Recovering the Historical Practice of Delayed Baptism and Pre-Baptismal Instruction for the Purpose of Restoring the Standard of a Regenerate Church Membership in Southern Baptist Churches

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by

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Recovering the Historical Practice of Delayed Baptism and Pre-Baptismal Instruction for the Purpose of Restoring the Standard of a Regenerate Church Membership in Southern Baptist Churches

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Abstract

Thesis: The recovery of the historical practice of delayed baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal instruction will better ensure a regenerate church membership, thereby promoting more faithful church members.

This study argues that reform is needed in Baptist churches in the preparation for believer’s baptism. As Baptists are “people of the Book,” it is most appropriate to survey what the Bible teaches about the meaning of baptism. The first chapter addresses the biblical texts commonly agreed upon by Baptists regarding baptism, as well as those most commonly disagreed upon. Attention is given to the texts used by opponents of delayed baptism contrasted with the passages used by those who are proponents of delayed baptism.

The second chapter considers the practice of the early church fathers related to delayed baptism and pre-baptismal instruction. While there was much regression in the doctrine of baptism in these early centuries, moving away from credobaptism to pedobaptism and from baptism being an outward sign of an inward reality toward baptismal regeneration, one still finds the church practicing due diligence in preparing the catechumenate for baptism and full membership by way of catechesis.

The third chapter examines the baptismal practices of the Reformation period with special emphasis on the practices of the magisterial reformers Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, and particular attention to the theology of one radical reformer Balthasar Hubmaier. Though the magisterial reformers maintained the Catholic practice of infant baptism in their churches, they also utilized catechisms, bringing this format of religious instruction into Protestantism. Hubmaier is distinguished from the magisterial reformers and shown to be an important doctrinal
link between Anabaptists and Baptists in use of catechisms and the practice of believer’s baptism.

While the previous chapters of this study are foundational, the fourth chapter argues for the recovery of the Baptist practices of catechesis, delayed baptism, and insistence on a regenerate church membership. Baptists consistently published and encouraged the use of catechisms from around 1600-1900. It is only in the last century that Baptists laid these practices aside. It is proposed that perhaps Baptist leaders, while rightly focusing on preaching, reaching, and baptizing have neglected regenerate church membership by expediting baptism for the sake of growth. This negligence has hindered church purity and witness. Regardless of philosophy or motive, the discontinuation of pre-baptismal instruction has contributed to the problem of Baptist church rolls filled with names of those who professed and were baptized, but have little to no relationship with the church.

The fifth chapter discusses the implications of implementing delayed baptism for pre-baptismal instruction with the aim of better ensuring a regenerate church membership in the Southern Baptist Convention. A model is proposed for implementation in Southern Baptist churches. Each Baptist church should prayerfully reconsider its responsibility to preserve the faith once for all delivered to the saints and to do all it can to ensure a regenerate church membership.
Recovering the Historical Practice of Delayed Baptism and Pre-Baptismal Instruction for the Purpose of Restoring the Standard of a Regenerate Church Membership in Southern Baptist Churches

INTRODUCTION

Believer’s baptism by immersion has been the hallmark of Baptist faith and practice for over 400 years. It has faithfully pictured the gospel that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised and has beautifully symbolized that the believer, who died and was raised with Christ, now walks in the newness of life. It has served Baptists as the gateway into visible, local church membership, signifying that the person has been regenerated by grace through faith having become part of the invisible body of Christ.

The commitment of Baptists to believer’s baptism by immersion (credobaptism) over and against infant baptism (pedobaptism) by sprinkling or pouring was costly. Defying the religious establishment, the practice invited the torture and execution of credobaptists as early as the 1500s.1 Timothy George writes, “It is well to remember that the Baptist witness was forged in the context of persecution and martyrdom. Something was decisively at stake for those early nonconforming Baptists who were willing to accept the loss of livelihood, the forfeiture of home, land, and family, even torture and death.”2 The “watery war”3 between credobaptism and pedobaptism intensified over the seventeenth century, as Baptists battled Catholics, Anglicans, Puritans, and Quakers over the meaning and mode of baptism. McBeth writes of Baptists, “This

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practice conferred their name and provided a vivid picture to distinguish them from others.”

Thus, believer’s baptism by immersion is at the core of Baptist identity, theology, and polity.

This conviction, that believers and only believers should be baptized, and then only by immersion was birthed out of Christ’s commission. For Southern Baptists, it has guided the organizational structure and propelled its educational, missions, and evangelistic campaigns for the past 175 years. While the Southern Baptist Convention has maintained a relentless call to its churches to reach and baptize more and more people, I am concerned that it may have achieved church and denominational growth at the expense of church purity, essentially by championing going, preaching, and baptizing, while failing to uphold the historic Baptist standard of a regenerate church membership. Now, with the Southern Baptist Convention declining in

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. McBeth states that “all” Baptist confessions between 1500-to present contain statements on baptism. A cursory review of historical Baptist confessions reveals the centrality of this doctrine. Though not agreeing with one another on the specifics of immersion, Baptists have stood united on the conviction that only believers should be baptized. For an example of differences among “Antepedobaptists,” see “Covenant of Cherokee Creek Baptist Church,” in Timothy and Denise George, eds. Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 213.


7 The Southern Baptist Convention founded its missions agencies (The International Mission Board [Foreign Mission Board] and the North American Mission Board [Domestic Mission Board]-1845), as well as the Cooperative Program (1925), around this biblical message. For more on this, see H. Leon McBeth, The Baptist Heritage (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 412ff.


9 John S. Hammett, Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2005), 110-111. McBeth writes, “Perhaps the origin of Baptists is best explained as a search for a pure church. They sought a church composed of ‘visible saints’ that is, true believers, observing the gospel ordinances and obeying the commands of Christ” in The Baptist Heritage (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 75.

10 Ibid., 81.
number of churches, baptisms, and membership, many leaders are once again urging evangelism and missions to stem the tide. As recently as May, 2019, in response to the SBC Annual Report, Ronnie Floyd, the President and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee urged,

As we look forward, it is time to press reset spiritually and strategically in the Southern Baptist Convention. Prioritizing and elevating the advancement of the good news of Jesus Christ into every town, city and county in America, as well as to every person across the world, must be recaptured by every church. Urgency is not an option for any of us as Christ-followers. People need Jesus and they need Jesus now. Our generation of Baptists must believe and determine now that we will do whatever it takes to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations.

While Floyd’s call is convicting, inspiring, and truthful, it seems to repeat the same pattern of the past century, calling more people into the faith without establishing them in the faith. Until recently, this century-old Southern Baptist strategy resulted in increased baptism. It is true that Southern Baptists need to be more faithful in sharing the faith in order to reach more, baptize more, and add to its church membership. However, this must be done with the insistence upon believer’s-only baptism and the preservation of a regenerate church membership.

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11 Annual of the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention (Nashville: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2018), 118. Interestingly, the average attendance of worshippers in Southern Baptist churches increased in 2018, perhaps reflecting the growing trend of non-members attending, placing them along with the non-attending members, outside the accountability of the church.


Rationale and Need

Alongside personal faith and *credobaptism*, regenerate church membership guided Baptist faith and practice for centuries. All the major historical Baptist confessions contain articles on believer’s baptism by immersion and the nature of the church as a gathered community of repentant, believing, baptized, regenerate saints. The Baptist commitment to a regenerate church membership has been so strong at times, that baptism was delayed for the purpose of allowing the church to observe that the one being baptized had truly repented, believed, and had been born again. This delay was not lost to idleness, but often included a time of instruction in the faith *prior to* baptism to better ensure that those being baptized understood the faith they were professing and demonstrated it in a regenerate lifestyle. However, though this practice of delay while continuing instruction was found among Baptists for centuries, most Baptist churches in the last one hundred years have laid aside both pre-baptismal instruction and high expectations for membership. Indeed, according to Nettles, though minor, private catechisms have been written, the last major publication of a Baptist catechism was James Broadus’ *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* (1892).

15 See Timothy & Denise George, eds., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 1996).

16 Hammett, 113.


18 Tom J. Nettles, ed. *Baptist Catechisms: To Make Thee Wise Unto Salvation* (n.p., 1983), 14. The earliest Baptist catechism was written in London by Henry Jessey, *A Catechism for Babes or Little Ones* (1652). However, Baptists borrowed and made use of earlier catechisms from others, such as Puritan John Cotton’s *Milk for Babes* (1646).

19 Ibid., 245. Nettles notes the last major publication of a Baptist catechism was James Broadus’, *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* (1892).
Broadus’ *A Catechism for Bible Teaching* in 1892. Charles Deweese cites this decline as one of the leading causes of non-regenerate church membership.20

I argue that the regrettable neglect of pre-baptismal training has contributed to the problem of an extraordinarily large number of individuals professing faith in Christ, being quickly baptized, and added to Baptist church membership rolls, without the church giving due diligence to instruct the convert in the faith, while observing visible evidence of a regenerate life. I am convinced that the laying aside of pre-baptismal instruction over the last century has resulted in the enormous problem of Baptist church rolls filled with professing, baptized, church members who have little to no relationship to the church. This deficient, expedited process has contributed to the embarrassing Southern Baptist Convention statistic that only 5.3 million members out of 15 million attend worship on a weekly basis.21 Perhaps more disturbing than the inflated numbers of Baptist church membership is the false assurance of eternal salvation given to church members who, though baptized by immersion, know little of what it means to know and walk with Christ or to be a member of His body, the church. The fact that the majority of adult baptisms in Southern Baptist churches are “rebaptisms” should alert us to a significant problem with our conversion/baptism/membership process.22 My assumption is that many baptized church members do not faithfully practice the faith because they lack an adequate, foundational understanding of the faith due to a lack of instruction in what it means to be a regenerate believer and church member.


21 *Annual of the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2018), 118.

As a pastor, I have experienced the challenge of ministering to individuals who verbally professed Christ, were baptized, and held membership in my churches, who subsequently lived a life with little to no visible evidence of regeneration, particularly no commitment to the church. Admittedly, pastors have contributed to the problem by utilizing a deficient process for converts which could be summarized as: 1) share the Gospel; 2) invite the person to pray a prayer of repentance and faith; 3) encourage the person to announce the decision and desire to be baptized to the church; 4) provide a brief theological discussion of the basics of faith and meaning of baptism; and 5) schedule their baptism around church and family schedules. It has become apparent to me that pastors and churches have a greater responsibility to better ensure that baptismal candidates understand the faith, have truly repented and believed, demonstrate a visibly, regenerate life, and their new relationship to the church before putting them forth for baptism.

This research comes from a deep love and devotion for Christ’s church, which He purchased with His own blood. I am especially concerned for Southern Baptist Convention churches whom I love, to whom I am indebted for my religious education, by whom I was licensed and ordained, and to whom I have given my life to serve. My greatest concern is for Baptist church members, who were quickly baptized without the rich blessing of instruction in the faith, only to walk away from the church and subsequently live with the false assurance that they are regenerate believers. It begs the question: What can we do differently?

**Research Question**

In this study, I will argue from a *credobaptist* perspective that recovering the historical practice of delayed baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal instruction will better ensure a

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regenerate church membership, thereby promoting more faithful church members. Providing pre-baptismal instruction requires a delay in baptism until the instruction is complete, while also providing an opportunity for the baptismal candidate to show visible evidence of a regenerate life. While there are many visible evidences of regeneration, I assert that the most basic and measurable mark to be a believer’s faithfulness to assemble for worship with other believers on a regular basis. The nature of the church entails a gathered group of believers. Mark Dever writes, “The most fundamental duty Christians have in relation to the congregation is the duty to regularly attend gatherings of the congregation (see Heb 10:25; cf. Ps 84:4, 10; Acts 2:42).” I am convinced that it is the standard of regenerate church membership that prompted Baptists to include the high expectation of regular attendance and support of the church, alongside articles on conversion and baptism in their church covenants. Baptist forefathers understood that church attendance is the context for obedience in so many other areas of the Christian life making it a fitting, measurable, visible sign of a changed life.

Additional questions that this research seeks to answer include: 1) What does the Bible teach about the meaning of baptism and pre-baptismal instruction? 2) What is the church’s responsibility in regard to ensuring that those who profess faith and request baptism, understand

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24 Mark Dever, “A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership,” in 9 Marks of a Healthy Church (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 160. Though church attendance is most fundamental, Dever adds, “The responsibilities and duties of members of a Christian Church are simply the responsibilities and duties of all Christians. Church members, like all Christians, are to be baptized and are to regularly attend the Lord’s Table. We are to hear God’s Word and obey it. We are to regularly fellowship together for mutual edification. We are to love God, one another, and those outside our fellowship, and we are to evidence the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). We are to worship God in all the activities of our home, work, community, and life.” Dever, 9 Marks, 159.

25 Ibid.

the faith? 3) What is the church’s responsibility toward those who profess faith and baptism, regarding church membership? 4) Historically, how has the church catechized prior to baptism? 5) Historically, how have Baptists (SBC and others) catechized prior to baptism?

From the main research question and the questions related to it, I will attempt to demonstrate that pre-baptismal instruction is consistent with the Bible’s command to contend for the faith and to teach it to believers, as well as being the pattern of the early church and Baptists, particularly Southern Baptists throughout the first half of their history.

A study of delayed baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal instruction raises questions related to baptizing children. At what age can a child cognitively understand the faith in order to be converted? Should churches utilize developmental psychology for discernment on this issue? Should the baptism of children be delayed until a certain age or at least until completion of pre-baptismal instruction? If a professing child’s baptism is delayed until a certain age, can the child participate in the Lord’s Supper? Further, if a child professes Christ and is immediately baptized, does the child become a fully functioning church member with voting rights, regardless of age? All these are legitimate concerns that have received various treatments in books and dissertations. Baptist churches, as autonomous entities, must reach their own conclusions and wrestle with the implications. However, these questions are beyond the scope of the present study.

An extension of the debate over the cognitive development of children and age of baptism is the baptism of the developmentally disabled. The same questions might apply. If a church adopts the policy that all professing believers must undergo pre-baptismal instruction

before baptism: 1) How does one determine when a developmentally disabled person has been converted? 2) Can a developmentally disabled person be effectively catechized? 3) Does one base the curriculum on the candidate’s mental age? 4) Should exceptions be made to a church’s requirement of pre-baptismal instruction? The same questions might be applied to cases of individuals who’ve suffered traumatic brain injuries, whether physical or chemical. Further, what are the limitations of the church requirement of pre-baptismal instruction for the mentally ill? Perhaps these questions rightly cause church leaders to pause and ponder what exceptions should be made to baptismal policies. All of these areas of concern deserve further research, but are beyond the scope of this study.

Another area related to pre-baptismal instruction, with its goal of better ensuring regenerate church membership, is church discipline or accountability. When a church is faithful to instruct a baptismal candidate in the faith, it will include one’s close relationship with the local church. This relationship involves many duties included in historical Baptist church covenants. This close relationship also involves the responsibility of individuals and the church at large to hold one another accountable to sound doctrine and regenerate living. It seems illegitimate for a church to exercise church discipline over members who were never instructed in the faith and the nature of church membership prior to baptism. Further, even if church leaders were willing to exercise church discipline, it is hard to imagine that a church, made up of individuals who were deprived of pre-baptismal instruction, would be willing to hold one of their own accountable to standards they have not considered. Is the neglect of church discipline partly due to the church’s


29 For an excellent source of historical Baptist statements in one source, see Timothy & Denise George, eds. *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996).
failure to properly instruct new believers in what it means to be baptized and become a church member? Though deserving a full treatment of its relationship to pre-baptismal instruction, church discipline is only briefly addressed in the present study.

Delayed baptism is also related to the other ordinance in Baptist churches, the Lord’s Supper. Questions arise, such as, if baptism is delayed for the purpose of pre-baptismal training, can the not-yet baptized believer participate in the Lord’s Supper? Or, must the candidate wait until after baptism to partake of the Lord’s Supper? The relationship between conversion, baptism, church membership, and the Lord’s Supper is worthy of further research, but will only be touched upon in the present study.

Finally, the subject of regenerate church membership is related to another historical Baptist conviction, religious freedom. Deweese rightly states, “Regeneration can be a required condition for church membership only in a country where there is no state church.” Though an interesting aspect of the subject at hand, a discussion on the relationship between regenerate church membership and religious freedom is beyond the scope of the present study.

**Definition of Terms and Phrases**

**Church**: The word “church” is the English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* and has a rich background of meaning. The Greek term meant “called out” and described when Greek citizens of a city assembled together. This was considered to be a privilege, as it distinguished Greek citizens from slaves and noncitizens for the purpose of conducting city business. Christians made use of this term, considering themselves specially called out by God to Jesus Christ for his purposes. The Greek term is also used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, which meant the “assembly” of people. Broadly speaking, it meant the entire people of God, but

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30 Deweese, 12.
more narrowly, the local congregation of called-out Christians. While church is the English translation of *ekklesia*, the English word is derived from the Scottish word *kirk* and the German *kirche*, which are derived from the Greek *kuriokon*, meaning, “belonging to the Lord.” More specifically, Mark Dever writes, “A church is a local collection of people committed to Christ, to regularly assemble and have his Word preached and obeyed, including Christ’s commands to baptize and to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.”

**Universal Church (invisible):** all believers, worldwide, regardless of geography. The invisible church emphasizes “the perfect, true, spiritual nature of the church.” The distinction between the visible and invisible church was utilized by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Pertinent to this study, this distinction implies that there may be some who are part of the visible church who are not part of the invisible church, meaning it is possible that some who are church members are unregenerate. Conversely, it implies that there may be those who are part of the invisible church (regenerate) who are not part of the visible church (non-attenders).

**Local Church (visible):** a particular group of believers gathered in a particular locality. The visible church represents “the local assembly of believers with its imperfections.” The distinction between the visible and invisible church has relevance to the issue in the Southern

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33 Dever, 157.

34 Enns, 364.


36 Ibid.
Baptist Convention of “membership” vs. “attendance.” Though not the historical Baptist position, perhaps many contemporary Southern Baptist professing, baptized, non-attending church members consider themselves primarily members of the invisible church, holding that the individual’s direct relationship to God through Jesus Christ makes one a Christian and constitutes “the church.” Conversely, membership in the visible church does not guarantee regeneration, making membership “relatively unimportant.”

Perhaps more prevalent among Southern Baptists is the “parish view” of the church, which stresses both the visible and invisible church. The visible church or parish includes all who make an outward profession and come together to hear the Word and celebrate the sacraments. The believers within this visible church constitute the true church, the invisible church.”

Conversion: the one-time act of turning from sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith. Erikson explains that it is one simultaneous action involving two parts. He writes, “Repentance is the unbeliever’s turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ. They are, respectively, the negative and positive aspect of the same occurrence.”

Regeneration: Strictly speaking, this term means begetting or generating again. Mullins defines it as “the change wrought by the Spirit of God, by the use of truth as a means, in which the moral disposition of the soul is renewed in the image of Christ.”

William W. Stevens’ comments are helpful for this study. He writes, conversion “is God’s turning of the repentant sinner to himself, with the sinful nature not completely eradicated but its power broken. Sin no longer takes the

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37 Erickson, 1045.
38 Ibid., 1046.
central place and reigns within. There has been a recreating in the image of Christ.”

**Baptism:** For Baptists, “the immersing or dipping of a believer in water symbolizing the complete renewal and change in the believer’s life and testifying to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the way of salvation.” It is an “outward symbol or indication of the inward change which has been effected in the believer. It serves as a public testimony of one’s faith in Jesus Christ.”

**Credobaptism:** a transliteration of the Latin word *credo* “creed” and *baptism* “immerge”. Thus, it is the immersion of those who have believed the Christian creed. Baptists hold that baptism is for believers only and comes after conviction of sin, repentance of sin, and confession of Christ as Lord and Savior. It is synonymous with believer’s baptism.

**Pedobaptism:** a transliteration of the Greek word *pais* meaning “child” and *baptism*. Depending on the religious tradition, it means “immersing, pouring, sprinkling.” Sometimes, it referred to the “christening” of children of believers, as baptism is interpreted as the sign of God’s new covenant. It is synonymous with infant baptism.

**Believer’s Baptism:** the historical Baptist practice, that only believers are to be baptized after a conscious faith response to the offer of salvation in Christ.

**Baptismal Confession:** the personal, public declaration that “Jesus Christ is Lord!” signifying death to the old life and devoting oneself to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

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43 Erickson, “The Initiatory Rite of the Church: Baptism,” 1096.

Regenerate Church Membership: the historical Baptist view that only the regenerate can be legitimate members of a New Testament church.

Catechism: the prescribed curriculum of biblical and theological instruction often organized in a question and answer format.

Catechesis: the act of instructing in the Christian faith. The word “catechesis” means instruction.

Catechumenate: a yet-unbaptized individual who is in the process of catechesis or pre-baptismal instruction.

Literature Review

Biblical Studies

In his seminal book, *Baptism in the New Testament*, G.R. Beasley-Murray carefully exegetes every occurrence of the subject of baptism in the New Testament. Beginning with the background and explanation of Jewish baptism, John the Baptist’s baptism, and the baptism of Jesus, he then carefully traces Christian baptism through Acts, Paul’s letters, John’s letters, Peter’s letters, and the book of Hebrews. Next, he examines how baptism relates to the great doctrines of grace, faith, hope, the Holy Spirit, and the church, as well as ethics. The later part of Beasley-Murray’s book is focused on the issue of infant baptism, where he addresses the most common scriptural passages that are utilized in favor of the practice (household baptisms and Jesus’ attitude towards children), before arguing against the practice based on the necessity of personal faith, repentance, and church membership. The strength of *Baptism in the New Testament* is that it rightly raises one’s awareness of the abundance of baptismal references in the Bible while emphasizing the significance of the baptism event, which is for Beasley-Murray more than just symbolic (but stopping short of sacramentalism). In the postscript, he calls for

45 Ibid.
reform in Baptist practice related to baptism but takes the opposite position than this study in suggesting there be no delay in baptism upon faith and repentance, as he sees conversion and baptism (specifically the coming of the Holy Spirit) as very closely related. This study will argue that the historic Baptist position of baptism as symbolic allows for delay and catechesis.

