](#) has a fatal flaw. The problem is that this medieval doctrine posits [an inherent conflict between flesh and spirit](#), i.e., “[the ‘disease of nature’ which inheres in matter](#).” This belief contradicts the declaration of Scripture that everything God created was “very good” (Gen 1.31). It pictures God as failing to create a good and perfect man in the beginning, but creating instead a man whose very nature made sin inevitable. However, God *did not* create human nature such that sin would erupt as the natural fruit of its own

⁸⁴¹ *Adv Haer* 3.23.5.

⁸⁴² Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 96. See *City* 14.27.

⁸⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Summa Theologica*, Complete English ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), Q. CIX, Art. 2.

constitution. God did not create human nature with “[a natural inclination and desire for sin](#).”

Furthermore, God did not create man from something inherently evil or diseased; moral corruption does not inhere in physical matter. If H. T. Cremer accurately characterizes [Bellarmine](#) in the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia,⁸⁴⁴ then [Bellarmine’s teaching](#) shows that, as late as the 17th century, the Roman Catholic church was still infected with [Platonic](#) anti-materialism. However, no true understanding of creation can demean the material world as it came forth from God’s hand.⁸⁴⁵ Far less can we consider a doctrine correct if it debases human nature as originally designed by an almighty and holy Creator.

The current teaching of [original sin](#) in the CCC and other Roman Catholic literature does not *overtly* teach anti-materialism. On the contrary, the CCC states that “man may not despise his bodily life,” but is “obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it.”⁸⁴⁶ Catholic literature does still teach, however, that Adam, by his sin, lost — with disastrous consequences for himself and his posterity — the gift of [original justice](#). The idea of the inherent conflict in human nature (between spirit and matter) is implied, but remains in the background. Sadly, even though current literature softens the teaching of the innate conflict in human nature that required a [superadded gift](#) of [original righteousness](#), this doctrine from [Anselm](#) forward has had two serious consequences, one theological and the other practical.

First, the theological problem: Since human nature as originally created is perceived to have an “inherent weakness,” due largely to its relationship to worldly matter,⁸⁴⁷ the Catholic idea of redemption makes mankind’s ultimate destiny *an angelic state*.⁸⁴⁸ As Wilhelm and Scannell put it,

⁸⁴⁴ Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), Vol. 10, p. 38.

⁸⁴⁵ Ch. 4 in Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution And The Death Of Man. The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: a Christian Worldview*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), Vol. 5, p. 32.

⁸⁴⁶ CCC, § 364.

⁸⁴⁷ Joseph Wilhelm and Thomas B. Scannell, *A Manual of Catholic Theology: Based on Scheeben’s “Dogmatik,”* Fourth Edition, Revised, (London; New York; Cincinnati; Chicago: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.; Benziger Bros., 1909), Vol. I, p. 496.

⁸⁴⁸ As if Origen had been right about mankind’s preexistence as angelic beings, whose destiny

The final perfection to which man is called includes the salvation of his entire nature Man is to be transfigured and his whole nature renewed; his earthy and animal elements are to be transformed into heavenly and spiritual elements, and his whole nature raised to the level of pure spirits In this state man “shall be as the angels of God (Mat 22.30), elevated above his own nature to that likeness with God which is natural to the angels.”⁸⁴⁹

This understanding of human redemption and destiny (1) slanders divinely created human nature as ultimately requiring transformation and elevation to something other than itself, (2) disparages earthly and physical existence, (3) obscures the destiny of redeemed mankind to rule on the earth (Rev 5.10), (4) calls into question God’s purpose to create a new heaven and new earth (Isa 65.17; 66.22; 2Pe 3.13; Rev 21.1), and (5) mistakenly views angels as the apogee of God’s creation, rather than man.⁸⁵⁰

Second, the practical consequence: The medieval formulation of [original sin](#) and the loss of [original righteousness](#) implies that the fall did not injure human nature, but only returned it to its natural state and neutral (even if conflicted) condition, neither sinful nor holy (as explained by [Louis Berkhof](#), above in [q. 2](#) under “[17 Questions About Human Fallenness](#)”). Thus, while Catholic literature teaches that the fall, and loss of [original righteousness](#), has wounded human nature and has made it inclined to sin, it simultaneously affirms that “human nature has not been totally corrupted.”⁸⁵¹ Through the centuries, and thanks in no small part to the Roman Catholic agenda of systematized penance, *the subtleties* of this teaching about human nature have been lost on the layperson, such that religious people who live under the influence of Roman Catholicism tend to believe that their human nature is perfectly intact, that they have equal capacity to do good or evil (with nothing

was to return to that non-material state.

⁸⁴⁹ Joseph Wilhelm and Thomas B. Scannell, *A Manual of Catholic Theology: Based on Scheeben’s “Dogmatik,”* Fourth Edition, Revised, (London; New York; Cincinnati; Chicago: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.; Benziger Bros., 1909), Vol. I, p. 496.

⁸⁵⁰ Men and women, not angels, were created in God’s image. Redeemed human beings are becoming the bride of Christ, not angels. Angels are ministering spirits who serve *for the sake of* the redeemed (Heb 1.14), and who long to look into the details of our redemption (1Pe 1.12). If man is currently “a little lower than the angels” (Psa 8.5; see Psa 8.6 ^{LXX}), it has to do only with his temporary suffering (Heb 2.7-9) and not with his inherent nature.

⁸⁵¹ CCC §405.

impinging upon their freewill), and that therefore, they can overcome sin if they choose, and if they (in the words of the [Council of Trent](#)) “resist manfully.” In short, the practical consequence of the [Anselmic](#) doctrine of [original sin](#) is that it has for centuries produced a mindset in the practice of Roman Catholicism that is essentially [Pelagian](#) (or at least [Semi-Pelagian](#)), encouraging in the masses a belief in justification by works.

Significantly, even after [Augustine’s](#) identification of [original sin](#) with [concupiscence](#) was abandoned (from [Anselm](#) forward), the belief in baptism as *the cure* for [original sin](#) never was. The [Council of Trent](#) taught explicitly that “[in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted](#).” Today, the CCC less precisely states that, “Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, *erases original sin* and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man”⁸⁵² How exactly does baptism “erase” original sin if its consequences remain? It is left to the reader to research the question until he discovers, *Aha! Baptism does not erase original sin, but only its guilt. Guilt for what? Guilt for being born without the superadded righteousness that we should have been born with.* Apparently, current Catholic policy is to describe the doctrine of [original sin](#) in terms that are vague enough to avoid raising questions among intelligent laypeople.

In summary, though the Roman Catholic doctrine of [original sin](#) finally evolved into something very nearly biblical *in some points*, it missed the mark in such a way as to poison the spiritual lives of countless people up to the present day. When, moreover, we recognize the doctrine as an essential component of a persisting sacramental system of [baptismal regeneration](#) and life-long penance, a system that renders no verifiable returns to religious adherents but does much for the self-perpetuation of the Roman Catholic church, we cannot help but see the Catholic doctrine of [original sin](#) as despicable.

THE INNOVATION OF IMPUTED GUILT

Even as the [Scholastics](#) correctly realized that man’s sin problem has to do with a deprivation, the [Reformed](#) theologians correctly recognized the complete

⁸⁵² CCC §405, emphasis mine.

ruination of human nature. The Reformers weakened their own arguments, however, with an imagined imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity.⁸⁵³ John Calvin remained on solid ground in this regard, teaching only the utter corruption of human nature while denying that original sin is "liability for another's fault."⁸⁵⁴ The Reformed theologians who followed, however, stepped out onto uncertain terrain by teaching that God imputed the guilt of Adam's sin to all mankind. The footing for the Reformed theory of original sin is collapsing today for a handful of reasons.

First, as already stated above in connection with Cyprian's notions, the idea of imputing guilt to one person for what another person did is utterly contrary to the just character of God.⁸⁵⁵ It also affronts God's omniscience, for it involves God in a legal fiction wherein He "thinks of people as having committed Adam's sin," contrary to reality.⁸⁵⁶ Granted: God has every right to define both reality and justice, and to govern the human race by whatever principles He chooses. For this reason we would have to accept liability for Adam's sin *if there were any scriptural warrant for doing so*. That scriptural warrant simply does not exist.⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵³ Application of Ockham's Razor tells us that a theory of federal imputation is unnecessary for understanding the texts that say "in Adam all die" (1Co 15.22), and because of Adam we "all sinned" (Rom 5.12). It is enough that we are sinners by the corruption of our nature; it is not necessary to theorize that we are sinners by the judicial imputation of someone else's sin.

⁸⁵⁴ *Inst* 2.1.8.

⁸⁵⁵ According to Strong, "Dr. E. G. Robinson used to say that 'imputed righteousness and imputed sin are as absurd as any notion that ever took possession of human nature.' He had in mind, however, only that constructive guilt and merit which was advocated by Princeton theologians." Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine of Man*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1907), p. 594 (p. 398 in AGES version). Strong adds that Robinson "recognized the fact that all men are sinners by inheritance as well as by voluntary act, and he found this taught in Scripture, both in the O. T. and in the N. T." On Robinson's behalf, Strong then goes on to give as examples Neh 1.6, Jer 3.25 and 14.20, but these passages teach no "sin by inheritance" but only the corporate guilt of a nation that has sinned, both in earlier generations and in the present. Strong then gives 2Ti 4.16 [in which our ETs use *counted*, *charged*, etc.] and Rom 5.13 as examples of the NT use of the word *to impute*, but these verses don't teach "inherited sin" either.

⁸⁵⁶ Roderick Graciano, *Alien Righteousness?* (Tacoma, WA: Timothy Ministries, 2011), pp. 109-110).

⁸⁵⁷ For centuries now, the chief argument for the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity has been derived from Rom 5.12-19. This passage, however, simply cannot bear the theological weight that has been hoisted upon it, as I have explained at length in my book, *Alien Righteousness?* (Tacoma, WA: Timothy Ministries, 2011), pp. 44-47. See also, Cornelius

A second reason that the fragile support for the [Reformed](#) doctrine of [original sin](#) collapses is that (as we have already recognized above in connection with the writings of [Ambrosiaster](#), [Ambrose](#), [Hilary](#) and [Augustine](#)) the idea of a corporate participation in Adam's sin is not only metaphysically suspect, but is an outright doctrinal innovation. Neither the apostles nor their Hebrew predecessors ever imagined such a thing. As [David A. Brondos](#) helpfully points out (in connection with the [imputation](#) proof text, Rom 5.12-14),

Paul is not explicit regarding the precise relationship between Adam's sin and the death of all human beings. It is important to note, however, that the ancient Jewish writings that mention this relationship do not provide any evidence for the idea that there had been some type of universal human participation in Adam's sin, or in Adam himself. Even passages such as 4 Ezra 7:118 and 2 Bar 48:42–43, which have been cited in support of the idea that Adam was “a corporate figure, whose sin could be regarded at the same time as the sin of all his descendants,”⁸⁵⁸ actually affirm only that all people suffer the consequences of Adam's sin in that they too now inevitably sin and die. Thus, the idea is not that Adam's sin was also the sin of others, or that Adam was a corporate figure who represented or included those who were to follow him, but simply that Adam's sin led to the present situation in which all of his descendants also sin and die. “All died” in the sense that Adam's act made it certain that they would also die, not in the sense that they somehow actually died when Adam sinned. The notion of some type of common participation in Adam's sin as well as a common sharing in his guilt is not found in Jewish thought but is a later Christian development, present particularly in the writings of [Augustine](#), who was heavily influenced by [Platonism](#). For [Augustine](#), Adam appears to be something like the original “form” or “idea” of “man,” in which all “men” participate; since all human beings are “one in him,” they all share both in his sin and in his guilt.⁸⁵⁹

In short, [Brondos'](#) assessment of the idea of corporate guilt for Adam's sin is the same as mine: the idea is an un-[Hebraic](#), unbiblical innovation with roots in [Platonic](#) myth.

Plantinga, Jr., *Not The Way It's Supposed To Be: A Breviary Of Sin*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 87, n. 21.

⁸⁵⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle To The Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 328.

⁸⁵⁹ David A. Brondos, *Paul on the Cross: Reconstructing the Apostle's Story of Redemption* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 185.

A third reason that confidence is waning in the **Reformed** theory of original sin is that the later framework of **Federalism** posited an unbiblical “covenant of works” established by God in Eden.⁸⁶⁰ God is imagined as having made a covenant with Adam, before the fall, along these lines:

God: All I require of you, Adam, is that neither you nor any member of your family eat of the forbidden fruit. Obey this requirement, for a probationary period, and you and all your descendants will live eternally ever after. As the father and federal head of your race, do you accept this stipulation?

Adam: Yes, Lord, I do.

God: Understand that the penalty for disobedience is guilt and death, and if you violate this covenant I will hold you and all your descendants responsible for the infraction and subject to the stated penalty.⁸⁶¹ Do you willingly enter into this covenant?

Adam: Yes, Lord,

However, there is not the slightest whisper in Scripture of any such covenant ever having been made (whether bilaterally as I’ve pictured it, or imposed unilaterally by God),⁸⁶² and a covenant of *works* flies in the face of the biblical story of redemption that is based upon grace from beginning to end. There was

⁸⁶⁰ This was developed to support the ideas of the imputation of Adam’s sin and of Christ’s righteousness, but the idea of a “covenant of works” between God and Adam was not held by Calvin, nor by Zwingli nor Bullinger. The phrase “covenant of works” first appeared in a work of Scottish theologian Robert Rollock in 1597. Donald Macleod, “Original Sin in Reformed Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 132.

⁸⁶¹ “Since the covenant was made with Adam, not only for himself but also for his posterity, ‘all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.’” H. Shelton Smith, quoting *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* in *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin: A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 2.

⁸⁶² In spite of the fact that theologians think they find the formal parts of a covenant in Gen 1-2, which Michael Horton, for example, delineates as:
a historical prologue setting the stage (Gen 1-2),
stipulations (Gen 2.16-17)
and the sanctions (Gen 2.17b)

Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 415. Horton resorts to the Fathers Irenaeus, John of Damascus, and Augustine to support the idea of an Edenic covenant (see *op cit* pp. 418-419).

no covenant in Eden; there was a family. God was the Father, and Adam and Eve were His children by creation (Luk 3.38). God gave His children a blessing, a responsibility, a charge, a commandment and a warning, as a good Father would. There was no formalized contract, there was no mention of Adam's role as representative of his posterity, and there was no statement from God regarding a period of probation at the end of which rewards and punishments would be meted out, etc.

A fourth weakness of the [Federal](#) view is that, like the [Augustinian](#) theory of [original sin](#), it fails to explain why Jesus — a true son of Adam — was neither included in the guilty verdict when Adam sinned nor inherited a corrupted nature. As explained above, [Calvinists](#) have not come to a consensus with regard to how the corruption of human nature is passed down, other than to say that it is “by propagation.” Leaving this matter unresolved, but emphasizing that all Adam's descendants inherit both his guilt and the corruption of his nature, would seem to suggest that either Christ was also guilty and corrupt, or that He was not a true son of Adam.⁸⁶³ Neither of these heretical ideas are taught in [Calvinist](#) circles nor in [Covenant Theology](#). Nevertheless, the unresolved questions of how the corruption of human nature is transmitted, and how Christ escaped both guilt and corruption, weakens the [Federal](#) theory of [original sin](#) by revealing its lack of explanatory power.

FINAL ASSESSMENT OF ORIGINAL SIN

THE FALSE PREMISES

Having traced the evolution of the doctrine of [original sin](#), and identified the doctrine's various errors at its different stages of development, we have seen that the idea of [original sin](#) was a theological innovation based, for different reasons at different times, upon various false premises:

⁸⁶³ As Grudem writes, “Some have objected that if Jesus did not sin, then he was not *truly* human, for all humans sin.” Grudem does not resolve the question of Jesus' lack of sin and corruption, but only affirms that He was truly human and truly sinless. Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), p. 535.

False Premise 1: Baptism remits sin.

As explained above in the section “[Original Sin Originates](#),” Origen put forth the idea of prenatal guilt as a rationale for infant baptism, c. AD 240. Maybe, if baptism had not been “enchanted” by the presuppositions of the [Hellenistic](#) milieu of early Christianity, i.e., if baptism had not come to be viewed as a rite that magically washes away sin, then the phenomenon of infant baptism might never have emerged, and a need for a theory of infant sinfulness may never have arisen in the early church. Since baptism *does not* remit or wash away sin, nor even directly symbolize such a thing, the earliest impetus for proposing the idea of [original sin](#) was false, and the idea should never have gained approval.

False Premise 2: People have both “actual sin” and “original sin.”

Once the idea took hold that infants should be baptized — more or less concurrently with the corollary belief that infants need remission of sin — it became a logical necessity to posit a new kind of sin. This necessity presented itself because the culture of the time assumed infants to be innocent of “actual” sins. However, the resulting juxtaposition of “[original sin](#)” and “actual sin” was a false dualism, biblically speaking, because the Bible never mentions such a thing as “[original sin](#).” A legitimate biblical pairing would have been: conscious and “willful sins” on the one hand (Psa 19.13 ^{NIVO}), and unwitting and unintentional sins on the other (Psa 19.12). Had this biblical pairing been taken more seriously, it may have helped the early Church understand that infants do indeed have their own *actual* sins, though unwitting and unintentional (as explained above, under the heading, “[Inaction Worthy Of Death](#)”). Were the early Church armed with that understanding, the doctrine of [original sin](#) might never have taken root.

False Premise 3: To be sin, it must be conscious and voluntary.

Augustine insisted that “there can be no sin but what is voluntary.”⁸⁶⁴ By this premise he supported his belief that infants are guilty of someone else’s sins, since they *are guilty* according to Scripture, but obviously can’t commit their own willful sins. However, Augustine’s premise revealed his failure to understand the Bible’s teaching about the kind of sins, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, that are unwitting and unintentional. In retrospect, the falsity of Augustine’s premise, that sin is necessarily voluntary, made his theory of original sin unnecessary.

False Premise 4: Sin is a substance.

Augustine also made the category mistake of thinking of sin a physically transmittable substance.⁸⁶⁵ The Pelagians justly reacted against this idea, reminding their contemporaries that sin is not a substance (implying origin from God who created all *things*), but is instead what philosophers call an *accident*.⁸⁶⁶ As an *accident* or as an *act*, sin cannot be passed down by physical propagation.⁸⁶⁷ Any theory of original sin that depends upon the idea that sin is a substance fails because it misunderstands sin; any theory that understands sin as a psychological-spiritual phenomenon, but posits that sin is transmitted by a physiological process, fails by its category error.

⁸⁶⁴ See William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2., (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), pp. 88-89. Others had apparently made this same assumption long before Augustine; see Fig. 12 above.

⁸⁶⁵ This view of Augustine’s seems to have been influenced by the traducianism of Tertullian and others of the Latin school, but Augustine never explicitly embraced a pure traducianism, else he may have developed a more consistent doctrine of original sin as a non-material corruption transmitted by the human propagation of both body and soul.

⁸⁶⁶ See Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 32. The later Scholastics, like John Duns Scotus, also rejected the idea of a physical transmission of sin, but primarily on the basis that they saw original sin as a deficiency of original righteousness, not a substantive thing that could be transmitted, but only a deprivation that is inherited. See R. Seeberg, “Duns Scotus,” § 7, “Doctrine Of Sin,” in Jackson, Samuel Macauley, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), vol. 4, p. 29.

⁸⁶⁷ The Pelagians, however, failed to understand the idea of sin as also a state or condition. While our sinful condition is still accidental, in that it is not an essential part of our nature, the condition is passed down to our posterity by virtue of being a deprivation (not a substantive thing) which parents are not able to rectify for their children.

False Premise 5: Sin is a disease.

The Bible often uses the disease/healing metaphor in connection with man's spiritual plight (Psa 41.4; 103.3; Isa 53.5; Jer 17.9; 30.12-13; Eze 34.4), and so we can understand why some have imagined that [original sin](#) might be a disease passed down by some kind of germ. The disease theory came to its zenith in [Augustine's](#) teaching that both the disease of fallenness *and* its mode of transmission is *lust* (as explained above in the section, "[Augustine Defines The Doctrine](#)").⁸⁶⁸ This made the lust, or *concupiscence*, present in the parents during the act of intercourse, the "germ" that "passes on to the children [the] inborn stain [that] becomes the *fomes peccati*, or source of sin, in the succeeding generation." This premise makes the same [category mistake](#) as the preceding one: sin (i.e., lust) is a psychological-spiritual state or condition, and as such, it cannot be transmitted from one person to another by a physiological act.

False Premise 6: God added something to human nature.

Not only does the [Scholastic](#) idea of [superadded righteousness](#) lack an explicit biblical basis, it also casts aspersions upon the power and wisdom of God. It implies that God did not know how to create a viable human nature, but had to provide assistance, as an afterthought, for what He created. As I have observed above in the section, "[The Scholastic Near Miss](#)," the Roman Catholic theory of a *donum superadditum* does express a truth about human fallenness; it posits that fallenness involves the loss or deprivation of something. However, by identifying the thing lost as *a gift extraneous to human nature*, the theory creates more problems than it solves, and fails to explain the profound depth of human corruption.

False Premise 7: God established a covenant of works in Eden.

As Methodist theologian [William Burt Pope](#) observed, the idea of [original sin](#) that has predominated in [Federal theology](#) is strongly [forensic](#), having to do with privileges forfeited by Adam's sin and thereby lost for all his posterity.

⁸⁶⁸ *De Nup* 1.27 [XXIV]. Bonaventure follows Augustine in the disease theory of sin, and states it strongly in his *Brev* 3.6, "On The Transmission Of Original Sin."

“But,” in Pope’s words, “such speculations as these stand or fall with the general principle of a specific covenant with Adam as representing his posterity, a covenant of which the Scripture does not speak.”⁸⁶⁹ Since the Bible nowhere teaches that God established an Edenic covenant, nor that He made Adam the federal head of his as yet non-existent posterity, the idea of God [forensically imputing](#) Adam’s sin to his descendants should have been stillborn, and with it the [Federalist](#) theory of [original sin](#).

THE DOCTRINE’S SUPERFLUITY

Upon reflection, we should realize that the doctrine of [original sin](#) is superfluous. Whether or not God holds us accountable for someone else’s sins, we have enough sins of our own to merit our condemnation and to render us utterly in need of God’s gracious salvation. The Bible tells us explicitly that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3.23); isn’t that enough?

Why then the ages-long compulsion of scholars and theologians to invent theories of [original sin](#), making us responsible for someone else’s infraction? As we have seen, motives have varied among the many proponents of [original sin](#), but I maintain that the doctrine has survived in the theologies of Christianity primarily because it supports the [sacramental](#) practice of [infant baptism](#). A [sacramental](#) understanding of [infant baptism](#) required a rationale for the application of the rite’s [sacramental](#) power: there had to be [original sin](#) to wash away. Even when the Reformers began to understand [infant baptism](#) as less than [salvific](#), the rite still required a rationale. Hence the doctrinal construct of [Federal Theology](#) (including its element of [imputed original sin](#)), teaching that a baby’s baptism (in place of OT circumcision) effects entrance into the new covenant. I conclude, therefore, that the doctrine of [original sin](#) is an unbiblical theological invention, maintained to this day as a support to [sacramentalism](#) in general, and as the foundation for [infant baptism](#) in particular.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁹ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volumes 1-3*, (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), Vol. 2, p. 78.

⁸⁷⁰ Of course this raises the question, “What has been the impetus for the ages-long

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

The Bible nowhere speaks of “[original sin](#),” but it does teach clearly that all Adam’s descendants, with one exception, have inherited a vitiated nature leaving them enslaved to sin and desperately in need of salvation. The Scriptures also teach clearly that our sin problem resulted from the primeval catastrophe that was Adam’s sin (Rom 5.12). In other words, it’s true that the *corruption* of our nature is rooted in our Adamic origin. Therefore, though the Bible doesn’t use such phrasing, we can speak biblically of *original corruption*,⁸⁷¹ i.e., we can rightly speak of what I have explained above as [fallenness](#). This life-ruining and God-offending [fallenness](#) cannot be overcome, healed, or removed by baptism or by any other external rite. We receive salvation only by the atoning merit and direct spiritual agency of the one unfallen son of Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ.

commitment of so many to *infant baptism*?” A thorough, historical investigation of this question is beyond the scope of this book, but we have already observed that the initial motive for infant baptism, even if misguided, was simple: parents in the Hellenistic milieu wanted the apotropaic benefits of baptism for their children. After the Hellenistic era of Christianity, however, ecclesiastical motives became more complex. Considering the spirit of compromise and greedy competition that reigned in medieval Christianity, one suspects that priests realized early on what a boon infant baptism was to their own interests: it guaranteed an endlessly multiplying supply of church members.

⁸⁷¹ Grudem writes, “This inherited sinful nature is sometimes simply called ‘original sin’ and sometimes more precisely called ‘original pollution.’ I have used instead the term ‘inherited corruption’ because it seems to express more clearly the specific idea in view.” Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), p, 496.

EPILOG: THE GOOD NEWS

The bad news is that we are members of a fallen race, having inherited spiritual deadness, along with its resultant sin and alienation, from our father Adam. Many would also perceive as bad news the fact that no human effort, [magical](#) ritual, or religious rite can deliver us from our fallenness and sin, nor restore us to fellowship with our Creator. Tragically, many will discover too late that their baptism (whether received as an infant or as an adult) did not secure eternal life for them.

The good news is, well, the Good News, the gospel proclaiming that,

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
and that He was buried,
and that He was raised the third day according to the Scriptures,
and that He appeared to [many witnesses].⁸⁷²

This gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1.16). Those who receive baptism in faithful response to this Good News, not only testify to their repentance and commitment to Jesus Christ (Act 2.38), but they also testify by rich symbolism to their participation by faith in Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom 6.1-7), and to their consecration for priestly service in God’s Kingdom (Rev 1.6). Dear Reader, may your faith in Jesus Christ, along with the baptism you received as a believer in Him, fill you with great joy and *spiritual boldness* in our strategic hour of history.