**Contemporary Books**

Charles W. Deweese’s *A Community of Believers: Making Church Membership More Meaningful* is an excellent book, expanding on his dissertation, “The Origin, Development, and Use of Church Covenants in Baptist History.” Its main focus is the need to restore the standard of a regenerate church membership in Baptist churches. Deweese argues that the standard of a regenerate church membership is both biblical and historical, at least for Baptists. He traces this lineage through Baptist history, especially in Baptist church covenants. The book is practical in its suggested multifaceted remedy for restoring this standard. First, he suggests churches develop and utilize a church covenant. Secondly, churches should place greater emphasis on the significance of baptism (and the Lord’s Supper). Thirdly, churches which utilize church covenants must implement church discipline. Fourthly, churches should reevaluate their motives and methods of evangelism, especially related to baptizing children. Finally, churches should expect all members to actively serve. Though making a significant contribution to solving the issue of unregenerate church membership, *A Community of Believers* doesn’t go far enough in its suggestions for pre-baptismal instruction. This study argues not only for the use of covenants, but for catechesis which will include Baptist confessions.

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John S. Hammett’s *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* examines Baptist church life from biblical, theological, and historical perspectives. He argues for the historical Baptist positions of believer’s baptism and regenerate church membership by establishing the nature of the church as an organized, deeply connected, assembled body of believers, covenanted together for the worship of God and mutual edification and accountability. Chapter 4, “Regenerate Church Membership,” is pertinent to this study, in that Hammett recounts the historical importance of this standard, as well as its role of safeguarding Baptist distinctives such as believer’s baptism, congregational polity, closed communion, and church discipline. Chapter 5, “Where We Went Wrong and How Can We Get it Right,” is significant in identifying weak baptismal practices and low expectations of church membership as complicit in the rise of non-regenerate church membership. Hammett believes recovering meaningful church membership to be the number one priority in Baptist churches today. He calls on Baptists to return to the use of church covenants to raise the level of church member commitment. While Hammett mentions the early church’s use of catechism prior to baptism, acknowledges the weak baptismal practice of Baptists, and even endorses delayed baptism for the purpose of examining a converts life, he stops short of calling Baptist churches to return to the historical practice of pre-baptismal instruction (namely catechism) to stem the tide of non-regenerate church membership. This study argues for the latter.

Mark Dever’s book *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* sets forth, in his view, the most essential criteria of healthy churches. He goes beyond the basic, historical healthy church standards of the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments to

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emphasize the standards of: 1) Expository Preaching; 2) Biblical Theology; 3) The Gospel; 4) A Biblical Understanding of Conversion; 5) A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism; 6) A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership; 7) A Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline; 8) A Concern for Discipleship and Growth; and 9) Biblical Church Leadership. His concern is that many church practices are pragmatic and ultimately self-defeating, settling for whatever leads to maintaining or increasing numbers. This in turn leads to the dilution of the gospel, confusion of the nature of the church, and the weakening and ultimately the death of a particular church. Most pertinent to this dissertation are Dever’s Chapter 4, “A Biblical Understanding of Conversion,” and Chapter 6, “A Biblical Understanding of Church Leadership.” In Chapter 4, the author explains the place and need for repentance and faith for true conversion, carrying with it the expectation that one’s life will be changed by God upon believing. Chapter 6 is helpful in its description of Baptist history’s high expectations of church membership as well as Capitol Hill Baptist Church’s process of examining new members’ lives for God-produced change. In addition, an explanation and signing of the church covenant with its accompanying expectations of church membership is explained. Though not within the purview of my dissertation, Dever’s chapter on church discipline is a natural outflow of the chapters on conversion and church membership. My research goes further to prescribe these same concepts as part of a post-conversion, pre-baptismal Baptist catechism, whereby explanations of conversion, repentance, faith, and expectations of church membership (including church attendance) are clearly set forth.

Jonathan Leeman’s book, Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus\(^9\) might easily be underestimated by its brevity. However, its conciseness reflects its precise focus on the need for reclaiming a biblical understanding of church membership. Leeman

draws a sharp distinction between the church as a volunteer club and its calling as an outpost of the heavenly kingdom under the kingship of Christ. Through the use of creative analogies, Leeman first explains that the church obtains its authority from Jesus to affirm and give shape to the life of Christians. Secondly, the church represents a nation (Christ’s Kingdom) inside another nation (world). Thirdly, the church represents Christ’s future kingdom and coming universal church. Fourthly, the church fulfills the role of sorting out who belongs in the kingdom and who doesn’t. Finally, the church is to be submitted to by its members. He explains that church membership is found in the New Testament (especially Acts) with characteristics such as being unified around the message of a Savior and Lord; united to individual churches that are interconnected with other churches; collectively identified as churches; possessing special power and corporate identity when assembled; identified first by baptism; separated from the world; lives oriented toward other members; leaders responsible for the members; members submitted to leaders; and excluding false professors from the fellowship. He provides an excellent definition of the local church as “a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinance.” He neatly unpacks this definition through the lenses of Matt 16, 18, 26, and 28. He also describes the biblical metaphors of the church, and the requirements for church membership which include faith, repentance, and baptism. He concludes his book with an explanation of the need for church discipline as a God-given tool to help members more faithfully represent Jesus in the world. Leeman’s book makes a significant contribution to the direction of my research in the areas of restoring a biblical concept of church membership. The church to which he belongs requires a six session pre-membership class which

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50 Ibid., 52.
includes faith, church covenant, and more. However, his book does not include the core of my position, the use of catechesis to better ensure regenerate church membership.

Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright’s book, *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ,*⁵¹ could be categorized as a biblical, historical, and practical source for inquiry into the subject at hand. As a collection of essays on topics ranging from baptism in the Gospel of Acts, to the Patristics, to the Reformation, to Restorationism, the book is primarily written to counter infant baptism and to promote believer’s baptism. It offers helpful insight into the biblical language and practice of baptism, the origin of infant baptism within the covenant of grace and reformed theology, and touches on regenerate church membership. The most pertinent chapters to this study are Steven McKinion’s Chapter 5 essay on “Baptism in the Patristic Writings” and Mark Dever’s Chapter 10 “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church.” McKinion demonstrates that the church fathers, though some practiced infant baptism, emphasized the significance of baptism as an initiatory rite, even to point of delay for the purpose of testing one’s faith. Such was the case with Hippolytus in *Apostolic Tradition.* Dever offers practical applications of the foregoing essays for the local church. He encourages the use of pastoral interviews and membership classes for baptismal candidates. He also endorses delay of baptism for the purpose of examining a professor’s life, but only when necessary, especially in the case of baptizing children. Though this book makes contributions to my case for delayed baptism, it doesn’t go far enough in prescribing pre-baptismal instruction for all candidates regardless of age for the purpose of better ensuring a regenerate church membership.

Thomas Nettles and Steve Weaver provide an excellent survey of Baptist catechisms in their book, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life.* Weaver, as a reformed theologian, provides the introduction to the *Orthodox Catechism* by Hercules Collins as it was written by a Particular Baptist (Calvinist) for Particular Baptists in England. Nettles provides much of the commentary on the rest of the book tracing significant catechisms utilized by Baptists from Europe to America. Each chapter examines a separate catechism. At the beginning of each chapter, the writers provide an adequate background to the catechism’s author, his influences, the circumstances in which he wrote, and the format of the catechism. This is followed by the actual text of the catechism. The authors meet their objective of demonstrating that Baptists embraced catechism at least through Broadus in 1892. All seven of the catechisms (**The Orthodox Catechism** [Collins], **The Baptist Catechism** [Keach], **Catechism for Girls and Boys** [Cecil], **The First Principles of the Oracles of God** [Sutcliff], **Notes and Questions for the Oral Instruction of Colored People** [Winkler], **A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine** [Boyce], and **A Catechism of Bible Teaching** [Broadus]), contain articles on believer’s baptism and are especially tailored to children. However, all of them are designed to be used by families and churches to raise children in the knowledge of God’s Word so that they may come to salvation in time. This application assumes Christian families raising children in a Christian context. While this is an appropriate use of catechisms, I argue that regardless of age, baptism should be delayed at least long enough to instruct professing believers, especially regarding the doctrines of regeneration, baptism, and the church.

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In his important book, *Baptist Catechisms: To Make Thee Wise Unto Salvation*, Thomas Nettles provides a helpful summary of the historical use of catechisms among Baptists. Though not as thorough as his book *Teaching Truth: Training Hearts*, this book reveals how Baptists have employed catechisms as an evangelistic tool and orientation to Christian doctrine. In addition to the historical practice, Nettles explains that the Bible encourages the formulation of “organized truth into readily digestible portions.” He recognizes these portions in Deut 6; Neh 8:8; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Tim 1:15-17; 3:12-16; 6:12-16; 2 Tim 1:8-10; 2:11-13; and Titus 2:11-14.

Further, Nettles notes the practicality of catechisms in helping churches redeem the time, providing building blocks for better Scripture comprehension, demonstrating the consistency and clarity of Scripture, and bolstering one’s faith in one’s conflict with sin. *Baptist Catechisms* contains a review of Baptist catechisms from 1652-1892, some of which are repeated in *Teaching Truth* while offering some unique to this text (ex. St. Paul’s Catechism, Exposition of the Baptist Catechism, and Compend of Christian Doctrines Held By Baptists). As a pre-conversion tool, Nettles recommends the use of *Catechism for Girls and Boys* (ages 3-5); *Baptist Catechism* (ages 6-8); and *The Baptist Scriptural Catechism and the Second London Confession* (as a follow up for ages 9-12). Though an excellent resource for background and applications for use of catechisms in Baptist life and while one wouldn’t disagree with the use of catechisms as a pre-conversion tool, my research is still unique in its argument for using catechisms as a post-conversion/pre-baptism instrument for professing believers regardless of age.

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54 Ibid., 4.
In the book by Catholic theologian Josef Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith*, the subject of catechism in the Catholic tradition is unpacked. Jungmann first surveys the history of catechisms in the Church to the present day. Then, he explains the who, what, where, when, and why of catechism before finally unpacking his “active learner” method of catechism. There are parallels between his observations from Catholic life and my concerns with the Southern Baptist Convention. For instance, he indicates that typically institutions decline when catechesis is lacking or laid aside. He believes it was the lack of catechesis that opened the door for the Reformers to convince Catholics to leave the Catholic faith. I see a similar pattern of decline in Southern Baptist church attendance since the last published Southern Baptist catechism in 1892. Jungmann’s expertise of catechetical method can be seen throughout the book as well as his commitment to a Christo-centric perspective and developmental psychology in developing his method. However, he is writing from the position that children are already baptized and are being instructed over the course of several years, primarily through the Catholic school system. While his insights are helpful for establishing the essential nature of catechizing believing children, I argue that catechism should be required as a post-conversion/pre-baptism course for all new believers, regardless of age.

**Historical Books**

Everett Ferguson’s seminal book, *Baptism in the Early Church*, provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of the first six centuries of baptismal history across the Christian world from Spain to Constantinople, from Gaul to North Africa. Ferguson focuses, not only on

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the prominent theologians and their writings, but also provides insight on baptism from more obscure writers and documents. He traces the historical similarities of baptism doctrine and practice during the Patristic period, such as baptism providing the forgiveness of sins and the imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as being a death, burial, and resurrection, as well as deliverance from Satan, clothing in Christ, and enlightenment. Further common elements included faith and repentance, catechetical instruction, being baptized in the nude, triple immersion, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil. He also highlights the historical distinctives that occurred over time such as the post-baptismal anointing becoming confirmation in the West; the liturgy including the opening of the ears and foot washing in Milan; the liturgy including spitting in the renunciation of the Devil in the East; and catechism preceding baptism, but following baptism in others. Ferguson provides a wealth of original sources related to baptism, demonstrates the historical closeness of baptism and the church, highlights the consistent use of catechism for catechumens, and reveals the expectation of regeneration, i.e. a changed of life at and after baptism, especially prior to the practice of infant baptism. The strength of Ferguson’s magnificent work is its historical descriptions and explanations. However, my research goes further, building on Ferguson’s historical foundation to demonstrate that Baptists understood and practiced the same values as the early church in utilizing catechisms and emphasizing the great doctrines of repentance and regeneration, as they related to the church.

Thomas Oden’s four volume set, *John Wesley’s Teachings*,\textsuperscript{57} provides the reader with both an overview and commentary on Wesley’s theology. Volume 1 reviews Wesley’s understanding of God and Providence. Volume 2 summarizes his Pastoral Theology. Volume 3 delves into Christ and Salvation. And Volume 4 sets forth his views on Ethics and Society. Many

applications of Wesley’s theology can be made to the present study. 1) Wesley’s quadrilateral method, i.e. the need for understanding the authority of Scripture in the light of tradition, reason, and experience, provides ample justification for delaying baptism for instruction; 2) Wesley’s insistence on the new birth resulting in observable evidences of changed behavior is very consistent with the historic Baptist position of delayed baptism to ensure a person is truly regenerate; 3) Wesley’s analogy of faith, which is helping one see what “connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness,” describes much of what could be included in a basic catechism; 4) Wesley’s “Soul Care,” the ministry in which a pastor leads persons of various ages, backgrounds, and struggles through the stages of spiritual birth, growth, despair, and victories, an intense, close relationship similar to that found between ancient catechists and catechumenates; and 5) Wesley’s “societies,” small accountability groups formed for the purpose of spiritual formation, including high expectations to participate, are much like Baptist’s historical expectations for church membership. Though some of Wesley’s beliefs and practices are applicable to my argument, most of Wesley’s methods are post-conversion and implemented long after his practice of infant baptism. My contention is that Southern Baptists should set forth high standards for church membership through thorough pre-baptismal instruction.

In 1810, Virginia Baptist pastor, leader, and historian Robert B. Semple wrote *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia: A True Story of the Early Baptist Churches in Virginia- What They Believed and Stood For.* In this valuable book, Semple traces three

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58 Ibid., Vol. 1, 71.
branches of Virginia Baptists which migrated into the state from England (1714), Maryland (1743), and New England (1744). While briefly covering the first two groups in the closing chapters, his primary attention is given to the latter group, the Separatists, who made up the majority and had the greatest “rise and progress” among Virginia Baptists. The book has narrative portions, describing the beginnings of associations along with invaluable minutes from associational meetings during this era. From these records, the book recounts the history and health of the churches which made up the associations as well as the issues, both practical and doctrinal, that were taken up. Continuous themes of these frontier associations and churches included: the ongoing recruitment of pastors, the successes and struggles of pastors and congregations, persecution of Baptists, frequent revivals, and consequently, baptisms. Though often identifying the enemies as the Established Church (Anglican), Methodism (with its accompanying Arminianism), infant baptism among Presbyterians, and Arianism/Socianism (whether literal or a derogatory description of his opponents), Semple champions Calvinism among Baptists, along with believer’s baptism by immersion. By 1809, the question of using a catechism for children was raised and debated. Opponents argued that a catechism would usurp the authority of Scripture. Proponents argued that catechisms simply restated what Scripture taught and thereby strengthened the Baptist commitment to Scripture. Churches were encouraged to utilize John Cotton’s Milk for Babes already in print. Semple was a strong critic of Baptists’ neglect of educating their children in the Scripture and a strong supporter of catechesis for this purpose. As a descriptive history of Baptists, A History does not prescribe that Baptist churches should utilize catechism in the way I am arguing. Like most catechisms historically used by Baptists, it documents the recommendation for a pre-conversion catechesis of children

60 Ibid., 62.
(essentially religious education for children of Christian parents), while I’m arguing for a post-conversion, pre-baptismal use of catechism for all ages.

In Michael F. Bird’s very accessible book on the theology of the Apostles’ Creed, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine through the Apostles’ Creed,* he describes the central role creeds have played in communicating what Christians believe. According to the author, the Hebrew Old Testament informed Jesus’ teachings on the gospel of the Kingdom, which informed apostolic teaching and the Apostle’s writings (Christian Scripture), which informed the rule of faith, which informed the early creeds, which informed the biblical canon. He advocates for teaching and learning the creeds as they help one grow in biblical faith. Further, learning the creeds enhances public worship, promotes unity, reminds Christians of God’s overarching plan, improves personal devotional lives, and reminds believers of the pledge they made at baptism. He unpacks the Apostles’ Creed phrase by phrase in a manner that draws the reader beneath the surface of summary statements, into the deep riches of meaning behind the text. While accomplishing his purpose of introducing the reader to the theology of the Apostles’ Creed, he does not, as this dissertation does, advocate for using the Apostles’ Creed (or another ancient Christian creed) as part of catechetical instruction for baptismal candidates, as was the common practice of the church fathers through the fourth century.

Articles

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In his 2014 article in the *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* entitled “An Encouragement to Use Catechisms,” Nettles sets forth the historical and biblical basis for using catechisms today. He firmly establishes the command of Scripture for pastors, teachers, parents, and the faith community (Jewish in the Old Testament and Christian in the New) to teach children the core of biblical faith both before and after baptism. He briefly highlights the common use of catechesis in the early centuries of the church. This practice changed with the wide acceptance of infant baptism at the end of the fourth century, changing pre-baptismal instruction to “after the fact” instruction in preparation for confirmation. He notes the shift back to catechetical instruction during Charlemagne’s reign due to mass Christianization. Nettles describes the Reformation as the golden age of catechisms, serving as a means of confession of faith and correction of Roman Catholic error. He answers the concerns of the dangers of rote memorization, which he compares to head knowledge versus heart knowledge, by insisting that catechetical content has been used historically to bring one to heart knowledge of Jesus Christ and memorization as having benefits throughout the lifetime of a Christian. He answers the concern that catechisms might be viewed as replacing the Scripture by demonstrating Protestantism’s consistent practice of the Scripture being the supreme and sufficient source of knowledge. He briefly mentions catechesis as a guard of church purity and describes the practical benefits of the use of catechisms. However, Nettles neither specifically prescribes catechesis as a means of restoring the Baptist principle of a regenerate church membership nor insists upon a post-conversion, pre-baptismal use of catechesis. My research argues for both.

Jeff Robinson’s article “Are Catechisms a Baptist Thing?” makes similar points as Nettles (above), citing Nettles as a source for his argument for the use of catechisms in Baptist life. His opening illustration about his own child’s conversion and his plan to “watch him for a while and thoroughly catechize him in sound doctrine” before baptizing him is met with the comment “I didn’t realize you all were Roman Catholic.” This demonstrates a misconception among many that Baptists and catechisms are antithetical, when history proves otherwise. Robinson rehearses Nettles’ argument, citing Collins, Keach, Grantham, Taylor, Jessey, Boyce, and Broadus to show that Baptist have a long track record of use of catechesis, up until about 100 years ago. Robinson provides four reasons to use catechisms: 1) Children memorize facts like glue; 2) Catechizing puts children in the realm of grace (meaning exposing them to the good news); 3) Catechizing children gives them a Christian worldview; and 4) Seeds planted can bloom into a harvest of grace. It is Robinson’s fourth reason that pivots his position away from what seemed promising in his opening illustration of his intentions to catechize his child before baptism. Rather, here one finds him reverting back to catechizing pre-conversion, leading to conversion, and then baptism. My position maintains that catechism should be post-conversion and pre-baptismal for all converts, just as the early church provided after candidates put forth their names to the bishops.

Jeff Brumley’s article “Baptists Eye Catechism (again) to Instruct the Faithful” strikes an optimistic tone that Baptists are reconsidering the use of catechism again, as worship

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64 Ibid.

attendance decreases and denominations decline. Brumley’s article interviews Nathan Taylor and Thomas Nettles, both of the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as, Bill Leonard and Janice Haywood, both of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. These diverse historians demonstrate a common interest in recovering “an ancient solution” to the challenges Baptists are facing. Taylor seems the least convinced of the possibilities of reimplementing catechisms among Baptists while, Nettles consistently champions the practice. Nettles aptly points out that catechisms often decline with the rise of denominationalism. This seems to be the case for Southern Baptists around the turn of the twentieth century. Leonard’s optimism is that as the Southern Baptist and Cooperative Baptist denominations decline, the possibility of catechesis is returning. Haywood sees the potential of using catechesis to bring children to faith, thus preparing them for baptism. However, she does not elaborate on the context in which this instruction would be provided. She observes that children’s attendance in Sunday School has waned and she believes catechism could help fill the void of theological education. While these are positive signs, none of the four historians call for a post-conversion, pre-baptismal catechism for all ages of converts as my research argues.

Clinton Arnold’s article, “Early Church Catechesis and New Christians’ Classes in Contemporary Evangelicalism” is an excellent piece on the inadequacies of modern new believer classes compared to the high standard set by the catechumenate of the church fathers. He asks pertinent questions of our modern new believer processes: 1) Is a few-week process long enough? 2) Are new believers immersed in Scripture? 3) Is the creed emphasized enough? 4) Is repentance emphasized and facilitated? and 5) Is spiritual warfare taken seriously? He unpacks these questions through a historical lens and concludes that the ancient catechumenate, as it

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instructed new believers, was equivalent to a new believer’s class. He reveals that the early church’s instruction for new believers lasted up to three years, was heavily immersed in Scripture, emphasized the memorization of the Creed, required moral transformation through repentance, renunciation, and adhesion, and conducted multiple exorcisms in acknowledgement of the reality of spiritual forces at work against the new believer. Arnold concludes that historically, catechesis was seen as “a commitment to a rigorous course of study, prepare for baptism, and join the community of believers.” His article observes key historical features of catechesis which include: 1) immersion in Scripture 2) focused on the major doctrines of the faith; 3) the expectation of repentance and a changed life; and 4) taking spiritual warfare seriously. His recommendation is that new believer’s classes should be extended to include these features. However, he does not recommend a true catechesis, in the historical sense of question and answer and memorization of the Creed. My argument is that Southern Baptist churches, in order to restore a regenerate church membership, must implement a post-conversion, pre-baptismal catechism that emphasizes these key historical features, with perhaps the exception of emphasizing spiritual warfare.

In “Arguing Regenerate Church Membership: Baptist Identity During the First Decade, 1610-1620,” Bill Pitts demonstrates that Baptist identity was not founded upon covenant, but upon believer’s baptism, emphasizing individual repentance and faith and the church’s nature as believers only. While Pitts’ article is primarily focused on early Baptist theologians’ arguments against infant baptism, his explanation of the reasons behind this theology are pertinent to my

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67 Ferguson, 451, notes that Canon 14 of the Council of Nicaea, 325 required “that catechumens who have fallen away and then returned are to spend three years with the ‘hearers.’”