⁸⁷² 1Co 15.3-8.

Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?

A court official of queen Candace of Ethiopia
Act 8.36

APPENDIX 1

THE HEBRAIC STYLE OF STACKED MODIFIERS

In the Greek Scriptures we find two distinctly different ways of arranging words to modify a **substantive**, i.e., to describe a stated *thing* or *participial action*. One way uses **nested** modifiers between a **substantive** and its **definite article**. This style of description looks like this:

τῆς τοῦ διαβόλου παγίδος, “the (of the devil) snare,” (2Ti 2.26)

ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος, “the (of the righteousness) crown,” (2Ti 4.8)

In the first instance, the nested **genitive** phrase *of the devil* modifies the **articular substantive** surrounding it, *the ... snare*. In the second instance, the nested **genitive** phrase *of the righteousness* modifies the **articular substantive** *the ... crown*. Notice that the nested **genitive** phrases give the **substantives** specificity: not just any snare, but the snare *of the devil*; not just any crown, but the crown *of righteousness*.

Readers of the Greek **NT** will easily spot instances of this nested-modifier style of description by its characteristic consecutive **articles** (as with τῆς τοῦ and ὁ τῆς in the above examples), but the canonical writers used this style only infrequently. In all his epistles, Paul used it only twelve times.⁸⁷³ However, the authors of the apocryphal 2Ma, 3Ma, 4Ma, Wis and Bar used this style extensively, as did **Josephus** and **Philo**.⁸⁷⁴

Instead of the relatively rare **nested** style of description, the canonical authors regularly used a **stacked** style. To describe a thing or a participial

⁸⁷³ Rom 10.3; 13.2; 2Co 1.19; 7.10; 8.19; 11.7; 1Ti 3.16; 2Ti 2.4,26; 3.17; 4.8; Tit 1.9.

⁸⁷⁴ Its only occurrences in 1Ma is in 1Ma 11.35.

action, they stacked up prepositional phrases⁸⁷⁵ with *increasing specificity*, sometimes adding a demonstrative pronoun to the top of the stack for good measure. Sometimes the stack is very simple as in,

τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “by the blood of the Christ” (Eph 2.13)

Had Paul **nested** this substantive and its descriptor it would have looked like this:

τῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αἵματι, “by the (of the Christ) blood”

Instead, the descriptor is **stacked** on top of its substantive:

τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “the blood + of the Christ”

Notice how in this simple example, the final (and only) descriptor makes the substantive absolutely specific; from the general idea of “blood,” Paul made the reader understand that he meant a very specific “blood,” *the blood of the Christ*.

In contrast to this short stack, here’s a tall one from Rev 22.7:

τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου

“the words + of the prophecy + of the book + this”

The **accusative** noun *words* is specified by a series of **genitives** stacked on top of it.⁸⁷⁶ The final item in the **genitive** stack is the decisive, demonstrative pronoun, *this*. The stacked modifiers leave no doubt as to which *words* are meant.

For a similar stack of **genitives**, consider Paul’s statement in Eph 1.6,

⁸⁷⁵ I use the term *phrase* here to include single Greek words that would translate into English as a phrase, e.g., δόξης, “of [the] glory.”

⁸⁷⁶ Such a series of genitives is often called a genitive chain or a concatenation of genitives.

ἐπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ

“[the] praise of [the] glory of the grace of Him”

Paul describes and specifies the noun *praise* by another three-item [genitive](#) stack. Here’s the grammatical structure:

Noun	praise
Gen. phrase	+ of [the] glory
Gen. phrase	+ [the glory] of the grace
Gen. phrase	+ [the grace] of Him

It’s important to observe that in these kinds of descriptive stacks, each element is modified by the phrase immediately after it in the stack. Because the modifiers are linked in this way, the reader can always recognize this stacking construction by his or her ability to imagine a series of questions and answers like the following about the items in the stack:

What *praise* is the author talking about?

The *praise of glory*.

What *glory*?

The *glory of the grace*.

Whose *grace*?

The *grace of Him* (i.e., *His grace*).

Notice again that the stacked construction serves to move our thought from the general to the increasingly specific. In this instance, it takes us from the general idea of “praise” to the very specific idea of the “praise of God’s glorious grace.” (Paul uses shortened versions of this same stack of modifiers in Eph 1.12 and Eph 1.14.)

In another instance of stacked modifiers with increasing specificity, Paul clearly identifies a certain spirit in Eph 2.2:

τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας

“the spirit the now working in the sons of the disobedience”

Again, the structure is:

Noun	... spirit
Gen. phrase	+ the one now working ⁸⁷⁷
Dat. phrase	+ [the one now working] in the sons
Gen. phrase	+ [the sons] of disobedience

Notice how the final term removes all ambiguity.

What *spirit* does Paul mean?

The *one now working*.

Well, that could be any one of a number of spirits.

Yes, but this is the one *now working in the sons*.

Oh, but which sons? The sons of Israel? The sons of righteousness?

No, *the sons of disobedience*.

Oh, that spirit!

Paul used an even more complex stacking construction in Eph 4.14 to specifically describe a participial action, the action of “being carried about”:

περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων,
ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδείαν τῆς πλάνης

“being carried about by every wind of the teaching in the trickery of the men, in craftiness toward the scheming of deceit”

Here’s the grammatical structure:

Participle	... being carried about
Dat. phrase	+ by every wind
Gen. phrase	+ [by that kind of wind which consists] of teaching,
Dat. phrase	+ by [teaching that is] trickery
Gen. phrase	+ [namely, trickery] of men

⁸⁷⁷ This phrase uses a genitive participle in place of an adjective or noun.

As he sometimes does for good measure, Paul adds additional phrases that add description, not to the immediately preceding element in the stack (“men”), but to an element further back in the stack (“teaching”):

Dat. phrase	+ by [teaching that is] in craftiness
Acc. phrase	+ [craftiness with a purpose] toward the scheming
Gen. phrase	+ of [the scheming that involves] deceit

This descriptive stack makes it crystal clear that the “being carried about,” i.e., the “manipulation,” that Paul wants the Ephesians to avoid (by growing to maturity) is that of *trickery*, and not trickery by some unseen influence, but the trickery, *of men*. He has already stated that the human trickery to which he refers is perpetrated in teaching. To avoid all ambiguity regarding what kind of teaching he means, he adds the final three prepositional phrases to specify that it is *crafty* teaching, utilizing the kind of craftiness that involves *scheming*, the kind of scheming that is *deceitful*.

The instance of this style of stacked descriptors that occurs in Eph 5.26 is important to the above study of baptism:

καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι

“having cleansed [her] by the washing of the water by [the] word”

Here’s the grammatical structure:

Participle	... having cleansed [her]
Dat. phrase	+ by the washing
Gen. phrase	+ [a washing] of the water,
Dat. phrase	+ by [that water which is] the word.

Some have interpreted the **genitive** phrase in this stack, “of the water,” as referring to baptism, and the final phrase, “with the word,” as referring to a baptismal invocation. This interpretation is precluded by four factors:

1. This grammatical structure is not employed by the biblical writers to describe an item in the middle of the descriptive stack, but to very specifically describe *the first item*, in this case the *cleansing* expressed by the participle. Everything stacked on top of the stated *cleansing* gives it increasing specificity, ultimately specifying it as a cleansing “by the word.”
2. The subject of baptism is foreign to the immediate context of Eph 5.26. The context is about Husbands loving their wives in a manner that follows Christ’s example. Paul was not exhorting husbands to baptize their wives, but to minister God’s word to their wives in a sanctifying manner.
3. If Paul had referred to a baptismal invocation by the phrase “by the word,” he probably would have used the preposition *συν* (*sēn*, *with*) to indicate a *concurrent* use or application of “the word” (cf. Eph 3.18, “**with** all the saints,” and Eph 4.31, “**with** all malice”). As it stands, the *dative* phrase, *ἐν ῥήματι* (*ēn 'rē-mā-tē*), indicates the “word,” i.e., the gospel proclamation (Rom 10.17-18), as the kind of “water” in view, and ultimately as the *instrument* of the cleansing.⁸⁷⁸ It is the final element in the stack of modifiers that ultimately specifies the means or agent of the action mentioned initially: the cleansing was accomplished by “the word.” *Water* is a metaphor added to the stack of modifiers to emphasize the nuptial purpose of the word’s sanctifying action.⁸⁷⁹
4. The consistent theology and poetic imagery in Paul’s writings rule out the idea that he suddenly, without precedent, indicates water baptism in this passage as the agent Christ used to cleanse His bride.

Having looked at the grammatical phenomenon of stacked modifiers in some *NT* passages, let us note that it is used throughout the *OT* as well. Most often, the stacked modifiers in the *OT* use *genitives* and *datives* in the *Grk*

⁸⁷⁸ Some authorities argue for interpreting the preposition *ἐν* as referring to an *accompanying* word, but they have failed to understand the syntax of stacked modifiers. See Glenn Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed., (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008).

⁸⁷⁹ See an allusion to the traditional nuptial bathing of the bride in Eze 16.8-13.

LXX, and [construct chains](#) and the preposition לְ (“to, for, in regard to”) in the MT. Stacked modifiers occur repeatedly as the form of expression used at the close of regnal sections in the books of Kings, as in 1Ki 14.29 (MT):

כְּתוּבִים עַל-סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה

“written in-the-book-of words-of-the-days to-the-kings-of Judah”

The structure is:

Participle	written
Prep. + Construct phrase	+ in + the-book-of
Construct phrase	+ [book of] words-of
Noun specifier	+ [words of] the-days
Prep. + Construct phrase	+ [the days pertaining] to + the-kings-of
Final noun specifier	+ [the kings of] Judah

We see the same stacking of modifiers in 1Sa 25.29 ([LXX](#)):

ἐνδεδεμένη ἐν δεσμῷ τῆς ζωῆς παρὰ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ

“having been bound in a bundle of the life with the Lord the God”

This stack has the structure:

Participle	Having been bound up
Dat. phrase	+ in a bundle
Gen. phrase	+ [a bundle] of life,
Dat. phrase	+ [the life that is] with [the] Lord
Dat. phrase	+ [with the Lord, i.e.,] God

The fact that this phenomenon of stacked modifiers occurs extensively in the canonical Scriptures, while the nested style predominates in other Greek writings,⁸⁸⁰ supports [Nigel Turner’s](#) observation that the stacking of a genitive “immediately upon its governing noun” is a *Hebraic construction*. This

⁸⁸⁰ Like those of Josephus and Philo, whose styles lean more toward classical and post-classical Grk.

has to do in part with the Hebraic reluctance to separate a noun from its **definite article** (in **Heb**, the noun and **article** are joined into one compound word). **Turner** goes on to explain that the “tendency in the literary style [of Greek] was, however, for the gen. to precede” the noun. This **Grk** literary style that **Turner** mentions would, of course, often result in what I have been calling nested modifiers.⁸⁸¹

Recognizing that the stacking of modifiers is the preferred **Hebraic** construction, I speculate that this **syntactical** phenomenon in biblical **Grk** may have arisen *not only* from the desire to keep nouns and their articles together, but also from the **Hebraic** concern for precise historical identification, whether genealogical or geographical. Consider the genealogical stack in Job 32.2 (**LXX**):

Ελίου ὁ τοῦ Βαραχίηλ ὁ Βουζίτης ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας Ραμ τῆς Αυσίτιδος χώρας ...

Elihu the [one] of Barachel the Buzite out of the family Ram of the Ausitis region ...

The **syntactical** structure for precisely identifying this character in Job’s story is now familiar to us:

Proper name	Elihu
Gen. phrase	+ the [son] of Barachel
Nom. phrase	+ [the Barachel who is] the Buzite,
Gen. phrase	+ [the Buzite] out of the Ram family
Gen. phrase	+ [the Ram family] of the Ausitis region

Matthew showed this same concern for precise identification when he reported the birthplace of Christ in Mat 2.1:

ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως

Participle	Having been born
Dat. phrase	+ in Bethlehem

⁸⁸¹ Turner adds that the use of the more literary Grk style of (what I call) nested modifiers in the NT “is consciously stylistic,” and gives as examples 2Co 1.19 and 2Pe 3.2. Nigel Turner, *A Grammar Of New Testament Greek, J. H. Moulton, Vol. III: Syntax*, (London: T & T Clark International, 1963), p. 349.

Gen. phrase	+ [the Bethlehem] of Judea,
Dat. phrase	+ [Judea as it was] in [the] days
Gen. phrase	+ [the days] of Herod
Gen. phrase	+ [i.e., Herod] the king

The most important thing to understand about this style of stacked modifier phrases is that the final modifier is the most specific, and therefore the key to the precise identification or description of the head substantive, i.e., the initial word naming the thing or action in view. To grasp this, consider the difference between how the specification of 1Ki 14.29b is expressed in [Grk](#) (we've already examined the Hebrew version above), and how we would normally express the same designation in English:

Greek (lit. trans): ... written in the scroll of the words of the days
[pertaining] to the kings of Judah.

English: ... written in Judah's royal chronicles.

The most important modifier is "of Judah"; without that specifier, the historical source for the written account in view is unidentifiable. However, while in English we would tend to state this most specific modifier first, the Hebraic style *builds up to the key modifier* and states it last. Understanding this will help us correctly interpret the instances of stacked modifiers that occur in our Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Sooner or later, somebody is going to insist that the Bible be studied, and then there will be disunity.

Gary Summers

APPENDIX 2

BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD

To what practice did Paul refer when he wrote of “those ... who are baptized for the dead” (1Co 15.29)? Theories abound, only ten of which I list here. According to various sources, Paul may have referred to:

1. Christian baptism for (i.e., in the name of) “the dead” Messiah (if there is no resurrection and Christ was not raised).
2. The ancient practice of baptizing, i.e., washing, dead bodies in funerary rites.⁸⁸²
3. Vicarious baptism for the dead as a rite in the [Eleusinian mystery](#) cult.
4. Vicarious baptism practiced by Christians for those who had died before baptism (or before hearing the gospel).
5. Vainly replenishing the ranks of the departed, i.e., “the dead” believers, by baptizing new converts.⁸⁸³
6. Baptism for the sake of reunion with loved-ones who had died in the Lord.⁸⁸⁴
7. Those being baptized because they were inspired by martyrs.
8. The baptism of martyrdom itself.
9. The ultimate and irremediable deadness of those receiving Christian baptism, if there is no resurrection.
10. The state of spiritual deadness of those being baptized, if Christ was not raised.

The first theory, that Paul referred to Christian baptism ironically as being “baptized for the dead [Messiah]” if there is no resurrection, we can dispense with immediately. The phrase *the dead* in 1Co 15.29 translates a plural noun, and therefore the [referent](#) is a group of dead people rather than an individual person like Christ.

⁸⁸² BBCNT. See also, *Bible and Spade*, 1987, Vol. 0.

⁸⁸³ Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Bible Difficulties*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992).

⁸⁸⁴ NIEBD, p. 402. Also, EGT, Vol. 2, p. 931.

It is slightly more plausible that Paul referred to the ancient practice (whether among Jews or pagans) of washing the bodies of the dead before burial. This second theory, championed in *Bible and Spade* (Premier Issue Autumn 1987), proposes that the “baptism for the dead” which Paul had in view was the ceremonial washing of corpses. According to this theory, Paul’s argument in 1Co 15 would amount to, “Why go to the trouble of preparing dead bodies for burial if those dead bodies will just disintegrate and never rise again?”

This theory depends upon reading the key verb, βαπτίζόμενοι (vāp-tē-‘zō-mē-nē), as in the middle voice rather than in the passive, and as referring to those *doing* the ceremonial washing (i.e. baptizing) rather than to those being washed (i.e. being baptized). While a middle voice reading of βαπτίζόμενοι is technically possible, the interpretation of 1Co 15.29 built upon this possibility is unlikely for several reasons:

1. As G. G. Findlay insists in the [EGT](#), in the context of the [NT](#), those baptized, “οἱ βαπτίζόμενοι, unless otherwise defined, can only mean *the recipients of Christian baptism*.”⁸⁸⁵
2. We can hardly limit the phrase τῶν νεκρῶν (tōn nēk-‘rōn), i.e. “the dead,” to those corpses being washed for burial. Unless it can be shown to be delimited contextually, the phrase refers to “the dead” as a general and all inclusive class. Since the ceremonial washing of corpses is neither explicit in this verse nor mentioned in the context, we have no reason to interpret τῶν νεκρῶν with that specific meaning.
3. Taking βαπτίζόμενοι as a middle verb would more likely provide the reflexive reading, “those who baptize themselves for the dead” (cf. the middle ἐβαπτίσατο (ē-vāp-‘tē-sā-tō) in 2Ki 5.14 [LXX](#)), and thus would rule out any allusion to the baptism or ceremonial washing of someone or something *else*, such as corpses.
4. Most importantly, the *What will they do?* question, the question anchoring Paul’s whole argument about “those baptized for the dead,”

⁸⁸⁵ G. G. Findlay, *EGT*, Vol. II, p. 930.

implies a coming crisis, whether of disappointment or temptation, for those baptizing or being baptized, and Paul knew full well that washing or not washing the bodies of the deceased would not create a future crisis for either the washers, the washed or the unwashed. Either people would be resurrected regardless of the ceremonies performed on their corpses, or they would remain disembodied spirits regardless of those rituals. In neither case would there be regret, whether in the immediate future or in eternity, with people moaning, “Oh, why did we bother washing (baptizing) the dead!”

Indeed, Paul’s *What will they do?* question will help us eliminate other interpretations of “baptism for the dead” as well. The phrase *what will they do* echoes the prophetic questions of the OT, posed in the face of impending judgment. Consider Isa 10.3^{LXX}: “And what will they do in the day of visitation? for affliction shall come to you from afar: and to whom will you flee for help?”⁸⁸⁶ The *What will they do?* question implies a coming crisis for the *they* (or *those*) in view, and the unlikelihood of such a crisis would make Paul’s argument moot.

For example, the idea that Paul alluded to a mystery cult rite performed just north of Corinth in Eleusis, also fails to make sense of the *What will they do?* question. If pagans were baptizing for the dead, the non-occurrence of resurrection would not have generated a crisis for them, whether in their immediate or distant future. If Paul had asked, “Otherwise, what will the Eleusinian pagans do who are baptized on behalf of the dead?” the Corinthians could well have answered, “Nothing.” The pagan cultists would do nothing if the dead are not raised, because resurrection was irrelevant to their rites. Granted, Paul’s second question, “If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?” *could* make sense, because it doesn’t necessarily imply an impending crisis, but only an absurdity: Why bother doing anything for the dead if there is no personal afterlife? However, making sense of only one of the two questions that constitute the argument (and as we shall see, it is actually a three-question argument) is not a satisfying exegesis,

⁸⁸⁶ The Heb puts the question in the second person, *What will you do?* Cf. the *What will you do?* questions of Hos 9.5 and Jer 5.31.

particularly when it proposes a reference (to pagan rites) entirely foreign to the context of 1Co 15 and to the flow of Paul's resurrection argument.⁸⁸⁷

In fact, the [Eleusinian](#) rite theory appears to be an internet legend. This proposed interpretation of Paul's "baptism for the dead" has been copied from website to website, but without support from any source of antiquity except [Homer's *Hymn to Demeter*](#). That hymn only refers generally to the rites of the [Eleusinian mystery](#) cult and does not mention baptism for the dead. One of the rites of the [Eleusinian](#) cult was initiates' self-baptism in the sea, for the remission of sin and regeneration.⁸⁸⁸ Another rite was the pouring out of a libation in honor of the dead. It may be that the idea that "baptism for the dead" was practiced at Eleusis originated with someone mentally conflating these two practices.

We should also dismiss from our thinking the idea that Paul alluded to some practice of vicarious baptism for departed relatives or friends. Such a thing did not occur in the Jewish milieu from which Christian baptism emerged,⁸⁸⁹ nor is there evidence that it occurred in the apostolic time, nor would we expect such a heretical practice to arise while the apostles were still teaching (even though it appeared in subsequent centuries). Furthermore, as Findlay points out, "Paul *associates himself with the action of* 'those baptized for the dead'" with the words "we also" in the following verse (1Co 15.30), and "Paul could not have identified himself" with a practice of vicarious baptism.⁸⁹⁰ (We will look more closely at the connection between 1Co 15.29 and 1Co 15.30 below.)

Some have suggested that Paul spoke of being "baptized for the dead" as a chiding reference to the Corinthians vainly replenishing the ranks of their departed ones if the dead are not raised.⁸⁹¹ Paul's argument would then have the sense, "Why do you continue to baptize converts to replace congregants who have died, if you do not really believe there is hope for any of them beyond

⁸⁸⁷ As Olshausen argues, this verse (29) cannot be disconnected from the flow of its context.

⁸⁸⁸ *Bap* 5.

⁸⁸⁹ BBCNT, on 1Co 15.29. Keener notes that "there is no evidence of vicarious baptism in ancient Judaism."

⁸⁹⁰ EGT (Vol. II, p. 930).

⁸⁹¹ Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992).

the grave?”⁸⁹² This interpretation seems particularly forced and does not fit Paul’s third-person reference to “those” in the question, *What will those do...?* If Paul were chiding the Corinthians in regard to their normal baptismal practice, we would expect a second-person reference, *What will you do...?*

In the EGT, G. G. Findlay argues forcefully that in 1Co 15.29 Paul referred to persons who were converted because of, and perhaps in response to the exhortations of, departed loved ones with whom they hoped to be reunited in the resurrection. According to Findlay’s interpretation, the sense of Paul’s argument would be, “What will they do who are being *converted* for the dead [believers] with whom they hope to be reunited, if the dead are not raised at all ...?” The presumed answer to the rhetorical question would be, “Their hopes will be dashed, proven vain!” However, Paul nowhere else uses *baptism* as an equivalent term for conversion (or salvation). Furthermore, Findlay’s interpretation does not coordinate well with 1Co 15.30; Paul parallel’s his own constant *risking of danger* with the action of those “who are baptized for the dead.” Were Findlay correct, we would expect Paul to follow up with something like, “Why also are we still hoping to be reunited with our departed brothers?” rather than with, “Why are we also in danger ever hour?”

Others have suggested that those being “baptized for the dead” were persons receiving Christian baptism because they had been converted by the heroism of martyrs (i.e., “the dead” who had laid down their lives for Christ).⁸⁹³ This interpretation is not impossible, and it could coordinate well with the *What will those do...?* question. Paul’s argument would be, “What will those do who are baptized, having been inspired by the martyrs’ faith in eternal life, when they learn that there is no resurrection?” One might answer, “They will be disappointed at best, and renounce their faith at worst!” However, the subject of martyrdom is foreign to the context of Paul’s extended argument for resurrection. Furthermore, to repeat Findlay’s observation, with the words “we also” in the following verse (1Co 15.30), “Paul associates himself with the action of ‘those baptized for the dead,’” and Paul was not baptized because of anyone’s martyrdom, but because of a radical encounter with Christ Himself.

⁸⁹² Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992).

⁸⁹³ Negated by EGT, Vol. 2, p. 931.

Speaking of martyrdom, [John Lightfoot](#) proposed that the baptism “for the dead” to which Paul referred was the baptism of martyrdom itself; [Lightfoot](#) cited the baptism metaphor for martyrdom in Mat 20.22-23.⁸⁹⁴ Applying [Lightfoot’s](#) interpretation, Paul’s argument would then become, “what shall they do who undergo martyrdom, and are *baptized* in that sense ... if the dead are not at all raised?”⁸⁹⁵ In other words, what will martyrs do when they discover that they have given their lives in vain, since there is no resurrection? This idea coordinates well with 1Co 15.30, as [Lightfoot](#) paraphrases it, “*and why do we also every day and every moment go in danger of martyrdom?*”⁸⁹⁶

In support of his exegesis, [Lightfoot](#) interprets Paul’s [Grk](#) phrase *for the* (ὕπὲρ τῶν, ē-’pēr tōn), in 1Co 15.29, as the apostle’s way of expressing in [Grk](#) the idiomatic [Heb](#) phrase *in the name of* (לְשֵׁם, ləshēm). He mentions how “The Jews baptized a proselyte ... *under the notion or in the name of a proselyte.*”⁸⁹⁷ Now this is an interesting insight, and it will move us closer to a correct understanding of Paul’s reference to those “who are baptized *for the* (ὕπὲρ τῶν) dead.” If we apply the Jewish idiom to 1Co 15.29, then those who were being “baptized for the dead” were “being baptized *in the name of the dead*,” i.e., they were being baptized *as dead ones*, even as the proselyte, according to Jewish usage, was baptized “*in the name of a proselyte*,” i.e., was baptized *as a proselyte*.

With this idiomatic meaning in view, we can paraphrase Paul’s argument this way:

Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized as dead people? If the dead are not raised at all, why are they baptized as (ultimately or essentially) dead people? Why do we also endanger ourselves every hour (if all we are is dead people)?

Now, this paraphrase produces a meaning other than [Lightfoot’s](#) intended interpretation involving the “baptism of martyrdom,” but the idea is not far

⁸⁹⁴ CNTTH, Vol. 4, p. 270.

⁸⁹⁵ CNTTH, Vol. 4, p. 270, italics original.

⁸⁹⁶ CNTTH, Vol. 4, p. 270, italics original.

⁸⁹⁷ CNTTH, Vol. 4, p. 270, italics original.

different. Instead of Paul asking, “What will happen to martyrs; why do they keep sacrificing themselves as martyrs?” Paul asks, “What will those do who receive Christian baptism when the implications of *No Resurrection* sink in; why do people keep getting baptized as Christians if there is no hope beyond death?”