68 Arnold, 42.

69 Bill Pitts, “Arguing Regenerate Church Membership: Baptist Identity During the First Decade, 1610-1620,” in Baptist History and Heritage (Winter 2019).
research, specifically regarding Baptist’s understanding of the nature of the church and regenerate church membership. He examines the doctrine of John Smyth (1609), who defined the church as “a company of the faithful; baptized after confession of sin and faith,” and baptism as “an outward sign of the remission of sins, of dying and being made alive, and therefore does not belong to infants.” Smyth’s convictions were so strong that he declared those who rejected believer’s baptism were false churches with false baptisms. The same strong stance was held by Thomas Helwys who planted the first Baptist church in England. In his Declaration of Faith of English People, 1611, he defined baptism as an outward, visible token of repentance and faith in Christ. Against infant baptism, Helwys emphasized the sequence of Matt 28:18 as making disciples, teaching them, and then baptizing them. Within this sequence was the expectation that the individual had repented (Mark 16:16), dying to sin, and was walking in the newness of life (Rom 6:2-4). He too declared churches that did not hold to believer’s baptism to be false churches. This included not only the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church, but also John Robinson’s Puritan-Separatist church and the Brownists. Leonard Bush in A Plea for Liberty of Conscience (1614) continued this biblical, Baptist argument for a regenerate church membership, insisting upon the new birth. Further, John Murton took up the mantle of Baptist insistence upon repentance, faith, and regeneration preceding baptism in his book A Description of What God Hath Predestined Concerning Man (1620). Appealing strongly to Scripture, Murton “developed a three-fold formula and sequence of repentance, faith, and baptism as the essentials to belonging to the Church of Christ.” While neither addressing delayed baptism nor catechism,

70 Ibid., 23, quoting John Smyth in “Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles, by John Smyth.”


72 Ibid., 33.
Pitts’ article establishes that Baptist faith and practice was founded on the principle of a regenerate church membership dating back to the early 1600s. My research builds on this historical evidence in its call for Southern Baptists to recover this foundational principle by reforming its prerequisites for baptism and admission to membership.

In January 2019, Gavin Ortlund and Jonathan Leeland (both credobaptists) wrote a series of articles related to baptism and church membership on the website, mereorthodoxy.com. These articles included: 1) “Can We Reject Paedobaptism and Still Receive Paedobaptists?” by Gavin Ortlund; 2) “Church Membership and the Definition of Baptism,” by Jonathan Leeland (a response to Ortlund’s first article); 3) “There is One Baptism, but Not One Baptist View of Baptism,” by Gavin Ortlund (his reply to Leeland’s response); and 4) “Baptist Sacramentology and the Concern with Donatism,” by Jonathan Leeland (Leeland’s final response to Ortlund’s reply). I will treat these as a whole, particularly as they pertain to the Baptist distinctive of regenerate church membership and baptism. Ortlund argues for a more relaxed Baptist position on admitting to church membership those who’ve been baptized as infants. He explains that there is a distinction between improper baptism and invalid baptism. He believes church unity trumps improper baptism, citing Bunyan and Piper as those who would agree with his position. Leeland responds by explaining that the historic Baptist position on true baptism is the subjective faith of the baptized at the time of baptism, which makes infant baptism improper at best, and invalid at

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worst. This position hinges on the scriptural commands of Christ to be baptized upon repentance and faith, a command Leeland has no authority to circumvent. Ortlund’s response is that there is no one “Baptist” view on proper baptism and views of membership over time and context have produced varying views among Baptists, including “hard closed,” “soft closed,” “modified closed,” “modified open,” “pluralistic open,” and “wide open.” Thus, Ortlund believes that it is possible to honor one’s sincere belief that one has been baptized and thereby join a Baptist church, even if that baptism was before subjective faith. Ortlund suggests that Leeland’s position would produce the same rebaptism arguments held by the Donatists, which were rejected by the early church. Leeland disagrees, holding firm to the historic Baptist position of faith preceding baptism. And rather than holding a Donatist view (that the lack of faith of the baptizer can invalidate one’s baptism), Leeland explains that the proper Trinitarian, gospel-affirming faith held and preached by the church matters in one’s baptism, as baptism is an extension of what the Church believes and proclaims. This dialogue between Ortlund and Leeland highlights the ongoing struggle among Baptists of holding to biblical and historical positions on baptism and regenerate church membership. These issues were at the root of Baptist beginnings and must continue to be defended and if lost, reclaimed. My research involves the attempt to reclaim these historical doctrines in an attempt to preserve a pure church.

Robert Matz’s well-written dissertation, “Should Southern Baptists Baptize Their Children? A Biblical, Historical, Theological Defense of the Consistency of the Baptism of Young Children with Credobaptistic Practices,” argues that children are cognitively capable of understanding the gospel, can be converted, and should be baptized contemporaneously upon
their profession of faith. As the title indicates, Matz examines the biblical accounts of conversion and baptism (especially in Acts) as well as the Gospels’ view of children and faith. His survey of Southern Baptist history of childhood conversions and baptisms is forthright and helpful, indicating that baptizing children is not a new invention but can be traced back to early Baptists through biographies and increasingly through church reporting. What isn’t indicated in the title is Matz’s unpacking of the developmental psychology theories most often cited to defend delayed baptism of children. His updates to Piaget and Fowler’s theories with Chi’s theory of “islands of competence” is useful. While rejecting baptismal delay for the reason of cognitive inability to understand faith, Matz recommends greater counseling of children to avoid false conversions and rebaptisms. Though his argument insists upon contemporaneous baptism upon profession of faith, my assumption is that he would not oppose at least a basic form of instruction of children to insure they understand the faith. My position goes further, however, as I argue for an extended post-conversion, pre-baptismal time of instruction of both young and old to ensure the candidate understands the faith.

These sources have increased my knowledge and appreciation for the significant place baptism has held in the church, scripturally, historically, and theologically. My understanding has increased in that though different aspects of baptism have been emphasized by various traditions, the common threads of baptism with water, as obedience to Christ, upon confession of faith (whether by individuals, parents, or sponsors), and as a strong connection to the church has remained consistent over time. One finds that instructing believers in the faith existed in Scripture, emerged as catechesis in the early church, gradually ceased with the widespread acceptance of infant baptism (fourth century) and mass conversions to Christianity (eighth century), reemerged in the Reformation, and was utilized among Baptists in varying degrees
until the end of the 19th century. The research calls for Baptists to return to catechesis in the modern age. However, the call is faint and applied primarily to pre-conversion instruction of children of Christian families within the church. While this is a worthy enterprise, my argument goes further than the existing literature by calling Southern Baptists to reclaim their biblical and historical commitment to a regenerate church membership, by guarding the door to believer’s baptism by way of post-conversion catechesis of all baptismal candidates regardless of age.

**Statement of Methodology**

This study will utilize both a theological and historical approach, examining pertinent texts in the Holy Bible related to baptism. I will examine early church history, Baptist history, and particularly Southern Baptist history related to the use of catechisms, the practice of baptism, and the principle of regenerate church membership. I will make a biblical argument from the relevant primary and secondary sources in the theological and historical literature.

**Chapter Summaries**

This study argues that reform is needed in Baptist churches in the preparation for believer’s baptism. As Baptists are “people of the Book,” it is most appropriate to survey what the Bible teaches about the meaning of baptism. The first chapter will address the biblical texts commonly agreed upon by Baptists regarding baptism, as well as those most commonly disagreed upon. Though space will not allow for an exposition of every passage that pertains to baptism,78 attention will be given to those used by opponents of delayed baptism contrasted with the passages used by those who are proponents of delayed baptism.

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The second chapter of this study will consider the practice of the early church fathers related to delayed baptism and pre-baptismal instruction. While there is much regression in the doctrine of baptism in these early centuries, moving away from credobaptism to pedobaptism and from baptism being an outward sign of an inward reality toward baptismal regeneration, one still finds the church practicing due diligence in preparing the catechumenate for baptism and full membership by way of catechesis.

The third chapter will examine the baptismal practices of the Reformation period with special emphasis on the practices of the magisterial reformers Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, and particular attention to the theology of one radical reformer Balthasar Hubmaier. Though the magisterial reformers maintained the Catholic practice of infant baptism in their churches, they also utilized catechisms, bringing this format of religious instruction into Protestantism. Hubmaier will be distinguished from the magisterial reformers and shown to be an important doctrinal link between Anabaptists and Baptists in use of catechisms and the practice of believer’s baptism.

While the previous chapters of this study are foundational, the fourth chapter gets to the heart of my argument for the recovery of the Baptist practices of catechesis, delayed baptism, and insistence on a regenerate church membership. It will demonstrate that Baptists consistently published and encouraged the use of catechisms from around 1600-1900. It is only in the last century that Baptists laid these practice aside. It will be proposed that perhaps Baptist leaders while rightly focusing on preaching, reaching, and baptizing have neglected regenerate church membership by expediting baptism for the sake of growth. This negligence has hindered church purity and witness. Regardless of philosophy or motive, the discontinuation of pre-baptismal
instruction has contributed to the problem of Baptist church rolls filled with names of those who professed and were baptized, but have little to no relationship with the church.

The fifth chapter discusses the implications of implementing delayed baptism for pre-baptismal instruction with the aim of better ensuring a regenerate church membership in the Southern Baptist Convention. A model will be proposed for implementation in Southern Baptist churches. Admittedly, as Baptist churches are autonomous, I am not suggesting that all churches should adopt the same pre-baptismal process. However, I believe each Baptist church should prayerfully reconsider its responsibility to preserve the faith once for all delivered to the saints and to do all it can to ensure a regenerate church membership.

Many positive results can come from returning to this historical practice: 1) Greater assurance of salvation for the one undergoing pre-baptismal instruction; 2) Deeper understanding of the rich meaning of baptism at the point of baptism; 3) Clearer expectations of church membership; 4) Greater uniformity in church members’ commitment to the church; 5) Clearer witness to the world of what it means to be a professing, baptized believer; 6) Greater fulfillment of the church’s biblical description as “the pillar and ground of truth.” Still, there will likely be short term consequences of returning to the historic Baptist practice of pre-baptismal instruction: 1) Baptist churches, steeped in tradition, may resist changes to their simple process of quickly baptizing; 2) Some, especially those who hold that behavior does not indicate regeneration, will reject this historic practice all together; 3) Perhaps some who are less inclined to academics will resist being required to take a class that includes study and memorization before baptism; 4) Churches may encounter difficulty in requiring baptismal candidates to commit to attending several weeks of instruction; 5) Some, due to having to delay their baptism until the completion

79 1 Tim 3:15.
of a pre-baptismal class, may fall away from faith and never get baptized. Some may blame the church and its policies for this outcome. However, this may serve the church well in that the person did not demonstrate true repentance; 6) Some whose church refused them baptism apart from a pre-baptismal class may choose to be baptized by another minister or church who does not uphold these historic standards; 7) Churches could potentially lose members who leave to join churches with lower standards; and 8) Some pastors, due to strong convictions in this matter, could potentially choose or be forced to leave their churches, if their churches are unwilling to make changes to their baptismal process.
CHAPTER ONE: A BIBLICAL CASE FOR DELAYED BAPTISM

For Baptists, arguments regarding faith and practice begin with Scripture. While Baptists have a rich heritage of holding beliefs consistent with historical creeds and have produced many confessions of their own, they have prided themselves in being “People of the Book” and as having “No Creed but the Bible.” These mantras are an attempt to reflect the Baptist conviction that the Christian faith and practice must be grounded in “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). However, while Baptists are united in general, they often disagree on specifics. This is true regarding baptism, as most Baptists though agreeing on the meaning and mode of baptism, still debate the Scripture’s teaching on immediacy versus delay.

References to baptism in the New Testament are numerous and a full treatment of the subject is beyond the scope of this study. However, there are particular texts related to baptism, its timing, and its relation to the church that will be discussed. In this chapter, I will emphasize Scripture’s command to baptize, to baptize only believers, and to instruct believers in the faith. Special attention will be given to baptism in the book of Acts as it is the epicenter of disagreement regarding the timing of baptism. From the Scripture, I will argue that Scripture provides the theological space needed for Southern Baptist churches to delay baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal instruction to better ensure a regenerate church membership.

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80 For a list of numerous Baptist treatises that include the subject of believer’s baptism, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 79.

81 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

The Command to Baptize

The practice of Christian baptism finds its root in Jesus’ command in Matt 28:18-20, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” For many, this text is understood as a straightforward command from the Lord Jesus. Still, critical scholars have questioned the authenticity of Matt 28:18-20 due to verse 19 being the only place in the New Testament containing the Trinitarian formula for baptism. Acts and Paul call for baptism in Jesus’ name (Acts 2:38; 41; 8:12; 36-38; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 1:1-17). Beasley-Murray considers this critical observation to be the weightiest of critics’ objections, admitting there is not one example of anyone in the New Testament being baptized in the name of the Trinity. Critics suggest that the Trinitarian formula was an interpolation of later Christians in defense against heresies pertaining to the Trinity, though the formula had become well established by the time of the


85 Beasley-Murray, 82.

86 Ibid., 81, citing F.C. Conybeare in “The Eusebian Form of the Text Matthew 28:19,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1901, who concluded that “Eusebius did not know the longer form of the text until the Council of Nicea, when the trinitarian doctrine became established.” He found the same ignorance in Justin and Hermas.
Another objection to the authenticity of Matt 28:18-20 is that a commission by Jesus to reach all nations would be quite unusual considering the early church’s Jewish converts’ attitude toward Gentiles. However, though Matthew’s audience is Jewish, this objection fails to recognize Matthew’s recording Jesus’ birth being attended by the magi (Matt 3), Jesus’ genealogy which includes Gentile women, and Jesus’s ministry to the Gentiles in Matt 4, 15, and 18. Jewish converts would not have thought it inconsistent that God’s plan of salvation reached beyond the Jewish nation.

While admitting Matt 28:19 seems more like the formulas of the Patristic era than words that were from Jesus’ own lips, France concludes that the evidence that Matt 28:18-20 is not original to the Gospel of Matthew is unconvincing and that the Trinitarian formula was what Matthew and his church knew, as reflected later in the Didache. He reasons that it is Matthew’s Gospel that records the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’s involvement in Jesus’ baptism (3:16-17). Additionally, France points out that church historian Eusebius regularly quotes the text as we know it (in its Trinitarian form). Thus, he argues that Eusebius’ shorter or altered versions of baptism “in the name of Jesus” or “the Lord” were simply abbreviations of the Trinitarian formula. A simpler explanation is provided by Kostenberger who writes, “It appears more

Didache (Didache 7:1,3). Didache 9.5 also refers to “baptism in the name of the Lord.”

Beasley-Murray, 78. Beasley-Murray in agreement with J. Lindblom in Jesu Missions-och Dopbefallning, Tillika en Studie over det kristma Dopets Ursprung. Uppsala, Stockholm, 1919, concluding that the historical origin of baptism is of less consequence than the spiritual authority for baptism, whether given by the Lord to his disciples or by the Lord to the church.

Ibid., 81, citing E. Klostermann in “Das Matthauseevangelium,” in H. Lietzmann’s Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 357, where he argues that if there is a longer and shorter version of the formula in Eusebius, the shorter is to be preferred as the original. To the contrary and in agreement with R.T. France, Beasley-Murray points out that Eusebius uses both shorter and longer versions even after Nicaea. Further, Lindblom adds that Eusebius argued in Contra Marcellum, that the Trinity was a truth hidden from Moses and the prophets but revealed by Jesus. He concluded that Eusebius combined Matthew 28:19 with Matt 10:8; 24:14, and John 20:24 and that “in my name” is due to the example in Luke 24:47 and Mark 16:17. Further, Eusebius chose the longer or shorter form based on whether he was teaching on baptism or the Trinity.
likely that the early church felt no contradiction between Jesus’ command to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and its practice of baptizing in the name of Jesus, since the latter implied the former.”90 One must conclude that if Matt 28:18-20 is authentic, then it is also authoritative for the church. Baptism is commanded by our Lord.

The Greek word “baptizing” in verse 19 is the transliteration of the verb *baptizo*. Thayer defines *baptizo* as “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge.” In the New Testament use, *baptizo* means “an immersion in water, performed as a sign of the removal of sin, and administered to those who, impelled by a desire for salvation, sought admission into the Kingdom of the Messiah.”91 Explaining the root of *bapto* Ferguson wrote, “The basic meaning of *bapto* is ‘to plunge,’ ‘to dip’ in a yielding medium, usually a liquid.”92 *Bapto* was used to describe plunging a weapon into a person (“to wet”), to submerge as in a sinking ship, and to dip a container in a liquid in order to draw the liquid up as in dipping a bucket into a water well. A secondary use of *bapto* was “to dye” as in dipping fabric in dye in order to color it. References to the use and meaning of the root *bapt* with its family of related words are replete in historical, religious, and academic writings and therefore will not be elaborated on here.93 Suffice it to say, that Christ commanded that his followers dip or plunge new disciples in water upon profession of faith.94

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92 Ferguson, 38.


94 See R.C.H. Lenske, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1951), 1173-1174, for the minority view that New Testament and Early Church baptisms were other than immersion.
The Command to Baptize Only Believers Implied

The New Testament knows no such thing as an unbaptized believer. Indeed, when Paul mentions baptism, he assumes all believers have been baptized. However, by the fourth century, infant baptism came into practice, eventually becoming the norm for the next thousand years. Infant baptism was born out of a sincere concern for the souls of infants and small children and developed out of the doctrine of original sin and covenant theology. Yet, the practice went beyond the clear teaching of Scripture, that one must believe in order to be saved. And only those who’ve believed could be baptized. The centuries-old debate between pedobaptism and credobaptism is beyond the scope of this research. However, the Scriptural basis for believer’s-only baptism will be presented below.

Believer’s baptism (credobaptism) by definition is that one must first repent and believe in order to be baptized. Jesus’ command to baptize in Matt 28:19 implies that the gospel has been presented, repentance has been made, and the message has been received by faith, making the convert eligible to be baptized. Godwin states, “Baptism comes after conviction of sin, repentance of sin, and confession of Christ as Lord and Savior.” Yeats puts it succinctly, “the body of Christ is comprised of those who are regenerated believers. For Baptists our claim has


98 Godwin, 151.
been and remains that this inward regeneration is best demonstrated through the public rite of believer’s baptism. This is why we claim a ‘believer’s church.’”

In 1 Pet 3:21, Peter makes the statement that has puzzled many, “baptism saves you.” This would seem to support a sacramental view of baptism and possibly pedobaptism. However, upon closer examination, the text implies that it is faith in the death and Resurrection of Christ that saves. Schreiner writes, “Baptism is only saving if there is an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, baptism saves only because it is anchored in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Hence, one believes in the cross and Resurrection and appeals to God for a clear conscience (the forgiveness of sins) based on this faith. This must precede baptism and makes one eligible for baptism.

Titus 3:5 is pertinent to this research as it declares the new life of a believer and will be discussed more in-depth below. This verse establishes that believers are those who have been regenerated and renewed. These are essential as they indicate a crossing of a “boundary between the old life and the new.” Only those who’ve been graciously brought across this boundary by personal faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized.

France states, “It is not enough that the nations hear the message; they must also respond with the same whole hearted commitment which was required of those who became disciples of Jesus during his ministry (see, e.g., 8:19-22; 19:21-22, 27-29).” Personal faith is the response necessary to become a disciple and be baptized. This is the foundation upon which Baptists base

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100 Schreiner, 70.
101 Ibid., 85.
102 France, 1115.
believer’s-only baptism. This position is further strengthened by the consistent requirement throughout the book of Acts to believe in order to be baptized. Thus, the association between faith and baptism is strong and clear in Scripture. Perhaps no issue is more important for Southern Baptist churches than to examine their commitment to follow the Scripture on believer’s-only baptism and to reexamine their process of preparing candidates for baptism.

The Timing of Baptism

Though baptism is a command from the Lord to his church, the timing of baptism is not commanded. Granted in Acts, some of the baptisms occur soon after conversion and, in some cases, the same day. However, the accounts describe a transitional period between the old and new covenant in the midst of the rapid expansion of the gospel to the nations. These unique circumstances sometimes resulted in but did not necessitate immediate baptism.

R.T. France argues for immediate baptism based on the order of the two participles in Matt 28:19, “baptizing” and “teaching.” This seems to be the most common view among Baptists. The imperative in verse 18 is “make disciples,” while the participles “spell out the process of making disciples.” He argues that the practice of teaching before baptism that came into vogue in the Patristic period contradicts Matthew’s model. Matthew indicates baptism is to be the point of enrollment into a process of learning which is never complete.103 However, one could argue that simple sequence or order of words does not necessarily require immediacy. One could follow this order (preach, repent, believe [make disciples]) while delaying baptism in order to ensure that only those who’ve truly repented and understand what they are claiming to believe are baptized and incorporated into the church.

103 France, 1116.
G.R. Beasley-Murray discusses two views on the sequence of disciple making in Matt 28:19. The first view is most common and is stated by France above. Disciples are made by proclamation, repentance, and faith and then they are subsequently baptized and enter into instruction. A second view opposes this interpretation based on the fact that the New Testament Epistles do not recognize the possibility of an unbaptized disciple. Thus, a disciple becomes a disciple at baptism. The “participles (baptizing, teaching) describe the manner in which a disciple is made; the Church is commissioned to make disciples by baptizing men and putting them under instruction.” Beasley-Murray calls the exegesis of the second view “dubious.” He understands the chief action of the passage to be preaching which is to be received in faith in order for the hearer to become a disciple. He explains a hearer becomes a full disciple upon baptism. He states, “Baptizing belongs to the means by which a disciple is made. The instruction comes after.” In his view, the participle “teaching” is subordinate to the “make disciples, baptizing.” If Beasley-Murray is correct this would lend itself to urging immediate baptism in order to become a “full disciple.” However, this concept of discipleship of believing (a half disciple) and being baptized (a full disciple) seems to push the interpretation too far. Those who argue for delayed baptism to better ensure a regenerate church membership could potentially use this stepped explanation to argue that there is theological space for delay.

The view of immediate baptism is well represented by Robert Stein who argues for immediate baptism based on five interrelated components of conversion which he argues “take

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104 Beasley-Murray, 88-89.
105 Ibid., 89.
106 Interestingly, Beasley-Murray’s stepped approach sounds reminiscent of the process of catechesis used in the Patristic era, whereby one became a catechumenate until being baptized and becoming a neophyte (a process that required delayed baptism). See Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 373.
place at the same time, usually on the same day.”\textsuperscript{107} These components (repentance, faith, confession, regeneration, and baptism) are all present in biblical conversion, whether or not explicitly mentioned in a given text. His position is that faith and baptism are interchangeable for the same event of conversion in passages such as Gal 3:26-27, indicating little to no passage of time between the two. He finds this same association between baptism and regeneration in Titus 3:4 and the baptism of the Spirit in Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13. He states, “In the experience of the earliest Christian community this association (baptism and regeneration, which involves the coming of the Spirit) did not create any major (theological) problem because these two aspects of the conversion experience were not separated in time.”\textsuperscript{108} He finds a similar association between baptism and justification in 1 Cor 6:11. He holds that if baptism (washing) is kept contemporaneous with justification in this verse, no difficulties of interpretation occur. While Stein’s points are well taken, this position does not account for the numerous times baptism is separated from faith and regeneration in the book of Acts. Nor does it take into account that few Baptists are actually baptized on the same day as believing.

Baptism in Acts

As most of the occurrences of the verb baptize and the noun baptism occur in Luke and Acts, a more thorough investigation of these texts is warranted.\textsuperscript{109} In many published works on


\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 8.

baptisms can be explained by examining the unique circumstances in which they occur. One must be cautious when applying these historical accounts to present day church practice.

While some baptisms in Acts are explicitly stated to have occurred immediately, such as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38), Cornelius and the others (Acts 10:34-48), and the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:32-33), many conversions and baptisms are described without specifying when the converts were baptized. For example, Simon, the Magician along with other men and women believed the good news and were baptized, without any indication of how soon (Acts 8:12,13). In the account of Lydia’s conversion, the text states that the Lord opened her heart to the gospel and that she extended hospitality to the apostles (Acts 16:14-15) after she and her household were baptized. Though her baptism might have been the same day, the text doesn’t specify. Further, in the case of Crispus, his household, and the other Corinthians believing and being baptized, the text doesn’t indicate that it was immediate (Acts 18:8).

Hammett rightly observes,

While there are instances of instantaneous baptism, there are other instances where the time factor is not clear (Acts 18:7-8) and where conversions are reported without any mention of immediate baptism (4:4; 13:48); in fact, conversions are spoken of as a daily occurrence, but not baptisms (2:47; 16:5). There is some deliberate openness as to the timing of baptism. The case for believer’s baptism is much stronger than that for immediate baptism, and if the purpose for delay is to ascertain as much as possible that those to be baptized are believers, the delay seems commendable rather than questionable.113

Robert Manz argues against this position,114 holding that Crispus’ baptism in Acts 18:7,8 is straightforward: he heard, believed, and was baptized without delay. Manz believes Christian baptism and personal faith are so intimately associated as to make them closely associated in

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114 Manz, 55.
time. While it is true that hearing, believing, and being baptized show a close association and are described sequentially in the text, sequence in historical narrative does not necessarily indicate immediacy. Luke’s sequential and summary style of writing historical narrative can be recognized in Acts 11:25-26. The text reads, “So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.” These were sequential events with no textual indication of the time intervals between the events. Is one to assume each of these occurred immediately, one right after the other with no delay, even the same day? This would be an assumption at best, considering neither the genre nor the text indicate nor demand immediacy.

In Acts, perhaps the most familiar baptismal passage is Acts 2:38. This hope-filled verse comes after Peter had preached Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, resulting in the crowd asking “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The text reads, “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 2:41 records the crowd’s response, “So those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Many commentators have emphasized the “that day” portion of this verse to support the position of immediate baptism upon repentance and faith. However, a closer look at this verse and the logistics of baptizing 3000 converts leaves room for the possibility of a delay. Granted, it is possible that some began to be baptized immediately upon their response of faith. But, when considering the sheer number of 3000 souls converted in one day, it would be a challenge to baptize all of them the same day. A common objection of the past has been that to baptize that many people at once would contaminate the entire drinking water supply in Jerusalem. However, scores of immersion pools (mikwaath) for daily purifications by
the priests and worshippers have been found on or around the temple mount. Therefore, the problem was not the lack of water to immerse believers, but how long it would take to baptize 3000 by evening. Consider the circumstances of Acts 2:4-15. The Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the 120 in the upper room. The noise was such that people who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost from all around the world came from across the crowded city to find out what the raucous was all about. Some believe that at some point Peter had relocated from the upper room where the Spirit was poured out to the temple courts. Acts 2:15 reveals that Peter began addressing the crowd sometime between 9am-10am (the third hour). His sermon was not a short devotional, but rather rehearsed the history of Israel, demonstrated Jesus as the promised Messiah, and called upon the listeners to respond in faith to Jesus as Lord. It is likely that these verses are another case of Luke’s summary style of writing, which leaves the length of his sermon up for debate. Luke notes that Peter extended his sermon even longer, writing, “with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them” (Acts 2:40). If the apostles began baptizing as early at 10am, this would give them roughly 8 hours (10am-6pm) to baptize 3000 people in immersion pools around the temple mount which was already crowded because of Pentecost. To accomplish the “baptized” = “that day” position meant: 3000 converts/8 hours (10am-6pm) = 375 baptized per hour/6 per minute/1 every 10 seconds, just to finish by evening. Such a large task would make it reasonable to believe that some would have to be postponed to the following day. There would be no inconvenience as Acts 2:47 reveals that the Lord was “adding to their number day by day, those being saved” and one would assume daily baptisms. The point is that Luke’s summary statement, “those who received the word were baptized,” (Acts 2:41) does not necessitate baptism the same day, unless one argues that “the Lord added that

115 Ferguson, 170.
day” means “the Lord added those who got baptized.” This is an unnecessarily strict interpretation of “added,” especially when compared to Acts 2:47 where the text simply states “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” without any mention of baptism.

Commenting on Acts 2:47, Longnecker explains that it is the Lord Himself who adds to His church, and thus the title ho kyrios (“the Lord”) appears first in the sentence not only for grammatical reasons but also for emphasis. The present participle tous sozomenous (“those who were being saved”) is iterative, suggesting that they were added as they were being saved.” The use of the iterative “as they were being saved” appears to rule out “as they were being baptized” unless salvation occurs at baptism. If “added” means 3000 souls were “water baptized that day,” the interpreter is faced with the logistical challenges of such a feat. However, if “added” refers to one’s spiritual baptism into the body of Christ which precedes water baptism (1 Cor 12:13), there is no difficulty in understanding how 3000 souls could be “added that day.” It is reasonable to allow that a crowded capital city, during a major Jewish feast, with the


117 The assumption that 3000 were baptized the same day is made by many commentators. See Barker and Kohlenberger, "Introduction: The Constitutive Events of the Christian Mission (1:1-2:41)," in Expositor's Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition: New Testament, by Kenneth L. Barker, and John R. Kohlenberger. Zondervan, 2017. Other commentators offer possible solutions for baptizing 3000 souls on the same day which include: 1) The other apostles may have preached in different parts of the city and assisted with baptizing so many converts; 2) Baptism may have been by affusion rather than immersion to accommodate so many converts; 3) The water baptisms occurred over the course of several days. For commentary articles on these suggested interpretations, see https://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/2-41.htm. Many admit the difficulty of baptizing 3000 souls on the same day as conversion. See also, Wayne Jackson, "What About Baptism on the Day of Pentecost?" ChristianCourier.com. Accessed November 15, 2019. https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1062-what-about-baptism-on-the-day-of-pentecost.
remarkable events of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the amazing results of Peter’s profound sermon could have resulted in at least a temporary, “circumstantial” delay in baptisms.

Paul’s conversion is often listed as evidence for immediate baptism upon conversion. However, a closer look at Paul’s conversion described in Acts 9, 22, and 26 indicates a delay. The distance between Jerusalem and Damascus was approximately 150 miles. It would take approximately two weeks to travel there by foot, which is likely how Saul would have traveled with his entourage. The text indicates that Saul, upon seeing a great light, fell to the ground (Acts 9:4) as he was confronted by the resurrected Christ. The location of this life-altering event was as he “approached Damascus” (Acts 9:3) and as he “drew near to Damascus” (Acts 22:6). Thus, he still had a distance to go before arriving at the city. Significantly, in Acts 9:6, the Lord doesn’t tell Saul to get up, find water, and get baptized, but rather to get up and go to the city, and that he would be told what to do. Therefore in Acts 22:11, because he was likely in shock and blind, he “was led by the hand” by those who were with him until they came to Damascus, where he awaited further instructions. It is interesting that there is no indication that this delay distressed Saul. One doesn’t find Saul urging those attending to him to find water as soon as possible, neither out on the road leading into Damascus, nor upon residing at Judas’ house while awaiting Ananias’ visit. Rather, the text describes Saul waiting, “without sight” and neither eating nor drinking (Acts 9:9), “praying” (Acts 9:11), and at some point during the three days, receiving a vision of Ananias’ coming and restoring his sight (Acts 9:12). Ananias fulfilled the Lord’s

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118 Ferguson, 173, does not believe the text indicates that Saul was saved upon seeing Jesus, but rather when he received the Holy Spirit at his baptism by Ananias. However, this position is inconsistent with the conversion (salvation) of Apollos and eleven others who had believed, but had not yet received the Holy Spirit nor been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5). Paul acknowledged Apollos and other’s belief in Jesus (verse 4) and consequently laid hands on them, upon which they received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and were baptized. It is best to understand this as a transitional description of gospel expansion in the New Testament church, resulting in a secondary receiving of the Holy Spirit. Paul himself explains, that salvation occurs upon repentance and belief (Eph 2:8,9) not upon an atypical reception of the Holy Spirit at baptism.
command by going to Saul, laying hands on him to restore his sight, and then sharing with Saul what the Lord’s plan was for his life. Saul was a chosen instrument (Acts 9:15; 22:14) to carry the message of Christ to the Gentiles and to the people of Israel (Acts 9:15; 22:15), which would lead to suffering for Christ (Acts 9:16). Then, the text describes that Saul rose and was baptized (Acts 9:18). Granted, Paul’s description of his baptism in Acts 22:16 includes Ananias’ words, “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Still, the text does not state how long it may have taken for Saul to get dressed and for attendants to prepare water for immersion (Acts 9:19). From this description, one can gather that the delay between Saul’s conversion and baptism was at least 3 days (Acts 9:9) and perhaps longer when accounting for the travel by foot of a stumbling, blind man, the subsequent waiting upon Ananias’ visit, and the preparation of water for Saul’s immersion. Was this delay disobedience to a command in Scripture to be baptized immediately upon conversion? No. Or was delay permitted by the circumstances of awaiting Ananias’ laying on of hands (Acts 9:17), Saul’s reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17), and Ananias’ confirmation of the vision God had given Saul (Acts 22:14-15). Yes. These factors indicate, that under certain circumstances, God permitted delay. One might argue that Paul’s conversion is atypical and can hardly serve as an example of God permitting delay. However, most of the baptisms in Acts are shaped by the unique circumstances of the genesis of the church and should not be held as models for churches in all places for all time.

In Acts 8:26-39, the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion and immediate baptism by Philip are often cited as evidence that baptism should be administered without delay. While it is true that

119 Ferguson, 174, states that Paul’s dramatic conversion and subsequent baptism “serve to provide Paul with the qualifications and commission from Jesus as an apostle.”
there was no delay, the special circumstances surrounding the events should be recognized. According to verse 26, the Lord instructed Philip to travel to the desert road that led from Jerusalem down to Gaza, a distance of approximately 50 miles. The text does not initially indicate who he would encounter or at what point along the road he would find him. Somewhere along the road, Philip encountered an Ethiopian government official who was sitting in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip approached the chariot and heard the Ethiopian reading aloud, upon which Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian indicated that he needed a guide to which Philip obliged, explaining that the passage spoke of Jesus. The Ethiopian’s faith is assumed when he asks, “What prevents me from being baptized?” The chariot stopped at a body of water and Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water where the Ethiopian was immediately baptized. What prompted this immediacy? Was it a theological necessity or circumstantial? First, the remaining distance the Ethiopian had to travel from Gaza to Ethiopia was significant. If in fact the Ethiopian was returning to Ethiopia, it would have taken him several days to travel before he could be baptized. Secondly, he’d likely not find a Christian community to baptize him so far south in Ethiopia at this stage of the New Testament church. Thirdly, Philip would soon be taken by the Spirit northward to Azotus (Acts

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120 The distance in a straight line from Gaza to Ethiopia is 1583 aerial miles.

121 Sergew Habele Selassie, “The Establishment of the Ethiopian Church,” ethiopianorthodox.org. Accessed November 12, 2019. http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html. See also, Sergew Habele Selassie and Tadesse Tamerat, “The Establishment of the Ethiopian Church,” in The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life Addis Ababa, (December, 1970), who trace the founding of Christianity to the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion as found in Acts 8:38. Eusebius and Irenaeus support this view. Selassie also cites Chrysostom’s Homily on Pentecost and taken Christianity with them. Rufinis, a fourth century church historical claims that Matthew was sent to Ethiopia with the gospel, established the church, and suffered martyrdom. Additionally, Christian merchants from the Roman Empire moved to places such as Axum and Adulis, bringing the faith with them. Christianity did not become the official state religion in Ethiopia until the conversion of Ethiopia’s Emperor Ezana in 330AD. Interestingly, Selassie citing the Kebra Negast, a 14th Century Ethiopian history, traces Judaism in Ethiopia back to the Solomonic dynasty. Everett Ferguson acknowledges the possibility of the Ethiopian eunuch being Jewish in Baptism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 172. See also Keon-Sang Un An Ethiopian Reading of the Bible: Biblical Interpretation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 86-87. See also B.M. Metzer, “The Christianization of Nubia
8:40), making him unavailable to baptize the Ethiopian later. Therefore, because there was likely no Christian community to baptize him in Ethiopia and Philip would soon depart, Philip baptized him immediately. It was the circumstances that necessitated immediate baptism, not a biblical mandate. It is likely that Luke’s point was to show that as a result of the Ethiopian’s conversion, the seed of the gospel traveled 1500 miles south to Ethiopia during the rapid expansion of the gospel.

In Acts 18:24-28, in one of the more difficult baptismal texts in Acts, Paul finds Apollos converted, welcomed into the Christian community, and teaching others about Jesus, yet unbaptized. As a Jewish convert from Alexandria, Apollos is described as “competent in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), as one who “had been instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25), and as one speaking boldly in the synagogue at Ephesus (Acts 18:26). According to Acts 18:26, Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak and committed to explain “to him the way of God more accurately.” The text indicates that the Christians at Ephesus encouraged Apollos to assist the Christians at Achaia (Acts 18:27). Upon his arrival he was warmly received into the Christian community where he helped those who had believed in Christ, and was especially effective at publicly refuting the Jews, “showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (Acts 18:28). Yet it is puzzling how one so versed in Scripture, so fervent in spirit, so accurate concerning Jesus, so thoroughly instructed in the “way of the Lord” and in “the way of God” could go unbaptized. Yet, he only knew the baptism of John (Acts 18:25). Granted, the baptism of John


would have cultivated repentance toward God with a forward look toward the coming Messiah, Jesus (Acts 19:4). But one wonders, how the command of Jesus (Matthew 28:19) and the preaching and pattern of the Apostles (Acts 2:38 and others) concerning baptism in the name of Jesus could be missed? Especially if the standard timing for baptism was immediate. Could Priscilla and Aquilla’s remediation have overlooked this essential doctrine? How could the believing community at Achaia not have inquired about his baptism before receiving him into their fellowship? Still, one finds Apollos leaving for Achaia without the text indicating that he ever received Christian baptism. One might conjecture that the additional instruction from Priscilla and Aquilla may have included and led to an unmentioned baptism. Leaving out such details that didn’t fit his purpose would be consistent with Luke’s summary style of writing history. Regardless, the fact remains that there was a delay between Apollos’ initial conversion and possible baptism. If he experienced baptism before leaving for Achaia, how long would the delay have been between his conversion and baptism? It is speculation, but one might suggest there would have been at least weeks involved, as Apollos taught at least once in the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath when he was heard by Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:26). The texts indicate there were many days, even years, prior when someone, unnamed, had instructed him in the way of the Lord (Acts 18:25). Does this refer to his childhood or adulthood? The text doesn’t indicate. There would have been additional days required for Priscilla and Aquilla to further instruct him. If one speculated that perhaps he was baptized by the believing community at Achaia, then there were also the days involved in traveling from Ephesus to Achaia where he

the Spirit, there was no requirement “to receive Christian baptism over and above the baptism of John…his existing experience in the Spirit would have made such a requirement unnecessary.” This is contrasted with the requirement of the twelve disciples in Acts 19:1-7 who had no such experience in the Holy Spirit and received Christian baptism. For the view that baptism was universally understood to be required of all Christians see Thomas R. Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers,” in Believer’s Baptism, 67; R. Schnackenburg, Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul: A Study in Pauline Theology, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 125; G.R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 298.
would minister to the believers and refute the Jews concerning Jesus. If and when Apollos was baptized remains unclear. But the fact that there was a gap of time between conversion and possible baptism is clear. Some might argue again that this was an unusual, transitional time for the early church which caused this delay, a point which I would concede. However, this unusual occurrence also demonstrates that Acts does not set forth a consistent baptismal pattern for churches in all places at all times.

One final account of delayed baptism is worthy of mention. In Acts 19:1-7, Paul finds twelve disciples in Ephesus who had believed on Jesus yet remained unbaptized. Paul inquired of them as to whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They replied that they had not, nor had they heard that there was a Holy Spirit. Paul then asked what baptism they had received to which they replied, “John’s baptism.” Paul explained how John’s baptism was of repentance toward God, but only prepared them for the coming Messiah, Jesus. Upon hearing Paul’s explanation, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. There are important components of conversion in this text (repenting, believing, receiving the Holy Spirit, and baptism). But most pertinent to my argument is the fact that there is gap of time between their conversion and baptism. Paul’s line of questioning reveals the unique circumstances of converts who received the faith in parts, as the gospel expanded to new frontiers. It is intriguing to recognize in this text, that though these men were believers, Paul took


124 Ibid. Bruce explains that Paul assumed they had been baptized as “an unbaptized believer is scarcely contemplated in the New Testament.”
the time to instruct them further on the meaning of baptism before baptizing them. Could this be scriptural grounds for remedial instruction of believers on the meaning of baptism before baptism is conducted when circumstances so demand? One could argue that a doctrinal deficit on the part of unbaptized, new believers warrants instruction prior to baptism. Nonetheless, Luke’s account of these delayed baptisms again demonstrates that “in the earliest Christian times there was no uniform baptismal practice.”

When interpreting the book of Acts, it is essential to recognize its genre and the author’s intention. As indicated above, the genre of Acts is historical narrative, meaning much of what is written is descriptive of early Christianity rather than prescriptive for the church in all places, at all times and thus required of Christians in any and all circumstances. Related to identifying the genre is the important task of discovering Luke’s intention for including what he wrote. Fee and Stuart describe Luke’s purpose as recording the movement of the gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, progressively out from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke has very little interest in the details of apostles’ lives, in the church’s organization or polity, or the specific regions through which the gospel spread. This indicates that church history was not Luke’s primary purpose. Further, Luke’s intention was not to standardize Christianity, that is to bring everything into uniformity. Fee and Stuart write,

When he records individual conversions, there are usually two elements: the gift of the Spirit and water baptism. But these can be noted in reverse order, with and without the laying on of hands, with or without the mentioning of tongues, and scarcely ever with a specific mention of repentance, even after what Peter says in his opening address (Acts 2:38-39) . . . Such diversity indicates that no specific example is being set forth as the model of the Christian experience or of church life.

125 Ferguson, 181, citing Friedrich Avemarie, Die Taufzahlungen der Apostelgeschichte: Theologie and Geschichte, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 413-440.

126 Gordan Fee and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 119.
Churches were to model themselves after the big picture of getting the gospel to all nations. Fee and Stuart state, “Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narratives or described does not function in a normative (i.e. obligatory) way.”

Fee and Stuart recommend three principles for determining whether a passage in Acts functions descriptively or prescriptively. First, “it is probably never valid to use an analogy based on biblical precedent to give biblical authority to present-day actions.” Secondly, biblical narratives can have illustrative and ‘pattern value,’ even if it may not have been the author’s primary purpose.” Thirdly, “regarding Christian experience and practice, biblical precedents may be considered repeatable patterns, even if they aren’t normative. But it is moot to argue all Christians must repeat the pattern or they are disobeying God’s Word.” The third principle is pertinent for the timing of baptism. As stated above, the command to be baptized following faith is not in contention. However, Luke’s supposed repeated pattern in Acts of baptizing without delay should not be seen as prescriptive, but rather descriptive as seen in Paul’s conversion.

There are several other practical questions related to early Christian baptisms that remain unanswered by Scripture or history. Were Jesus’ twelve disciples baptized? Were the 120 persons in the upper room on the day of Pentecost baptized after being baptized with the Holy Spirit? If so, was it immediate? Why does Luke, the author who is known for providing details in his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) and who uses the *bapt-* word family more than any other writer, not include baptism in his description of how the gospel of "repentance for forgiveness of sins” would be proclaimed to all nations (Luke 24:46-48)?

127 Ibid., 124.

128 Beasley-Murray, 93-99. Johannes Weiss makes this argument in an attempt to prove that “baptism was not from the outset a necessary mark of the Christian profession.” Beasley-Murray argues against Weiss’ position, as Christian baptism was known in the earliest days of Christianity and taken for granted by Paul. See Johannes Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, E.T., 1937 (from the German *Das Urchristentum*, 1917), 30.
Taken together, the preceding arguments show that the timing of baptism in Acts is not commanded,129 is not uniform,130 and cannot be used as a basis for immediate baptism. Further, many of the immediate baptisms in Acts can be attributed to the rapid expansion of the gospel, few gathered believers in a locale, and Apostles being dispatched to and fro. Summarily, the unique circumstances during the transitional period of the early church, with the unfolding components of repentance, faith, confession, and receiving the Holy Spirit, sometimes allowed for immediate baptism, while at other times required a delay. And most significantly, there is no Scriptural evidence that these occasional delays were of grave concern to the Lord or the New Testament church, as long as the command to baptize was followed in due time. I am convinced these facts provide the theological space needed for Southern Baptists to delay baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal instruction to counter the theological problem of an unregenerate church membership in Southern Baptist churches.

What Baptism Declares

The primary aim of my research is to reclaim the historic Baptist principle of a regenerate church membership. Thus, it is important to know what it means to be regenerate. It is my contention that baptism declares among many things that one has become regenerate. Regeneration is one of several key components that occur at the moment of conversion. Others include repentance, faith, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and becoming part of the body of Christ. Below, I will examine the biblical texts related to these and to baptism.

129 Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 122. Hammett observes, “in some cases the time element is not clear (such as 18:8) or baptism is not mentioned in connection with conversion at all (4:4; 5:14; 13:48; 14:1; 14:21).”

130 Ibid. Hammett states, “there is no command regarding the immediacy of baptism anywhere in the New Testament.”

131 Beasley-Murray, 97, provides an excellent summary of this unique, transitional period in church history.
Repentance and Conversion

Repentance has been the call of God to the unbeliever from the opening days of Jesus ministry. After Jesus’ baptism and subsequent temptation in the wilderness, he launched his ministry with the message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). The same message was proclaimed by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Stagg explains, “The Greek *metanoein* literally means, “to change the mind,” but in New Testament usage it includes more, as it calls for a basic change of way.”