This interpretation answers all the requirements of the text. As we’ve noted, the interpretation of “those ... who are baptized for the dead” must make sense with Paul’s leading question, “What will they do...?” The question implies an impending crisis, and if we interpret “those who are baptized for the dead” as Christians who are baptized but consider themselves (or are taught that they are) ultimately dead anyway, the crisis will come with the first wave of persecution: why should such Christians stand by their confession of Jesus if there is no real hope beyond this life? In fact, why should they take the risk of public baptism in the name of Jesus at all? If all that awaits the Christian is to perish eternally (1Co 15.18), then, “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die!” (1Co 15.32). Paul is already facing persecution, and so adds himself to the argument: “Why **are we also** in danger every hour?” In other words, the apostle asks the Corinthians, “If those who receive Christian baptism will ultimately succumb to eternal death anyway, what will they do now when they face persecution? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people still baptized for ones (i.e., themselves) who will ultimately remain dead? And if we will all ultimately remain dead, why am I and my ministry team still risking our lives when we should be making the most of life’s pleasures, since this life is all there is?”

W. E Vine arrives at essentially this same interpretation from a different direction.⁸⁹⁸ He wrote,

Bearing in mind that the original was written without punctuation marks, let the first question mark in the verse be placed after the word “baptized,” and the verse gives a meaning at once consistent with the doctrine of Scripture. The reading will thus be: “Else what shall they do which are baptized? It is⁸⁹⁹ for [i.e., “in the interests of”] the dead, if the

⁸⁹⁸ W. E. Vine, *The Collected Writings Of W. E. Vine* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), ch. 13.

⁸⁹⁹ Vine correctly notes that there is good Pauline precedent, even in the immediate context of 1Co 15, for providing a form of the verb *to be* in our translation where it is to be

dead are not raised at all. Why then are they baptized for them?”

The bottom line is that, by “those ... who are baptized for the dead,” Paul means Christians who are being baptized as people who will ultimately perish and who have no reason to endure the risks of their Christian profession in view of their final oblivion — *if the dead are not raised*.

Alternatively, some may emphasize the present spiritual deadness rather than the ultimate physical deadness of those baptized with no hope of resurrection. As Paul said in 1Co 15.17, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” Then the sense of Paul’s argument becomes,

What will those do who are baptized as people who remain spiritually dead? If there is no resurrection, and consequently no atonement accomplished by Christ, why then are people baptized as the spiritually dead persons that they are? And if I and my team are still dead in our sins, why are we still risking our lives for the gospel?

Either of these last two interpretations of “those ... who are baptized for the dead” will meet the requirements of the text. We see, therefore, that the baptism of which Paul spoke is none other than Christian baptism, but it is Christian baptism as viewed from the ironic, absurd and hopeless perspective of an alternate reality in which there is no resurrection from the dead.

understood in the text, even though not written. For examples, see 1Co 15.39-42, 47-48, 55-56.

APPENDIX 3

THE ALLUSION TO PRIESTLY BAPTISM IN HEBREWS 10.22

Heb 10.19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, **having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water**. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

SYNOPSIS

As with Eph 5.26 and Tit 3.5, commentators almost always interpret Heb 10.22 as referring to Christian baptism though it explicitly mentions no such thing. Heb 10.22 does allude to the Levitical *priestly baptism*, but only in so far as that baptism typified spiritual realities in the Christian's life. Nevertheless, by reminding us of the [OT](#) ordinance of priestly baptism, the author of Hebrews reminded us that Christian baptism consecrates us for priestly ministry.

God commanded Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons to “minister as priests to me.” He then instructed Moses, “you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water” (Ex 29.4; cf. Ex 40.12-15). Heb 10.22 alludes to this consecration for priestly service:

...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our **hearts sprinkled clean** from an evil conscience and our **bodies washed** with pure water.

Sadly, as with a handful of other passages, commentators almost always interpret Heb 10.22 as referring to Christian baptism though it explicitly mentions no such thing.⁹⁰⁰ In Heb 10.22, the author may have intended a circuitous allusion to Christian baptism (see [Fig. 13](#) below), but his immediate [referent](#) is the ordinance of priestly consecration. The priest-and-temple imagery of the passage, including the sprinkling and the washing of the physical body (σῶμα, 'sō-mə),⁹⁰¹ tells us this. Let's look again at Ex 29:

Ex 29.1 “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them to minister as priests to Me: take one young bull and two rams without blemish ... 4 Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and **wash them with water**.... 19 Then you shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram. 20 You shall slaughter the ram, and **take some of its blood** and put *it* on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of his sons' right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet, and **sprinkle the rest of the blood** around on

⁹⁰⁰ For the idea that Christian baptism “signifies the cleansing believers received upon entering the body of Christ,” Schreiner and Wright cite three passages: 1Co 6.11; Eph 5.26; Tit 3.5. None of these passages mentions baptism. Arguing that they *do* allude to baptism, the authors refer us to the classic work by Beasley-Murray, *Baptism In The New Testament*. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), p. 83.

⁹⁰¹ The idea of having “bodies washed” is only *explicitly* mentioned *this once* in the NT. The gospels of course mention the ceremonial *hand-washings*, etc., of the Pharisees, and mention Jesus washing *the feet* of His disciples (at which time He referred indirectly to bathing). Besides that, Act 9.37 tells of the postmortem washing of Tabitha, which we can assume (as do the NAU and NIV) meant the washing of her whole body. Nevertheless, as a spiritual-religious idea, *having ... our bodies washed* occurs only here in Heb 9.22. This singularity should alert us that the phrase alludes to an idea or ideas in Christianity's *originating culture*, and was not a reference to a current Christian phenomenon, i.e., baptism. Had the first Christians talked about baptism in this way, we would expect to see more baptismal references in the NT and earliest Christian writings mentioning “bodies washed,” but we find none.

the altar. 21 Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil, and **sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, and on his sons and on his sons' garments with him; so he and his garments shall be consecrated, as well as his sons and his sons' garments with him.**⁹⁰²

Clearly, Heb 10.22 alludes to the rites of Levitical consecration, and by making such an allusion applies the **typology** of the ancient consecration symbols to the new life of the Christian believer.

Of course, OT **types** can foreshadow physical events (like the death of Christ), or spiritual events (like the atoning of sin). The Levitical consecration of priests foreshadowed the phenomena mentioned in Heb 10.22, but since this verse speaks of our *hearts* being sprinkled, we realize that the foreshadowed events are spiritual rather than physical. The phrase “bodies washed with pure water,” then, does not refer to physical baptism in water, but speaks metaphorically of how believers in Christ have been consecrated for priestly ministry to God and to His people.⁹⁰³ The phrase “pure water” (ὑδατι καθαρῷ, 'ē-thə-tē kā-thä-'rō) appears only rarely in the Bible, and in Heb 10.22 the author probably meant it to echo not only the washing of Ex 29, but also the sprinkling of Eze 36.25 where God says to Israel, “I will sprinkle clean water (ὑδωρ καθαρόν, 'ē-thōr kā-thä-'rōn, in the LXX) on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.” Since this part of Ezekiel’s prophecy refers to the inner, spiritual aspect of Israel’s restoration, an allusion to it in Heb 10.22 underscores the spiritual rather than physical nature of the washing and sprinkling that the author of Hebrews had in view.⁹⁰⁴

⁹⁰² Cf. Lev 8.6, 23-24; Num 8.6-11. See also the Day of Atonement ritual of Lev 16, by which the high priest is able once a year to enter the Holy of Holies; it too involves the sprinkling of blood and washing of the priest’s body. If our Hebrews passage did not speak of “blood” and of cleansing “from an evil conscience,” we might also think of the ritual purification for one who had come in contact with a dead person (Num 19.13-21), the ritual cleansing for the leper (Lev 14), or perhaps the ritual cleansing for a bodily discharge (Lev 15).

⁹⁰³ It’s *possible* that the author of Hebrews switches from metaphorical sprinkling to literal washing in the same verse, but not likely.

⁹⁰⁴ The only other instances of the phrase “pure water” appear in Num 5.17 and Job 11.15 (see LXX for the latter reference).

Once we have looked at Heb 10.22 in its context, *and* taken its Levitical typology into account, we can summarize the author's message in this way:

Through Christ's atonement, we now enter the holy place of God's presence, set apart to serve God and His people, ministering as priests under our great High Priest. Just as Israel will be finally cleansed of the immoral detritus of the nations (Eze 36.25) and faithfully serve God once again, we likewise have been "sprinkled" by the blood of Jesus and consecrated by the "pure water" of God's Spirit so that we are now able to serve Him faithfully, enduring steadfastly in the face of persecution, interceding and encouraging one another, and spurring one another on in good works.

Therefore, while Heb 10.22 refers to inward, spiritual events, and not to the external rite of Christian baptism, an understanding of the allusions to priestly consecration in the passage, *including the reference to priestly baptism*, should remind the Christian reader of Hebrews that *our baptism* consecrated us to priestly service in God's kingdom.

The Indirect Connection Between **Hebrews 10.22** And Christian Baptism

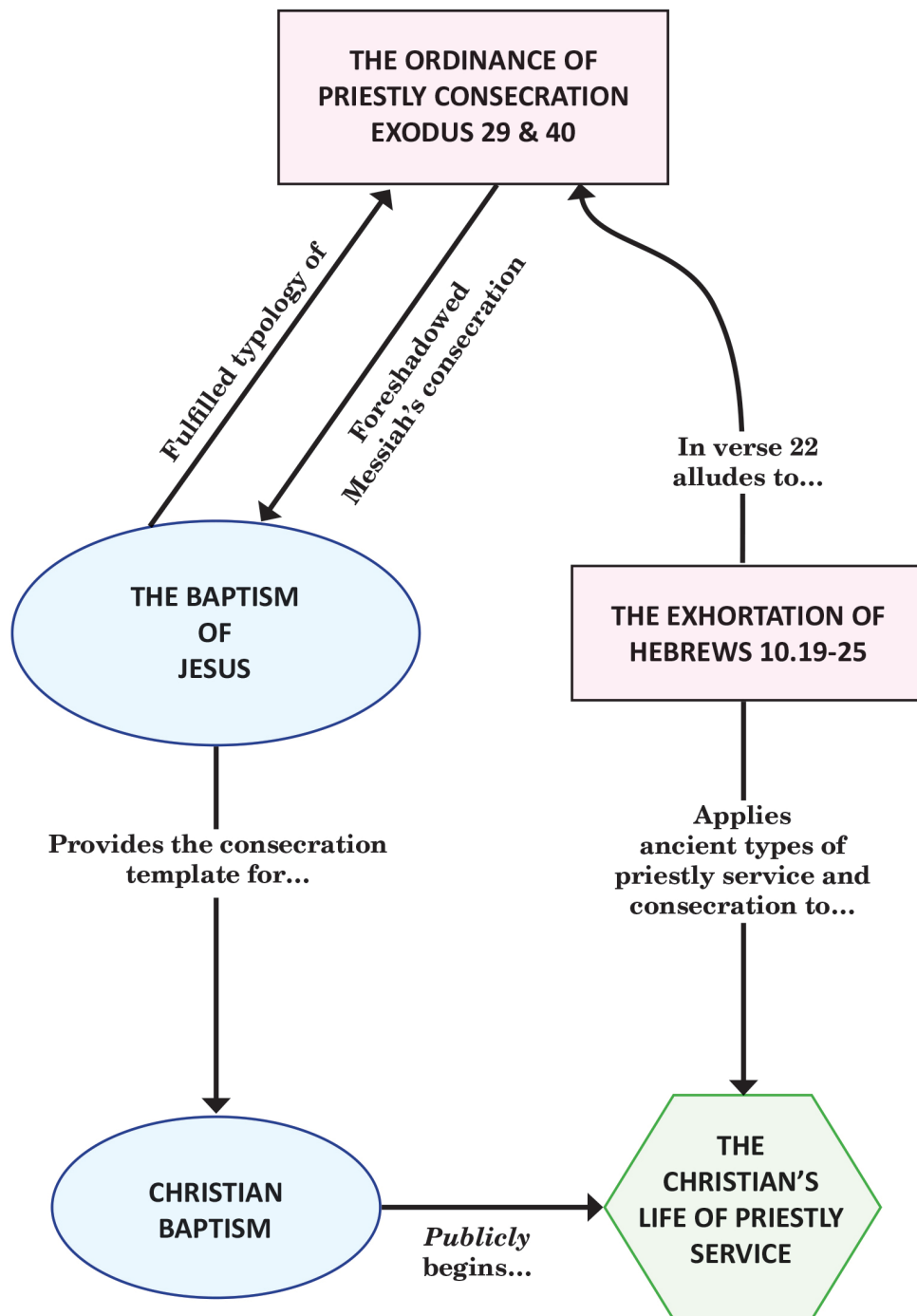


Figure 13

A part of the act of baptism in the Church of India is for the candidate to place his own hand on his head and say, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." This is part of the baptismal service of new members, not the ordination of ministers!

E. Paul Hovey

APPENDIX 4

THE LEVELS OF MEANING IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Interpreters have observed the following levels of meaning in the Scriptures. I present them in the order of their importance, with most important first.

1. THE CONVENTIONAL MEANING

This is the literal meaning of the words and phrases themselves, read before interpreting any figures of speech or irony that the author may have intended. It is similar to the *p'shat* reading in the Jewish PaRDeS⁹⁰⁵ system of interpretation, although *p'shat* does take into account figures of speech. This level of meaning is essential as the starting point of interpretation; without it the other levels of meaning are detached from the text.

2. THE INTENTIONAL MEANING

This is the meaning that the author(s) intended to convey by a given text; to grasp this meaning the reader must take into account such things as historical and literary context, figures of speech and irony. While authorial intent can be difficult to discern, this level of meaning trumps in importance all the other levels that follow.

3. THE TYPOLOGICAL MEANING

This is the foreshadowing (or commemorating) accomplished by a biblical narrative, or by the things or events described in it. The typological meaning points to other more important things or events in the story of redemption.

⁹⁰⁵ The acronym PaRDeS stands for four levels of interpretation, *p'shat* (straightforward, contextual interpretation), *remez* (interpretation making use of metaphors and allusions in the text to reveal the deeper meaning), *d'rash* (contemporary relevance, moral, homiletic application that may make use of allegory) and *sod* (mystical interpretation, perhaps using numerology).

4. THE RESONANT MEANING

In biblical interpretation, we must notice how the text under scrutiny resonates with or echoes preceding biblical narratives or statements. This level of meaning has a similarity to the *remez* interpretation (in the Jewish PaRDeS system) which looks for allusions to other passages in the text. However, unlike with *remez*, we note the resonant meaning of a text not to formulate a “deeper meaning” for the passage under scrutiny, but rather to understand how the passage coordinates with the narrative and teaching of the larger biblical revelation. The interpreter must exercise caution with regard to resonant meaning, because personal theological biases may prompt thematic associations in one’s mind that were never intended by the biblical authors. Furthermore, with resonant meaning it is tempting to prioritize allusion over the direct [referent](#) of the text (i.e., replace the intentional meaning with the resonant meaning).

5. THE PRACTICAL MEANING

This is similar to what Stephen I. Wright calls the Responsive Meaning.⁹⁰⁶ It is the meaning that the reader derives personally as he responds to a biblical text and is able to apply it for his own instruction, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2Ti 3.16). This level of meaning overlaps with the *d’rash* interpretation in the Jewish PaRDeS system; *d’rash* may use typology and allegory as it seeks the practical and homiletical message of a passage.

6. ESTHETIC MEANING

This is the poetic and spiritual beauty that the reader or hearer of Scripture perceives subjectively from the sound, repetition or other aspects of the text.

7. [MYSTICAL](#) MEANING

Popular both among rabbinical interpreters (cf. the *sod* interpretation in the PaRDeS system) and medieval Christian interpreters, the [Mystical](#) (or [Anagogical](#)) Meaning is that “hidden meaning” discovered by clever expositors using numerology or over-allegorization to make passages about practical and earthly things speak of ethereal things. The [Mystical](#) level of meaning is of

⁹⁰⁶ Stephen I. Wright, “Exegesis And The Preacher,” *Evangel*, Summer 1999, pp. 62-67.

questionable value in biblical interpretation, for as Bruce Corley, et al, write, “The Bible is not a jumble of religious opinion or a [mystical](#) cryptogram that the contemporary reader sorts out according to whim or fad. On the contrary, God purposed to speak through human language and to be understood.”⁹⁰⁷ Indeed, since [Mystical](#) Meaning is so often based on the subjective choices made by the interpreter (often strongly influenced by his or her personal [soteriology](#) or [ecclesiology](#)) it tends to detach itself from the text, or at least from its [Intentional Meaning](#).

Let’s illustrate these 7 levels of meaning using Ex 29.4:

“Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.”

[Conventional Meaning](#): God commanded Moses to bring Aaron and his sons to the tabernacle entrance and wash (apparently immerse) them there with water.

[Intentional Meaning](#): God intended that a ceremony mark the end of the priests’ private lives and the beginning of their lives of public service to Himself and His people.

[Resonant Meaning](#): The immersion of the priests would serve as a reminder of Israel’s break from her old life in Egypt, when God brought the nation across the Red Sea to begin her new life of service to Him as “a kingdom of priests” (Ex 19.6). The immersion of the priests resonates with the earlier “baptism” of the nation “in the cloud and in the sea” (1Co 10.2).

⁹⁰⁷ Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke and Grant Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2nd ed., (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), p. 8.

Typological Meaning: The immersion of the priests foreshadowed the baptism of Jesus in particular and the baptism of His followers in general; in every case, baptism marks the beginning of public priestly service to God.

Practical Meaning: Christ followers must see themselves as priests and ministers, and understand that by their baptism they were set apart to service in God's kingdom.

Esthetic Meaning: The revelation of the profound privilege of being called into God's work as a "coworker" warms my heart. The imagery of leaving the old life behind on the far shore of the sea leaves me in awe.

Mystical Meaning: **Roman Catholic:** The immersion of the priests points to the power of sanctified water to remit sin. **Lutheran:** As the ceremonial water sanctified priests, so baptism sanctifies us by producing faith and effecting our new birth. **Evangelical:** The baptism of the priests points to the fact that God's servant must be born again by "the washing of regeneration" (Tit 3.5). [The author disavows all of these [mystical](#) meanings for Ex 29.4.]

APPENDIX 5

CHRISTIANITY VS. THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

CHRISTIANITY	MYSTERY RELIGIONS
Origin in Palestine	Very little influence in Palestine
Historical basis for events	Mythological basis for events
Established doctrine	Syncretizing, evolving doctrine
God acts in history	Non-historical deities
Theological	Lack of insight about God
Monotheistic	Polytheistic
Incarnation (God becomes man)	Apotheosis (men become gods)
Resurrection	Reincarnation
Adherents join in God's work	Adherents seek self-improvement
Eschatological plan for the cosmos	Personal plan for individual's afterlife
All of life sacred	Sacred-secular split
Exclusive	Members belonged to multiple cults
Mysteries made public	Mysteries kept secret
Emphasis on relationship	Emphasis on ritual
Rituals metaphorical	Rituals magical
God saves you	Initiation saves you

Figure 14

Our chief interest in the past is as a guide to the future.

W. R. Inge (Dean of St. Paul's), *Assessments And Anticipations*, 1929

The most important lesson which history can teach is humility.

Robert Runcie in foreword to *A New History of Christianity* by Vivian Green.

APPENDIX 6

THE CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINES OF BAPTISM AND ORIGINAL SIN

BC	Jewish And Pagan Baptismal Rituals Originate; Anti-Material Greek Myths Composed.
c. 2400	First references to the Egyptian goddess Isis. How early the pre-initiation ritual bath was instituted is unknown.
c. 2300	Traditional date of Noah's flood.
c. 1550	Earliest use of the Egyptian funerary text known as <i>Book Of The Dead</i> , or, <i>Book Of Coming/Going Forth By Day</i> . The spells recorded in these texts refer to water purifications understood to have been immersions. ⁹⁰⁸
c. 1446	Early date of the Exodus and crossing of the Red Sea.
c. 1445	Early date for giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, including instructions for consecrating priests with a baptismal ritual.
c. 1274	Late date of the Exodus and crossing of the Red Sea.
c. 1275	Late date for giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, including instructions for consecrating priests with a baptismal ritual.

⁹⁰⁸ Michel Meslin, "Baptism," in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia Of Religion*, (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987), Vol. 2, p. 59.

c. 1200

Ramesses II (“The Great”) builds a temple for himself at Abydos. One relief in the temple depicts him being baptized (by pouring) by the gods Horus and Thoth.⁹⁰⁹



800

[Hesiod's](#) *Theogonia* posits a mating of Heaven and Earth that produces the troublesome Titans.

c. 530

Pilgrims from Greece and beyond flock to Eleusis to participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries whose initiation rites began with an immersion in the sea.

⁹⁰⁹ Photo © Hannah Pethen, April 4, 2011, used by permission. Photo title: “Baptism of Pharaoh”; photo description: “Image of the purification of Pharaoh, known as the ‘Baptism of Pharaoh’, by Horus and Thoth in the hypostyle hall of Ramses II at Abydos.” <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hannahpethen/6804507496/>

- c. 428-348 [Plato](#) taught that the human soul is an eternal, transmigrating spark of divine substance (i.e., intelligence) that has “fallen” and been forced into a human body.⁹¹⁰
- c. 250 Isis-Serapis worship, with its baptismal initiation rites, already in Athens.⁹¹¹ The god called Mên Askaenos worshipped in Asia Minor from this time or earlier; his sanctuary in Pisidian Antioch had pools in which followers are believed to have immersed themselves in purificatory rites.⁹¹²
- 150-140 Settlement at Qumran by the Essenes (or other “Dead Sea Sect”).
- c. 100 Composition of 1QS, “The Community Rule” found among the [DSS](#). Ritual baptisms a familiar practice at Qumran.

AD The Church’s Loss Of Its Hebraic Heritage Allows The Compounding Of False Assumptions.

- 24 Strabo dies. Final version of his *Geography* in which he describes “The [licentious] rites called Cotytia ... celebrated among the Thracians” in honor of the goddess Cotys or Cotytto (Κότυς or Κοτυττώ).⁹¹³ “Those who celebrated her festival were called βάπται, from the purifications which were originally connected with the solemnity.”⁹¹⁴

⁹¹⁰ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 326, note 35.

⁹¹¹ H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*, (New York; London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 98.

⁹¹² David W. J. Gill and Bruce W. Winter, “Acts And Roman Religion,” in David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (eds.), *The Book Of Acts In Its First Century Setting, Vol. 2: Graeco-Roman Setting*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 89. Michel Meslin, “Baptism,” in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia Of Religion*, (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987), Vol. 2, p. 60.

⁹¹³ *Geo* 10.3.16.

⁹¹⁴ Leonhard Schmitz, “COTYS or COTYTTO (Κότυς or Κοτυττώ),” ed. William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1870), p. 869.

- c. 80-110 *The Didache* prescribes instruction and fasting before baptism.
- 100 Growing contempt and ridicule of Jews and Judaism in Christian literature.
- c. 115-120 Christian worship shifts from Sabbath to Sunday.
- c. 117 **Ignatius** writes, “For our God, Jesus Christ ... was born and baptized, that by His passion He might purify the water.”⁹¹⁵
- c. 130 *Epistle of Barnabas* states, “we indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up, bearing fruit in our heart, having the fear [of God] and trust in Jesus in our spirit.”⁹¹⁶
- 135 After second Jewish revolt Judaism loses its status as a *religio licita* and Christian Jews depart the synagogue.**
- 140 *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions the only true repentance “which takes place when we descended into the water and received remission of our former sins.”⁹¹⁷
- Probable date for *Dialogue Of Justin, Philosopher And Martyr, With Trypho, A Jew*.
- c. 140-160 The Church separates completely from its Jewish heritage and steadily becomes more **Hellenized**.
- 150 Baptism becoming enchanted. **Fathers** begin to interpret Joh 3.5 as referring to new birth through baptism, as in *Hermas* 3.9.16.

⁹¹⁵ *Ign Eph* 18.

⁹¹⁶ *Bar* 11.

⁹¹⁷ *Hermas* 2.4.3.

Approximate date of *An Ancient Homily*, commonly known as *The Second Epistle Of Clement To The Corinthians*.

c. 150-250 Gnostic *Paraphrase Of Shem*: “they are deceived ... thinking that through baptism with the uncleanness of water ... he will take away the sins.”⁹¹⁸

Gnostic *Testimony Of Truth*: “Baptism of truth” superior to other baptism.⁹¹⁹

c. 160 [Justin Martyr](#) writes that spiritual circumcision is received through baptism, identifies baptism with new birth which a person chooses to receive,⁹²⁰ and claims Christians are “true spiritual Israel.”⁹²¹ [Justin](#) also makes passing references to the human race having “fallen under the power of death and the guile of the serpent,” and to Eve having “brought forth disobedience and death.”⁹²²

Pausanias writes his *Description Of Greece* in which he describes the water purifications at the sanctuary of Trophonios.⁹²³

c. 170 [Theophilus of Antioch](#) writes of men “being destined to receive repentance and remission of sins, through the water and laver of [regeneration](#)....”⁹²⁴

c. 180 [Irenaeus](#) writes of a catastrophic change in the human race that had come through Adam and Eve, and of “what we had lost in Adam.”⁹²⁵ He also provides one of the earliest Christian references to holy water, writing, “For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred

⁹¹⁸ *Shem* 37. Robinson’s *Nag Hammadi Library*, p. 357.

⁹¹⁹ *Truth* 69. Ibid., p. 457.

⁹²⁰ *IApo* 61.

⁹²¹ *Dial* 123.

⁹²² *Dial* 88, 100.

⁹²³ *Greece* 9.39.5-7.

⁹²⁴ *Auto* 2.16.

⁹²⁵ *Adv Haer* Book 3: 18.1; 21.10; 22.4; 23.8.

water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually **regenerated** as new-born babes....”⁹²⁶

- c. 200 The date at which **Kurt Aland** places “the emergence of infant baptism.”⁹²⁷ As parents in North Africa begin to request baptism for their children, **Tertullian** resists on practical grounds. **Tertullian** writes against the baptism of infants, in spite of the fact that he believes man is sinful due to an abiding condition inherited from Adam.⁹²⁸

 Around this time, also, Latin Fathers, like **Tertullian** begin to use the **Lat** word *sacramentum* to translate the **Grk** term *mysterion*.