Stagg believes the idea of conversion which involves the whole man more adequately represents the noun *metanoia*. He explains, “The whole self is addressed in the call to God: the thinking, feeling, willing, moral, spiritual, bodily self…The call to ‘repentance,’ then, was a call to persons for a radical turn from one way of life to another. In effect it was a call to conversion from self-love, self-trust, and self-assertion to the way of obedient trust and self-commitment to God in Christ as sovereign.”

Stagg’s description highlights that God is the one calling the unbeliever to repentance and by His grace is extending the offer of forgiveness and a new life. The first step toward God is to make a “spiritual about face” turning from sin and turning in faith toward Christ (Acts 2:38). Thus, by definition, the one being baptized has experienced a radical change, a change that is not only expressed verbally, but also visibly by an immediate change of thinking, feeling, and acting. It is not only experienced internally, but its effects can be observed externally. When a church and a new believer understands repentance, they will be better able to

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133 Ibid., 119.

134 Moo, 69.
evaluate whether God has indeed granted the new believer repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:28).

**Faith**

Baptists are committed to baptizing only believers and the natural outcome of this commitment is a regenerate church membership. Yet, to uphold this standard, one must define what is believed and what it means to believe. Ephesians 2:8 reads, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Thayer explains the noun *pistis* generally means “conviction of the truth of anything . . . in reference God, it is the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ . . . in reference to Christ, it denotes a strong or welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God.” The verb, *pisteuo* carries the idea of embracing Jesus, “a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ.” The unbeliever’s “action” toward Christ in believing is in response to God’s action toward the unbeliever (conviction of sin, granting repentance). Faith is closely associated with repentance as the action of “turning” from sin and involves a “turning and embracing” Christ. Stagg explains that *pisteuein* is difficult to translate as English does not have a word that means “to faith.” Like a two-sided coin, faith has a factual side whereby one’s confidence is placed in who Jesus is and what he has done, but also a personal side whereby one personally comes to know and trust (embrace) Christ. Stagg explains that for Paul, “faith is not just rational

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135 Thayer, 512.
136 Ibid., 511.
137 Stagg, 120.
acceptance of factual data; it is the ‘knowledge of Christ’ in the sense of personal acceptance of Christ and acquaintance with him.” Thus, “To have faith in Christ is to know him as an actual presence.” This robust definition of personal faith in Jesus that is always accompanied by repentance, issuing itself in an observably changed life has historically been championed by Baptists. It served as the basis for believer’s baptism and a regenerate church membership. However, over the last century this foundation has been eroded. Some argue that regardless of the life lived thereafter, all that matters is that one has believed the right content. Others insist that if one has believed, the corresponding doctrines of repentance, regeneration, and the gift of the Holy Spirit guarantees one’s life has and will change. Part of reclaiming this lost ground involves understanding that baptism declares one has repented and believed and ensuring that the new believer understands what these mean. If believer’s-only baptism and regenerate church membership are to be upheld, what could be more important than contending for what it means to have believed? Jude 3 reads, “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” The verb “contend” is epagonizesthai which means “to struggle.” Blum notes that it is “a present infinitive, showing that the Christian struggle is to be continuous.” The church has an ongoing responsibility to contend for the faith entrusted to it, insisting that the faith not be changed, reduced, watered down, or eroded.

139 Ibid.
Regeneration

Understanding regeneration is central to upholding the standards of believer’s-only baptism and regenerate church membership. The Greek word paliggenesia is defined as a “moral renovation, regeneration, the production of new life consecrated to God, a radical change of mind for the better.” Baptists have historically held that one will be able to observe evidence of this new life in a new believer. Erickson explains, “Regeneration is the other side of conversion. It is God’s doing. It is God’s transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ.” While conversion involves man’s response to God in repentance and faith, regeneration describes God’s work of making a person spiritually alive from the dead (Eph 2:1). These all occur at the moment of conversion. One who is spiritually dead experiences a radical change, a transformation, a metamorphosis, “not a mere modification or adjustment.” Essentially, a resurrection is needed and provided. Thus, Enns states, “Regeneration means to impart life. Regeneration is the act whereby God imparts life to the one who believes.”

Paliggenesia only occurs two times in the New Testament. The first is in Matt 19:28 referring to the new world to come in the Messiah’s reign. It came into Christian use to refer to the new beginnings that were initiated by the work of Christ. The other time it is used is in Titus 3:5-7 which reads, “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured

143 Thayer, 474.
144 Erickson, 942.
145 Ibid.
146 Enns, 353.
out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” The “washing of regeneration” is interpreted in one of two ways: 1) The washing is literal and refers to water baptism in which regeneration occurs, or 2) The washing is spiritual and refers to the spiritual immersion of a believer by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ upon regeneration. Ferguson holds that the word washing is not figurative for the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, but rather refers to one’s actual baptism which is “not a human work but is a work of God,” whereby God washed our sins away. Hiebert disagrees, stating that “‘Washing’ speaks of our cleansing from the defilement of sin in regeneration,” holding that the washing was a “divine inner act,…symbolically pictured in Christian baptism.”¹⁴⁷ Towner concurs stating, “Some have seen in this image a reference to the rite of water baptism, but there is reason to see it rather as a reference to the work of the Spirit in terms of ‘washing’ that, then, the outward rite of water baptism might serve to symbolize.”¹⁴⁸ He adds that the result of the washing was rebirth, as “rebirth” is in genitive relation to “washing.” Enns agrees that the washing is the inner experience of regeneration, pictured in water baptism. John 3:3, though not including the word regeneration, expresses the new life that is imparted to the believer. It reads, “Truly, truly I say unto you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Born again can be translated as born from above.¹⁴⁹ The use of the passive in John 3:5 “is born” means the work is done upon man, not by man. Hence, new birth is a spiritual birth, generated by the Holy Spirit. Enns summarizes, regeneration is instantaneous when the


¹⁴⁹ Enns, 353.
Holy Spirit imparts new life. It is not the result of human experience as it is something done to the person, not by the person. It is not based on human effort in that it is an act of God. It results in a new nature (2 Pet 1:4). The believer receives a new self (Eph 4:24) and a capacity for righteous living. He is a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). It results in new life, producing a new mind (1 Cor 2:16), a new heart (Rom 5:5), and a new will (Rom 6:13). Enns description of regeneration as new life brought about by God in the believer is both invisible (new nature, new self, and new life) and visible (new mind, new heart, new will) which issues itself in righteous living. Oepke writes, “The new life . . . necessarily bears an ethical character. For it is life from God, the life of Christ…The break with sin is thereby accomplished and attachment to the life of the new creation effected.” Repentance, the turning away from the old life, faith, believing in the person and work of Jesus, and regeneration as new life imparted by God, supports the Baptist position that a regenerate life is observable and can be used a standard for upholding believer’s-only baptism and regenerate church membership.

Receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit

Jesus taught important truths about how the Christian life begins and the Holy Spirit’s role in it, teaching that the Holy Spirit is essential in both conversion and regeneration. Erickson explains, “Conversion is man turning to God” in repentance, which is the abandonment of sin and in faith accepting what Christ has done. In order to repent, one must be convicted of sin which is the work of the Holy Spirit toward an unbeliever, convicting one of sin, righteousness,

150 Ibid., 354, citing J. Dwight Pentecost, Designed to Be Like Him (Chicago: Moody, 1966).
151 Oepke, 541.
152 Erickson, 872.
and judgment (John 16:8,9). At the moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit brings about rebirth, that is regeneration. Erickson explains, “Regeneration is the miraculous transformation of the individual and implantation of spiritual energy.”153 Jesus told Nicodemus that unless one is born of water and the Spirit, that is born again from above, one cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3-6). Upon conviction, repentance, faith, and regeneration, the Holy Spirit then indwells the person. Graham states, “When you were converted, the Spirit of God immediately came to live in you.”154 Further, he states, “there is only one baptism with the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer, and that takes place at the moment of conversion. This baptism with the Holy Spirit was initiated at Pentecost, and all who come to know Jesus Christ as Savior share in that experience and are baptized with the Spirit the moment they are regenerated.”155 And again, “No interval of time falls between regeneration and baptism with the Spirit. The moment we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we received the Holy Spirit.”156 Zodhiates agrees, “Belief is the condition for receiving the gift of the Spirit of God. Where there is faith, there God’s Holy Spirit is present. The gift of the Holy Spirit is automatically bestowed when a person exercises faith in Christ and is born from above.”157 Hammett notes,

Baptist interpretation of this idea (the baptism of the Spirit) has been that the baptism of the Spirit is the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit himself, who enters a believer’s life, effects the union of the believer with Christ, and begins the ongoing work of sanctification and production of spiritual fruit…the baptism is an initial and universal

153 Ibid., 873.
154 Billy Graham, How to Be Born Again (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1977), 73.
156 Ibid., 71.
work of the Spirit, in that it happens to all believers, and places them within the body of Christ. 158

This is what Jesus promised in John 14:16-17, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” Some insist that the reception of the Holy Spirit occurs at baptism rather than at faith. 159

This is often due to normalizing the unusual occurrences of a secondary reception of the Holy Spirit at baptism in the book of Acts. But in John 14:16-17, the promise of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of the believer is made without mention of water baptism. In fact, there is no record that Jesus’ Apostles were ever baptized, though they all were indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

Acknowledging the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is unique and happened during a transitional period, Erickson states, “Since that time the normal pattern has been for conversion/regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to coincide.” 160 Of all the components of conversion, it seems that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee that one who has repented, believed, and been regenerated will be internally comforted, taught, reminded, and guided, but also externally transformed initially and continually. These multiple layers give credence to the Baptist belief that born-again believers are recognizable and the church is to be made up of those who’ve been regenerated.

Immersed into the Body of Christ, the Church

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158 Hammett, T 3001 Systematic Theology II: Class Lecture Notes: (Wake Forest, NC: Self Published, 1998), 69.

159 Manz, 49.

160 Erickson, 879-880.
That every believer (those who have repented, believed, been regenerated, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit) is both spiritually incorporated into the invisible church and physically joined to a visible church is where conversion meets practice. The concept of being baptized into the body of Christ is found in 1 Cor 12:13, a text Ferguson calls “the most controversial baptismal verse.” It reads, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews and Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink in one Spirit.” This passage is Paul’s plea for unity as the body of Christ. Ferguson states, “Baptism into Christ was also baptism into the body of Christ, the church. Hence, it carried consequences for one’s manner of life.” Whether referring to spiritual or literal baptism, it still incorporates one into the body of Christ, the church with the expectations of Scripture on one’s life. Hammett explains that “baptism signals incorporation. To be identified with Christ means to be identified with his body.” Hammett sees this strong connection in Acts 2:41 as the baptized “were added to the church” and also a fainter connection in 1 Cor 12:13. He states, “Paul affirms that all were baptized into one body, but baptism in this context seems not to be in water but the common reception of the Spirit, as parallel to verse 13 shows: ‘and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.’” Either way, it shows incorporation into Christ’s body. For Baptists, baptism has been seen as symbolic in that it does not accomplish our identification, purification, or incorporation, but symbolizes or declares they have occurred. We are in Christ when we hear the gospel and believe (Eph 1:13); our hearts are purified by faith (Acts 15:9); we receive the Spirit when we believe (Gal 3:2). Faith is the reality while baptism is

161 Ferguson, 152.
162 Ibid., 165.
163 Hammett, Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches, 264.
164 Ibid.
the symbol. Hammett observes, “any overall reading of the New Testament reveals clearly the priority of faith in salvation. Baptism is discussed once in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and in none of the other Pauline epistles, save 1 Corinthians. By contrast, faith is everywhere.”

It is at the moment of faith that we are spiritually incorporated into the body of Christ. Erickson puts it plainly, “From verse 12, it is very clear that this ‘one body’ is Christ. Thus, Paul is saying in verse 13 that we become members of Christ’s body by being baptized into it by the Spirit. Baptism by the Spirit appears to be, if not equivalent to conversion and new birth, at least simultaneous with them.” This is incorporation into Christ but also into the people of God, the church. Bruce concurs, “baptism in water continued to be the visible sign by which those who believed the gospel, repented of their sins, and acknowledged Jesus as Lord were publicly incorporated into the Spirit-baptized fellowship of the new people of God.” Commenting on verse 13, Schreiner writes, “Paul is almost certainly speaking of the time of conversion here, for Jesus immerses in the Spirit so that his people are incorporated in the body of Christ. The second half of verse 13 expresses the same reality. At conversion, believers drink of one Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the mark of induction into the people of God (Gal 3:1-5) and hence Jesus’ work of baptizing with the Spirit occurs at the threshold of the Christian life.” The believer’s immersion into the body of Christ seems to be a missing component in Baptist teaching as so

165 Ibid.
166 Ibid., 266.
167 Ibid., 880.
168 Bruce, 70.

169 Schreiner, 72. Schreiner holds that water baptism and Spirit baptism can be distinguished conceptually from one another, but that they should be held close together. He does not appear to hold that they are simultaneous; See Schreiner, 74, n21. See also James D.G. Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 140; See also Douglas J. Moo, “The Epistle to the Romans,” in NICNT, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 359.
many Baptists have a loose affiliation with the church after baptism. Many hold to membership in the universal, invisible church while neglecting the joy and duty of belonging to the local, visible church. Once again, frontloading these truths into the heart and mind of new believers through pre-baptismal instruction will go a long way in remedying this deficit.

Dead, Buried, and Raised with Christ

One of the most significant texts for the purpose of my research is Rom 6:3-4. Ferguson calls Rom 6:1-11 “Paul’s key, indeed distinctive, baptismal passage.” It is often quoted or paraphrased in Baptist baptismal ceremonies. As the pastor lowers and raises the candidate in and out of the water, he declares, “we are buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in the newness of life!” (Rom 6:4). Few passages are as rich with baptism’s meaning as this text.

Paul’s description of baptism as dying, being buried, and being raised with Christ flows out of the previous chapter on faith and justification. In Rom 6:1-2 he is refuting the argument that since one is justified by faith alone and since grace abounds where sin abounds, then one should sin all the more in order to experience more grace, resulting in more glory for God. Paul declares this to be absurd with his signature rebuttal “By no means!” (verse 2). This is the preface for his dying, burial, and resurrection metaphor. How could one who is dead to sin, live in sin? One who has died does not respond to commands, urges, or stimuli. Next, Paul asks a profound question, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (verse 3). This question is significant as it indicates several important facts. First, all believers are baptized. Secondly, the text doesn’t mention water, and is most likely referring to our spiritual immersion into Christ (1 Cor 12:13). If Paul meant water

170 Ferguson, 155.
baptism, it is strange that he would not mention water in the whole passage. Rather, he speaks to
the spiritual realities of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Paul’s emphasis is on the
believer’s participation in the spiritual baptism one experienced upon repentance and faith which
is described by Paul as death, burial, and resurrection, all of which are symbolized by water
baptism. Thirdly, the question indicates that the Roman believers had been taught about their
spiritual death, burial, and resurrection previously, possibly prior to their baptism. Paul assumes
they knew these truths already. Ferguson writes, “The question, ‘Do you not know?’ implies a
common teaching in regard to baptism that Paul makes the basis for his further exposition.”
Moo agrees, “By introducing this teaching with the phrase ‘or are you ignorant,’ Paul signifies
that what he is saying has a basis in what the Roman Christians already know about baptism and
Christian experience.” Apparently, the image of burial and being raised with Christ in baptism
was not an isolated teaching, but was taught to other churches as well. To the church at Colossae
Paul wrote, “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by
putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in
baptism, in which you were raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who
raised him from the dead” (Col 2:11,12).

Paul’s metaphor gives spiritual meat to the bones of both spiritual (as inward reality) and
physical baptism (as outward declaration). Beasley-Murray sees a threefold reference to the
redemptive event of Christ in Rom 6:1-4:

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171 Ibid., 157, emphasizes Paul’s use of the preposition “with”—“buried with” (6:4), “united with” (6:5),
“crucified with” (6:6), “died with and shall live with” (6:8) to stress that the believer is actually present with and
involved with the unique experiences of Christ. He boldly states, “there is no participation in the death, burial, and
resurrection of Christ without baptism.” The result of this participation is a new life of righteousness.

172 Ibid., 155.

173 Moo, 359.
First, it relates the baptized to the death and resurrection of Christ, involving him in the actual dying and rising of Christ Himself; secondly, it involves a corresponding event in the life of the baptized believer, whereby an end is put to his old God-estranged life and a new one begins in Christ and His Kingdom and His Spirit; thirdly, it demands a corresponding ‘crucifixion’ of the flesh and a new life in the power of the Spirit that accords with the grace received, which ‘dying’ and ‘rising’ begins in the baptism event.

While disagreeing with Beasley-Murray on this dying and rising occurring during one’s baptism, his threefold explanation is helpful as it highlights the significance of what has occurred internally in the life of every believer upon conversion. The dying, burial, and rising of Rom 6:1-11 fits succinctly with the doctrines of repentance, faith, and regeneration discussed above, all of which issue into a new and changed life. If it is true that the Roman Christians and others knew these truths regarding the meaning of baptism as death, burial, and resurrection before Paul’s letters, does it not behoove today’s church to teach these same fundamental truths early on to new believers in order to set forth expectations for the Christian life?

The result of the spiritual reality of death, burial, and resurrection is that the baptized believer will “walk in the newness of life” (verse 4). Ferguson states, “The baptismal participation in the death and resurrection of Christ results in a new life of righteousness.”

Wuest adds,

the word baptizo means the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with someone else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition. And that is its usage in Romans 6. It refers to the act of God introducing a believing sinner into vital union with Jesus Christ, in order that the believer might have the power of his sinful nature broken and the divine nature implanted through his identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection; thus altering the condition and relationship of that sinner with regard to his previous state and environment, bringing him into a new environment, the kingdom of God.

174 Ferguson, 156.

The implications of these texts for understanding baptism are immense. Far from relegating faith to mere mental assent at the immersion of the confessor, these texts along with the doctrines of repentance, faith, regeneration, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and being immersed into the body of Christ give biblical warrant to the expectation that those who claim to believe will live a different kind of life as they have died to sin, been buried, and raised with Christ!

**The Command to Instruct Believers**

The Old and New Testaments are replete with commands and descriptions of teaching and instruction. Though this research is primarily focused on the teaching role of the church, it is helpful to comment briefly on the Old Testament commands. In Deut 6:1-7 God explains that being in covenant with Him meant knowing His words so that one might follow His ways. In Deut 6:7 God commands Israel “You shall teach them diligently to your children when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise.” Instruction was essential to living out the faith and was to begin early and continue on throughout the generations.

Nettles believes the teaching role of the church today is much like that of the Levites in Nehemiah’s day. Neh 8:8 states, “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, while the people understood the reading.” Nettles comments, “When the Israelites were on the threshold of recovering their significance as the people of God, central to this reorientation was the learning of the word of God. Ezra led the scribes and the Levites in intensive sessions with

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176 Nettles sees the foundation of teaching both in the Old and New Testaments as Deut 6:7 “You shall teach them diligently to your children when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise.”
people.” From this event, one could argue that on occasion, when a theological deficit exists among those who believe in God, it is proper if not necessary to provide intensive, remedial instruction in order to narrow the gap in knowledge and to set expectations for living the life of faith. My argument is that such a theological deficit exists in an unchurched society and indeed in Southern Baptist churches. New believers reached by Southern Baptist churches would do well to provide intensive, remedial instruction before baptism to prepare converts to live out the life of faith.

In the New Testament, Jesus came teaching, commanded his disciples to continue teaching, sent the Holy Spirit as an ongoing teacher, and provided the Word of God as the content of teaching. In Matt 28:18-20, teaching is directly tied to faith and baptism. Here Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey all that He commanded them. The Greek word used in Matt 28:20 is didaskontes from the root word didasko which means “to teach, instruct, to provide information in a manner intended to produce understanding, either in a formal or informal setting.” There is little debate as to the church’s responsibility to provide instruction to believers. However, I am convinced that this command should begin immediately upon conversion and if applied prior to baptism can serve to “produce understanding” of what it means to become a Christian. This immediate instruction, especially emphasizing the basics of what it means to be converted and one’s involvement in the church, will make baptism more meaningful for the convert and set forth clear expectations for obeying Christ’s commands.

177 Ibid., 16.
Another word for teaching in the New Testament is *katecheo* which means “to sound toward, to sound down upon, to resound and also to teach, to instruct.” Mounce explains *katecheo* further as “to sound in the ears, make the ears ring; to instruct orally, to instruct, inform, 1 Cor 14:19; to be taught, be instructed, Luke 1:4; Rom 2:18; Gal 6:6; to be made acquainted, Acts 18:25; to receive information, hear report, Acts 21:21, 24.” *Katecheo* is used eight times in the New Testament (Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25; Acts 21:21; Acts 21:24; Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6), further establishing that instruction was occurring in various forms in the New Testament church and often from a very young age. Jungmann states, “Ever since its foundation, catechesis has always been found in the Church. We encounter the word,…in the New Testament sometimes already in its modern sense as meaning basic training in Christian doctrine (Gal 6:6).” As argued above, there is no prohibition in the Scripture for delaying baptism for a time, but there is the imperative to make disciples by teaching them. Nettles states, “The divine out-breathings which produced the Scripture create both an assumption and a purpose which are consistent with this approach (*catechisms*) to instruction. The assumption is the authority, sufficiency, and consistency of Scripture; the purpose is the increase of spiritual maturity in the children of God.”

Nettles sees the development of a core of essential teachings in the traces of confessions found in Eph 4:4-6; 1 Tim 1:15-17; 3:12-16; 2 Tim 1:8-10; 2:11-13; and Titus 1:11-14. Analyzing these texts and others, Nettles relates “words of the faith” in 1 Tim 4:6 with the phrase

179 Thayer, 340.
181 Jungmann, xiii.
“faithful sayings” in 1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; and 2 Tim 2:11. In 1 Tim 4:6 the noun form of “faith” is used. In the other verses the verb form is used. Conceptually, the “faithful saying” incorporates words which summarize certain truths of the faith: thus, “words of faith” becomes “faithful words,” or “faithful sayings.” These are in turn identified with “the sound doctrine.” 183 Earlier in Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he urges Timothy to “guard the deposit” and follow the pattern of “sound words,” as many will live contrary to sound teaching.” (1 Tim 1:10-11). I argue that this is happening in Southern Baptist life as new believers are inadequately instructed in what it means to repent, have faith, be regenerate, and belong to the church. And part of the remedy will be to return to teaching the contents of biblical confessions and “words of faith” before and after baptism.

The command of Jude 3 and 4 applies to this core of teaching as well. The text reads, “I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” By teaching, the church can contend for the faith in three ways: 1) By reacting to false teachings that attempt to infiltrate the church. Church leaders and members, equipped in sound doctrine, will be able to clearly identify and address what is contrary to the faith, both ideas and behaviors. This contending is essential as the avenues of misinformation are increased in our technological age, no longer limited to persons delivering false teachings; 2) By preventing the erosion of sound doctrine among church members. This is often seen when foundational doctrines are neglected and members make up their own sets of beliefs informed by culture and/or convenience, rather than Scripture; and 3) By preemptively

183 Ibid., 18.
instructing new believers in foundational truths that will set them on the proper course for understanding the new life God has imparted and the life of faith that He produces in them, including dying to sin and one’s relationship to the church.

In this chapter, I have attempted to set forth a biblical case for delayed baptism. There is widespread agreement in Christianity that baptism is commanded. There is much less agreement that baptism is meant only for confessing believers, as some practice infant baptism. Through Scripture, I demonstrated that believer’s-only baptism, though not explicitly commanded, is implied throughout the New Testament through the close association of repentance, faith, confession, etc. with baptism. Central to my argument is that the timing of baptism is not commanded. And contrary to those who claim that all of the baptisms in the New Testament were immediate, the Bible sometimes mentions conversion without mentioning baptism or when mentioning conversion and baptism together doesn’t indicate when the baptisms occurred. Additionally, the unique circumstances of the book of Acts makes it less than ideal for use as a baptism policy manual. Rather, its descriptions highlight the rapid expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem throughout the known world. The descriptions of baptism throughout the New Testament are rich with meaning of what baptism declares, including that one has repented, believed, been regenerated, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, has died, been buried, and raised with Christ, and been incorporated into the body of Christ. These have direct implications for how one is to live the life of faith, i.e. “walk in the newness of life.” These truths partially form a core of instruction that the church would do well to teach, especially to new believers prior to baptism, when fulfilling its duty to make disciples, baptize, and teach.
CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORICAL CASE FOR DELAYED BAPTISM AND PRE-BAPTISMAL INSTRUCTION IN THE SECOND THROUGH FIFTH CENTURIES

The church fathers and early Christian documents have much to say about the themes Southern Baptists have historically held dear, such as baptism, catechesis, faith, repentance, and local church involvement. It would be impossible to discuss every occurrence of these themes throughout the early centuries of the church. However, a survey of early documents and writers indicates that at an early date and then consistently throughout the first five centuries, baptism was preceded by an extended time of instruction, faith and repentance were prerequisites for baptism, a changed life was expected, and incorporation into the local church was intentional.

Second Century

The practice of baptism in the second century is significant in this research as the evidence connects the reader back to within decades of the time of the Apostles. In some instances, such as with the Didache, the structure and content of pre-baptismal instruction may go all the way back to the Apostles, as a similar process may have been known by the Apostles themselves. Perhaps describing baptism as delayed in the patristic era is somewhat of a misnomer. It would be more accurate to say that baptism was the planned and grand culmination of the completion of catechesis for the catechumenate, occurring weeks and sometimes years after one’s initial profession of faith. Still the result was baptism after a period of instruction in the faith with an emphasis on repentance, faith, and connection to the church.

Didache

The Didache (also known as, “The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations”) is variously dated from the end of the first century to the beginning of the second century. It is the earliest non-canonical, non-heretical description of the administration of baptism known to exist. There is evidence that a number of baptismal traditions had developed by this time, such as baptizing in living (running) water, with the alternative of using cold water if living water was unavailable, and still further warm water if cold water was unavailable. The Didache indicates that immersion would have been the norm, though pouring was acceptable when neither running, cold, or hot water was unavailable. Further, the baptizer, baptizand, and others are called upon to fast prior to baptism. More specifically for this research, the Didache reveals that pre-baptismal instruction based on the “Two-Ways” (life and death) was utilized to prepare baptismal candidates for baptism and the Christian life to follow.


186 Jonathan A. Draper and Clifford N. Jefford, eds. The Didache: A Missing Piece of the Puzzle in Early Christianity, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 33. Jefford notes “more recent studies have indicated either the presence of independent oral traditions, parallel textual developments, or even the possibility that certain New Testament authors may have made use of the Didache itself.” See also, Alan J.P. Garrow, The Gospel of Matthew’s Dependence on the Didache, JSNT Sup 254 (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

187 Ibid., 149. Acknowledging the Jewish Christian background of Didache, Jefford sees Jewish ritualistic temple washings as the background to the order in 7.1 to use the most appropriate water available for baptism.


189 An excellent summary of the reasons behind the pouring and the triple name can be found in Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 203-206, with an additional reference to Milavec, The Didache, 264.

190 Draper and Jefford, 47. Regarding the use of the Trinitarian formula in 7.1 and 7.3, Jefford notes, “its certain absence from the Apostolic Constitutions and Canons once again suggests its presence in Codex Hierosolymitanus is an editorial addition and thus more accurately associated with an later editor and not with the Didachist.”
Draper and Jeffords find the background of the Two Ways in Second Temple Judaism’s purity practices\textsuperscript{191} which set high standards of moral and ethical conduct and prescribed washings for misconduct. The Two Ways set forth a common ancient pattern contrasting the way of life and death followed by a list of virtues and vices. *Didache* 1-4 describe the way of life. *Didache* 5 describes the way of death. This basic format can be found in both Jewish Hassidic circles (*Derek Eretz*), as well as Greek versions. These refined, Jewish ethics developed into pre-baptismal teachings for use in teaching Gentile converts what God expected of them upon baptism. Draper and Jeffords note, “For non-Jews, the line of former beliefs and previous conduct had to be changed. The Two Ways dichotomy served as a framework for understanding the radical alteration in behavior and commitment that the gentile convert was expected to make.”\textsuperscript{192} Draper and Jeffords call this first century Jewish Christian format of teaching expectations to new converts, the “ethnicization” of the baptismal ritual.\textsuperscript{193}

The commonality in both ancient Jewish and early Christian communities of teaching the Two Ways leads Draper and Jeffords to make a remarkable suggestion. They state, “Since the writers and the addressees of the Gospels and the New Testament letters were baptized, they may have been familiar with the Two Ways teaching. The tradition might have been just as fixed and its influence on the faith and action of the first readers and writers just as strong as the influence

\textsuperscript{191} Second Temple Judaism was from about 515 BC to AD 70.

\textsuperscript{192} Draper and Jeffords, 152.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 153.
of popular hymns is on people today.” If Draper and Jeffords are correct, this points to very early catechetical instruction prior to baptism in the background of the NT.

Central to one qualifying for baptism was demonstration that one had repented. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal the practice of the Jews in the Qumran community, which called for washings that would cleanse a member of both ritual and moral impurities, but only “in the case of a person’s meek submission to God’s precepts. Conversely, the washing was unavailable to the unrepentant.” As for converts to Christianity, Draper and Jeffords note, “Mastery of the Two Ways became a prerequisite for baptism.” Further they state, “What is important is that

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194 Ibid. Draper and Jeffords, citing Alistair Stewart-Sykes, Λόγος Αληθοσείς: Paraenesis and Baptist in Matthew, James, and the Didache, in Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in their Jewish and Christian Settings, eds. Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zandenberg, SBLSymS 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 341-59 (347), note the similarities of Matthew and James’ exhortations and asserts they both may have utilized the Two Ways. They state that Stewart-Sykes’ research shows that James’s exhortations were meant “as a means of restoring the hearers to their baptismal resolve.” This remarkable claim would indicate both Matthew and James were familiar with and reemphasized an “unofficial” pre-baptismal instruction in Christian ethics. See further, Draper, “The Two Ways and Eschatological Hope: A Contested Terrain in Galatians 5 and the Didache,” in Neotestamentica, Volume 45, No. 2 (2011), 221-251. Draper suggests that Paul may have known the Two Ways of Didache 1-6. He writes, “the polemic of Galatians 5 echoes key themes of Didache 1-6, 16. This indicates that Paul was aware of the Two Ways catechesis whether in oral or written form and of its relationship to Torah,” 222. Van de Sandt and Flusser believe Jesus knew and used the Two Ways to “formulate his instruction” for the Sermon on the Mount. Draper, 223, citing H. Van de Sandt and D. Flusser, The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Place in Early Judaism and Christianity (Minneapolis: Assen, 2000), 112-190. Though intriguing, Draper argues against this position. While the parallels between Jesus’ teachings and the Two Ways are fundamental, he acknowledges that “the Matthean Jewish community formulated and continually adapted and used the traditions found also in the Two Ways attested in Did. 1-6…as baptismal catechesis.” However, Draper suggests that either Matthew or the Didache put these parallel words on the lips of Jesus rather than it actually being what Jesus said. Thus, the parallels are not with Jesus and the Didache, but with Matthew and the Didache. See Draper, “The Two Ways,” 223n2. For an argument against the shared traditions of Matthew and the Didache, see Aaron Milavec, “Synoptic Tradition in the Didache Revisited,” in Journal of Early Christian Studies, Volume 11, no.4, Winter (2003), 443-480. Milavec argues that “Matthew’s gospel and the Didache reveal two religious systems that grew up independently of each other,” 443.

195 Ferguson, 202.

196 Draper and Jefford, 154-155, citing Klawans, Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism, 22-31. Draper and Jefford note that “The Qumran community believed that wholehearted repentance combined with deeds of righteousness caused their lustrations to be effective,” 155.

197 Ibid., 153.
baptism in *Did. 7* carried with it a commitment to right conduct (*Did. 1-6.*).”

This is significant in that the *Didache*’s date (possibly 50-70AD) sets forth a very early pattern of pre-baptismal instruction that included an expectation of repentance and evidence of a changed life (regeneration).

Hartman summarizes, “baptism stands at the boundary where individuals leave the way of death in order to instead walk on, revealed as God’s will by Jesus. So baptism has a background in conversion. The conversion to this life must be followed by a proper way of living.”

The *Didache* also provides evidence of the immediate and strong connection between the baptized and the church. Hartman notes, “baptism is in such a large measure a rite de passage into the community determined by ‘the way of life’…It is also visible in the Two Ways instruction daily to seek ‘the presence of the saints’ and to ‘avoid schism’ (4.1-3).”

Catechumens would have understood the expectation that those who receive baptism were to be faithful to the church. Hall indicates that the expectation of weekly worship was established in that “the readers are directed to break bread with thanksgiving every Sunday.” This implies further that “baptism was not only an adhesion to the Lord but also an admission into the

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198 Ibid., 155-156. This expectation of moral purity carried forward into the ongoing life of the church as baptized believers were expected to live holy lives in order to participate in the Eucharist (*Didache* 9.5, 10.6, 14).

199 Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 16, notes “It is notable that the same document of the Two Ways appears embedded in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 18-20 as the ways of light and darkness, and in some other Christian documents, and that enough features appear in the document known as The rule (or The manual of discipline: *IQS* 3.13-4.26) to show that the Two Ways derives from Jewish proselyte-instruction. This document comes from the Jewish baptizing sect which had a monastery at Qumran, who library partly survives in the Dead Sea Scrolls. No doctrinal teaching is mentioned in the baptismal preparation described by *Didache*: the test of readiness for baptism is the upright life, and knowing its rules.”

200 Hartman, 176.

201 Ibid., 177.

202 Hall, 30, citing *Didache* 14-14.1.
community of his followers. Membership in the community of the Lord and a commitment to right conduct are the principal points of significance to baptism that can be deduced from what the *Didache* says.”203

Thus, one finds in the Two Ways evidence of: 1) Possible apostolic awareness and formulation of NT instruction consistent with the Two Ways; 2) The practice of pre-baptismal catechesis as early as the late first century; 3) The requirement of repentance and faith204 for baptism; 4) The expectation of a changed life pre- and post-baptism; and 5) The connection of the baptized to the church. These place the practice of historic Baptist principles as early as the transition between the NT and the apostolic Fathers.

*The Shepherd of Hermas*

*The Shepherd of Hermas* is “a complex Christian apocalypse written in Greek in stages from AD 90 to 150.”205 It was very popular and was accepted by some as canonical.206 The book is arranged in sections of five *Visions*, ten *Mandates*, and seven *Similitudes* and is “the longest writing of the Apostolic Fathers and contains the greatest number of references to baptism of all the Apostolic Fathers.”207

*Hermas* emphasizes the baptismal themes of catechism, forgiveness, repentance, and one’s relationship to the church. Hartman explains that in *Hermas*, “the rite of baptism was an

203 Ferguson, 203.

204 Ibid. Ferguson states, “Although the presence of faith in the convert is not explicit, it is implied in the submission to instruction and the reference to the divine names” which is affirmed in *Didache* 16.2,5.


207 Ferguson, 215.
external confirmation of what the whole process of becoming a Christian (in one word, conversion) meant to the individual. But it also affected what it confirmed. The sins of the past were forgiven, the one baptized left mortality and received life, and became the property of the Lord, protected and supported by him.”208 The meaning of baptism is commonly emphasized in early church documents, as it provided understanding of the faith and set expectations for the moral life one should live. This was important in Hermas as some Christians and catechumens had become morally lax and others had become apostate. Perhaps it was the spiritual condition of believers that informed Hermas’ theology, which stressed a strict morality after baptism. Hermas understood baptism as the forgiveness for the sins of the past (31:3), leaving post-baptismal forgiveness uncertain. Thus in Hermas 31.1, believers are urged to live in purity. In Hermas 11.5 baptism is salvation from sin, but is only preliminary. One must keep one’s heart pure to attain eternal salvation. Hartman comments, “It is salvation, not least that sins are forgiven there, but it must be retained through fidelity to the moral demands, and the Christian must not of course fall away or become a hypocrite (7.2; 14.1; 72.5; 96.1).”209 The writer insists on a changed life after baptism.

Hermas’ demands for purity were so strict, some believed the message of Jesus initially and then recanted. Hartman notes, “the catechumens are also instructed in the strict moral demands of Christianity, and it seems that these demands make some change their minds.”210 He declares there to be but one repentance which occurs at baptism and covered former not future sins. His rigorist stance was softened after receiving a vision of the availability of one post-

208 Hartman, 185.
209 Ibid., 181.
210 Ibid., 179.
baptismal repentance. Hartman notes, “To such people the message is that now there is an opportunity to return, to do *metanoia*, namely a second *metanoia* after the first which took place when they entered Christianity, or came to faith, when they were baptized.” However, *Hermas* urged catechists not to emphasize this additional opportunity to the newly baptized, but rather the expectation of a pure life. Those unwilling to live so were discouraged from being baptized (*Mandates* 4.3.1-4, 6 = 31.1-4, 6).

Significant for this research, *Hermas* emphasizes baptism’s relationship to the church. It compares the church to a tower being built of stones on the waters, an allusion to believers (stones) and to baptism (waters). At first glance this appears to be a strong statement for baptismal regeneration. However, faith is also essential to conversion (*Similitudes* 5.6.2-3). Specifically, *Hermes* insists that no one can enter the kingdom without taking the name of the Son of God (*Similitudes* 9.12.4 = 89.4; 9.15.2 = 92.2). The tower (church) has nearby stones which fell near the water but did not enter the water, a description of those who wanted to be baptized and turned away due to baptism’s strict demand for behavioral change. Ferguson explains, “Baptism placed one as stones laid in the building of a tower, and not to be baptized prevented one from entering the church.” *Hermas* contains a vision of the future growth of the church, as stone upon stone is added through faith and baptism (11.5). Hartman explains, that

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211 Ibid., 216, citing Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Vol. 15: Penance in the Early Church* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 57-113. Rahner notes that one baptismal repentance was ideal, but additional penance as a believer was available. The limited repentance was due to *Hermas’* view of the imminent end of the world.

212 Ibid., 178.

213 See *Similitudes* 9.16.1-6 = 93.1-6 for an even stronger statement on the necessity of baptismal regeneration, “They went down into the water dead and came up alive.”

preaching is the beginning of the road toward baptism and “Baptism stands at the end of the path into the church” (15.3).

While Hermas goes too far in seeing baptism as a conversion-baptism, limiting opportunities for repentance, and calling for a life of sinlessness, its emphasis on the strong connection between baptism, repentance, a changed life, and incorporation into the church are components that have been historically championed by Southern Baptist churches in preparation for baptism.

1 Clement and 2 Clement

1 Clement was written in Rome by an unidentified author around AD 96 and is important to understanding early Christianity, as the author shows familiarity with the Septuagint and uses the OT and NT extensively. 1 Clement is preserved in Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Latin. It calls for a strong moral life and a solid church organization. The reader is exhorted to the virtues of faith, hospitality, self-control, and humility. Baptism is only mentioned in the Latin version (42.2) and is considered to be an addition in the eyes of many scholars. While not denying this position, Ferguson notes that the phrase “baptizing those who are obedient to the will of God” is consistent with what would have been understood in reference to preaching and baptism at the time (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16; Luke 7:29-30). Some find allusions to baptism throughout the letter. 1 Clement includes Old Testament stories often connected to Christian baptism: 1) Noah as a preacher of repentance and regeneration; 2) Jonah as a preacher of repentance, salvation, and

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216 Ferguson, 207, suggests that a copyist error may have led to baptism being omitted from the Greek, Syriac, and Coptic versions. He states that preaching and baptizing was the traditional understanding of coming to faith by the time of 1 Clement.

217 Ibid., citing Benoit, Le baptême, 83-94.
forgiveness of sin; and 3) the Red Sea as drowning Pharaoh and his army due to the hardness of their hearts. Most significant to this research is 1 Clement’s call for all believers to live righteous and holy lives (35:1-2) as a result of knowing Jesus Christ. This foundational standard is at the core of Southern Baptist convictions regarding regenerate church membership.

This call is reinforced in 2 Clement, an anonymous sermon from the mid second century, in which believers are exhorted to “repentance and moral living.” The word baptism occurs only once in the sermon, but it is significant to this study. The writer states, “With what confidence shall we enter into the royal house of God if we do not keep our baptism pure and undefiled? Or who will be our advocate if we are not found to have holy and righteous works?” (6.9). Another important reference to baptism is found in 2 Clement’s use of the term “seal” which represented the mark of ownership by the Lord. The word $\Sigma\varphi\rho\alpha\gamma\iota\varsigma$ (seal) is used in pagan antiquity and Judaism to denote the actions of tattooing, stamping, and branding, all indications of ownership by another. The hearer is urged to “keep the seal” spotless in order to receive eternal life. If this is the background of 2 Clement’s use of the term “seal,” it has significant implications for teaching catechumens the close association between baptism, a changed life, and living under the Lordship (ownership) of Jesus Christ. 2 Clement exhorts believers not just to call Jesus Lord but to live under his Lordship (4.1-4.2). Believers, who made

218 Snyder, 264, notes that as a homily, 2 Clement is the oldest extracanonical Christian sermon known.

219 Ferguson, 207.

220 Ibid., adding that “seal” is also used in early Christian literature to indicate the result of preaching and faith, the protection of God’s property, the baptismal formula, Christ himself imprinted on the soul, and the authentication of a document. According to Georg Kretschmar, Die Geschichte des Taufgottesdienstes in der alten Kirche, Leiturgia 5 (1964-66): 36-42, “seal” is considered the most common designation of baptism in the second century and carried eschatological connotations.

their confession of faith in Christ in baptism are urged to continue to confess Christ by obeying his commands (3.1-4.1). Ferguson concludes, “The emphasis on repentance and keeping pure one’s baptism, the seal, and the flesh which received it shows the association of baptism with purification from sin, change of life, commitment to holy conduct, and receiving the Holy Spirit.” These emphases are hallmarks in Baptist church history as well.

Ignatius

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in the early second century, is known for the seven letters he wrote in route to execution in Rome (d. 107). The letters include Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Polycarp and reveal Ignatius’ high view of the office of bishop, holding that it is Christ who appointed the bishop, not the church (Ephesus 3). Out of concern for church unity and good order, he regulated the church ordinances by requiring they be conducted only by the bishop. He stated, “It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize or hold agape” (Smyrneans 8.2). Allowing only the bishop to baptize served to connect believers to the local church through the leadership.

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222 Ferguson, 208. For the opposing view that 2 Clement 3.1-4.1 is referring only to the baptismal confession of faith rather than ongoing confession of faith, see Joseph Crehan, Early Christian Baptism and the Creed (London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, 1950), 63.

223 Ibid., 209.

224 Ibid., 209, notes that Ignatius also opposed assemblies not under the supervision of a bishop as providing opportunities for false teachings and as divisive. See Ignatius, Ephesians 5.2-3; 20.2; Magnesians 4; 6.1-7.2; Trallians 2.2-3.1; 7.2; Philadephians 2.1; 4; 8.1; Smyrneans 6.2-7.2. See also William R. Schoedel, Ignatius of Antioch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985): 238-244.

225 Ignatius’ insistence on a bishop performing the baptism is not that far removed from the historical Southern Baptist position of only ordained ministers conducting baptism. See Robert B. Semple, A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia (Charleston, AR: Cobb Publishing, 2019), 44. Virginia Baptists required an ordain minister to conduct baptisms (1771). This was overturned in 1790 due to geographical, not theological reasons.
Pertinent to this study, Ignatius saw baptism as “part of the armor protecting Christians.”226 Ignatius used military terms to call for loyalty to one’s commander and perseverance in battle. Ignatius writing to Polycarp exhorts baptized believers to faithfulness. He wrote, “Be pleasing to him whose army you serve and from whom you receive your rations. May no one of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism remain as your arms, your faith your helmet, your love as your spear, your endurance as your armor (Polycarp 6.2).227 Though the letters were not pre-baptismal instruction, still one can see the expectation that those who are baptized will be loyal to Christ, united with the church, and live faithful lives.

Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas was a letter written by an unknown author228 around AD 132-135.229 Its primary focus is the debate between Christians and Jews over the question, “To whom does the covenant belong?” While the letter is not focused on baptism, it is worthy of mention as it is yet another early source that upholds the high standard for catechumens to live moral lives and to be associated with the church. Ferguson notes that the writer emphasizes that baptism “leads to a moral life of obedience that glorifies God in the church (6.16; 11.6; 16.7; cf. the ‘way of light’ in contrast to the ‘way of darkness’ in 18-21). The expectation of morality was a common theme among early Christians.

226 Ibid.


228 Ferguson, “Epistle of Barnabas,” in Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 167. Ferguson notes that though modern scholarship rejects the author as the Barnabas of the New Testament, other theories include: 1) the document is pseudonymous; 2) it was written by another person named Barnabas, but was mistaken for the better-known Barnabas of the New Testament; 3) an anonymous writing mistakenly attributed to Barnabas of the New Testament.