- 200-400 Latin translations of the **LXX** and **NT** produced, constituting what are now called the Old Latin Versions antedating the **Vulgate**.

- c. 220 Tertullian writes that “without baptism, salvation is attainable by none,” quoting a severely abridged Joh 3.5: “Unless one be born of water, he hath not life.”⁹²⁹

- c. 220-230 Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1.39: Baptism replaces sacrifices. *Recognitions* 6.9: To be baptized is to be born again to God, the waters of baptism “alone can quench the violence of the future fire.”

- 226 **Origen** refers to baptism as Christian circumcision.⁹³⁰

- c. 230-250 As infant baptism *for the remission of sins* becomes more common, people question the supposed sinfulness of infants.

⁹²⁶ *Frag* 34.

⁹²⁷ Kurt Aland, ET by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 103.

⁹²⁸ *Anima* 40-41.

⁹²⁹ *Bap* 12.

⁹³⁰ *Com Joh* 1.1.

- c. 234 [Origen](#), in his *Homilies On Luke*, makes some of the earliest references to “the [mystery](#) of baptism.”⁹³¹
- c. 240 [Origen](#), in his commentary on Romans, explains that infants are baptized because they have an “innate defilement” [from a pre-existent state].⁹³²
- c. 246 [Origen](#), *Against Celsus*, in which he writes about the effects of the curse upon the earth for “every man who died in Adam,” and “who in Adam were driven out of paradise.”⁹³³ In the same work he teaches that the Jews were a “most wicked nation” deserving of their calamities, and identifies Christians as “the spiritual Israel.”⁹³⁴ About this time he refers to infant baptism as the “[custom of the Church](#)” in a homily on Leviticus.⁹³⁵
- 250 In one of his epistles, [Cyprian](#) teaches that repentant heretics should be baptized with the “only baptism of the holy church” so that “by divine regeneration” they “may be born of both sacraments, because it is written, ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”⁹³⁶
- [Cyprian](#) also advances the novel idea that remission in baptism is “for the sins of another.”
- 257 [Novatian](#): The Spirit “effects with water the second birth.”⁹³⁷
- 285 [Antony](#) (c. 251-356) crosses the Nile in search of isolation.

⁹³¹ *Hom Luk* 11 (referring to the baptism of Jesus), also *Hom Luk* 33.

⁹³² *Com Rom* 5.9.11.

⁹³³ *Celsus* 7.28.

⁹³⁴ *Celsus* 2.8.

⁹³⁵ *Hom Lev* 8.3.5, Quasten translation, Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vols. I-IV, (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1992), p. 83.

⁹³⁶ *Cyp Epi* 72.21. The reference to “both sacraments” is to baptism and the laying on of hands. Cf. *Cyp Epi* 71.1.

⁹³⁷ *De Trin* 29.

- c. 300 In his commentary on the Revelation, [Victorinus](#), uses the phrase *peccatum pristinum*,⁹³⁸ but not exactly the phrase later coined by [Augustine](#), *peccatum originale*.
- The *Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles* appears, stating, “Except a man be baptized of water and of the Spirit, he shall by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven,” replacing Christ’s word, *born* with the word *baptized*.⁹³⁹
- Methodius of Olympus paraphrases Eph 5.26-27, replacing the phrase “washing of water with the word” with the single word “laver,” and alludes to Tit 3.5 saying that the Church gives believers “new birth by the laver of regeneration.”⁹⁴⁰
- 312 The “conversion of Constantine.”
- 320 The monastic pioneer, [Pachomius](#), settles in the abandoned village of Tabennisi on the east bank of the Nile.
- c. 339 It becomes a criminal offense in the Empire to convert to Judaism.
- c. 340 The Empire begins to see Roman legislation favoring Christianity and penalizing paganism.
- c. 350 [Cyril Of Jerusalem](#): “Baptism is a chariot to heaven.” Baptism now fully enchanted and often reserved for late adulthood, though [paedobaptism](#) still not universally practiced (until the time of [Augustine’s](#) ministry).
- 354 [Augustine](#) born in Thagaste.

⁹³⁸ *Com Apoc* 1.16.

⁹³⁹ *Const* 6.15.

⁹⁴⁰ *Banq* 3.8.

- 355 [Hilary](#) teaches that all are implicated in the sin of Adam, writing about “the sins ... of our origin,” (*ab originis nostrae peccatis*).⁹⁴¹
- c. 360 [Athanasius](#) writes the best-selling *Life of St. Antony*.
- c. 366-384 [Ambrosiaster](#) advances another novel idea, writing that all sinned “in Adam as though in a lump.” He also writes that, “In baptism the believer is washed clean from all sins and is made righteous in the name of the Lord, and through the Spirit of God he is adopted as God’s child.”
- c. 370 [Gregory Nazianzen](#): Baptize children if they are in [mortal] danger; for others wait until they are three and able to answer questions about the sacrament.⁹⁴²
- c. 371 [Augustine](#) enters into a concubinage relationship.⁹⁴³
- c. 373 [Augustine](#) associates with the Manicheans.
- 379 [Ambrose of Milan](#) says, “In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died; ... guilty as I was in him”⁹⁴⁴ In another place he writes, “human nature itself sinned.”⁹⁴⁵
- c. 380 [Ambrose of Milan](#) praises the burning of a synagogue.
- [Pelagius](#) begins his ascetic movement in Rome.
- 381 The Creed of Constantinople, known to us as The Nicene Creed, includes the statement, “we confess one baptism unto the remission of sins.”

⁹⁴¹ Hil *Mat* 10.24.

⁹⁴² *Ora* 40.28.

⁹⁴³ Kim Power, “Concubine/Concubinage,” Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 222.

⁹⁴⁴ *Sat* 2.6.

⁹⁴⁵ *Dav Alt* 71, quoted in Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 305.

- c. 381-398 [Chrysostom](#): “baptism conveys remission.”⁹⁴⁶
- c. 383-410 [Pelagius](#) teaches human willpower in Rome.
- 384 [Optatus](#): “the baptism of Christians had been foreshadowed in the circumcision of the Hebrews.”⁹⁴⁷
- 386 [Augustine](#) converted, received into full membership of the church.
- 386-387 [Chrysostom](#) launches his preaching series *in Antioch* entitled “Homilies Against The Jews.”
- 387 [Augustine](#) is baptized by [Ambrose of Milan](#).
- c. 388 [Augustine](#) dismisses his concubine.
- 388 [Ambrose of Milan](#) remonstrates to the emperor against Christians having to pay for a synagogue they had burned down.⁹⁴⁸
- 390 *The Life of Pachomius* written.
- 391 [Augustine](#) becomes a priest.
- 395 [Augustine](#) made bishop of Hippo, coined the term *peccatum originale*. Before this time, he “held that Adam’s punishment is inherited as mortality in the flesh and that the infant’s soul is innocent.”⁹⁴⁹
- c. 397-401 [Augustine’s](#) *Confessions* written sometime during this period.
- c. 400 [Rufinus’](#) *Liber de Fide*. Also around this time, [Jerome](#) honors the 8th day of the week, the day of Christ’s

⁹⁴⁶ *Hom Act* 7.

⁹⁴⁷ *Con Don* 5.

⁹⁴⁸ *Amb Epi* 40.

⁹⁴⁹ Paul Rigby, “Original Sin,” edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 608.

resurrection, as “the day on which the synagogue comes to an end and the church is born.”⁹⁵⁰

Augustine writes, “... with how much greater certainty should it be said of baptism ... that without it no one can reach the kingdom of heaven....”⁹⁵¹

404 [Jerome](#) completes the Latin translation of the Bible from which the Vulgate would be derived.

411 Council of Carthage at which [Caelestius](#) and [Julian Eclanum](#) champion the doctrines of [Pelagius](#). The council officially condemns the [Pelagian](#) movement and its teachings.

412 [Augustine's](#) *Treatise On The Merits And Forgiveness Of Sins, And On The Baptism Of Infants* (in which he becomes the first to mention the *magnum opus* of Pelagius, i.e., the *Commentary On Romans*). Combatting [Pelagianism](#), [Augustine](#) codifies the doctrine of “[original sin](#),” defending it on the basis of the Church’s long tradition of baptizing infants, and identifying [concupiscence](#) as “the sole cause of the transmission of [original sin](#) from parents to children....”⁹⁵²

417 [Pelagius](#) and [Caelestius](#) excommunicated.

418 In harmony with [Augustine](#), the Council of Carthage declares against the [Pelagians](#),

that whoever says that infants fresh from their mother’s ought not to be baptized, or says that they are indeed baptized unto the remission of sins, but that they draw nothing of the original sin from Adam, which is expiated in the bath of regeneration, whence it follows that in regard to

⁹⁵⁰ *Jer Hom* 93, cited in *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth and Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), p. 139.

⁹⁵¹ *Peti* 3.56.68.

⁹⁵² Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 65.

them the form of baptism “unto the remission of sins” is understood as not true, but as false, let him be anathema. Since what the Apostle says: “*Through one man sin entered into the world (and through sin death), and so passed into all men, in whom all have sinned*” [cf. Rom 5.12], must not be understood otherwise than as the Catholic Church spread everywhere has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith even infants, who in themselves thus far have not been able to commit any sin, are therefore truly baptized unto the remission of sins, so that that which they have contracted from generation may be cleansed in them by regeneration.⁹⁵³

Julian of Eclanum counterattacks on behalf of the Pelagians. Julian differs from Pelagius on the matter of concupiscence, however, teaching that libido and desire are part of created nature and permitted by God; only their excessive indulgence is sin.⁹⁵⁴

426 Augustine’s *The City Of God*, a Christian philosophy of history, in which he writes, “it was not in man’s power, even in Paradise, to live as he ought without God’s help.”⁹⁵⁵ To later theologians, this implies that God had to give Adam a superadded righteousness to enable man to live as he ought, since human nature itself was insufficient.

430 Augustine dies in Hippo.

431 Council of Ephesus at which Caelestius is again condemned.

⁹⁵³ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources Of Catholic Dogma*, ET by Roy J. Deferrari, (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 45.

⁹⁵⁴ See Adolf Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Edited by T. K. Cheyne and A. B. Bruce, Translated by Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), Vol. 5, p. 195.

⁹⁵⁵ *City* 14.27.1.

Middle Ages Paedobaptism Now A Key Component Of The Roman Catholic Church's Political Control.

- 529 The Council of Orange formally ends the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian controversies, while moderating the more extreme positions of Augustine. Its declaration, approved by Pope Boniface II in 531, rejects Augustine's view that "one was predestined either to damnation or salvation," but follows Augustine in affirming "both the existence of prevenient grace [contra semi-Pelagianism] and the role of grace in the performance of good works."⁹⁵⁶
- 853 The Council Of Quiersy, notes that "Man, using his free will badly sinned and fell, and became the 'mass of perdition' of the entire human race,"⁹⁵⁷ thus affirming Cyprian's teaching that all sinned while "in Adam as though in a lump [*massa*]," which idea Augustine made central to the doctrine of original sin.
- c. 1033-1109 Life of Anselm of Canterbury.
- c. 1059 Anselm settles in Normandy, becomes a monk, eventually rises to abbot.
- 1050-1100 The writings of Aristotle, rediscovered in the West through Jewish and Muslim translations, lay the foundation for the Aristotelian logic and dialectic method of the Scholastic movement.
- c. 1070 Anselm, "the first scholastic," contributes to a movement utilizing reason to deepen faith.
- c. 1070-1400 Scholasticism.

⁹⁵⁶ Ralph W. Mathisen, "Councils of Orange," edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).

⁹⁵⁷ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources Of Catholic Dogma*, ET by Roy J. Deferrari, (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 126.

- 1098 The publication of [Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*](#) “marks the turning-point at which the legal and external and purely logical and objective conception of God’s relation to us displaced the personal and organic and biological, after which the theology of the Atonement takes an entirely novel direction.”⁹⁵⁸
- c. 1100 Influenced by [Anselm of Canterbury](#), the Catholic church departs from [Augustine’s](#) scheme of [concupiscence](#)-based [original sin](#) and begins to adopt the idea of [original sin](#) as the loss of *superadded original righteousness*.
- 1140 The Council of Sens condemns [Peter Abelard’s](#) contention “That we have not contracted sin from Adam, but only punishment.”⁹⁵⁹
- 1224-1274 Life of [Thomas Aquinas](#). Thomas departs from [Augustine’s](#) understanding of [original sin](#),⁹⁶⁰ but follows [Augustine](#) in regard to the doctrine of divine election. After [Aquinas](#), however, “the dominant trend within Catholic theology was a drift toward [Pelagianism](#).”⁹⁶¹
- 1257 In his *Breviloquium*, [Bonaventure](#) (1221-1274) speaks of [concupiscence](#) as “a disorder consequent upon [original sin](#), and not to be identified with it.”⁹⁶²

⁹⁵⁸ George Cadwalader Foley, *Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement: The Bohlen Lectures, 1908*, (London; Bombay; Calcutta; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), pp. 6-7.

⁹⁵⁹ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources Of Catholic Dogma*, ET by Roy J. Deferrari, (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 150.

⁹⁶⁰ “[Thomas Aquinas](#), for his part, explicitly rejected the Augustinian equation of original sin with concupiscence, believing that although the latter is the material element of the former, the formal element of original sin is to be explained as ‘privatio originalis iustitiae per quam voluntas subdebatur Deo,’” i.e., “the privation of original justice, whereby the will was subject to God.” Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin: Augustine And The Pre-Augustinian Sources*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 66-67.

⁹⁶¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 925.

⁹⁶² Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, trans. José De Vinck, vol. 2, *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), p. 116.

- 1265-1308 Life of [John Duns Scotus](#). He teaches that [concupiscence](#) is an element of man's created nature, and not itself sin. He also opines that Adam had merited the gift of [original righteousness](#), and that "fallen man might ... also merit the gift of first grace...."⁹⁶³
- 1341 In his book *Iam Dudum*, Benedict XII rebukes the Armenians for, among other things, their unbelief in [original sin](#).
- 1530 The Augsburg Confession. [Luther](#) and other reformers reject many superstitions of Roman Catholicism, but retain [paedobaptism](#); [Luther](#) interprets baptism as new birth (Joh 3.5) and as faith-generating, following [Augustine's](#) teaching of baptism as the "sacrament of faith."
- 1536-1539 [Calvin's Institutes Of The Christian Religion](#). Rather than [Augustine's](#) idea of sinning *in Adam*, Calvin emphasizes inherited depravity *from Adam*, and explicitly denies that God holds us liable "for another's fault" (*Inst* 2.1.8; contrary to [Ferguson](#) and [Packer](#) who read the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity back into this passage⁹⁶⁴). [Calvin](#) makes use of the extra-biblical phrase "the righteousness of Christ," but speaks of this righteousness as being *communicated* (in contrast to the [Pelagians](#) who urged that it be *imitated*), not of it being *imputed* (*Inst* 2.1.6).
- 1537 [Luther's](#) Smalkald Articles state that "the corruption of nature is so profound and dark as to be past human

⁹⁶³ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms : Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 97.

⁹⁶⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 250.

- comprehension, but must be received as matter of revelation and faith.”⁹⁶⁵
- 1542-1621 Life of Jesuit theologian [Robert Bellarmine](#) who clarifies the idea of man’s natural inner conflict between flesh and spirit, and the idea of [superadded righteousness](#).
- 1545-1563 The [Council of Trent](#) counters the ideas of the Reformers and codifies the main ideas of the Catholic doctrine of [original sin](#).⁹⁶⁶
- c. 1550 [Melancthon](#) defines [original sin](#) as “the want of [original righteousness](#)” such that men are “not able to obey the law of God,” and said that “on account of this corruption, they are guilty, and are the children of wrath....” In other words, he sees men as guilty due to their corruption, but he also says, “If anyone wishes to add that also they are born guilty on account of Adam’s fall, I do not object.” In agreement with [Augustine](#), and against the [Scholastics](#), [Melancthon](#) sees “[concupiscence](#) as an active evil in man,” rather than “as a mere weakness in man, and not sin.”⁹⁶⁷
- 1559 In his *Institutes* and other writings, [Calvin](#) extensively develops the idea of covenant, in part to justify the [Reformation](#) (since the Roman church has broken the covenant).⁹⁶⁸ In so doing, he lays groundwork for the later [federal theology](#) of [Johannes Cocceius](#) (1603-1669).
- c. 1560 [J. Heinrich Bullinger](#) (1504-1575), adopts and expands ideas inherited from his mentor [Zwingli](#) (1484-1531),

⁹⁶⁵ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volumes 1-3*, (London: Beveridge and Co., 1879), vol. 2, pp. 77–78.

⁹⁶⁶ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources Of Catholic Dogma*, ET by Roy J. Deferrari, (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), pp. 246-248.

⁹⁶⁷ James W. Richard, *The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church*, (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), pp. 340-341.

⁹⁶⁸ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 175.

- developing a theology of covenant-based redemption. In Belgium, [Michel de Bay](#) (also [Michael Baius](#), or Bajus, 1513-1589), a forerunner of the [Jansenists](#), develops a radically [Augustinian](#) theology, and (according to the condemnations in the papal bull of Pius V in 1567) teaches against the idea of [supernatural righteousness](#), superadded in the beginning to human nature.⁹⁶⁹
- 1562 Publication of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, presenting a generally reformed theological perspective, codifies the idea that “baptism is instituted in the new covenant” instead of circumcision.⁹⁷⁰
- 1562-1585 Two students of [Calvin](#), Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) and Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), develop the ideas of a pre-fall covenant of works and a pre-temporal covenant of redemption. “These ideas coupled with the covenant of grace resulted in the federal theology of men such as [Johannes Cocceius](#) (1603-1669).”⁹⁷¹
- c. 1565 [Theodore Beza](#) (1519-1605), [Calvin’s](#) successor in Geneva, speaks of Adam as the “federal representative” of mankind, providing this idea as the basis for God’s inclusion of all in Adam’s sin.⁹⁷² [Beza](#) thus anticipates the [federalism](#) of [Cocceius](#) and of John Ball.
- 1584 The Lutheran [Formula Of Concord](#) counters the Roman Catholic ideas that (1) man is indebted to God for Adam’s loss of the [superadded righteousness](#) and (2) that [the Fall](#)

⁹⁶⁹ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources Of Catholic Dogma*, ET by Roy J. Deferrari, (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), pp. 304-311. See Adolf Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*. Edited by T. K. Cheyne, Translated by Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), Vol. 7, pp. 86-89.

⁹⁷⁰ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Article 74, in David Lang, *Creeds, Confessions, And Catechisms* (Oak Tree Software, 1997).

⁹⁷¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 175.

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 250.

- did not corrupt human nature but only lost the supernatural help to that nature that God had given Adam.
- 1597 The phrase “covenant of works” first appears in *Tractatus de Vocatione Efficaci*, published by Scottish theologian Robert Rollock.⁹⁷³
- 1600 Reformed theologians reinterpret paedobaptism as the counterpart of circumcision and as the sign of the new covenant.
- 1643-1646 In England the “federal” or “covenant” doctrine of the Fall and original sin is enshrined in the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
- 1648 The German Johannes Cocceius (pron.: *Ko-kay-us*, 1603-1669) publishes *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei*, the fullest explanation of covenant theology published up to that time. Though he builds on the ideas of covenant developed by J. Heinrich Bullinger, and is undoubtedly indebted to the Germans Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) and Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), as well as the British John Ball (1585-1640), Cocceius subsequently becomes known as “the father of federal theology.”
- c. 1680 Francis Turretin gives explicit expression to the doctrine of the immediate imputation of Adam’s guilt: “the actual disobedience of Adam is imputed by an immediate and antecedent imputation to all his posterity springing from him by natural generation.”⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷³ Donald Macleod, “Original Sin in Reformed Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 132.

⁹⁷⁴ *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (3 parts, Geneva, 1679–1685), quoted by Donald Macleod in “Original Sin in Reformed Theology,” in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological,*

- 1713 The papal bull “Unigenitus,” by Clement XI, condemns 101 propositions ascribed to the French [Jansenist](#) theologian, Pasquier Quesnel (Paschasius Quesnel, 1634-1719). Proposition 35 ascribed to Quesnel declares that “the grace of Adam ... was due to his whole and sound nature,” i.e., Adam had no [superadded righteousness](#).⁹⁷⁵
- c. 1740 In New England during the time of the Great Awakening, the writings of men like [John Taylor](#) and [Jonathan Mayhew](#) begin to erode the [Westminster Confession’s federal doctrine of the Fall](#).
- 1794 Pius VI condemns the intimation of the Synod of Pistoia, that Adam’s primeval sanctity was a “condition of human nature” and “not a gratuitous gift of God.”⁹⁷⁶
- 1854 In his address, “Singulari quadam,” Pius IX mentions the “grave and terrible” wound that “was inflicted on human nature from the fault of our first parent,” with the result that “darkness has spread over the mind, and the will has been inclined to evil.”⁹⁷⁷ He says further that, “it is agreed that by the [original sin](#) propagated in all the posterity of Adam, the light of reason has been decreased....”⁹⁷⁸
- The doctrine of *The Immaculate Conception Of Mary* is made an official dogma of the Roman Catholic church.
- 1929 Pius XI, in the Encyclical, “Divini illius magistri,” says that even after redemption, “the defilements which flowed into the nature of man from Adam’s sin, especially the infirmity

Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 139-140.

⁹⁷⁵ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources Of Catholic Dogma*, ET by Roy J. Deferrari, (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 349.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 374.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 414.

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 415.

of the will and the unbridled desires of the soul, survive in man.”⁹⁷⁹

1997

The *Catechism Of The Catholic Church* states, “original sin ... is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin — an inclination to evil that is called concupiscence.”

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 576.

APPENDIX 7

CURRENT DEFINITIONS AND REMEDIES FOR ORIGINAL SIN

Roman Catholicism: A deprivation of original holiness and justice that does not leave human nature totally corrupted but subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin. **The Remedy:** The faith and [regeneration](#) conferred in baptism, preferably in infancy.

Eastern Orthodoxy: An inclination towards sin that is a heritage from the sin of our progenitors, a disordered passion but not a state of total depravity.⁹⁸⁰

The Remedy: The faith and [regeneration](#) conferred in baptism, preferably in infancy.

Anglican: “Article IX Of Original Or Birth Sin: [Original sin](#) ... is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated....” **The Remedy:** The faith and [regeneration](#) *signified* by, and the washing away of sin *effected* by, baptism (normally in infancy).⁹⁸¹

⁹⁸⁰ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Original_sin, viewed on July 21, 2014.

⁹⁸¹ See Article XXVII of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. See also <http://stpaulsbr.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/original-sin-and-its-cure/>, viewed on July 21, 2014.

Lutheran, Missouri Synod (influenced by Federalism): The guilt of Adam's sin imputed to his offspring and the corruption of man's nature.⁹⁸² **The Remedy:** The faith and [regeneration](#) conferred in baptism, preferably in infancy.

Presbyterian, PCA: The total depravity of human nature resulting from Adam's sin.⁹⁸³ **Remedy:** "In the gift of the Holy Spirit-by grace through faith-the originally sinful nature of man is transfigured to become Godly and possessed of the capacity to be God-like. This 'new life' begins now in the hearts of those who believe in and receive Jesus Christ. ... In keeping with the doctrine of Sovereignty, under which God is seen to determine all things, Presbyterians believe that the knowledge of Christ and the acceptance of Christ which leads to Salvation also come from God. We are saved by faith alone and this faith itself is a gift of God. Our personal redemption is not due to any goodness of our own for we have none; neither is it earned by our good works for sinners cannot accumulate 'credit' leading to redemption. We find Christ because He finds us. We love Him because He first loved us. We become His because He chooses us, calling us and sanctifying us after he justifies us. Presbyterians do not pretend to understand the great truth underlying the Election of God. They simply know that they did not seek God until first they were sought; they did not know Him until He enlightened their hearts; they did not believe until He gave them faith; they did not come until they felt themselves moved."⁹⁸⁴

Christian Reformed: A corruption of the whole human nature, a depravity inherited because of Adam's disobedience that infects all humanity from the womb, and is not abolished or uprooted even by baptism.⁹⁸⁵ **The Remedy:** God's sovereign election and eventual resurrection (baptismal [regeneration](#) is explicitly denied).

⁹⁸² <http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=s&word=SIN.ORIGINAL>, viewed July 21, 2014.

⁹⁸³ <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/believe.html>, viewed on July 21, 2014.

⁹⁸⁴ <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/believe.html>, viewed on November 17, 2014.

⁹⁸⁵ <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession/article-15-doctrine-original-sin>, viewed July 21, 2014.

Methodist: The corruption of human nature inherited from Adam, whereby man is continually inclined to evil.⁹⁸⁶ In other words, the first sin of Adam, and the sinful nature (depravity) possessed by every man since Adam, due to Adam's first transgression.⁹⁸⁷ **The Remedy:** The faith and [regeneration signified by](#), and the washing away of sin *effected by*, baptism (normally in infancy).⁹⁸⁸

Evangelicals (influenced by Federalism): The guilt of Adam's sin [imputed](#) to his offspring, and the corruption of man's nature.⁹⁸⁹ **The Remedy:** [New birth](#) by the Holy Spirit, upon which the sinner is clothed in "the [righteousness of Christ](#)."

Pentecostals: "[T]he sinful nature possessed by every man since Adam, due to Adam's first transgression. This sinful nature is called "depravity."⁹⁹⁰ "[T]he inclination to sin. This disease of the human nature, upon a child's reaching the age of moral responsibility, inevitably issues in personal acts of sinning, for which the individual falls under the wrath of God. Th[is] effect of Adam's sin on the human race ..., though not itself the reason sinners are condemned by God, consequently leads one into overt personal sin Out of Adam's sin, then, innocence was lost, the divine image in humankind was distorted and weakened, people became enslaved to sin (see Rom 6), and discord and death entered the world."⁹⁹¹ **The Remedy:** "All that anyone must do to be saved from the wrath that must come on sin is to look to Christ and live (cf. Num 21:4-9; Joh 3:14-15; 12:31-32). Salvation is not a complicated series of elaborate rites

⁹⁸⁶ <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=1389>, viewed July 21, 2014.

⁹⁸⁷ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), p. 165.

⁹⁸⁸ See http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/what-we-believe/documents/by-water-spirit-baptism.PDF, viewed on July 21, 2014.

⁹⁸⁹ See <http://sbcheritage.com/baptist-statesman-james-boyce-on-original-sin-and-imputed-guilt/>, viewed July 21, 2014.

⁹⁹⁰ Duffield, Guy P. and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, (Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), p. 165.

⁹⁹¹ William W. Menzies, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Stanley M. Horton, (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1993), p. 89.

and religious forms or a set of mystical steps. It occurs instantaneously in the life of the genuine seeker after God the moment he or she truly believes.”⁹⁹²

⁹⁹² William W. Menzies, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Stanley M. Horton, (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1993), p. 102.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

All dates are Anno Domini unless otherwise noted.

ALAND, KURT (28 MARCH 1915 – 13 APRIL 1994)

German liberal theologian of Lutheran heritage (the Confessing Church), an ordained minister, textual critic and professor of New Testament Research and Church History. Aland has left his mark on biblical studies as a principal editor of the Nestle-Aland and UBS Greek editions of the New Testament that underlie the [RSV](#), [NASB](#), [NIVO](#) and [ESV](#) translations.

AMBROSE OF MILAN (C. 337 – 397)

More of a preacher and pastor than an exegete, Ambrose nevertheless had a working knowledge of [Grk](#) and “helped to bring elements from Eastern tradition into the West, both in a Christianized reading of [Philo](#) and in his use of [Origen](#), Basil and others.”⁹⁹³ Ambrose directed his primary doctrinal efforts toward defending the Nicene Christology against that of the [Arians](#) who denied the eternality of Christ, but Ambrose also wrote extensively on virginity, in support of the asceticism of his time. Ambrose directly influenced the thinking of [Augustine](#).

ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (C. 1033 – 1109)

Born in Italy, Anselm became a monk in Normandy, and finally took the post of archbishop of Canterbury, a post he held until his death in spite of multiple exiles. Many acknowledge him as the first [Scholastic](#), or at least as a pioneer of [Scholasticism](#); he lived after [scholastic](#) methods were already in use, but before the West’s recovery of the bulk of [Aristotle’s](#) works.⁹⁹⁴ Though influenced philosophically by [Plato](#) and theologically by [Augustine](#), Anselm was an original thinker best known for producing the ontological argument for the

⁹⁹³ McKim, Donald K., ed. *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p. 121.

⁹⁹⁴ G. R. Evans, “Anselm of Canterbury,” Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 23-24.

existence of God. He also made “the principles of the practice of penance the fundamental scheme of religion in general,”⁹⁹⁵ principles that included the idea that one person’s merit can be transferred to another.⁹⁹⁶ Regarding the development of the doctrine of **original sin**, “Anselm was the first to depart from the **Augustinian** tradition.”⁹⁹⁷ “Anselm was the first thinker [after **Augustine**] to separate **original sin** from the lust of intercourse,” affirming that “**original sin** is simply human nature without **original justice** [righteousness], and that it is transmitted because parents cannot give **original justice** if they do not have it themselves....”⁹⁹⁸

ANTONY (AKA ANTHONY THE GREAT, 251 - 356)

Born in Egypt to a prosperous Christian family, Antony lost his parents when he was about 18, and became responsible for the family estate. Walking into church one day while the Gospel was being read, the words “If you would be perfect, go and sell all that you have and give to the poor; and come follow me ...” seemed as though spoken directly to him. He obeyed the words of Jesus immediately, and began spending time with Christian hermits, joining in their prayers, fasts and austere living. Antony became famous for battling demons, healing the sick, reconciling enemies and comforting the bereaved. Thanks to his influence during his lifetime, and his biography written by Athanasius, Antony became the chief inspiration for the subsequent monastic movement.

ARISTIDES (SECOND CENTURY)

A Christian philosopher of Athens who wrote a popular Apology utilizing ideas from **Aristotle** (he addressed the Apology to the emperor, Antoninus Pius). Also attributed to Aristides are a homily “On The Call Of The Thief And The Answer Of The Crucified” (Luk 23.42-43), and a fragment of a letter “To All Philosophers.”

⁹⁹⁵ Adolf Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Edited by T. K. Cheyne and A. B. Bruce, Translated by Neil Buchanan, Vol. 6., (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), p. 56.

⁹⁹⁶ George Cadwalader Foley, *Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement: The Bohlen Lectures, 1908*, (London; Bombay; Calcutta; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), p. 109.

⁹⁹⁷ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 66-67.

⁹⁹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anselm_of_Canterbury#Writings accessed June 29, 2014.

ASTERIUS THE HOMILIST (C. 385 - 410)

A preacher who lived in or near Antioch, unknown except as the author of thirty-one sermons on Psalms 1-5 and 18.

AQUINAS, THOMAS (1224 - 1274)

An Italian Dominican friar mentored by Albertus Magnus (the great interpreter of [Aristotle](#)). Aquinas became the most famous [Scholastic](#) theologian, known for his magnum opus, *Summa Theologica*. Dying shortly before his fiftieth birthday, Aquinas had authored an astounding 10,000,000 words in 60 different works, dictating a different book to each of up to four secretaries at once. For Roman Catholics, Aquinas codified for all time [Anselm's](#) principle of [original righteousness](#), affirming it as a *donum superadditum* given to Adam immediately upon his creation as an unmerited gift. While thus departing from [Augustine's](#) doctrine of [concupiscence](#)-based [original sin](#), Aquinas did affirm [Augustine's](#) understanding of divine election.

ARISTOTLE (384 - 322 BC)

A disciple of [Plato](#) and the tutor to 13-year-old Alexander of Macedon (later Alexander the Great). Aristotle moved away from [Plato's](#) idealism (theory of eternal forms), and in its place developed a philosophy of realism (involving a theory of causation that pointed to a supreme "First Cause"). Aristotle's creation of the science of "Logic" probably impacted the development of theology in the Middle Ages more than his other teachings. The West had lost track of Aristotle's writings in the early centuries, due in large part to the [Fathers'](#) preference for the more "spiritual" [Plato](#), and their aversion to Aristotle's realism (which they suspected of being tantamount to materialism). When Europe began to recover Aristotle's works (a recovery that would be completed by Arabic texts brought home by returning Crusaders), it was his logical writings that came to light first, beginning in the 9th century. [Anselm](#) and others began to apply Aristotelian logic to the study of theology, and the [Scholastic](#) movement was born.

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (AKA AUGUSTIN, 354 - 430)

Recognized as “the father of the doctrine of [original sin](#),” Augustine was not the first to speak of the idea, but the one to finally systematize diverse propositions about inherited sin into a cohesive doctrine. Born in Thagaste (a Numidian city in what is now Algiers) of a godly Christian mother, Augustine nevertheless pursued a worldly life, for more than a decade keeping a concubine by whom he had a son, Adeodatus. For ten years, while a teacher of rhetoric, he was enthralled by [Manichaeism](#), and though he later wrote voluminously against the sect, he may have never fully purged himself of their disdain of sex and marriage. Finally converted to Christianity under the influence of [Ambrose of Milan](#), Augustine served as bishop of Hippo Regius (a city also in what is now Algiers) from 396 until his death in 430. Though involved in various doctrinal controversies during his lifetime, it was as the Church’s champion against the heresy of the [Pelagians](#) that Augustine fully developed his doctrine of [original sin](#), a doctrine that would stand mostly intact for almost 700 years (until the time of [Anselm of Canterbury](#)).

BASILIDES (FL. C. 120 - 140)

A [Gnostic](#) disciple by [Menander](#) at Antioch. Basilides taught in Alexandria in a churchlike school that practiced magical rituals, and his followers purportedly became libertines. Accounts of the details of his teachings conflict, though he apparently had a doctrine of reincarnation (judging from [Origen’s](#) writing against it).

BEASLEY-MURRAY, GEORGE RAYMOND (1916 - 2000)

A British Baptist theologian of the 20th century, known for his influential book *Baptism In The New Testament*, and for his work on the Olivet discourse. He served as principal of Spurgeon’s College in England and also as the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

BEDE THE VENERABLE (C. 673 - 735)

The greatest Anglo-Saxon scholar, best known for his *Historiam ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*). Bede lived in a

monastery in northeastern England from age 7, was ordained a deacon at age 19 and a priest at 30. For his exegetical work, he used the [Vulgate](#) and the Old Latin translations of the Bible. For his work on Acts, he also used the [Grk](#) text. He based his commentaries primarily on the writings of [Augustine](#), [Jerome](#), [Ambrose](#) and Gregory the Great.

BELLARMINE, ROBERT (1542 - 1621)

A Jesuit theologian of the post-Tridentine period who lectured against [Luther](#), [Calvin](#) and other important Protestant writers. A member of the Holy Office (Inquisition), Bellarmine delivered the order forbidding Galileo to teach a heliocentric astronomical model.

BERKHOF, LOUIS (1873 - 1957)

An American-Dutch [Reformed](#) theologian, whose works on systematic theology influenced Bible colleges and seminaries throughout the 20th century.

BONAVENTURE (AKA BONAVENTURA, 1221 - 1274)

A [scholastic](#) theologian and a Franciscan mystic. He highly regarded [Augustine](#), whose works he saw as a needed balance to the influence that [Aristotle's](#) writings were having upon the [Scholastics](#). Bonaventure's Augustinianism, as well as his emphasis upon individual devotion, may have contributed to creating a theological environment that was ripe for [Reformation](#).

BULLINGER, ETHELBERT WILLIAM (1837 - 1913)

A descendant of the Swiss [Heinrich Bullinger](#), E. W. was born in Canterbury, Kent, England. In adulthood he was a sometimes controversial, ultradispensationalist, Anglican clergyman. At age 29 he became the clerical secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society (TBS), an office in which he served until his death.

BULLINGER, J. HEINRICH (1504 - 1575)

An influential Swiss reformer and minister, who succeeded the Protestant [Reformation](#) leader [Ulrich Zwingli](#) in Zurich. Earlier, Bullinger taught Bible and ancient languages at a Cistercian monastery, which under his influence

dissolved and became a Protestant church. A gifted preacher and leader, Bullinger served the Zurich church for forty-four years. His personal statement of faith, the Second Helvetic Confession, became the [Reformation's](#) most widely used summary of Protestant belief.

CAELESTIUS (AKA, CELESTIUS, C. 370 – C. 431)

Trained as a lawyer, Caelestius abandoned that career and became a disciple of [Pelagius](#) in 390. Around 399 he met Rufinus the Syrian from whom he adopted the idea that Adam's sin had no effect upon Adam's posterity. Caelestius received ordination as a priest in Ephesus in 415, and about that time wrote a short work entitled *Definitiones* in which he argued that the human will could be sinless. He denied the transmission of [original sin](#) and taught that infants are baptized "in order to obtain sanctification or the kingdom, not remission of sins."⁹⁹⁹ Pope Innocent I condemned both Caelestius and [Pelagius](#) as heretics on January 27, 417. After various appeals and a final condemnation at the Council of Ephesus in 431, Caelestius disappeared from the public eye.

CALVIN, JOHN (1509 – 1564)

Within two decades of [Luther's](#) world-shaking protest, the French lawyer, John Calvin came under Protestant influences and began to work for the Protestant cause. From 1536 to 1559, Calvin worked on his magnum opus, the *Institutes Of The Christian Religion*. This four-volume work laid the groundwork for much of Protestant theology down to the present time.¹⁰⁰⁰

CHROMATIUS (D. 407)

Bishop of Aquileia in northern Italy, friend of [Ambrose](#), Rufinus, [Jerome](#) and [John Chrysostom](#). He authored tracts and sermons.

CHRYSOSTOM, JOHN (C. 350 – 407)

Raised in Antioch by his pious Christian mother, and tutored by the [Hellenistic](#) pagan rhetorician, Libanius, John would come to be known as

⁹⁹⁹ J. D. Douglas, *et al*, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978).

¹⁰⁰⁰ Roderick Graciano, *Alien Righteousness?* (Timothy Ministries, 2011), 159.

Chrysostom (“golden mouth”) for his eloquent preaching. He preached in Antioch until he was kidnapped and forced to become the archbishop of Constantinople (an event he accepted as in God’s providence). John lived a life of self-sacrifice, using his income to build hospitals and care for the poor. His preaching against sins, including the abuses of wealth and power, offended his fellow bishops and members of the imperial household, and resulted in his exile to the eastern shore of the Black Sea where he died.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (C. 150 - 215)

Titus Flavius Clemens was born of pagan parents in Athens, but became the head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria. Clement took a positive approach toward philosophy, teaching that philosophy prepared the Greeks for Christ even as the law had prepared the Hebrews. He taught that man can attain to the likeness of God through love and self-control. His teaching influenced Greek Christian spirituality and undoubtedly the spirituality of the [Desert Fathers](#).

CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE (C. 200 - 258)

Famous for stating that “there is no salvation outside the church,” Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus was a disciple of [Tertullian](#), and succeeded his mentor as the bishop of Carthage. A pastor and administrator more than a theologian, Cyprian involved himself to a large extent in the ecclesiastical controversies of his day: controversies regarding the lapsed and regarding the connection between water baptism and the gift of the Spirit. On the charge of “sacrilege against the Roman gods, Cyprian was beheaded, martyred during the persecution of Valerian.

[Von Harnack](#) described Cyprian as “the Latin Church author par excellence” up until [Augustine](#), and as one who “dictated like a sovereign to the Western Church for the next 120 years” after [Tertullian](#), because his “authority ranked close after that of the Holy Scripture,” even though “Cyprian had hardly one original theological thought....”¹⁰⁰¹

¹⁰⁰¹ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma, Volume 5*, edited by T. K. Cheyne and A. B. Bruce, translated by Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), p. 24.

Cyprian taught that human [fallenness](#) involves *inherited guilt*, such that people need remission for *Adam's* sins. Cyprian wrote, for example, that “an infant ... has not sinned” but is more apt to receive the forgiveness of sins in baptism, since the sins “that to him are remitted, [are] not his own sins, but the sins of another.”¹⁰⁰² This radical, and heretofore unheard of idea, that newborn infants inherit the guilt of someone else's sins, and that people need (and can receive) remission for someone else's sins, met a doctrinal need in the Church of the 3rd century, and so survived to be codified in the teachings of [Ambrose](#) (c. AD 339-397),¹⁰⁰³ and in those of [Ambrose's](#) great disciple, [Augustine](#) (AD 354-430).¹⁰⁰⁴

COCCEIUS, JOHANNES (1603 - 1669)

Cocceius (pronounced *Ko-kay-us*) was the German theologian acknowledged today as the father of [federal theology](#), though he built on the ideas of covenant developed by [J. Heinrich Bullinger](#) (1504-1575), who in turn had adopted and expanded ideas inherited from his mentor [Zwingli](#). During Cocceius' lifetime, the English developed their own federal system of [reformed theology](#) with the help of John Ball (1585-1640) and others. It was in England that the “federal” or “covenant” doctrine of [the fall](#) and [original sin](#) was enshrined in the famous [Westminster Confession](#) of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The [Westminster Confession](#) then carried this [federal doctrine](#) of [the fall](#) to New England where it remained the orthodox view in that region until its influence was eroded by the writings of men like John Taylor and Jonathan Mayhew in the time of the Great Awakening.¹⁰⁰⁵

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA (370 - 444)

Patriarch of Alexandria known for a polemical career in which he battled against Novationism, Neoplatonism and the Jews. He may have indirectly

¹⁰⁰² *Cyp Epi* 58.5.

¹⁰⁰³ *Sat* 2.6. See also Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 305.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *De Pec* 1.11 [X]; *Aug Epi* 250.2; *Trin* 13.12, etc.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See Richard A. Müller, “Reformed Confessions And Catechisms,” in *The Dictionary Of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) pp. 482 ff. See also H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions Of Original Sin: A Study In American Theology Since 1750* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), ch. 2.

helped instigate the death of the distinguished female Neoplatonist, Hypatia, who was murdered by his supporters. The most important controversy of his career was that with the Nestorians, in which he championed the correctness of calling Mary *Theotokos*, “God-bearer”; the controversy had to do with the correct understanding of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ.

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM (C. 310 - 387)

Jerusalemite Cyril was appointed c. 343 as the priest in charge of catechizing those preparing for baptism. The lectures he then prepared for catechumens comprise Cyril’s only surviving writings. Elected Bishop of Jerusalem c. 350, he repeatedly fell victim to church politics during the years of his tenure, the first time for having sold church property in order to feed the poor during a famine. In his later years he stood firmly against the [Arian heresy](#).

DIODORE OF TARSUS (D. C. 394)

Founder of the school of exegesis and interpretation in Antioch that graduated [John Chrysostom](#). Though Diodore was respected during his lifetime, [Cyril of Alexandria](#) attributed the Christological and mariological doctrines of Nestorius to Diodore’s influence, and branded Diodore “the father of Nestorianism.”

EDWARDS, JONATHAN (1703 - 1758)

Connecticut-born Congregational minister and [Reformed theologian](#). Once called “the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene,” Jonathan Edwards may yet remain the greatest American intellect ever. A friend of George Whitefield, it was under Edwards’ pastoral influence that the Great Awakening broke out in 1734, and a geographically more extensive revival continued in 1740-1741. Among Edwards’ important works are *Freedom Of The Will*, and his book in answer to [John Taylor](#) on *Original Sin*.

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA (C. 265 - C. 339)

Bishop of Caesarea and a leader at the Council of Nicea, his greatest fame derives from his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, on the basis of which he is known as “The Father of Church History.”

FEE, GORDON (B. 1934)

American-Canadian theologian and minister of the Assemblies of God. An outstanding exegete and leading expert in [pneumatology](#), Fee currently serves as Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Regent College in Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

FERGUSON, EVERETT (B. 1933)

An accomplished church historian and author, and Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the [Church-of-Christ](#)-affiliated, Abilene Christian University.

GODET, FRÉDÉRIC LOUIS (1812 - 1900)

Swiss Protestant theologian and New Testament scholar. “He defended the orthodox Christian position against the growing theological liberalism in academic Protestant theology, and combined a deep, Christian piety with positive biblical and historical criticism.”¹⁰⁰⁶

GRAHAM, WILLIAM FRANKLIN “BILLY” (B. 1918)

American “evangelist to millions” ordained in the Southern Baptist denomination. Graham served as charter vice-president of Youth For Christ (YFC) International, and also as president of Northwestern College, Bible School and Seminary in Iowa. He formed the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in 1950 after a 1949 Los Angeles evangelistic crusade drew crowds totaling more than 350,000. He also co-founded *Christianity Today* magazine. Billy Graham remains one of the most admired and respected men in the world, though his career-long emphasis on salvation by personal decision has been criticized by [Calvinists](#), and his ecumenical spirit disparaged by other Protestant fundamentalists.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN (AKA GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, 329 - 390)

One of the “Cappadocian Fathers,” a priest and eloquent preacher. He was appointed the Bishop of Constantinople, in which post he served for less than a

¹⁰⁰⁶ NIDCC, pp. 420-421.

year. His important writings include a compilation of selections from works by [Origen](#), and a treatment of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

GREGORY OF NYSSA (C. 335 - C. 395)

One of the “Cappadocian Fathers,” called by some “The Star of Nyssa,” because of his giftedness as a speculative theologian. He was profoundly influenced in his theological views by [Origen](#).

GRUDEM, WAYNE (B. 1948)

Calvinistic theologian and author, Grudem served on the committee overseeing the *English Standard Version* translation of the Bible, and from 2005 to 2008 he served as General Editor for the [ESV](#) Study Bible.

HEGG, TIM (B. 1951)

Calvinistic author and teacher, and one of the overseers at Beit Hallel messianic congregation in Tacoma, WA. A member of ETS and SBL, Tim has contributed papers at the annual meetings of both societies. He currently serves as adjunct professor of Hebrew Grammar and Exegesis at Corban University School of Ministry.

HILARY OF POITIERS (C. 315 - 368)

Hilary was elected bishop of his home town in west central France, and soon found himself embroiled in the Church debates of the time regarding the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Hilary vigorously defended the orthodoxy of both, and as a consequence suffered banishment to Phrygia by the non-Trinitarian Emperor Constantius.

HIPPOLYTUS (FL. 222 - 245)

An influential biblical commentator, probably of Palestine, whose writings opposed [gnostic](#) teaching and overzealous apocalypticism (he did not believe Christ would return until around 500). Hippolytus was a pastor and preacher (possibly a bishop) personally acquainted with [Origen](#).

HODGE, CHARLES (1797 - 1878)

Presbyterian theologian of Philadelphia. Hodge was elected Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature at Princeton Seminary in 1822, and in 1840 was transferred to the chair of exegetical and didactic theology, a move which allowed him to engage more fully in his theological work. He championed the doctrine of God's sovereignty and man's inability in salvation.

HOMER (C. 850 BC)

Considered the first and greatest of the Greek epic poets, Homer is best known for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. About half of Homer's works were speeches which were emulated as models of persuasive speaking and writing throughout the ancient and medieval Greek world.

HORTON, MICHAEL (B. 1964)

An influential author and a [Reformed theologian](#) who teaches theology and apologetics at Westminster Seminary California since 1998. He also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine. He is an ordained minister in the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

HOVEN, VICTOR E. (1871 - 1965)

Hoven was Professor of Biblical Doctrine at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, OR, now Northwest Christian University. NCU's historical roots are in a religious heritage represented today by The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Christian Churches, and The Churches of Christ, all groups that teach the necessity of baptism for salvation.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (C. 35 - 107/112)

As he was taken from Antioch to Rome to be martyred, Ignatius wrote letters to local churches, in which he emphasized the importance of the bishop's office. His letters thus document the rapid rise of hierarchy in the early church, along with a proto-[sacramentalism](#).

IRENÆUS (FL. C. 180)

Probably a native of Smyrna, Irenaeus succeeded the martyred leader Pothinus as the bishop of Lyons. His two surviving works are his *Exposure and*

Overthrow of the Pseudo-Knowledge, commonly referred to as his treatise, *Against Heresies*, and his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*. The former work is the most famous, in which he combats Christian [Gnosticism](#).

JEROME (C. 340 - 420)

Jerome, born Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus in what until recently was Yugoslavia, traveled widely as an adult. At length he became an ascetic and a biblical scholar. As he wrote his commentaries, Jerome departed from the earlier scholarly trend of disparaging all things Jewish, and utilized Jewish sources (as had [Origen](#)). Jerome was also the only fourth-century [Father](#) to learn Hebrew. While his use of Jewish works opened fresh insights into the biblical text, his admiration for [Philo](#) (and for [Origen](#) whom [Philo](#) had influenced) encouraged him in the allegorical interpretation of biblical texts, an approach to scripture that was mitigated by what he learned from the Antiochene school's more literal approach. Aside from his sharp tongue by which he lashed his opponents with sarcasm and invective, Jerome is most remembered for his translation of the Bible from the original [Heb](#) and [Grk](#) into [Lat](#), a translation which became the basis for the [VUL](#). The [VUL](#) became in effect the official Bible version of the western church for a millennium, insuring that [Lat](#) would be used in the church liturgy until long after the general population no longer understood the language.

JOHN OF DAMASCUS (C. 650 - 750)

An Arab-Christian monastic and theologian who defended the use of images during the iconoclastic controversy. Though his most important written work, *The Fount Of Wisdom*, is a summary of Eastern theology, his other writings influenced Western theologians, including [Thomas Aquinas](#).

JOSEPHUS, FLAVIUS (C. 37 - C. 101)

A Pharisee personally acquainted not only with the Sadducees but also with the Essenes. He fought in the first Jewish-Roman war as commander-in-chief in Galilee until surrendering to the Romans. After the war, he dedicated himself to writing a history of it, as well as a larger history of his people.

JULIAN OF ECLANUM (380 - C. 455)

Bishop of Eclanum (in southern Italy) who was removed from office and exiled in 419 for failing to renounce [Pelagianism](#). In exile he was supported by [Theodore of Mopsuestia](#). Julian was a “person of considerable classical culture, ... well trained in the sophisticated biblical studies of the time It was he who was the natural opponent of [Augustine](#), the true architect of [Pelagianism](#), the system builder and the tireless spokesman of the movement.”¹⁰⁰⁷

JUSTIN MARTYR (C. 100 - C. 165)

Born in Samaria, Justin searched for truth among the philosophers, but was finally led to the study of Scripture and became the first great Christian apologist. He defended Christianity to both pagan and Jewish readers. He was martyred, probably under the prefect Rusticus.

KEENER, CRAIG (B. 1960)

Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, and respected author. Though ordained in an African-American Baptist church, Keener has taught in diverse denominational settings.

KAUFMANN, KOHLER (1843 - 1926)

A German-born-and-educated Jewish theologian who came to the U. S. to serve as a Reform Rabbi, first in Detroit, then in Chicago and finally in New York. In 1903 he became the president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

KUBRICK, STANLEY (1928 - 1999)

American film director, screenwriter, producer and cinematographer, perhaps best known for his films *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Shining* (1980), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).

LACTANTIUS (C. 250 - 325)

Christian apologist, author of *The Divine Institutes*, in which he endeavored to defend and instruct about Christianity by the use of argument and reason, and with reference to the testimonies of philosophers and historians.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission Of Sin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 30.

LADD, GEORGE ELDON (1911 - 1982)

Born in Alberta, Canada, and raised in New England, Ladd became a Christian at age 18. Ordained a Baptist minister in 1933, he later became professor of New Testament exegesis and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. A specialist in eschatology, Ladd did not follow the popular dispensational thinking of his day, but taught Historic Premillennialism. His writings regarding the Kingdom of God have widely influenced the Kingdom theology of our generation.

LEITHART, PETER J.