229 Ibid., 168. Other possible dates include the late 70’s and AD 96-98.
Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165) was an exegete, apologist, and author considered to be “one of the most important witnesses of life, faith, and worship of second century Christianity.” In his 1 Apology, he describes conversion which includes many themes related to this research. Foundationally, he states that only those who are “persuaded and believe the things said and taught” were accepted for baptism. Interestingly, he adds that believers also “promise to be able to live accordingly (to what is taught)” expressing a high expectation for a changed way of life after conversion. Further, the text states that those who believe and promise to live by what they are taught are taught further still while fasting and praying. It is only then that candidates are “led by us to where there is water.” Justin saw baptism as a “conversion baptism” holding that regeneration occurred in the baptismal waters where “at that time they are washed in the water in the name of God the Master and Father of all, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.” At baptism one was repenting of sin in the waters (61.9) and upon baptism was “illuminated” gaining an understanding of the new life in God (61.12). For Justin, illumination or enlightenment was not purely mystical, but also associated with the intellectual and moral


231 Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 242-243, notes that Justin makes explicit and frequent use of the βαπτίζω- family of words in Dialogue with Trypho, developing his baptismal theology and distinguishing between Jewish washings and Christian baptism. Ferguson provides an excellent discussion of Justin’s relating baptism with spiritual circumcision (Dialogue, 43.2), concluding that they are distinct. Further, Justin associates baptism with the cross (Dialogue 86.6) and the ark of Noah (Dialogue 138.1-3).

232 Ibid., 239, referencing 1 Apology 61.2.

233 Ibid., 1 Apology 61.2-3.

234 Ibid.

235 Ibid., 239, notes that the change of behavior included rejection of idols (1 Apology 49.5) and change of moral life (1 Apology 14.2-4). See also 1 Apology 61.9,12.
content of instruction. Thus at baptism there is both a decisive choice to change one’s mind and behavior (repentance) accompanied by God’s supernatural action of changing (illuminating) the baptizand’s mind, upon the reception of the Holy Spirit.

The early connection with the church can be seen as the congregation and the baptizer fasted and prayed alongside the catechumen in preparation for baptism. This early connection is realized further when the neophyte was led “to where those called brothers and sisters have gathered together to make fervent prayers in common on behalf of themselves and of the one who has been illuminated” indicating an immediate incorporation into the activities of the body of Christ. The newly baptized received a kiss of greeting from the congregation followed by one’s first Eucharist. Baptism naturally became associated with the first Eucharist as both occurred on the first day of the week when the church gathered for the Eucharist.

Ferguson summarizes Justin’s position on baptism stating, “Faith, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and the new life are what constitutes the Christian.” Significantly, Justin claims these practices were learned from the Apostles, indicating they had “already become traditional by his time.” What Justin meant by “learned from the Apostles” is uncertain.

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236 Ibid., 241. See also Benoit, *Le baptême chrétien*, 165-169, where illumination is related to both intellectual illumination and receiving the gift of the Spirit (*Dialogue*, 39.2).

237 Ibid., referencing *1 Apology* 65.1.

238 Justin’s understanding of the meaning of baptism and its association with the Eucharist is summarized in *1 Apology* 66.1 “This food is called by us the eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except the one who believes the things taught by us to be true, was washed in the bath for the forgiveness of sins and regeneration, and who lives in the manner Christ taught.” This practice of the Eucharist only for those baptized and faithful would be called “closed communion” today and was standard practice of Southern Baptists in the 19th Century.


240 Ibid., 242.

241 Ibid., 238, referencing *1 Apology* 61.9.
Perhaps he was referring to the essential doctrines of repentance, faith, regeneration, and baptism recorded in the New Testament. Or perhaps he was referring to the practices recorded in the *Didache*, discussed above. Regardless, one finds that very early Christian baptismal practices included repentance, faith, regeneration, and pre-baptismal instruction which provided an explanation of baptism, set forth clear expectations of a changed life, and an immediate connection to the church. Justin’s comment of learning from the apostles (whether NT or *Didache*) coupled with his use of baptism as a culminating event which allowed for pre-baptismal instruction indicates this practice was permissible among the church fathers and places it very early in Christian tradition.

**Irenaeus**

Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyons who lived from AD 115-202. He personally knew Polycarp and was therefore familiar with the Johannine tradition. Perhaps his most important writing was *Against Heresies*, a refutation of Gnosticism. In it he briefly mentions baptism. Ferguson states, “Irenaeus’s brief statements about baptism summarize ‘the orthodox’ practice and understanding of baptism.” He doesn’t describe the ceremony of baptism, but rather addresses the preparation for baptism.

For Irenaeus, the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit were given in baptism. Irenaeus’ pairing of these two doctrines in one event reveal his understanding that baptism was the transforming act that causes one to leave the former life of sin and begin the

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242 Ibid., 237, citing M.A. Smith, “Did Justin Know the Didache?” *Studia Pastristica* 7 (1966): 287-290. Smith argues that Justin did know the *Didache* from the liturgical parallels. Ferguson is more cautious, stating, “the similarity may come from common Christian practice and so be of limited probative value.” See Ferguson, 237 n.2.


244 Ibid., 303.
new life in the Holy Spirit. Ferguson writes, “Regeneration is Irenaeus’ most frequently recurring motif in regard to baptism.” His opponents rejected the very idea of a visible sign or physical act that brings regeneration. Against them Irenaeus stated, “there are as many schemes of ‘redemption’ as there are teachers of these mystical opinions. And when we come to refute them, we shall show in its fitting-place, that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God, and thus to a renunciation of the whole [Christian] faith” (Against Heresies 1.21.1).

Irenaeus evidently had no issue with postponing baptism until the completion of instruction. He offers an explanation of why baptism was immediate in Acts holding that Peter would not have so readily baptized Cornelius and his household had he not heard them prophesying by the Holy Spirit. Additionally, had the Holy Spirit not come down on the Gentiles, someone would have raised an objection to their baptism (Against Heresies, 3.12-15). Commenting on Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, his baptism was immediate because he had been engaged in study of the Scripture, being instructed by the prophets (Against Heresies, 4.32.2). He believed that while instructing Gentiles was labor intensive for Paul (1 Cor 15:10), instructing Jews was easier because of their background in the Scripture (Against Heresies 4.24.1-2).

Irenaeus’ catechism contained rich doctrinal content, demonstrating the depth of pre-baptismal instruction in the second century. Kelly describes Irenaeus’ catechesis as “a very fair

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245 Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 307-308. Ferguson notes, “Regeneration was a broader category for Irenaeus than the baptism that was related to it.” Jesus’ virgin birth and Resurrection are said to regenerate people to God. See Against Heresies, 3.22.4 and 4.33.4. Since regeneration flowed to a person from Jesus in multiple ways in baptism (virgin birth, Resurrection, etc.), Irenaeus could subscribe to infant baptism as Jesus was “made an infant for infants and sanctifying infants (Against Heresies, 2.22.4). Explaining Irenaeus’ position, Ferguson states, “The coming of Jesus brought a second beginning to the whole human race. He sanctified every age of life. Some believe this is to be one of the earliest references to infant baptism in Christendom (see also Against Heresies, 1.10.1). Against the view that Irenaeus subscribed to infant baptism, see Benoit, Le baptême, 216-218.
picture of intelligent catechetical instruction.” In Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching 6

Irenaeus wrote:

This, then, is the order of the rule of faith….God the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith. The second is this: the Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, Who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesying and according to the method of the Father’s dispensation; through Wisdom (i.e. the Word) all things were made; Who also, at the end of the age, to complete and gather up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and who brought forth life and produced perfect reconciliation between God and man. And the third point is: the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led into the way of righteousness; Who at the end of the age was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man to God.

Line upon line, the catechist offered explanations of the faith to the one being baptized. Far from a mere profession of faith, a brief interview, and rushed baptism, Irenaeus followed the pattern of those before him, conducting baptism only after rigorous, content rich, pre-baptismal instruction, infusing depth of meaning into each catechumen’s baptism experience.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria was a Christian writer who lived from about AD 160-215. Little is known of his early life except his brief description of himself in his autobiography Miscellanies or Stromateis. Wagner describes him as “a Christian questing for knowledge about God, traveling the Mediterranean studying under teachers from Italy to Palestine, and settling finally with an unnamed master in Egypt.” Clement claimed his teachers had learned what they taught him directly from the Apostles. If true, Clement’s baptismal practices further support the thesis


that the church fathers followed a very early tradition of only baptizing after the completion of instruction.

The historian Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that Clement conducted an official catechetical school in Alexandria and taught Origen who later led the catechetical school. However, Wagner notes there is no historical evidence outside of Eusebius that a catechetical school existed in Alexandria prior to Origen or that Origen was Clement’s pupil. Contrarily, Clement wrote that he led an independent school “that presented Christianity as the true philosophy, welcoming students from the level of prebaptismal inquirers to highly advanced scholars.”

Clement wrote of baptism in a variety of contexts. He used the word *baptizo* in a secular sense referring to a sinking ship, figuratively as being overwhelmed by drunkenness and as being overwhelmed by ignorance. Conversely, he refers to Christians who continued in sin as having been baptized from self-control to fornication. Clement saw Christian baptism as regeneration, which is “the divine function of imparting new life.”

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250 Wagner, 262.

251 Ibid. Wagner notes that Clement’s extant writings include a trilogy of works among others: *Exhortation to the Greeks or Protreptikos, Instructor or Paidagogos*, and *Miscellanies or Stromateis*. Wagner notes, “Protreptikos means exhortation toward actions, the philosopher’s speech to attract students, and the exhorter-philosopher. The title applies to the introductory stage of philosophy and to the unbaptized beginners interested in Christianity. Paidagogos concerns mostly the specific duties of ethics, the entry point of the next stage of philosophy…This stage is appropriate for baptized students whose appetites and wills need further discipline.”


256 Ferguson, 310, n.7.
physical life in generation (origination) he imparts spiritual life in regeneration at baptism. Here one was cleansed and received the Holy Spirit. It is also seen as a gift of grace as “in it the penalties belonging to our sins are removed;” as an illumination as by its holy, saving light we obtain a clear vision of the divine;” as perfection as the one who knows God needs nothing; and as a bath as “through it we thoroughly cleanse ourselves of sins. Ferguson notes that Clement also used the word “seal” for baptism, representing ownership of the baptizand to the Lord.

Clement’s theology of baptism rests on his understanding of Jesus’ baptism in Matt 3:17. Jesus baptism in water purified water perpetually for all who are baptized. He believed God perfected Jesus’ humanity (not his deity) at baptism and that the same perfection and sanctification happens to all humans upon baptism. This new and perfected life from God received at baptism has moral consequences. Clement wrote, “We have put off the old person, removed the old garment of evil, and put on the incorruption of Christ in order that we may become new, a holy people, having been regenerated, we keep the [new] person undefiled and are innocent as a baby of God, having been cleansed from fornication and wickedness.”

257 Clement, Instructor, 1.6.26.2, cited in Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 311.
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., 1.6.27.2.
260 Ibid., 1.6.26.2. For further insight into Clement’s terms for baptism, see Harry A. Echle, The Terminology of the Sacrament of Regeneration According to Clement of Alexandria (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1949).
261 Ferguson, 312-313.
262 Clement, Prophetic Eclogues 76.1-3 Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 314.
263 Clement, Instructor 1.6.32.1, 4, cited by Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 311. It should be noted that if Wagner is correct that Exhortation is for the unbaptized inquirer and Instructor is for the baptized needing further discipline, then this important call for a changed moral life would not apply to prebaptismal instruction. See further, n.247 above). However, this passage does reinforce the expectation that the baptized life has been transformed.
Clement’s sequence in baptism included instruction, faith, and baptize taken from Gal 3:23-28 and 1 Cor 12:13. For Clement, “it is impossible to believe without instruction.”

Interpreting 1 Cor 3:1-3 he saw catechetical instruction as milk prior to being able to sustain meat. He viewed the unbaptized as still fleshly and the baptized as spiritual. These distinctions highlight his understanding that regeneration occurs in the waters of baptism, not via repentance and faith prior to baptism. Unfortunately, since Clement held that baptism forgives past sins, he developed the idea that post-baptismal sins must be purged by discipline. He wrote, “God gives forgiveness of past sins, but of later sins each one gives to himself.”

Though holding to baptismal regeneration and the unavailability of forgiveness of post-baptismal sins, Clement of Alexandria still maintained the second century practice of baptism upon the completion of catechetical instruction, and the expectation of moral living.

**Third Century**

Baptismal practice in the third century church closely mirrored that of the second century. Inquirers requested baptism and after examination and approval, were admitted to catechesis prior to baptism. However, a change was occurring in that infants were being baptized more and

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more. The debate centered around the developing doctrine of original sin. The growing practice also reflected a shift in views concerning the necessity of baptism for salvation, the role of personal repentance and faith, and the responsibility of the baptized to live out the Christian life.

Tertullian

Tertullian (AD 155-220) was a philosopher and apologist who became a presbyter in Carthage and wrote the earliest treatise on the subject of baptism. *On Baptism* was written between AD 200-206 and is the only surviving treatise on the ordinance from the time before the Council of Nicaea, AD 325.

Tertullian commended delay of baptism, upholding the doctrines of repentance and confessed faith. Tertullian understood repentance and faith to be expressed in the renunciation of the old life and adhering to Christ. Burns, Jr. and Jensen write, “Tertullian defined Christianity according to its dual baptismal oaths: first, as the rejection of the traditional practices of Punic

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266 Steven A. McKinion, “Baptism in the Patristic Writings,” in *Believers Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 178, notes that the African Synod in AD 253 required the baptism of infants. The fact that a synod ordered infant baptism indicates it was not universal practice among the churches at the time.


268 Ferguson, 378-379 adds that inscriptions on the graves of infants are the key to understanding the origin of infant baptism. What began as a “baptism of necessity” in emergencies for gravely ill children, became a normal practice. Further, the understanding of John 3:5 (born of water and of the Spirit), came to be understood that one must be reborn in baptism to enter the heaven.


270 McKinion, 173.
and Roman idolatry; and second, as commitment to Christ that was to be lived by faithful
adherence to the church’s ritual, moral, and ascetic practices.”

Tertullian believed that repentance and faith were necessary for baptism. Baptism
should only be given to those prepared to accept its responsibilities and live by them. Thus,
baptism should be delayed until the following could be fully satisfied: teaching, learning, and
personal knowledge of and commitment to Christ. Baptism must await the person’s recognition
of sin and so the need of seeking salvation. Therefore, since an infant could not recognize sin,
repent, and believe, Tertullian did not believe an infant was lost and in need of immediate
baptism. His logic is clear. If an infant’s soul was in eternal jeopardy without baptism, one
should baptize the infant as soon as possible. However, if the soul of the infant was under grace
by virtue of its inability to personally believe, there need be no rush. Thus Tertullian counseled
patience when considering the baptism of children.

He held that repentance from sin and commitment to right living were inherent in the
ordinance of baptism. There was no harm in delaying baptism for the sake of instruction which
served to ensure the person had repented and believed and to set forth biblical expectations for
one’s way of life, including one’s relationship to the church. Churches, church leaders, and new
believers need not run headlong into baptism without ensuring that repentance and faith are more
fully understood and embraced. Tertullian challenged the unrepentant who mistakenly thought

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271 J. Patout Burns, Jr. and Robin M. Jenson, Christianity in Roman Africa: the development of its practices
and beliefs (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005), 601.

272 McKinion, 174. See also Tertullian, On Baptism 14.2.

273 Ferguson, 364.

274 Tertullian, On Baptism 18, cited by McKinion, “Baptism in the Patristic Writings,” 174. Tertullian
denied that infants were in need of salvation.
entering the catechumenate gave them license to sin. He wrote, “These, no doubt, are they who
do steal a march upon (the treasure), who, after approaching to the faith of repentance, set up on
the sands a house doomed to ruin. Let no one, then, flatter himself on the ground of being
assigned to the recruit-classes of learners, as if on that account he have a license even now to
sin.”

Tertullian wrote, “If any understand the weighty importance of baptism they will fear its
reception more than its delay.”

Burns, Jr. and Jensen add, “Baptism was not to be granted
spontaneously and immediately upon conversion. Candidates not only had to be well established
in a life that eschewed the idolatry of the surrounding Roman culture, but also had to
demonstrate their ability to maintain the moral standards enjoined upon each member of the
Christian community.”

McKinion summarizes Tertullian’s view when he wrote: 1) baptism
should come subsequent to agreement with Christian belief and commitment to Christian
practice; 2) faith, not baptism, was the means to salvation; 3) the baptized person was held to a
higher standard of Christian moral practice, presumably because of his or her identification with
the church.

Coming to know Christ led one to be deeply committed to him. Baptism reflected that
one had renounced sin and adhered themselves to Christ. To be baptized and then return to sin
was unthinkable. Tertullian wrote, “As soon as you know the Lord, you should fear Him; as soon
as you have gazed on Him, you should reverence Him. But what difference does your knowing
Him make, while you rest in the same practices as in days bygone, when you knew


277 Burns, Jr. and Jensen, 168-169.

278 McKinion, 175.
Him not?" Tertullian considered this renunciation/adhesion to be a vow one made to Christ to be loyal to him in life.

Thus Tertullian’s baptismal process delayed baptism for the sake of instruction, insisted upon repentance and faith, and called for the observation of the candidate’s life. All these measures were designed to prevent one from being baptized without truly repenting and then returning to a life of sin.

Hippolytus

Hippolytus lived from about AD 170-236. He was a presbyter, rival bishop to Pontianus in Rome, and a martyr. The authorship of some of the works attributed to him is disputed, including his most important work pertaining to baptism, *Apostolic Tradition*. The current scholarship views this work as a compilation of materials from different regions and cultures, though Ferguson views the work as church use literature, likely from multiple authors, attributed collectively to Hippolytus, dating to the third-century in Rome. This will be the assumption of 279 Ibid., *On Repentance* 6. New Advent. Accessed December 15, 2019. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0320.htm.

280 Ferguson, 349.


283 Ibid., 328.
this author in the discussion on baptism below. For convenience, I will refer to the author of *Apostolic Tradition* as Hippolytus.

Perhaps no early church leader was as intense in prebaptismal instruction as Hippolytus. Common in catechetical processes of the Patristics era, those interested in baptism were brought to catechists by other Christians who were willing to testify to the readiness of newcomers to begin catechesis. Unlike modern day receptions, whereby a request to be baptized is often greeted with congratulations, a brief interview, and instant preparations for baptism, catechists examined the newcomer’s motives, social (slave or free) class, and marital status. Based on the person’s answers, preliminary catechetical instruction commenced addressing one’s status. If one was a slave, then one was instructed to obey one’s master. If married, fidelity was taught. If single, the lessons were on chastity. And understandable, if one was demon possessed, the inquirer was required to be cleansed before entering instruction.284 Any person involved in a questionable occupation was given the choice to leave the profession or be rejected for catechesis.285 Those admitted into catechesis received instruction for three years, but less if the person’s character was deemed to be reformed.286 The text reads, “it is not time, but his character that is decisive.”287

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285 Ferguson, 329. These occupations included brothel keepers, makers of idols, actors, teachers, charioteers, gladiators, soldiers, magistrates, prostitutes, and magicians.

286 Hall, 16, notes “For two or three years a convert would be expected to attend regularly, learning the rules of Christian behavior, and then would be prepared with advanced instruction and subjected to scrutinies during the months immediately preceding baptism.”

Another strength of Hippolytus’ process was his linking the catechumen to the church through instruction. This reinforced that baptism, while certainly an individual and family affair, was also a church event whereby one was connected to and involved with the local congregation. McKinion notes, “the Tradition instructed that catechumens were to attend worship and participate fully in the church, with the exception of taking the Eucharist, from which they were excluded.”

When the time came to baptize the catechumen, they were once again examined as to whether they had lived according to the faith and been engaged in good works during the delay. The gospel was then preached to the catechumens again and a further exorcism was conducted to ensure the person was completely pure. Additional components of the ceremony included a bath, fasting, prayer, another exorcism, breathing upon the candidate, sealing the candidate’s forehead, ears, and nose. Then the candidate spent the night in vigil, being read to and receiving additional instruction. Also significant was the expression of renunciation and adherence. At baptism, the candidate renounced Satan and all his works and declared faith in the


Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The extent to which the catechumen had been instructed prior to baptism can be seen in the interrogative questions asked. While the first question, “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?” was without elaboration, the second question involved great detail. Hippolytus wrote, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who was born by the Holy Spirit out of Mary the Virgin, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died and was buried, and rose on the third day alive from among the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, to come to judge the living and the dead?” This detailed question indicates the thoroughness of Hippolytus’ catechetical instruction. Future catechists would include this same question in the fourth and fifth century “at the very end of a manuscript of the New Testament (Codex E); in an explanation of the creed by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan (339-397); in Sermons 213 and 215 by Augustine the bishop of Hippo in North Africa (354-430); and in Sermons 57-62 by Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna (400-450)”…and “in the Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed composed by Rufinus of Aquileia (ca.404).”

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292 Ibid., 1.21.15, cited in Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, trans. by Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 46. In his note on 21.15, Burton explains that in the Sahidic version, the text reads, “I believe in the only true God, the Father Almighty, and his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, and in [the] Holy Ghost, the life-giver to the universe, the Trinity in one substance, one Godhead, one Lordship, one Kingdom, one faith, one baptism, in the Catholic apostolic church, Amen.” This extensive elaboration on what it means for one to believer could very well predict an extensive course of instruction prior to baptism.

293 Ferguson, 758, notes Chrysologus preached sermons on the creed and on the Lord’s prayer that may have been part of instruction preparatory for baptism.

baptism and anointing with oil, the newly baptized joined the congregation to receive the holy kiss of peace and to receive their first Fucharist.295

Catechism in *Apostolic Tradition* highlights the seriousness and thoroughness of instruction in the third century church. The unusually long instructional period delayed baptism, at least until evidence of repentance was observed. An informed faith was declared. Character mattered. Witnesses of a changed life were utilized. Evidence of repentance was required. Multiple layers of instruction were applied. The expectation of walking in the newness of life was established. Incorporation into the church was immediate. This is superior to cursory questioning and instant preparation of baptismal candidates in many Baptist churches today.

Cyprian

Cyprian was bishop of Carthage AD 248-258. He served and wrote in difficult circumstances, administering catechesis and baptism during the Decian persecution. During this time, many baptized Christians lapsed, creating divisions and schisms within the church. Once the persecution ended, there was great debate over whether the lapsed could be readmitted to the church, and if so what would be required of the readmitted. At the center of this debate was the subject of rebaptism of the lapsed.