American author, minister and theologian with background in the Presbyterian Church in America. Also president of Theopolis Institute for Biblical, Liturgical, & Cultural Studies in Birmingham, Alabama. Leithart was tried for heresy, and exonerated on all charges, by his presbytery in 2011. The charges had to do with Leithart's affirmation of the so-called Federal Vision (also called Auburn Avenue Theology) which is a Reformed Evangelical discussion focusing on the "sacraments of Baptism and Communion," among other things. Displaying profoundly sacramental presuppositions in his writing, Leithart explicitly defends what he calls "a form of 'baptismal regeneration.'"¹⁰⁰⁸

LIGHTFOOT, JOHN (1602 - 1675)

An English biblical scholar who supported the [Reformed](#) theological orthodoxy of his day, he was also a rabbinical scholar who (before most others) argued for the importance of rabbinic Judaism as a context for understanding the life and ministry of Jesus.

LOWRY, ROBERT (1826 - 1899)

Baptist minister and hymn writer. He had a part in about 500 compositions, including, "Nothing But The Blood," "Christ Arose," "Shall We Gather At The River?" and "Marching To Zion." Besides his pastorates, Lowry served as faculty member and ultimately chancellor of the University at Lewisburg (now

¹⁰⁰⁸ See Peter J. Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), p. xxi.

Bucknell University), and also as the president of the New Jersey Baptist Sunday School Union.

LUTHER, MARTIN (1483 - 1546)

An [Augustinian](#) monk who wrestled deeply with the meaning of “the righteousness of God” in Rom 1.17. It eventually dawned on Luther that the phrase did not refer to God’s *punitive justice*, but rather to a righteousness conferred upon man by God as a gift through faith. Having made this personal rediscovery of the principle of “justification by faith,” Luther realized that the Roman Catholic church had sold the world a bill of goods. This realization led him to spark the [Protestant Reformation](#), on October 31, 1517, by issuing his *Ninety-five Theses* protest against the Church’s sale of indulgences. Once having separated from Roman Catholicism, Luther nevertheless retained an [Augustinian](#) perspective on [original sin](#) and a commitment to [infant baptism](#).

MACMULLEN, RAMSAY (B. 1928)

American professor of history, now retired, and important author with interests in the social history of Rome and the replacement of paganism by Christianity.

MARCION (FL. C. 150)

Son of a Christian bishop of Sinope on the Black Sea, Marcion came under the influence of a Syrian [Gnostic](#) and embraced his teachings. Following his mentor, Marcion taught the existence of two Gods: the supreme, unknowable, good God (and Father of Jesus), and the evil [demiurge](#) who created the world. Marcion rejected the OT as Scripture, and accepted only the Gospel of Luke, and some of Paul’s epistles.

MENANDER (FL. C. 50)

A Samaritan [Gnostic](#) and magician, purportedly the disciple of Simon Magus whom he succeeded as the leader of the Simonians. When the Simonians divided in a schism, Menander called those who remained with him Menandrians. He established a school in Antioch and declared himself the

messiah, teaching that water baptism is the essential source of eternal youth. One of his disciples was [Basilides](#).¹⁰⁰⁹

METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS (D. C. 311)

Believed to have served as the bishop of Olympus, Lycia (in what is now southwestern Turkey), and to have been martyred in Chalcis, Greece. His only work that survives in its entirety is his *Symposium; or Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, extolling virginity. A surviving portion of his other work *On The Resurrection* refutes [Origen's](#) doctrine of the soul's preexistence.¹⁰¹⁰

MEYERS, CAROL

Characterized as “a feminist biblical scholar,” Meyers is the president of the Society of Biblical Literature, and has taught at Duke University since 1977.

MURRAY, JOHN (1898 - 1975)

Scottish Presbyterian and highly respected theologian, John Murray, brought together in his thought the influences of [Calvin](#), the Puritans, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos, among others. Murray taught at Princeton Seminary and then at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

NEWTON, B. W. (1807 - 1899)

Born in a Quaker family, Newton intended to pursue ordination in the Church of England, but radical evangelical influences resulted in his becoming an early Plymouth Brethren leader instead. After a conflict with John Darby, Newton became an independent preacher and an author specializing in eschatology. A godly man of Calvinist leanings, Newton was a proponent of premillennial post-tribulationism during the time that pre-tribulational dispensational theology was born.

OECUMENIUS (SIXTH CENTURY)

Known as the Rhetor or the Philosopher, Oecumenius (not to be confused with the 10th century Bishop of Tricca in Thessaly of the same name) was the author of the earliest known commentary on the book of Revelation.

¹⁰⁰⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menander_\(gnostic\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menander_(gnostic)), accessed November 26, 2014.

¹⁰¹⁰ *Resur*, especially 3.1-4.

OPTATUS (FL. 370)

A Bishop of Milevis in N. Africa, known for his seven books, *Against Parmenian The Donatist*, calling for the repentance of the Donatists and for their readmission into the one Catholic Church. His fifth book in the corpus discusses baptism.

ORIGEN (C. 185 - C. 254)

Origenes Adamantius (originally of Alexandria, and later laboring in Caesarea) was a scholar, exegete of Scripture and a prolific author. In his writing and teaching he emphasized the allegorical and [typological](#) meanings of the biblical text. He had a [mystical](#) and spiritualizing tendency that implied a [Platonic](#) disregard for the physical. That tendency led to debates, during his time and beyond, about the orthodoxy of his beliefs,¹⁰¹¹ but he is respected to this day as a great early Christian scholar.

ORR, JAMES (1844 - 1913)

A Scottish Presbyterian theologian and an apologist for evangelical doctrine. His extensive influence extended to North America, and contributed to the thought of Carl F. H. Henry among others. While apparently not subscribing to biblical inerrancy, he nevertheless stood against a Darwinian explanation of man and human sinfulness, defended Moses as the source for the Pentateuch, and defended the virgin birth of Jesus along with other orthodox evangelical doctrines. He served as the general editor of the five-volume *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (1915).

PELAGIUS (C. 354 - 420)

A well-educated lawyer from Briton who led an ascetic movement in Rome from c. AD 383-410. As an ascetic, it seemed to Pelagius that the teaching of sinfulness “in Adam” provided an excuse for spiritual complacency. The doctrine that would soon become known as [Pelagianism](#), emerged from this reaction of asceticism to a perceived theological fatalism. [Pelagius](#) believed and

¹⁰¹¹ Bottomley calls Origen “a kind of Christian Gnostic emphasizing the aristocratic and intellectual elements of Christianity at the expense of its Catholic and human ones.” Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes To The Body In Western Christendom*, (London: Lepus Books, 1979), p. 73.

taught that man was not morally ruined in [the fall](#), nor is man hindered by inherited sin, but has the power of free will to do either good or evil. Man, therefore, does not need grace, but can live a righteous life if he simply chooses to do so. Pope Innocent I excommunicated Pelagius and his follower [Caelestius](#) on January 27, 417.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA (C. 20 BC TO AD 50)

A [Hellenistic](#) Jewish philosopher and exegete, possibly a rabbi. Sometimes called the “Hebrew [Plato](#),” Philo’s writings influenced the early [Fathers](#)’ understanding of the [OT](#), particularly in the cases of [Clement of Alexandria](#), [Justin Martyr](#), [Ambrose](#) and [Origen](#).

PINK, ARTHUR WALKINGTON (1886 - 1952)

Bible expositor from Nottingham, England, self-taught, and much influenced by the writings of the Puritans. A thorough [Calvinist](#) who disbelieved in human free will, Pink nevertheless believed that the gospel should be proclaimed to all, and that people are responsible before God to repent and believe the gospel. He was influenced by dispensationalism early in his life, but later repudiated it and embraced amillennialism. Though Pink briefly held various pastorates in the United States and Australia, his shy and prickly personality (combined with his austere doctrine) led to much rejection and disappointment, culminating in his retirement to the town of Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides. There he lived out his days writing for his periodical, *Studies in the Scriptures*. His writings have had greater influence since his death than Pink had during his lifetime.

PLATO (C. 428 - 348 BC)

Greek philosopher of Athens, student of Socrates and teacher of [Aristotle](#). Plato authored the famous Dialogues which address a wide range of concerns including ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. Plato taught that the human soul is an eternal, transmigrating spark of divine substance (i.e., intelligence) that has “fallen” and been forced into a human body.¹⁰¹² Plato felt that “[t]he

¹⁰¹² Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 326, note 35. Plato’s argument for the preexistence of the

soul [can] be purified through philosophy, ... and the denial of bodily pleasures,” but that the body is simply a prison (in which the soul “is undergoing punishment”).¹⁰¹³ Plato’s writings influenced [Anselm](#), [Origen](#) and many other Church [Fathers](#).

POPE, WILLIAM BURT (1822 - 1903)

A Methodist linguist, translator and theologian, born in Nova Scotia, who ministered and taught in England. His magnum opus was *Compendium Of Christian Theology* (1875-1876), setting forth what he believed was the superiority of Methodist doctrine.

QUASTEN, JOHANNES (1900 – 1987)

Roman Catholic priest, archeologist and [patristic](#) scholar from Freiburg im Breisgau (now in Germany). After a confrontation with the Nazi regime, Quasten moved to Rome, and then in 1938 to America where he joined the Catholic University of America. He labored there until his retirement in 1970.

REMIGIUS OF AUXERRE (C. 841 - C. 908)

Burgundian Benedictine monk and scholar. Remigius is known for his commentaries — on Latin authors and on biblical texts — which were widely used in the Middle Ages, and which contributed to the revival of classical learning that had begun during the reign of Charlemagne.

REYMOND, ROBERT L. (1932 - 2013)

Reymond served as a professor of systematic theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri and at Knox Theological Seminary in Fort

soul was his doctrine of the eternal Forms (or Ideas) after which material things are modeled. How do we know these Forms exist? We remember them, as demonstrated by Socrates eliciting principles of geometry from an untaught slave boy (Plato, *Meno* 81a ff.). But if we remember things that we were never taught, we must have acquired the knowledge of them in a previous life (*Meno* 85d ff.).

The idea of the transmigration of the soul, along with an underlying dualism between positive and negative cosmic principles, Plato seems to have inherited from Empedocles and other earlier philosophers. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Edited by R. D. Hicks, (Kansas City, MO: Harvard University Press, 2005), lines 76-77. See also, “Greece and The Hellenistic World,” <http://cyberspacei.com/jesusi/inlight/religion/belief/dualism.htm>, viewed on July 24, 2014.

¹⁰¹³ Plato, *Crat* 400c. See also, Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 326, note 35.

Lauderdale, Florida. After resigning from Knox in 2008, he went on to preach at Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church, a new congregation in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Teaching and writing from a [Reformed](#) perspective, he published his own *Systematic Theology* in 1998.

ROGERS, CARL RANSOM (1902 - 1987)

Influential American psychologist. After an early interest in religion and two years at Union Theological Seminary, Rogers found his calling in clinical psychology. His theory of the self and approach to counseling were focused upon harmonizing the subjective phenomenological inner life of the individual.

SCHECK, THOMAS P. (B. 1964)

Professor of theology at Ave Maria University Institute for Pastoral Theology, and translator of works by the Church [Fathers](#). Brought up as a Catholic, Scheck experienced a deep religious conversion in 1983, pursued full-time ministry as an evangelical (studying at Moody Bible Institute and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984-1989), and served as pastor of Evangelical Free Churches from 1990 to 1999. In 1999, having been affected by his intimacy with Catholic theological tradition as expressed in the writings of the [Fathers](#), in the Catechism of the Catholic church, and in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam, Scheck reverted to the Catholic church.

SCHREINER, THOMAS R. (B. 1954)

Conservative evangelical theologian and professor of New Testament Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. He specializes in Pauline theology, and has published several books on the subject.

SCOTUS, JOHN DUNS (1265 - 1308)

A Franciscan theologian, born near Duns in Berwickshire, Scotland. He studied at Oxford, and became so well known as to become the basis for the Reformers' word *dunce* which they used to ridicule the [Scholastics](#). He was the first well-known theologian to defend the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

SELWYN, EDWARD GORDON (1885 - 1959)

English Anglican priest and theologian who served as founding editor of the academic journal *Theology*.

SEVERIAN OF GABALA (FL. C. 400)

An exegete of the Antiochene style who authored sermons on Genesis, and other homilies. With influence in the court of Empress Eudoxia in Constantinople, Severian politically opposed [Chrysostom](#).

SHEDD, WILLIAM GREENOUGH THAYER (1820 – 1894)

American theologian and church historian, descendant of Massachusetts Puritans. Shedd served in turns as a Congregational and then a Presbyterian pastor, and also as a professor in turns at a Presbyterian and a Congregational seminary. Shedd finally became professor of biblical literature and then of systematic theology in Union Theological Seminary, New York. Though a strong [Calvinist](#), Shedd rejected [Jonathan Edwards'](#) assertion that the human will is determined.¹⁰¹⁴ Shedd's understanding of church history convinced him that the Church did not constantly make positive forward progress, but instead frequently rejected truth and fell into error and heresy.

SHUSTER, MARGUERITE

An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and professor of Homiletics and Systematic Theology at Fuller.

SPURGEON, CHARLES HADDON (1834 - 1892)

An English Baptist minister, [Calvinistic](#) in his doctrine, who by age 22 had become the most popular preacher of his time. Many still consider him the best preacher in Church history. Spurgeon was an outspoken enemy of Rome, ritualism, hypocrisy, modernism and American slavery.

¹⁰¹⁴ Wallace, P. J. "Shedd, William G. T." Edited by Timothy Larsen, D. W. Bebbington, Mark A. Noll, and Steve Carter, *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

TATIAN (C. 110 - 172)

An Assyrian converted in Rome c. 150, who then became a pupil of [Justin Martyr](#). After [Justin's](#) death, Tatian relocated to Syria and founded a group that would become known as the [Encratites](#). He wrote an apology, his "Address To The Greeks," in which he defended the Christian faith against pagan distortions. He also composed the more famous *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four gospels.

TAYLOR, JOHN (1694 - 1761)

While many have read too much into Adam's sin, others have read too little. John Taylor was of the latter group. An English Nonconformist minister and Hebrew scholar, Taylor's greatest work was the publication of his *Hebrew Concordance*. Theologically, he tended toward an Arian Christology and the denial of the [Reformed](#) view of [original sin](#), teaching that Adam's sin had only natural, not moral, consequences. His book examining the *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin* (first published in 1740) is believed to have done much to prepare the way for the Unitarian Movement in American Congregationalism.

TAYLOR, NATHANIEL WILLIAM (1786 - 1858)

Connecticut-born Congregational minister, appointed the first professor of theology at Yale Divinity School. When the Second Great Awakening (c. 1787-1825) had almost run its course, Nathaniel Taylor attempted to tweak [Calvinistic](#) theology to make it fit with the revivalism of the time (he had overseen revivals in his own church that had added 400 members in a decade). He repudiated the idea that God holds the human race guilty for Adam's sin, and he emphasized the idea that each person is responsible for his or her own moral choices. His "modified [Calvinism](#)" created enough controversy that a rival [Calvinistic](#) seminary was founded at Hartford.

TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE (C. 160 - C. 220)

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was an African writer whose few [Grk](#) works are lost, but whose [Lat](#) corpus has secured his place in history as "father of Latin theology." He followed in the theological footsteps of [Irenaeus](#), writing the *Apology* and other apologetic works. As a theologian he cast the die for

Catholic belief of the next two centuries, strongly championing the [mystical](#) power of baptismal water. He repeated the commonly taught prescript of his time that “without baptism, salvation is attainable by none,” and cited as basis for this rule “that declaration of the Lord, who says, ‘Unless one be born of water, he hath not life.’”¹⁰¹⁵ He made his belief very clear that human nature suffers from a corruption deriving “from its corrupt origin,” which makes it susceptible to evil and to the suggestions of Satan.¹⁰¹⁶ A [traducianist](#), he taught that “the soul is seminally placed in man.”¹⁰¹⁷ In other words, he proposed that rather than God creating each new soul directly, fathers produce the new soul in their children, in the process of biological conception. For the early [apologists](#), this explained how Jesus was born sinless, since He was not conceived by a fallen, earthly father, but by the Heavenly Father, God.¹⁰¹⁸ Tertullian is infamous for finally becoming a schismatic leader of the charismatic and apocalyptic Montanists, though this sect was probably not as heretical as their enemies painted them.

THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA (C. 350 – 428).

A native of Antioch, and one of the principle figures among the Antiochene theologians (together with his friend [John Chrysostom](#)). In 392 Theodore became bishop of Mopsuestia, a town midway between Antioch and Tarsus (now in eastern Turkey), where he lived out his days. Unlike the allegorizing Alexandrian exegetes, Theodore insisted that biblical texts be interpreted according to their historical contexts. He avoided turning [OT](#) texts into allegorical prophecies of Christ and Christianity, but was willing to see [typological](#) foreshadowings in them. While holding to an orthodox Nicene Christology, Theodore was nevertheless branded posthumously as the Father of Nestorianism, since Nestorius had been his pupil. Also, because he wrote against [Augustine’s](#) view of [original sin](#) and received [Julian of Eclanum](#), he was unjustly branded by some as the “father of [Pelagianism](#).”

¹⁰¹⁵ *Bap* 12.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Anima* 41.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Anima*, chs. 25 and 36.

¹⁰¹⁸ Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), pp. 235-236. See [Traducianism](#) in the Glossary below.

THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH (SECOND CENTURY)

Hellenistic Christian apologist of eastern Syria who became bishop of Antioch (succeeding Eros). The first theologian to use the word “Triad” (τριάς) of the Godhead. His apologetic writing seems to have influenced **Irenaeus** and possibly **Tertullian**.

TURNER, NIGEL

A Koine **Grk** scholar who emphasized, perhaps to a fault, the high degree of Semitic influence in the **Grk** of the **NT**. A Reader in Theology at the University of Rhodesia, he served on one of the committees for the New English Bible. Author of the third volume of J. H. Moulton’s grammatical trilogy, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax*, (London: T & T Clark International, 1963), he authored the fourth volume as well, *Style* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976). He also wrote *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965), and finally *Christian Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

TURRETIN, FRANCIS (AKA FRANÇOIS TURRETINI, 1623 - 1687)

Swiss-Italian Reformed Theologian. One of the earliest theologians to explicitly write (c. 1680) of Adam’s guilt as being immediately imputed to Adam’s posterity. A pastor and professor in his native city of Geneva, he defended the doctrines of the Synod of Dort and helped author the Helvetic Consensus.

URSINUS, ZACHARIAS (1534 - 1583)

A Calvinist scholar and teacher from Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland). Ursinus became a student of Melancthon in Wittenberg, and subsequently of Peter Martyr in Zurich. He co-authored the Heidelberg Catechism and also wrote a rebuttal of the **Formula of Concord**.

VALENTINUS (AKA VALENTINE, FL. C. 150)

An Egyptian apostate of the second century who founded a **gnostic** sect, the teachings of which he seems to have disseminated from Rome and Cyprus. Perhaps the most influential **Gnostic** of his day, Valentinus taught a system in

which only one of three classes of mankind, the *pneumatikoi*, could be redeemed to the spiritual realm through *gnosis*. Of the other two groups, the *psychikoi* could obtain a partial salvation, and the *hylikoi* were destined to annihilation.

VICTORINUS, MARIUS (C. 285 - 365)

African grammarian and teacher of rhetoric. After his conversion c. 355, he wrote commentaries on Paul's letters, as well as works against the [Arians](#).

VON HARNACK, ADOLPH (1851 - 1930)

A liberal, German Lutheran theologian and an able church historian, von Harnack's writings trace the influence of [Hellenistic](#) philosophy on early Christian doctrine, and also provide many insights regarding the relationships and doctrinal interactions between church [Fathers](#).

WAGNER, GÜNTER (B. 1928)

German theologian who taught New Testament Studies at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschlikon, from 1958 until his retirement in 1993.

WILLIAMS, NORMAN POWELL (1883 - 1943)

An Anglo-Catholic theologian (much influenced by Darwinian thought) whose liberal mindset allowed him to unflinchingly point out the lack of basis for the traditional doctrine of [original sin](#).

WRIGHT, DAVID F. (1937 - 2008)

Church historian and theologian of the Church of Scotland. His expertise was in the early church [Fathers](#) and in the theology of the [Reformation](#). Around the turn of the millennium, Wright was very involved in the continuing debate about [infant baptism](#) in the Church of Scotland.

WRIGHT, N. T. (B. 1948)

Anglican priest, theologian and apologist. Nicholas Thomas (Tom) Wright was born in England and educated at Oxford. He currently serves as Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews. He previously served as the Bishop of Durham, as Canon Theologian,

Westminster Abbey, and as Dean of Lichfield. A generally conservative Christian, Wright remains controversial for (among other things) his espousing of the “New Perspective on Paul,” which portrays the apostle as not combatting salvation by the works of the law, but instead opposing an ethnocentric pursuit of national righteousness by which it was assumed that Jewish descent guaranteed salvation.¹⁰¹⁹ By virtue of his expertise on Paul and the book of Romans, Wright has encouraged [Evangelicals](#) to reexamine their presuppositions about the mechanics of justification and about the meaning of “[the righteousness of Christ](#).”

ZWINGLI, ULRICH (1484 - 1531)

Protestant [Reformation](#) leader of Zurich, Switzerland. As a parish priest he fell in love with the Scriptures, taught himself [Grk](#) and began memorizing passages from Erasmus’ edition of the [GNT](#). Zwingli parted ways with [Luther](#) over their differing understandings of the Lord’s Supper: Zwingli saw it as a symbolic memorial, [Luther](#) insisted on Christ’s literal presence. Zwingli mentored [J. Heinrich Bullinger](#) who succeeded him in the Zurich church.

¹⁰¹⁹ Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver, *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), p. 443.

God allows even the greatest of men to err, that we may know that they are but men.

Author Unknown

GLOSSARY

ACCIDENT

A nonessential aspect or quality of something. [Adj.](#), *accidental*.

ACCUSATIVE CASE

In [Grk](#) and other inflected languages, case is a feature of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles, that indicates the function of such words in a sentence. Words in the accusative case generally denote the direct object of the verbal action mentioned in the clause. Were we to translate the sentence, “Sally read the book,” into [Grk](#), the word *book* would be written in the accusative case. Cf. [Genitive Case](#), [Dative Case](#).

ACTUAL SIN

Sin committed by the subject as distinguished from sin committed by someone else and only [imputed](#) to the subject.

ANABAPTIST

“Re-baptizer,” originally a pejorative term used against Christians in the [Reformation](#) era who became convinced that the Bible teaches “believer’s baptism,” and who therefore had themselves baptized as adults even though they had already been baptized as infants. Various Anabaptist groups arose in the sixteenth century, some radical and cultish, others more biblical. Anabaptists in the Netherlands became what are now the Mennonites.

ANCHORITE

An reclusive ascetic who lived more or less alone (in contrast to a [cenobite](#)) under very austere conditions.

ANTINOMIANISM

From [Grk](#), meaning “against law”: libertinism, or less radically, an overemphasis upon grace that obscures the value of law. An *antinomian* is a person who in some sense repudiates law.

ANTITYPE, ANTITYPICAL, ANTITYPICALLY

A corresponding [type](#), i.e., a [type](#) that both reflects a previous or concurrent [type](#) *and* continues to foreshadow or commemorate a real person, thing or event. Imagine driving on the freeway and seeing a huge, colorful billboard announcing: “Museum of Methodist Memorabilia, Next Exit!” Think of that billboard as the initial [type](#), foreshadowing what is ahead. You take the next exit, and where the exit ramp joins the arterial, you see a smaller sign with an arrow that says, “Museum of Methodist Memorabilia this way!” The smaller sign is the antitype, corresponding to the earlier billboard, but still pointing to what is ahead. Consider that all billboards are signs, but not all signs are billboards. In the same way, all antitypes are [types](#), but not all [types](#) are antitypes — to qualify as an antitype requires the existence of another corresponding [type](#).

Biblically, we must not mistake ἀντίτυπος (än-'dē-tē-pōs) as referring to the fulfillment of a [type](#) — the NT uses a different word, πληρόω (plē-'rō-ō), to speak of the fulfillment of a prophecy or type (Luk 22.15-16; 24.44). When something is *antitypical* it is still [typical](#): it has the quality of foreshadowing or commemorating something. To accomplish something *antitypically*, is to do it in such a way as to *both* correspond to another [type](#) *and* still symbolize or foreshadow the greater reality in view.

AORIST TENSE FORM

A form of the [Grk](#) verb that expresses perfective aspect (i.e., completed action) and is often used to denote the general, outlining events of a narrative. Because of its perfective aspect, the aorist is most often translated in [Eng](#) with a past tense, or used to describe action antecedent to the main verb.

APOCALYPSE

An unveiling or revelation. Jewish *apocalyptic* literature has to do with the unveiling of God’s [eschatological](#) plans (the end-of-the-age events toward which He is directing history), and thus with a revelation of God’s own heart and character, particularly as revealed in the mission of the Messiah. An *apocalypticist* is one who emphasizes the coming divine unveiling in his writing

or teaching. *Apocalypticism* is the devotion of an individual or group to teaching about and seeking the coming [eschatological](#) unveiling of Messiah.

APOCRYPHA

Books not found in the [Heb OT](#) but included in the [Septuagint](#), and subsequently in the [Vulgate](#) and other Catholic translations. *Apocrypha* comes from the [Grk](#) word meaning “hidden,” and was probably once a term of reverence. Now we generally use the [adj.](#) *apocryphal* pejoratively to describe something as of dubious authenticity.

APOTHEOSIS

Deification, the elevation of a human being to divine status or character.

APOTROPAIC

[Adj.](#) describing things or actions as designed to avert evil, and thus as having the virtue of saving a person from harm. [Adv.](#), *apotropaically*.

ARGUMENTUM AD ANTIQUITATEM

A fallacious appeal to antiquity or to common practice. It is the “this is right because we’ve always done it this way,” argument. The fallacy is that the traditional practice appealed to may have always been in error.

ARGUMENTUM AD VERECUNDIAM

An “appeal to [a respected] authority.” This is a fallacious argument unless the authority appealed to is respected by all parties and accurately represented and interpreted. An appeal to [Augustine](#), for example, is a weak validation when one is arguing for a certain interpretation of a biblical text.

ARGUMENTUM EX SILENTIO

An “argument from silence.” Not all arguments from silence are without merit, but most are unconvincing. An example of a fallacious *argumentum ex silentio*: “The Bible doesn’t say, ‘you shouldn’t smoke marijuana,’ so there’s nothing wrong with it.”

ARIANISM

Named after Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria (d. 336), a heresy that denied the eternality of the Son of God. The Jehovah's Witnesses are the primary modern proponents of this heretical Christology. Not to be confused with *Aryanism*, the doctrine popularized by Nazism that one race is superior to others.

ARMINIANISM

The theology attributed to Jacob Arminius. *Arminian* theology emphasizes God's loving and just character, and God's willingness that all people be saved. *Arminian* used as a noun refers to an adherent of *Arminianism*. Cf. [Calvinism](#), [Calvinist](#), [Calvinistic](#).

ARTICLE, DEFINITE

The part of speech most often used to make a noun or other substantive definite. In [Eng](#), it is the word *the*. Like [Eng](#), [Heb](#) has a single definite article, the word *ha*. [Grk](#), on the other hand, has twenty-four forms of the definite article, distinguished by number, gender, and case.

ARTICULAR

A grammatical term describing words made definite by the accompanying [definite article](#), i.e., the word *the* (or its equivalent in a given language).

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

The belief that baptism or consecrated baptismal water effects the spiritual [rebirth](#) of the [baptizee](#). A *baptismal regenerationist* is someone who believes [new birth](#) occurs during a person's baptism.

BAPTISMISM

1 : belief that the rite of water baptism (or consecrated water itself) confers [mystical](#) union with Christ, conveys spiritual merit or communicates expiatory, regenerative or otherwise [salvific](#) power; 2 : the propensity to find allusions to Christian baptism in any Bible text mentioning or having to do with water or washing; 3 : the inclination to see baptismal formulas and confessions in early Christianity before such things existed; 4 : the impulse to

alter or add to Scripture in order to promote the idea of [baptismal regeneration](#).

BAPTIST

1 : one who baptizes, as “John the Baptist”; 2 : an adherent of an [Evangelical](#), denomination that practices believer’s baptism by immersion and operates under a congregational polity.

BAPTIZAND (ALSO, BAPTISAND)

A candidate for baptism; the term is often applied to those being [catechized](#) in preparation for baptism.

BAPTIZEE

A person about to be, being, or having just been baptized.

BASILICA

A type of building used extensively in the Roman empire for religious and state purposes. With the legalization of Christianity in the empire, the design of new church buildings followed the basilica floor plan. This encouraged a hierarchical form of worship, with professional clergy officiating from an apse and altar at one end of the main sanctuary.

BELIEVER’S BAPTISM (ALSO, BELIEVERS’ BAPTISM)

The teaching that Christian baptism should be reserved for those who have already come to personal faith in Christ. Also, the consequent practice of baptizing only those who have professed faith. The [Anabaptists](#) and their detractors used the phrase *believer’s baptism* to contrast their belief and practice with the predominant tradition of baptizing infants.

CALVINISM, CALVINIST

The theological framework credited to [John Calvin](#), and largely embodied in his *Institutes Of The Christian Religion*. Calvinism emphasizes the [monergistic](#) working of God’s grace in salvation, and God’s absolute sovereignty over every aspect of creation. A *Calvinist* is a proponent of

Calvinism. The noun *Calvinist* is also used as an [adj.](#), though the [adj.](#) is *Calvinistic*.

CATECHISM

A religious teaching manual, often composed in a question-and-answer format, or the formal meeting in which the manual is used. To *catechize* is to teach the fundamental ideas of the Christian faith to a child, new convert or [baptizand](#). *Catechesis* is that religious instruction.

CATEGORY MISTAKE (ALSO, CATEGORY ERROR)

A reasoning error (and fallacy in argument) in which something belonging to a certain category (say *chocolates*) is thought of or represented as belonging to a different category (like *vitamins*), and as having the character or qualities of that other category.

CAUSE

Generally when we think of the cause of something, we think of the *efficient cause*, namely, the ultimate source of an effect, like a *chef* who produces a cake. However, philosophers have recognized five other kinds of causes that we think about as well, though we may not think of them as causes. The *instrumental cause*, for example, is the means used to produce the effect. For the chef, primary and secondary *instrumental causes* would include the oven, pans, mixing bowls, etc. There is also a *final cause* which is the purpose for which an effect is produced; for the chef, that would be the enjoyment of whoever eats the cake. The *formal cause* is the essence of the effect; in our example, “cake-ness” as opposed to “pie-ness.” The *material cause* is the material of which the effect consists; in our example, flour, eggs, sugar. The *exemplar cause* is the example or pattern that made producing the effect possible, or that defined how the effect should be produced; in our example of the chef, the recipe is the *exemplar cause* of the cake.

CENOBITE (ALSO, COENOBITE)

From a [Grk](#) word meaning “common life,” a monk living in a religious community as contrasted to an [anchorite](#) or hermit. [Adj.](#), *cenobitic* (also, *coenobitic*).

CESSATIONISM

The belief that all or some of the spiritual gifts ([charismata](#)) described in the [NT](#) ceased to operate when the last of the [NT](#) writings were composed or when the last of the apostles died. A *cessationist* is an adherent to this belief.

CHARISMATA

The spiritual gifts mentioned in the [NT](#) along with any others authentically generated by the Holy Spirit. A *charismatic* is one who believes in and practices the use of spiritual gifts. *Charismatically* designates something as being done by means of spiritual gifts.

CHIASM

A style of Hebraic parallelism involving the repetition or echoing of ideas in inverse order, with the main point of emphasis appearing in the central parallelism. To describe a passage as *chiastic* is to say that it repeats ideas in inverse order.

CHRISTOLOGY

The study of Christ, his person, character and messianic work. To describe a work as *Christological* is to say that it emphasizes ideas about Christ.

CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

See [Righteousness Of Christ, The](#).

CHURCH FATHERS

In theological discussion, “the Fathers” or “early Church Fathers” refers to those non-canonical Christian writers who were esteemed as witnesses, teachers and apologists in the early centuries of Christianity. Though the Fathers can be sorted into different categories according to their geographical area of influence (e.g., Cappadocian Fathers), or language of writing (e.g., Greek Fathers; Latin Fathers), or particular theological emphases, they are most often categorized chronologically as the Apostolic, Ante-Nicene and Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers. The combined time periods of these Fathers stretches from about AD 100 to about AD 600. These Fathers are not to be

confused with the Jewish patriarchs or ancestors of the first Jewish disciples (1Co 10.1).

CHURCH(ES) OF CHRIST

A fellowship of churches with roots in the American Restoration Movement. Intending to reproduce the first-century Church of the apostles in contemporary times, the non-instrumental branch of the Churches of Christ worships with only *a cappella* singing, since the NT nowhere mentions musical instruments. Though not explicitly **baptismal regenerationists**, their emphasis on baptism as a prerequisite for salvation creates an atmosphere of belief in salvation by baptism.

CONCATENATION

In grammar, a chain or series of interrelated words or phrases. Generally, biblical concatenations involve words or phrases in the **genitive case**, but sometimes also employ the **dative case**.

CONCUPISCENCE

In NT usage, ἐπιθυμία (ě-pē-thē-'mē-ə), sometimes translated *concupiscence* in the KJV, is simply “desire,” the intensity and appropriateness of which is determined by the word’s context. **Tertullian** understood this general meaning of the Lat *concupiscentia*, but also used the term to mean “distorted desire.”¹⁰²⁰ For **Augustine**, however, this term referred to that libidinous urge that transmitted **original sin** through the act of procreation. **Augustine** believed that baptism remitted the guilt for [one’s parent’s] concupiscence, but did not remove concupiscence itself, which remained within the baptized person as a disorder fomenting sin. In current Roman Catholic thought, concupiscence is a condition that “unsettles man’s moral faculties, without being in itself an offense, [but that] inclines man to commit sins.”¹⁰²¹

¹⁰²⁰ Peter Burnell, “Concupiscence,” Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 226.

¹⁰²¹ Peter Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

CONFESSIONALISM

The view and practice of expressing Christian faith through the formulation and recitation of doctrinal statements to which church members subscribe. To describe a denomination or congregation as *confessional* is to say that it prioritizes the adherence to and liturgical recitation of a formal doctrinal statement, such as the Nicene Creed or Westminster Confession.

CONSECRATE

To set apart, dedicate or otherwise prepare a thing or person, even oneself, for some sacred purpose. A *consecration* is that act, acts or ritual that effectively prepares or dedicates the thing or person being consecrated.

CONVERSION

A spiritual, moral turnabout (Psa 51.13; Mat 18.3). Conversion differs from repentance in that it connotes a one-time reorientation of one's life, whereas repentance continues to occur as need arises, even after the fundamental direction of one's life has changed.

COVENANT THEOLOGY

Also called Covenantalism, Federal Theology, Federalism. According to this theological system, God entered into a covenant ([Lat foedus](#)) with Adam, and made Adam the covenantal representative (federal head) of all his posterity. Therefore, when Adam sinned, God held both Adam and those he represented guilty, i.e., He [imputed](#) Adam's sin to all mankind. By virtue of the federal union between Adam and his posterity, "his sin, although not their act, is so [imputed](#) to them that it is the judicial ground of the penalty threatened against [Adam] coming also upon [his posterity]."¹⁰²² Therefore, according to Federalism, the solution for sinners is to attach themselves by faith to a new federal head, i.e., Jesus Christ "the second Adam," so that God may [impute Christ's righteousness](#) to them. The [Westminster Confession](#) (completed in 1646) codified the principles of [federalism](#), allowing its ideas to gain important standing in the theology of Scotland and New England.¹⁰²³

¹⁰²² *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1989), pp. 312, 313.

¹⁰²³ Roderick Graciano, *Alien Righteousness?* (Timothy Ministries, 2011), p. 148.

CREATIONISM

With regard to the origin of the human soul, the belief that God creates each soul directly, in contrast to the belief of [traducianism](#) that human parents produce the souls of their children in the process of procreation. The [adj. creationist](#), describes an adherent or doctrine that subscribes to this belief.

CRIOBOLIUM

See [Taurobolium](#).

CULPAE SUCCESSIO

[Lat](#): Inherited guilt.

DAEMONS (ALSO, DAEMONES, DEMONS)

Spirits, both good and evil, intermediate between gods and mortals. [Platonists](#) thought of these spirits as the beings who involved themselves in human affairs (sometimes as guardians) so that God (or the gods) could remain serenely undisturbed by the mundane. According to the [Hellenistic](#) worldview, spirits were ubiquitous and their realm intersected the visible and tangible world of human experience: the universe was envisioned “as a vast, multistoried [tenement] with swarms of supernatural beings occupying the floors above and below” its mortal inhabitants.¹⁰²⁴ Because these ever-present *daemons*, were the causes behind supernatural occurrences, [Hellenists](#) thought of miraculous events as a normal part of daily life.¹⁰²⁵

DATIVE CASE

In [Grk](#) and other inflected languages, case is a feature of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles, that indicates the function of such words in a

¹⁰²⁴ Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity In The Greco-Roman World*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), p. 25. For more on the ubiquity and hierarchy of gods and *daemons* see Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism In The Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 79-85.

¹⁰²⁵ Cf. Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World*, (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 129. See also Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity & Paganism In The Fourth To Eighth Centuries*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 140. MacMullen explains that the Hellenistic belief in demonic causation was greatly fortified and confirmed by the Church’s “doctrine of demons best known through what priests recited at baptism, that doorway to the church.” So, baptismal renunciation of the devil confirmed the Hellenistic belief in demonic causation, which in turn fortified a magical worldview.

sentence. The dative case generally expresses the indirect object, instrumentality or location of something. In the clause, “by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2.8), the word *grace* is written in the dative case.

DEFINITE ARTICLE

See [Article](#), [Definite](#).

DEMIURGE

From the [Grk](#) word for “artisan” or “maker” (see Heb 11.10), *demiurge* is the term [Plato](#) used to describe the divine principle that crafted the visible world. The various [gnostic](#) sects, believing that the vile physical world could not have come from the supreme Good, used the word *demiurge* to describe a lesser and evil god who created the material universe. Some sects identified the evil creator demiurge with the YHVH of the [OT](#).

DEPRAVITY, TOTAL

The comprehensive effect of [the fall](#) upon the whole man. Those who subscribe to the doctrine of total depravity do not teach that man is totally sinful or “as sinful as he can possibly be,” but only that *the totality* of man’s faculties, including his will and his reason are corrupted by sinfulness, and that therefore, man is totally incapable of saving himself.

DESERT FATHERS

Ascetic monks from the late third century and after, like [Anthony the Great](#), who pursued spiritual perfection in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Many of them saw themselves as tasked with holding the line that kept the world from falling completely into corruption, since even the visible church was often compromised. The monastic orders that followed in Europe and elsewhere emerged from the principles and examples of the desert fathers.

DOCETISM

The [gnostic](#) heresy which taught that Christ only “seemed” to have a human body. Believing that everything material is inherently evil, some docetic sects pursued extreme asceticism. The [adj.](#) *docetic* usually describes a person or doctrine that denies the real incarnation of God’s Son.

DONUM SUPERADDITUM

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, a superadded gift, especially the gift of supernatural grace or [original righteousness](#) added to complement human nature at the creation.

DUALISM, DUALISTIC

Belief in two opposing (and possibly balancing or complementary) principles. In theology, the belief in the existence of eternal (or at least premundane) principles of both good and evil. [Gnosticism](#) expressed dualistic belief in its teaching that there is an ultimate good God and a lesser evil god or [demiurge](#), resulting in the goodness of all things spiritual and the evil in all things material.

ECCLESIASTIC

A churchman. To describe something as *ecclesiastical* is to say that it pertains to the Church, church life, church ritual, church tradition, etc.

EFFICIENT CAUSE

See [Cause](#).

EISEGESIS

The fallacious reading of preconceived ideas into a text, even though the ideas are foreign to the context.

ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

The most famous and influential Greek [mystery religion](#) dedicated to the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Known for its elaborate and secretive [initiation](#) rites, it introduced some of its elements — such as [initiation](#) — into non-Greek religions (like the Egyptian religion of Isis, Osiris and Sarapis) as they were [Hellenized](#).

ESCHATOLOGY

The study of last things. To describe something as *eschatological* is to say that it pertains to last things, such as End Time events, and the Second Coming of Christ.

ESCHATON

The climax of history, the end of the age, when Christ returns and the Day of the Lord begins.

EVANGELICALISM

In this work I use the term *Evangelicalism* to designate the transdenominational and multiethnic *non-Roman Catholic* movement that emphasizes the divine authority of Scripture, proclamation of the gospel and the need of all to experience personal salvation through new birth and faith in Christ. An *Evangelical* is an adherent to this movement. While historic Protestant denominations would once have been part of Evangelicalism as I've defined it, some Protestant churches have become non-Evangelical in practice as they have adopted a more liberal and critical view of biblical inspiration. Evangelicalism has also been inclined historically to exclude non-Reformed or non-Calvinistic adherents from its associations, but has not succeeded in doing so in the unbridled theological milieu of the last century. In recent times, attempts have been made to narrow the definition of the term *Evangelical* by insisting that Evangelicals must believe in certain specific dogmas like the [imputation](#) of "[the righteousness of Christ](#)." On the other hand, many supposedly Evangelical academics are campaigning to eject belief in a literal six-day creation and in a historical Adam and Eve.

EVANGELISTS

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the authors of the four gospels (*evangels*).

EXEGETE

Verb: To *exegete* is to explain the meaning drawn out of a text, i.e., to interpret a text producing an *exegesis* of it. To describe something as *exegetical* is to say that it has to do with explaining the meaning of a text. If something is done *exegetically* it is done with reference to drawing the meaning from a text.

Noun: An *exegete* is one who interprets a text, especially a text of Scripture.

EXEMPLAR CAUSE

See [Cause](#).

EX NIHILO

[Lat](#), “out of nothing.”

EXSUFLATION AND INSUFLATION

A ritualized blowing upon a [baptizand](#) to remove evil spirits and invite the presence of the Holy Spirit.

FALL, THE

The first sin of Adam and Eve and its consequences for the human race and for planet Earth.

FALLENNESS

The consequences to human nature deriving from Adam and Eve’s first sin.

FATHERS

See [Church Fathers](#) above.

FATHERS, DESERT

See [Desert Fathers](#) above.

FEDERAL THEOLOGY (ALSO, FEDERALISM)

See [Covenant Theology](#).

FOMES PECCATI

The *fomes peccati* (literally, *the tinder of sin*) is what the [Evangelical](#) thinks of as the “law of sin [in our] members” (Rom 7.23), our inborn impulse to sin.¹⁰²⁶ [Augustine](#) equated it with the germ of lust passed down by one’s parents.

FORENSIC

This [adj.](#) and [adv.](#) describe something as having to do with discussion, debate or declaration in a public forum. Thus, an announced verdict or other declaration in a courtroom is a forensic pronouncement. In theological

¹⁰²⁶ See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary Of Latin And Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985).

formulations, *forensic* generally means that the thing in view has to do with a *judicial declaration*.¹⁰²⁷

FORMULA OF CONCORD

A doctrinal text produced by a process of consensus-formation (which lasted from 1568 to 1577) among German Lutheran groups who had been formerly divided by a variety of theological controversies. In its final form, the Formula addressed such issues as [original sin](#), grace and free will, the righteousness of faith, the distinction of law and gospel, etc., and repudiated “errors” of the [Anabaptists](#) and others.

GENITIVE CASE

In [Grk](#) and other inflected languages, case is a feature of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles, that indicates the function of such words in a sentence. Words in the genitive case generally expresses the class or category of something, and translate into English with the help of the preposition *of*. In the phrase, *the grace of God*, the word *God* would be written in the genitive case.

GENITIVE CHAIN

A series of words or phrases in the [genitive case](#) that have been strung together. Generally, each genitive word or phrase in the chain is anchored to the preceding one and adds specificity to it.

GNOSTICISM

A heresy, and heretical movement, that reached its height in the second century, and reemerged in the twentieth. Gnosticism arose from a syncretizing of Christianity, Platonism and the [mystery religions](#). While Gnosticism had differing forms of outward expression in its varied sects, the name of this heresy derives from its emphasis upon gaining a salvific knowledge of one’s own divine nature. The [adj. gnostic](#) can describe an adherent of, or an idea consistent with, the doctrines of Gnosticism.

¹⁰²⁷ Roderick Graciano, *Alien Righteousness?* (Timothy Ministries, 2011), p. 148.

GRACE, RESISTIBLE

Spiritual help from God that can be ignored or rejected.

HALAKAH (ALSO HALAKHAH, OR HALACHA)

The word *halakah* derives from the [Heb](#) verb to *go, walk* or *follow*, and also connotes *way*. It was the *way* one was supposed to *walk out* or *follow* the law, according to the rabbis. Jewish *halakah* was finally codified in the Mishnah and Talmuds around AD 200 to 400, but in the time of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were already imposing their extensive *halakah* upon the Jewish populace, teaching detailed interpretations of how to apply the law in daily life. They did this as a means not only to pursue full compliance with the will of God, but also to build a hedge of preventative rules around the Torah to protect against violation of the written law.

HEBRAIC

Having to do with the Hebrew (or Jewish) language or culture.

HELLENISM

Hellenism (a term possibly coined by the author of 2 Maccabees, 2Ma 4.13) designates the period of Greek culture stretching from Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) to the beginning of the Roman Empire under Augustus (31 BC). However, *Hellenism* also designates Greek culture itself. *Hellenistic* (or *Hellenic*) describes something as influenced by or having characteristics of Greek culture, and *Hellenization* is the international promotion of Greek culture begun by Alexander at the time of his conquests.

Hellenism as a culture, though distinctively Grecian by virtue of its [Grk](#) language, was an amalgam of Greek, Middle Eastern and Asian elements. Hellenism was characterized by “the extensive mingling of populations, ... the ascendancy of philosophy over poetry ..., and [syncretism](#) in religion....”¹⁰²⁸ This cultural phenomenon outlived its originating civilization such that the succeeding Roman Empire became markedly Hellenistic — as did the [subapostolic](#) Church. As D. F. Watson explains,

¹⁰²⁸ “Hellenism” in Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986).

Although Greece was no longer a political power, its cultural influence — the Hellenization begun by Alexander the Great — was a powerful force molding not only Palestinian culture but Roman as well. Greece continued as a cultural and intellectual center during the Roman period, being the location of choice for upper-class Romans to finish their formal education. The influence of Hellenism upon the church was also marked. The early church used rhetorical and other facets of a Greek education in its preaching and teaching, modes of worship and ethical exhortation, among others things. This Greek influence is particularly seen in the fact that the early church used the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the [OT](#), and wrote the documents of the [NT](#) in Greek. This influence continued beyond the first-century church to play a role in interpretation and theological formulations.¹⁰²⁹

Indeed, the [Platonic](#) thought (and to a lesser degree the [Aristotelian](#)) that permeated Hellenism continues to influence philosophy and theology in the West to this day.

HENDIADYS

[Lit.](#) *one by means of two*. A common figure of speech in Scripture that uses two nouns to amplify and emphasize a single idea. Generally, one noun identifies the idea and the secondary noun (even if it comes first in the sentence) is a metaphor that amplifies the idea. The secondary noun often becomes, in effect, a strong adjective modifying the primary noun. For example, the hendiadys, “water and spirit,” in Joh 3.5, expresses one idea, *spirit*, and amplifies it with the metaphor *water* to point to the Spirit’s “fluid” and life-giving qualities. We could over translate this particular hendiadys in this manner: “water, *namely*, the life-giving Holy Spirit.” The nouns in a [NT](#) hendiadys occur in the same case and are joined by the conjunction *and* (*καί*).

HERMENEUTICS

The science of interpretation, particularly of texts like those in the biblical canon. A *hermeneutic* is a particular approach (probably involving a handful of

¹⁰²⁹ D. F. Watson, “Greece and Macedon” in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

principles) to interpreting a text. The [adv.](#), *hermeneutically*, refers to actions relating to the interpretation of a text.

HIEROPHANT

A title meaning, “he who makes things appear.” Specifically, the chief priest of the [Eleusinian mysteries](#); generally a revealer and interpreter of the sacred objects in the [initiation](#) rites of a [mystery religion](#).

HYPOSTATIZE

To treat or represent an abstraction as a concrete reality.

IMPUTE

To credit something to someone; *imputation* is the act or event of that crediting. What is credited can be something already possessed, or alternatively, something not possessed until a person in authority acts as though it is, possibly at a cost to himself.¹⁰³⁰

INFANT BAPTISM

The baptism of infants or small children. Also called paedobaptism (also *pædobaptism* or *pedobaptism*). Those who practice infant baptism are called *paedobaptists*.

INFUSED RIGHTEOUSNESS (*IUSTITIA INFUSA*)

Infused righteousness is that gift of righteousness which, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, is infused into the sinner by grace through the [sacraments](#) of the church, such that the recipient is eventually justified by his or her now intrinsic righteousness.¹⁰³¹

INITIATE

To induct a member into a sect or society by rites, ceremonies, ordeals or instructions; *or* (as a noun) a person so inducted. An *initiation* is the whole process by which a person is inducted into a sect or society. The [adj.](#) *initiatory* describes something as having to do with initiation.

¹⁰³⁰ Roderick Graciano, *Alien Righteousness?* (Timothy Ministries, 2011), p. 149.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*

INSTRUMENTAL CAUSE

See [Cause](#).

JANSENISM

A movement of French Catholics in the 17th and 18th centuries, named after C. O. Jansen and arising from his treatise *Augustinus* (AD 1640). The treatise was about grace and human nature, and was based upon the anti-[Pelagian](#) writings of [Augustine](#). Just as Protestant [Reformers](#) gleaned much encouragement for their doctrines from the writings of [Augustine](#), so did Jansenism, positing ideas that would hardly be out of place in a [Calvinistic](#) fellowship, and so were unsurprisingly condemned as heretical by pope Innocent X (AD 1653). The most famous adherent of Jansenism was Blaise Pascal (AD 1623-1662).

LATE ANTIQUITY

See [Subapostolic](#).

LCMS

The acronym for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, a Protestant denomination.

LIBERTINE

An immoral and irresponsible person, particularly in sexual matters, who probably rejects religion and fancies himself a “freethinker.” *Libertinism* refers to the “philosophy” or lifestyle of such a person.

MAGIC

The power of spirits, or [daemons](#), mediated by the rites and incantations of adepts. “The root idea in magic was that by employing the proper means the gods or demons could be forced to do something for you.”¹⁰³² A vast number of [Grk](#) magical spells have been recovered from the early Christian era, including

¹⁰³² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 229.

love spells, spells for cures, for gaining favor, for requesting revelation, etc.¹⁰³³ The spells generally involve invoking a god's or goddess's help, by means of chants accompanied by a very specific ritual and/or potion. To describe something in the early Christian era as *magical* is to say that it involved (or was thought to involve) [salvific](#) or [apotropaic](#) power, conveyed by means of proper ritual and invocation.

MANICHAISM

Named for its Parthian founder, Mani (Manichaeus, AD 216-276), Manichaeism was a [dualistic](#), [gnostic](#) cult propounding two eternally opposed principles, God (Light = good) and Matter (Dark = evil). Demons, birthed by the Prince of Darkness, copulated and thereby imprisoned the divine Light in matter by producing Adam and Eve. Human copulation perpetuates the imprisonment of Light in intrinsically evil Matter. Manicheans, therefore abstained from sex in order to contribute to the gradual liberation of the Light from Matter.

METONYMY

A figure of speech in which the name of one thing is used to signify a second thing with which the first is associated, as in using “the *crown*” to signify “the *king*.” A word so used is called a *metonym*.

MIKVEH (PL. MIKVAOTH)

A bathing pool for Jewish ritual immersions, and by extension, the immersion itself. Readers familiar with the Israeli national anthem, *Hatikvah*, will know that *tikvah* (a related word to *mikveh*) means *hope*. The *mikveh* is the “place of hope” where one expects to change his or her ritual status for the better.

MISHNAH, THE

The collection of Jewish oral [halakah](#) written down by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi sometime between AD 135 to 220. Mishnaic material forms part of the compendium of rabbinic law and lore called the [Talmud](#).

¹⁰³³ Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri In Translation Including The Demotic Spells*, (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1986).

MODALISM

The heresy, also known as Sabellianism, that understands the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three modes of manifestation of the one divine person of God. A *modalist* is an adherent of this belief.

MONERGISM

The belief that God is the sole agent at work in the [conversion](#) of man from unbelief; once man is born again of the Spirit and believes, the ongoing process of sanctification becomes [synergistic](#). The [adj. monergistic](#) describes something as involving only one effective working principle.

MYSTERY

In [NT](#) usage, a truth not fully understood in earlier times, but now made clear by the teaching and atoning work of Jesus, and by further revelation given to His apostles (Eph 3.4-5). Occasionally, *mystery* refers to a symbolic representation as in Rev 1.20; 11.8; 17.7.

In Paganism, a mystery was simply a secret, but in a religious context it referred to a carefully guarded [mystical](#) secret disclosed only to an [initiate](#) of a given religion. Due to these secrets of [initiation](#), the religions that employed them are known collectively as [mystery religions](#), and sometimes simply as “[the mysteries](#).” In later [patristic](#) usage, *mystery* referred to a religious ritual with [mystical](#) power or significance, as in “the mystery of baptism”: see [Sacrament](#).

MYSTERY RELIGIONS, AKA: THE MYSTERIES

[Syncretistic](#) cults that proliferated along with [Gnosticism](#) in the [Hellenized](#) world during the early centuries of Christianity. The word *mystery* refers to the secrecy of their [initiations](#). Counted among the mystery religions were the Eleusinian, Dionysiac and Mithraic cults, along with the cults of Isis and Osiris, that of Cybele (“The Great Mother”), and also the worship of Orpheus and Adonis (or Tammuz).

MYSTICAL

Having or having to do with spiritual or [magical](#) efficacy, often in connection with secret or privileged formulas, incantations or rituals.

MYSTICISM

A religious view involving the belief in spiritual or [magical](#) power that can be harnessed by rituals or incantations. A *mystic* is an adherent of such a view or a practitioner of its rites. The [adj.](#) and [adv.](#) describe something as having or exerting secret and/or spiritual or [magical](#) power. A *mystical* ritual is seen as more than simply symbolic.

In more contemporary usage not directly related to the subject matter of this book, the belief that union with the divine can be attained by contemplation and self-surrender.

NATURA INTEGRA

[Lat](#) for “[human] nature that is still whole,” referring to human nature before [the fall](#).

NATURA VITIATA

[Lat](#) for “impaired nature,” referring to human nature after [the fall](#).

NEW BIRTH

See [Regeneration](#).

NOMINATIVE CASE

In [Grk](#) and other inflected languages, case is a feature of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and participles, that indicates the function of such words in a sentence. In a clause or sentence, the nominative case denotes the subject that does the action. In the phrase, *Jesus saves sinners*, the word *Jesus* would be written in the nominative case.

OCKHAM’S RAZOR, AKA: PRINCIPLE OF PARSIMONY

Succinctly stated as “entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity,” the principle that, generally speaking, the simplest explanation for something is the best.

ORDINANCE(S)

Something, such as a religious ritual, that is commanded or ordained. When Baptists call baptism and the Lord's supper *ordinances*, they do so to acknowledge that Christ commanded these practices, and simultaneously to deny that these practices are *sacraments* with inherent *mystical* power.

ORIGINAL RIGHTEOUSNESS (ORIGINAL JUSTICE)

Sometimes called "original holiness and justice," "original righteousness and holiness," "original holiness," or "original grace," it is (in Roman Catholic teaching) a supernatural and superadded gift (*Donum Superadditum*) of sanctifying grace given by God to Adam, and by extension refers to *the state* of relational harmony that existed between Adam and Eve and all creation before their sin.¹⁰³⁴ Medieval theologians disagreed on the question of whether the gift was merited by Adam's first good act, or given by sheer grace antecedently to anything which Adam did. Since God superadded this gift to Adam after his creation, it is not considered an essential element of human nature. Nevertheless, the loss of this superadded original righteousness left human nature at the mercy of its own *concupiscence*, i.e., its (supposed) innate opposition between flesh and spirit, an opposition which inevitably fomented sin.

Luther and other *Reformers* continued to speak of original righteousness (*justitia originalis*), but understood it not as a supernatural gift added to the whole man, but as an essential aspect of Adam's nature inclining him to fear, love and trust God.¹⁰³⁵

ORIGINAL SIN

Through the centuries, the words *original sin* have been used to translate various phrases,¹⁰³⁶ and once *Augustine* codified the dogma of original sin, the idea of it continued to evolve. However, in *Augustine's* formulation, *original sin* refers both to the first sin of Adam and to the defect in human nature (the

¹⁰³⁴ CCC §376.

¹⁰³⁵ See Adolf Von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, edited by T. K. Cheyne, translated by Neil Buchanan, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), Vol. 7, p. 201.

¹⁰³⁶ Like, for example, *Origen's* *innate defilement*.

egoistic *disposition* of man) that has resulted from Adam's sin. Therefore, *original sin* refers to the sinfulness of humans that is not *actual sin*; it does not have to do with one's own actions, but is inherited by each person because of their origin. [Augustine](#), had two origins in mind: our immediate origin from our lustful parents, and our ultimate origin from Adam, both bequeathing guilt. After [Anselm](#), theologians began to set aside the idea of contracting guilt and sinfulness from our immediate parents, and only Adam remained as the locus of our original sin. In the most recent formulation of the doctrine (developed by the [Reformers](#) but harking back to [Cyprian](#)), *original sin* refers to Adam's *guilt*, legally imputed by God to all Adam's posterity.

ORPHISM

A Greek literary and ethically-oriented religion that was at its height during the fifth the sixth centuries BC. Adherents followed the non-violent example of the legendary musician and shaman, Orpheus, eschewing killing (thus excluding the blood sacrifices of traditional Greek religion), and pursuing a life of purity as vegetarians. *Orphic* cosmogonic literature provides background for the [Platonic](#) idea that human souls are in some sense "imprisoned" in their material bodies.

PAEDOBAPTISM (ALSO, PEDOBAPTISM)

See [Infant Baptism](#).

PAEDOBAPTIST (ALSO, PEDOBAPTIST)

See [Infant Baptism](#).

PAPIST

Pejorative term for a Roman Catholic, particularly one who promotes Roman Catholic dogma and authority.

PAPYRUS

An aquatic sedge and the material from its pithy stem from which people in the ancient Mediterranean world made rough paper. *Papyri* refers to the countless, if often fragmentary, ancient manuscripts written on papyrus that have survived in Egypt's dry climate.

PATRISTICS

The study of the Fathers and their writings. The [adj.](#), *patristic*, describes something as relating to the [Church Fathers](#) or their writings.

PAX ROMANA (AKA PAX AUGUSTA)

The “Roman Peace” which dawned in the time of Caesar Augustus and spanned roughly from 27 BC to AD 180. This “peace” consisted of a relative lack of political-military upheaval in the Roman Empire (in spite of the two Jewish revolts), which allowed for increased freedom of commercial and religious mobility among the nations under its dominion.

PENTECOSTAL

Technically, having to do with the feast of Pentecost, or with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Act 2. In contemporary theology, having to do with a Christian movement begun in the early 20th century that emphasized an individualized crisis experience with the Holy Spirit, an experience generally marked by the sign of speaking in tongues.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL

Having to do with sensory experience or observation. We use phenomenological language, i.e., we speak *phenomenologically*, when say things like, “I saw the sun rise”; that was our perception, but technically it was the earth that moved (revolved).

PLATONIC

Technically, having to do with the philosopher [Plato](#) or his teachings. Because of Plato’s inclination to prefer the invisible and spiritual over the visible and material, *platonic* has come to refer to a close human relationship that is not sexual.

PNEUMATOLOGY

Study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Also, the title of that division of theology or Christian doctrine having to do with the Holy Spirit.

PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

Generally known as The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, a body of Jewish and Jewish-Christian religious literature dating from roughly 100 BC to AD 100, and generally believed to be *pseudepigraphal*, i.e., falsely (*pseud-*) titled (*epigraphos* = “superscription”), or falsely attributed (generally to some exalted personage from the Bible). Historically, the Pseudepigrapha have been viewed more negatively than the [Apocrypha](#), since the former seem to present themselves under false pretenses. Nevertheless, these ancient documents provide us with invaluable information about Jewish and Jewish-Christian beliefs and worship in the pre-apostolic and apostolic eras. In this book I have cited the following pseudepigraphal documents:

- *1 Enoch*
- *2 Baruch*
- *Ezekiel The Tragedian*
- *Odes Of Solomon*
- *Philo The Epic Poet*
- *Psalms Of Solomon*
- *The Sibylline Oracles*
- *Testament Of Solomon*

PREVENIENT GRACE

God’s gracious working in man that precedes any positive human response to Him.

PROOF TEXT

To fallaciously cite a biblical passage without reference to its context, in order to support a theological argument. Also, (noun) a biblical text cited in this way.

PROSELYTISM

The act and process of making a religious convert. In a biblical context, a *proselyte* is a Gentile who has become a full convert to Judaism, even accepting (for males) the rite of circumcision.

REBIRTH

See [Regeneration](#).

REFERENT

The thing to which a word or phrase refers or corresponds. The referent can be another, perhaps synonymous, word or phrase in the same sentence or paragraph, or simply the noun (e.g., *slave*) to which a pronoun or adjective refers (e.g., *wicked* in Mat 18.32). In the case of pronouns with their corresponding nouns, we also call the noun (the pronoun's referent) the antecedent.

REFORMATION, THE PROTESTANT

An attempt at renewal and revival within the Roman Catholic church that quickly became an external movement of those protesting the errors and abuses of the Roman Catholic system. The spiritual and political seeds of the Reformation were planted as early as the fourteenth century, but they are generally considered to have sprouted in the protest of [Martin Luther](#) in AD 1517. Culminating around AD 1650, the Reformation generated the Protestant denominations of the Lutherans, the Presbyterians and others.

REFORMED THEOLOGY (AKA REFORMED TRADITION)

Generally equivalent to [covenant theology](#), a [Calvinistic](#) system, contrasted with that of the [Lutheran](#) and [Anabaptist](#) traditions, that emphasizes God's glory and sovereignty, and the idea of Adam and Christ as contrasting federal heads of humanity.

REGENERATION

Spiritual rebirth. To be *regenerate* is to be spiritually born again by the Spirit of God. In the context of spiritual rebirth, only the Holy Spirit is *regenerative*, though baptism has too often been described as such. To be *unregenerate* is to be not yet born again, but still in a state of [fallenness](#).

RELIGIO LICITA

A phrase coined by [Tertullian](#) (*Apol* 21.1) referring to religions that had won concessions from the Roman government to practice their rites and traditions

according to ancient custom without penalties. While [Tertullian's](#) phrase was not used in the Roman decrees regarding Judaism, Judaism did, in fact, enjoy this status, in part because of the religion's antiquity, and in part because the Jews proved that they would die before worshipping Caesar. Thus, throughout the early Christian era, Jews remained exempt from sacrificing *to the Emperor*, though while the Jerusalem temple stood, daily sacrifices were made *on behalf* of the Emperor.

REPENTANCE

In biblical usage, a turning away from sin and toward God, in response to an inner change of heart and mind. To *repent* is to engage in this act or process which generally involves confession, and also restitution when material damage was involved in the offense. To describe someone as *repentant* is to say that they have by their thoughts and actions entered into a state of repentance.

RESISTIBLE GRACE

See [Grace, Resistible](#).

RIGHTEOUSNESS, ORIGINAL

See [Original Righteousness](#).

RIGHTEOUSNESS, SUPERADDED

See [Original Righteousness](#).

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, THE

A phrase never used in Scripture, but referring in the doctrines of [Reformed theology](#) to the supposedly transferable merit of Christ.

SACRAMENT

A term often used synonymously with [ordinance](#), but in early Catholic usage referring to a religious ritual believed to communicate a [mystical](#) work of God to the participant.

SACRAMENTALISM

The practice of church rituals in the belief that they have [mystical](#) power. From the [Lat](#) word for “an oath of allegiance,” the word *sacrament* is rooted in the verb that means *to consecrate*. The [Vul](#) used *sacramentum* to translate the [Grk](#) word μυστήριον (mē-'stē-rē-ōn) in Paul’s epistles, but [mystery](#) in its pagan usage connotes [magical](#) efficacy. In technical church usage, therefore, a *sacrament* is a rite with [mystical](#) efficacy. To describe a teaching or a church as *sacramental* is to say that it subscribes to the idea that rituals, like baptism, have [mystical](#) power.

SALVIFIC

[Adj.](#) describing something as contributing to or effecting salvation.

SCHOLASTICISM

Generally speaking, the theology, philosophy, *and method* of philosophical and theological reflection, practiced by the medieval schools that arose in Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (thanks to the increase of wealth and influx of new ideas). “[Aristotle](#) was the precursor of Scholasticism, by making theology a part of philosophy,” and the methods of Scholasticism were already in use in the West by the ninth century.¹⁰³⁷ The tradition reached its zenith, however, in the thirteenth century. It flourished until the fourteenth century, after which some of its elements were taken up by the [Reformers](#).

Scholastics were the teachers and practitioners of Scholasticism, of whom [Anselm of Canterbury](#) was the first to give form to its philosophic spirit, and [Thomas Aquinas](#) was the greatest practitioner. The scholastics sought to more deeply understand and more clearly systematize Christian doctrine by synthesizing Greek and Roman philosophy with both Scripture and the writings of the [Fathers](#). The scholastics advanced deductive proofs, making logical and definite what the [Fathers](#) had set forth as figurative and rhetorical.¹⁰³⁸ Though scholasticism attempted to “fuse faith and reason as to save the one from being blind, and the other from being autocratic,” and to

¹⁰³⁷ George Cadwalader Foley, *Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement: The Bohlen Lectures*, 1908, (London; Bombay; Calcutta; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), p. 116-118.

¹⁰³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

present Christianity as utterly reasonable, it also introduced “an immense amount of subtle and often absurd speculation,”¹⁰³⁹ which gave rise to the mocking characterization of scholastics as ones who debated such things as “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin”¹⁰⁴⁰

SEMINAL THEORY

The [Augustinian](#) theory (going back to [Origen](#)¹⁰⁴¹ and [Ambrose](#)¹⁰⁴²) that all of humanity was seminally present in Adam’s loins when he sinned, and that therefore all people are guilty of having sinned with Adam while biologically in him.

SEMI-PELAGIANISM

A doctrinal position between the poles of [Augustine’s](#) strong doctrine of grace and [Pelagius’](#) teaching that man’s will is as free as Adam’s was before [the fall](#). According to this view man can begin to believe on his own, but then God’s grace must complete the work of salvation. Also in this view, predestination is simply God’s foreknowledge. A *Semi-Pelagian* is an adherent of this position.

SEPTUAGINT

The third century BC translation of the [Heb OT](#) into [Grk](#), done (according to legend) by seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish translators, and thus often designated by the Roman numeral seventy, LXX. The apostolic community and early Church used the Septuagint extensively.

SHEKINAH

From the [Heb](#) verb *to dwell*, the manifest presence of God. The phenomenon visible when God “dwells” for a time in a definable space, as He did in the wilderness as the pillar of fiery cloud, and subsequently as the shining

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid., pp. 116-117.

¹⁰⁴⁰ The supposed debate on how many angels can dance (or sit) on the head of a pin was undoubtedly imagined by someone intending to mock the Scholastic theologians. Thomas Aquinas did discuss the question of “Whether Several Angels Can Be At The Same Time In The Same Place?” in *Summa* Part 1, q. 52, art. 3.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Origen: Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans Books 1-5*, ET by Thomas P. Scheck, (Washington DC: The Catholic University Of America Press, 2001), p. 311.

¹⁰⁴² *Dav Alt* 71, quoted in Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas Of The Fall And Of Original Sin: A Historical And Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green And Co. LTD., 1927), p. 305.

Presence between the cherubim over the mercy seat (Ex 25.22; Num 7.89; Psa 80.1).

SINE QUA NON

Lat, *without which not*, designating an essential component or ingredient.

SOTERIOLOGY

The study and doctrine of the Savior and salvation.

SUBAPOSTOLIC PERIOD

Subapostolic designates the period immediately following the time of Christ's apostles. The subapostolic period thus begins in the last third of the first century or at the beginning of the second. The period roughly corresponds to the time of the Apostolic and Ante-Nicene [fathers](#), and to what historians refer to as Late Antiquity.

SUBSTANTIVE, SUBSTANTIVAL, SUBSTANTIVELY

Grammatically speaking, a *substantive* is a word used as a noun. Such a word could be an [adj.](#), which we would describe as *substantival*, and as used *substantively*.

SUMMUM BONUM

[Lat](#), *highest good*, designating what one values above all else, and that thing from which all other good flows.

SUPERADDED RIGHTEOUSNESS

See [Original Righteousness](#).

SYNCRETISM, SYNCRETISTIC

The blending, or attempted blending, of incompatible elements from different religions, philosophies or worldviews. To characterize something as *syncretistic* is to say that it does, or tends to do, this kind of blending of elements from discordant religions or philosophies.

SYNERGISM

The belief that man cooperates in his own salvation. [Semi-Pelagians](#) believe that this cooperation must occur from the outset, i.e., man must *synergistically* choose to cooperate with God's grace and by that cooperation come to faith and salvation. [Calvinists](#) teach that synergism only comes into play after God has *monergistically* given a person the gift of [new birth](#) and faith.

SYNTACTICAL

Having to do with syntax, i.e., with the way words are arranged in a sentence, and with the grammatical rules for sentence formation.

TALMUD, THE

The compendium of rabbinic law and lore, of which there are two main forms, the Babylonian and Jerusalem. This authoritative record of rabbinic tradition consists of [the Mishnah](#) (a collection of rabbinic discussion and interpretation of biblical laws codified in the second century) and the Gemarah (a commentary on [the Mishnah](#) codified in the sixth century). A *talmudist* is an expert in Talmud.

TAUROBOLIUM

A [mystical](#) ceremony in which a bull was stabbed as it stood upon a wooden lattice work above a pit, so that its blood would bathe a person (the recipient of the rite) who stood in the pit beneath the lattice. "The rite apparently meant the transfer of the energy of the bull to the person undergoing it or to the one for whom it was performed."¹⁰⁴³ Criobolium was the same rite using a ram. J. L. de Villiers states that, "Once he had been baptized by blood, the initiate [to Mithraism or the Cybele-Attis cult] was born again for ever," but cites no source for this point.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰⁴³ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 285.

¹⁰⁴⁴ J.L. de Villiers, "Religious Life", in *The New Testament Milieu*, ed. A.B. du Toit, Guide to the New Testament, Vol. 2., (Halfway House: Orion Publishers, 1998), §8.3.3. Gordon C. Neal says: "Some texts refer to rebirth 'for ever' or 'for twenty years.'" J. D. Douglas, Earle E. Cairns, and James E. Ruark, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 691.

TEBILLA (ALSO, TEBILLAH OR TEVILAH)

A Jewish ritual washing involving a full-body immersion in a [mikveh](#).

TORAH

Traditionally, the Pentateuch, i.e., the first five books of the [Heb](#) canon. Sometimes used more narrowly to mean “law,” but now often used more generally to refer to the entire [OT](#) canon, and sometimes even used to include the [Talmud](#).

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

See [Depravity, Total](#).

TRADUCIANISM

The belief that the human soul (like the physical body) is transmitted from the parent to the child, rather than directly created by God. Traducianism was taught by [Tertullian](#), along with others of the Latin Church like [Cyprian](#), [Hilary](#) and [Ambrose](#). [Tertullian](#) taught that the soul was specifically transmitted from the father, and others used this idea to explain how Christ was born sinless since His Father was God.

The idea that defective souls are transmitted by human fathers to their offspring did not prevail in the early Church. The Alexandrian school, influenced by the [Hellenistic](#) dualism that posited an enmity between the soul and the body, insisted that the two components of man had to have come from different sources, the body from human parents, the soul from God.¹⁰⁴⁵ [Origen](#) and [Clement](#), therefore, taught the pre-existence of the soul, rather than its propagation from human parents. Later theologians, like [Methodius of Olympus](#), did not teach a human preexistence, but insisted that “the Almighty alone breathes into man the undying and undecaying part,” i.e., only God creates the soul.¹⁰⁴⁶ [Lactantius](#) also agreed that “the soul ... has its origin ... out of heaven from God.”¹⁰⁴⁷ [Lactantius](#) went on to explicitly deny that the soul is produced from human parents, reasoning that “a soul cannot be produced

¹⁰⁴⁵ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 325.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Banq* 2.7.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Div Inst* 2.13

from souls.... the production of souls belongs entirely to God alone.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Thus, the early Church inclined toward a [creationist](#) view of the origin of the soul.

Nevertheless, traducianism remains popular among Lutherans, while Catholic and Reformed theologians prefer [Creationism](#).

TRADUX PECCATI

[Lat](#): *Transmitted sin*.

TRENT, COUNCIL OF

The official council of the Counter Reformation, which in 1545 to 1563 promulgated the Roman Catholic response to the Protestant Reformers. The anathemas of the Council of Trent were enforced by the Inquisition, and are still affirmed to this day in the documents of Vatican Council II.

TRIDENTINE

Of or having to do with the [Council Of Trent](#).

TRINITY

A term coined to refer to the one God of the Bible as existing in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The [adj](#). *Trinitarian* refers to doctrines or groups that subscribe to this view of God.

TYPE, TYPICAL, TYPOLOGICAL, TYPOLOGY

In biblical studies, a person, thing or event that *foreshadows* “a reality of a higher order than itself.”¹⁰⁴⁹ However, after the historical hinge of Christ’s accomplished atonement, types like baptism and the Lord’s supper, can also *commemorate* important realities. The *typological* sacrifices that once *foreshadowed* Christ’s work, will in the future *commemorate* that same work (Zec 14.21). We describe such a foreshadowing or commemorating (by a symbol or metaphor), and the symbol or metaphor itself, as *typological* or *typical*. The type is said to speak *typologically* or *typically* of the thing it foreshadows or commemorates.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Work* 19.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle Of St. Peter*, 2nd Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1946), p. 298.

In our [Grk](#) scriptures, the word *type* (τύπος, 'tē-pōs) conveys the underlying idea of the mark left by a blow (Joh 20.25). Just as the mark (τύπον, 'tē-pōn) in Christ's body implied the corresponding nail, so a metaphorical type corresponds to a past or future reality, either commemorating or foreshadowing. Most often in the [NT](#), τύπος is used to speak of a *pattern*, whether for behavior (i.e., an example, Phil 3.17; 1Th 1.7; 1Ti 4.12; etc.) or for a building (Act 7.44; Heb 8.5). However, τύπος also clearly refers to Adam (Rom 5.14) as a foreshadowing (metaphorical) type, and to the events of the Exodus as simultaneously constituting both foreshadowing types and warning examples (1Co 10.1-6).

Besides τύπος, the word παραβολή (pä-rə-bō-'lē), meaning *parable*, *symbol*, *figure* or *illustration*, is also used to indicate a (metaphorical) type (Heb 9.9), as is the word σκιά (skē-'ä), meaning *shadow* (Heb 10.1). However, once the idea of a type is understood, the reader will find many types in the Bible not explicitly designated as such in the text. We call the study of these biblical types *typology*.

UNREGENERATE

See [Regeneration](#).

VULGATE

From [Lat](#) *vulgatus*, “common.” The [Lat](#) translation of the Bible produced at the close of the fourth century, mostly by the efforts of [Jerome](#). As the Bible version in the common language of the Roman world, the Vulgate was widely adopted and finally declared the official edition of the Roman Catholic church by the [Council of Trent](#).

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION & CATECHISMS

Completed in AD 1646, the most influential doctrinal statement for proponents of [Reformed theology](#) in the English-speaking world, adopted by Presbyterians and some Baptist and Congregational congregations. The Larger and Shorter Catechisms are used to inculcate the doctrines of the Confession.

WORLDVIEW

The sum of person's cultural (moral, philosophical, religious and scientific) and political viewpoints that defines his or her understanding of the world and its phenomena (including human interaction). We can think of a worldview as the “mental lens” through which one views and understands his or her world.

YETZER HA-RA AND YETZER HA-TOV

Also spelled Yetser Hara, Yetser Hatov. In Judaism, the human inclinations to do evil or to do good, sometimes imagined as independent spirits of perversity or truth.¹⁰⁵⁰ The Heb word, יֵצֶר , is translated *intent* in Gen 6.5.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See DSS, 1QS (“The Community Rule,” or “Charter of a Jewish Sectarian Association”) 3.16-4.26.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roderick Graciano is an ordained minister and the founding director of Timothy Ministries in Tacoma, WA, USA. Married since 1974, Roderick and his wife Kaaren Joy have three daughters, three sons-in-law, and eight grandchildren.

Roderick says that he “feels God’s pleasure” when he teaches. He believes that biblical teaching is much more than a transfer of information, and that it should

facilitate a life-giving learning experience. He endeavors to connect the biblical principles in his lessons to the real challenges faced by a contemporary audience, and happily shares the personal insights learned through the failures and successes of his own life. Roderick makes all of his teaching services available free of charge. His daily theological and philosophical thoughts can be seen on Twitter.com by following **Theophilo7**.

Besides research, writing and teaching, Roderick is dedicated to city transformation and to the eradication of human trafficking and slavery.

Roderick’s sports of choice are tennis, archery and both urban and alpine hiking.

A little boy was asked in Sunday School to explain baptism. He said, "It's when the preacher holds you under water and you think about Jesus!"