Cyprian’s guiding principle for readmission was the unity of the church, insisting there is but one faith and one baptism. For Cyprian, true baptism must be administered by the one true church. If one who had been baptized by the true church lapsed, one could only be readmitted

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provisionally, with penance and no guarantee of eternal salvation. That would be left up to the Lord on judgment day. In the case of those baptized by schismatic groups, he believed they had never received true baptism and could only be admitted into the true church by the regular process of catechesis and baptism. A full discussion on this debate and its implications for the meaning of baptism is beyond the scope of this research. However, within this debate one gains insight into Cyprian’s theology of baptism.

The catechumenate was well established by Cyprian’s time, which he referred to often in his letters. At the center of catechesis was repentance which was “a commitment of each Christian to a shared faith and moral code.” While “only Christ could read and judge the intentions of the heart,” the behavioral standard for baptism was the church’s sure way of knowing one had turned from sin and placed faith in Christ. Like those before and after Cyprian, repentance was a key theme and was expressed in the renunciation of the devil and the world in the baptismal rite. Cyprian took the requirement of repentance from sin seriously and literally. To Donatist he wrote, “By the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years was washed away, and a light from above, serene and pure, was infused into my reconciled heart; after that, by the means of the Spirit breathed from heaven, a second birth restored me to a new person...So that now to be able not to sin is the beginning of the work of faith.”

296 For an excellent and concise treatment of Cyprian’s life and ministry, see J. Patout Burns, Jr. Cyprian the Bishop (London: Routledge, 2002).


298 Ibid., 71.

299 Ibid., Letter 13 (6).5.3; 11 (7).1.2; 57 (53).3.1, cited by Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 352. See also Testimonies 3.11; Mortality 26; Lord’s Prayer 13, 19; Dress of Virgins 7; Lapsed 2, 8; Advantage of Patience 12; To Fortunatus 7; Jealousy and Envy 11.

300 Cyprian, Epistle 1.4, cited by Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 357.
Cyprian lists many benefits of baptism including: being renewed and sanctified (Letter 74.5.1); sins being cast off and becoming a new person (Letter 74.5.3); putting on Christ (Letter 74.5.3); experiencing regeneration and the second birth (Letter 74.5.4; 6.2); dying to the old self so that the new may be born (Letter 74.6.1), being cleansed from sin (Letter 74.5.4); receiving salvation (74.11.3); and identification with the church (Letter 74.7.2; 11.3).\footnote{Ferguson, 357-358.}

Though Baptists could not concur with Cyprian on baptismal regeneration, they could certainly agree with his insistence on repentance as an indication of a regenerate life. This brief sketch of Cyprian’s thought on baptism places him within the mainstream of the church fathers, who consistently emphasize repentance, faith, delayed baptism for the purpose of prebaptismal instruction, observation of a changed life, and connection to the local church.

Origen

There is no single document containing all of Origen’s thought on baptism, but his references to it are abundant. Origen’s theological system interpreted everything through a series of symbols corresponding to the Old Testament as shadow (and often involved allegorical interpretations), the temporal Gospel as image, and the eternal Gospel as reality. For example, regarding baptism, he understood John’s baptism as belonging to the Old Testament as shadow, baptism in the church as symbol or image, and the eschatological baptism in fire and final conforming to the resurrection of Christ as mystery or reality.\footnote{Ibid., 400.}
For Origen, baptism brought the forgiveness of sin and the abiding of the Holy Spirit. He believed it meant being born anew, a second birth, the washing of regeneration, dying and rising with Christ, deliverance from the devil and evil spirits, marriage to Christ, spiritually circumcised, and placement into the church.

Origen’s process of admitting new converts is recorded in his answer to Celsus’ accusation that Christians attempted to convert “only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception, and slaves, and women, and children, of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts.” Origen did not deny this charge, claiming the purpose of conversion was to make people better, whether intelligent or simple. He responded with a description of his process of catechesis which divided the catechumenate into two stages. He wrote,

The Christians, however, having previously, so far as possible, tested the souls of those who wish to become their hearers, and having previously instructed them in private, when they appear (before entering the community) to have sufficiently evinced their

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303 Ibid., 410.
305 Ibid., *Commentary on John* 6.33, in Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 412. Origen’s favorite phrase for baptism was “the bath of regeneration.”
306 Ibid., *Commentary on Romans* 5.8.2,10,12,13, in Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 414.
312 Hall, 17, states “Origen as catechist appears to have begun a cycle of Old Testament homilies intended to last two or three years.”
desire towards a virtuous life, introduce them then, and not before, privately forming one
class of those who are beginners, and are receiving admission, but who have not yet
obtained the mark of complete purification; and another of those who have manifested to
the best of their ability their intention to desire no other things than are approved by
Christians; and among these there are certain persons appointed to make inquiries
regarding the lives and behavior of those who join them, in order that they may prevent
those who commit acts of infamy from coming into their public assembly, while those of
a different character they receive with their whole heart, in order that they may daily
make them better. And this is their method of procedure, both with those who are sinners,
and especially with those who lead dissolute lives, whom they exclude from their
community, although, according to Celsus, they resemble those who in the market-places
perform the most shameful tricks.313

Origen was no Baptist, but his process was mindful of testing an individual’s motives, instructing
them in the faith,314 before baptizing them and accepting them into the church, observing the life
of catechumens over a period of time, and excluding those who had not shown evidence of
repentance. All of this was done within the context of delayed baptism. Further, Origen’s
emphasis on the need for repentance was contained in the renunciation of sin and Satan, which
was a promise to live a different kind of life.315 The renunciation’s counterpart was the adherence
to Christ. Ferguson notes, “The renunciation of sin has as its counterpart the confession of
faith.”316 The scriptural pattern of death to sin and new life in Christ was seen in Rom 6:10 and 2
Cor 4:10 combined with Christ coming to dwell in the believer in Gal 2:20.

313 Ibid., 3.51.
314 Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 420-421. Origen utilized Moses and the prophets as an
introduction to Christianity, concentrating in moral matters and simple faith in the early stages, then doctrine and the
sacraments in more advanced stages. The catechumen heard the Law of God daily (to restrain sin) and then studied
the divinity of Christ as one’s baptism approached. The second phase of instruction included explanations on the
Trinity, the resurrection, and the sacraments, as well as the regula fidei, “the tradition of the church and the
apostles.” Here, Origen laid out the essentials pertaining to God, Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the nature of the soul,
free will, the devil and his angels, the creation of the world, and the scriptures. See Origen, On First Principles
1.pref.4-8, cited by Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 421.
315 Ibid., 423.
316 Ibid.
Like his predecessors, Origen followed baptism with the neophytes joining the church for the Eucharist for the first time, which was a vivid picture of the reality that the new believer is incorporated into both the universal and local church.

The requirements for baptism appear to be fairly standardized by the end of the third century. Baptism was not instant, nor automatic. Church leaders delayed baptism in order to inform and examine one’s claim to repentance and faith by providing solid, biblical instruction to those interested in baptism. This was all done within the context of the local church into which the newly baptized were immediately incorporated.

**Fourth Century**

The same baptismal themes found in the second and third century continue into the fourth century. Church leaders and writers of this century include Lactantius, the rhetorician from North Africa (d. 320), who wrote that baptism was “the crucial turning point (conversion) in human life.”

Methodius, the bishop of Olympus (d. 311), understood baptism as a rebirth, a birth by the church into the church.

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), the writer of the immensely valuable *Church History*, held that baptism was “the mark of entering the new covenant.” Further, the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) addresses the importance of instruction for catechumens. Canon 2 cautions churches about promoting newly baptized believers to positions of leadership. Canon 14 required catechumens who had fallen away and then returned to be instructed for three years. Canon 19 required rebaptism for those who had been baptized by heretical groups who did not

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317 Ferguson, 445, referencing Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.5.22.
319 Ibid., 449, referencing Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* 2.3.36.65b.
hold “a right faith about the divine persons.” Serapion, bishop of Thmuis (d. 360), expressed the expectation that one’s life would be devoted to God after baptism. He prayed over the baptized, that they “may serve you always and observe your commandments.” Ephraem the Syrian (d. 373), deacon and writer from Edessa, emphasized the essentials of faith and repentance in baptism. This brief sketch of church leaders of the fourth century makes it evident that the fourth century Fathers had no issue with delayed baptism, but utilized it as a tool to insure the baptized understood the faith, had turned from sin, were informed about the expectation of a changed life post baptism, and understood one’s close connection with the local church. A closer examination of the baptismal thinking of Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Ambrose follows below.

Athanasius

A discussion of fourth century church history must include Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (d. 373). Though looming large over the debate of the divinity of God the Son, Athanasius did not write extensively on baptism, though he did mention it occasionally. He calls baptism “baptismal consecration,” an indication of his high regard for the rite and his understanding that the baptizand was dedicating one’s life to Christ. Not surprising, Athanasius argued for the use of the Trinity in baptism, referring to the Triune name of God in Matthew 28:19. This was not only in defense of the deity of the Son, but also in defense of the deity of

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320 Ibid., 451, referencing Athanasius, *Discourses against the Arians* 2.18.42-43.
the Holy Spirit against the Pneumatomachians. He insisted that proper baptism required baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Otherwise the baptizand was “ineffective and uninitiated.”

Trinitarian faith was the one true faith and required for proper baptism. This tied sound baptism to sound faith. A sound baptism required that one had been properly instructed, especially concerning the deity of Christ. He wrote, “That the right faith might follow upon learning, and together with faith might come the consecration of baptism.” First came teaching, then came believing, then came baptism. It was essential for new believers to understand the faith they were professing. Thus, Athanasius’ baptismal practice involved delay, instruction, proper faith, devotion to the Lord (with implied repentance), and then baptism.

Canons of Hippolytus

A brief mention of the Canons of Hippolytus is in order as it provides insight into fourth century catechetical practice in Egypt. The Canons were written around AD 336-340 by an unknown author and consists of thirty-eight church orders that reflect and sometimes modify its primary source Apostolic Traditions, including articles on the catechumenate and baptism. The collection describes the process of baptism as beginning with an examination of the motives and occupations of the inquirers. Then they were instructed in the Scripture by a deacon for forty days. A teacher determined if the catechumen had made a clean break with the former life and


326 Ibid., 2.18.42.


328 Ferguson, 466, notes Canons 11-18 “detail in a rather thorough way the occupations, circumstances of life, and practices forbidden to Christians.”
thereby worthy of baptism. During catechesis, catechumens attended church services with the baptized, but did not partake of the Eucharist. Preparation for baptism included the usual bath, fasting, prayer, exorcism, signing, anointing, renunciation, adhesion, and confession of faith. After baptism, the newly baptized joined the church, receiving the holy kiss and Eucharist. A teacher continued the neophyte’s post-baptismal instruction.329

Canons demonstrate that the fundamental process of catechesis from the second and third century carried over into the fourth. The consistent pattern of requiring repentance, faith, delayed baptism, pre-baptismal instruction, and incorporation into the church continued.330

Cyril of Jerusalem

Cyril was the bishop of Jerusalem from AD 350-387. He wrote “Procatechesis and the eighteen Catechetical Lectures either shortly before or (more likely) shortly after becoming bishop.”331 In Cyril’s process, church members catechized other members.332 Also, he directed fathers who had begotten children according to the flesh to instruct their children. The bishop or presbyter provided the final instruction before baptism. Reflecting his view of conversion-baptism, he wrote “the catechumens heard of hope, but had it not; they heard mysteries but did not understand them; they heard scriptures but did not know their depth.”333 Catechumens are

329 Ibid., 467, citing Canon 38.

330 Ibid., citing Canon 29 highlights the inclusion of the newly baptized into the church. In a prayer by the bishop over the neophyte, it reads, “We bless you, Lord God almighty, for that you have made these worthy to be born again, that you pour your Holy Spirit on them, and to be the one body of the Church, not being excluded by alien works; but, just as you have granted them forgiveness of their sins, grant them also the pledge of your kingdom; through our Lord Jesus Christ…”

331 Ferguson, 473.

332 Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures 15.18, referenced by Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 474.

333 Ibid., Procatechesis 6.
described as being enlightened by instruction, a process of gradual illumination, which Cyril associates with instruction in the “word of doctrine.”

Cyril viewed pre-baptismal catechesis as a forty-day opportunity for repentance. He warned about the seriousness of sin, the dangers of sin, the need for repentance, the need to confess sin, and to believe. As motivation, he included a catalogue of biblical examples of people who fell into the trap of sin. Yet he struck a hopeful tone in that no matter how great the sin, no one is beyond the reach of God’s love and forgiveness through repentance and faith. Writing further on the necessity of faith and repentance, he wrote, “For God seeks nothing else from us, save a good purpose. Say not, How are my sins blotted out? I tell you, by willing, by believing. What can be shorter than this? But if, while your lips declare you willing, your heart be silent, He knows the heart, who judges you. Cease from this day from every evil deed. Let not your tongue speak unseemly words, let your eye abstain from sin, and from roving after things unprofitable.”

His instruction included an explanation of the meaning of baptism and warnings about temptation. He taught,

Great is the Baptism that lies before you: a ransom to captives; a remission of offenses; 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! But there is a serpent by the wayside watching those who pass by: beware lest he bite you with unbelief. He sees so many receiving salvation, and is seeking whom he may devour. You are coming in unto the Father of Spirits, but you are going past that serpent.

334 Ibid., Catechetical Lectures 18.13, referenced by Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 474.


336 Ibid., Procatechesis 8.

Cyril also warned against insincerity in baptism, insisting that “the step of baptism will be a futile one unless it is undertaken with genuine faith and commitment.”338 Warning of the possibility of receiving baptism without repentance, he wrote:

Even Simon Magus once came to the Laver: he was baptized, but was not enlightened; and though he dipped his body in water, he enlightened not his heart with the Spirit: his body went down and came up, but his soul was not buried with Christ, nor raised with Him. Now I mention the statements of (men's) falls, that you may not fall: for these things happened to them by way of example, and they are written for the admonition of those who to this day draw near. Let none of you be found tempting His grace…339

Like others before him, Cyril emphasized baptism as the death and resurrection of the believer from Rom 6:3-14. Indeed, it is the opening Scripture for Catechetical Lectures 3. He writes,

For you go down into the water, bearing your sins, but the invocation of grace, having sealed your soul, suffers you not afterwards to be swallowed up by the terrible dragon. Having gone down dead in sins, you come up quickened in righteousness. For if you have been united with the likeness of the Saviour’s death Romans 6:5, you shall also be deemed worthy of His Resurrection. For as Jesus took upon Him the sins of the world, and died, that by putting sin to death He might rise again in righteousness; so thou by going down into the water, and being in a manner buried in the waters, as He was in the rock, art raised again walking in newness of life.340

Interestingly, Cyril calls ministers doorkeepers of the church. He wrote, “For we, the ministers of Christ, have admitted everyone, and occupying, as it were, the place of door-keepers we left the door open: and possibly thou entered with your soul bemired with sins, and with a will defiled. You entered, and were allowed: your name was inscribed.”341 Though for him, this image demonstrates his high regard for the office of bishop and the church, it is a helpful image

338 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Historical Theology and Introduction (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 125.
339 Cyril of Jerusalem, Procatechesis 2.
340 Ibid., Catechetical Lectures 3.12.
341 Ibid., Procatechesis 4.
as this research proposes that Baptists should place greater emphasis on preparation for baptism as a gateway into the house of God, the church. He further connects the catechumen to the church when he wrote, “You have come within the Church's nets: be taken alive, flee not: for Jesus is angling for you, not in order to kill, but by killing to make alive: for you must die and rise again. For you have heard the Apostle say, Dead indeed unto sin, but living unto righteousness. Die to your sins, and live to righteousness, live from this very day.”

For Cyril, the church was mother and the catechumens were taught that they were sons and daughters. He sought to engrave the place of the church on the hearts of the catechumens. Admittedly, he goes further than any Protestant in declaring that the kingdom of heaven is attained via the church. He writes, “In this Holy Catholic Church receiving instruction and behaving ourselves virtuously, we shall attain the kingdom of heaven, and inherit eternal life; for which also we endure all toils, that we may be made partakers thereof from the Lord.” However, Cyril’s instruction on the church gathered, growing, and enduring together is ageless and needed today.

These important concepts were part of Cyril’s pre-baptismal instruction, preparing the heart and mind for more meaningful baptism, more preparedness to connect with the church, and walk in newness of life. Summarizing, Cyril delayed baptism for forty days, provided extensive instruction, called for repentance and faith, emphasized the expectation of a changed life, and ensured a strong connection between the catechumen and the church, many of which were hallmarks of Baptist churches until the late nineteenth century.

342 Ibid., Procatechesis 5.
343 Ibid., Procatechesis 13.
344 Ibid., Catechetical Lectures 18.22-31.
345 Ibid., Catechetical Lectures 24.
John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (AD 347-407) was a presbyter in Antioch who became the bishop of Constantinople in AD 398. He is considered by some the greatest preacher of the early church, hence the name Chrysostom which means “golden-mouthed.” He wrote Instructions to Catechumens (Catechetical/Baptismal Instructions) sometime between AD 388-390 while still a presbyter in Antioch.

For John Chrysostom, the catechism was more than words, but rather was a “solid resolution of the mind.” To make a strong confession of faith one must speak the right words and understand with the heart. Chrysostom likened the spiritual struggle of his thirty-day catechism to a wrestling match in which one must be as fully engaged just as one would be in physical combat. The outcome of this rigorous endeavor would be a mind fixed on God which would help one avoid the devil.

Chrysostom’s catechesis utilized a non-systematic treatment of the creed as well as a strong emphasis on moral instruction. Ferguson states this to be “The predominant concern of the Baptismal Instructions.” The first six chapters of Instructions addresses faith, the next twenty-three chapters address attitude and conduct. Chrysostom expected the catechumen to have experienced a change of heart and life. As with earlier Fathers, this expectation can also be seen in the renunciation of Satan, wherein paganism was to be abandoned. Chrysostom wrote, “What are the pomps of the devil? Every form of sin, spectacles of indecency [the theatre], horse racing,
gatherings filled with laughter, and abusive language. Portents, oracles, omens, observances of times, tokens, amulets, and incantations—these too are pomps of the devil.” The “far-reaching change in our lives,” was symbolized in the newly baptized wearing a white robe for seven days post-baptism. It was an outward, physical indication that the neophytes had indeed put on Christ (Gal 3:27). The expectation of a changed life is most vividly captured in the title given to the newly baptized, “faithful.” Now one must live up to the title.

In Chrysostom’s eyes, baptism was a contract with God that was to be kept. It was a contract not written with ink nor on paper but with faith and confession. It was voluntarily entered out of a heart of gratitude and, much like the contract of marriage, should be kept as a promise to the Master whom one loved.

Chrysostom expressed the meaning of baptism through texts and symbols consistent with the church fathers. The baptized were identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:3-5). In baptism, the old man is buried and the new man is raised. He wrote, “The priest makes you go down into the sacred waters, burying the old man and at the same time raising up the new, who is renewed in the image of his Creator…. Instead of the man who descended into the water, a different man comes forth.” This transformation of the person is

350 Ibid., 538, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 11.25. See also Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 12.52.
351 Ibid., 543-544, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 5.24. For more on Chrysostom’s clothing imagery, see 6.24; 4.18; 4.31-32.
352 Ibid., 563, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 12.4-9.
353 Ibid., 550, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 4.31.
354 Chrysostom held that baptism brought about the forgiveness of sins (Baptismal Instructions 9.20), the reception of the Holy Spirit (Baptismal Instructions 2.10; 11.12), spiritual circumcision (Homilies on Colossians 6.2); enlightenment (Baptismal Instructions 9.12); and clothing in Christ (Baptismal Instruction 5.18).
355 Ibid., 552, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 2.25. Chrysostom exegetes this important truth from Romans 6:3-5 in his Homilies on Romans 11.
described as the new creation resulting in the person no longer living for pleasure. Chrysostom explains, “Did you see how a new creation has truly taken place? The grace of God has entered these souls and molded them anew, reformed them, and made them different from what they were. It did not change their substance, but made over their will.”

Chrysostom counted many benefits of baptism. He wrote, “You have seen how numerous are the gifts of baptism. Although many men think that the only gift it confers is the remission of sins, we have counted its honors to the number of ten….sanctification, justice, filial adoption, and inheritance, that they may be brothers and members of Christ, and become the dwelling place of the Spirit.”

Chrysostom understood faith to be a necessity for baptism. Those enrolled in catechism are said to “bring forward a generous faith and a strong reason.” One’s faith was to be in the Trinity and when confessed in baptism it resulted in the forgiveness of sins. Thus faith wasn’t just a mental agreement, but a spoken confession. The human response to God’s divine activity in baptism is faith and repentance, understood with the mind, expressed with the mouth, and lived out in a changed life. This was regeneration, the new birth spoken of in Titus 3:5.

Chrysostom was sure to connect the soon to be and newly baptized to the church. Holding that baptism was necessary for salvation (John 3:5) and the fact that baptism was only

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356 Ibid., 553, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 7.14.
357 Ibid., 544, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 3.6.
358 The necessity of faith can be seen further in Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians 8.
359 Ferguson, 550, citing Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 2.9.
360 Chrysostom often describes baptism as “the bath of regeneration.” See Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions 1.7; 3.23; 9.12; 11.29; 10.14. See also Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis 40.4.
offered through the church, he placed the church at the center of faith. For him, the church was the mother, giving birth to many children through baptism.\textsuperscript{361}

Consistent with his predecessors, Chrysostom practiced delayed baptism for an intensive catechism, which emphasized repentance, faith, an expectation of a changed life, and a strong connection to the local Church.

The Cappadocian Fathers

The Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) contribute to this research, not so much in their use of catechism, but on their insistence that repentance and faith led to a transformed life.

Basil the Great became a presbyter in AD 362 and became bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia serving from AD 370-379. In Basil’s day, delayed baptism was a problem, as people put off being baptized in order to avoid the penalty of penance for post-baptismal sins.\textsuperscript{362} Preachers urged people not to delay, jeopardizing one’s soul, but rather to be baptized and to live out the faith. Basil had much to say about baptism, mentioning it in \textit{Homily 13, Exhortation to Baptism}, \textit{On Baptism}, \textit{On the Holy Spirit}, and other Letters.\textsuperscript{363}

To baptize an individual, Basil required the candidate to repent, believe, enroll to receive words of instruction, and to learn the gospel way of life.\textsuperscript{364} For Basil, teaching the disciple must

\textsuperscript{361} For more on the church as mother, see \textit{Baptismal Instructions} 4.1; 6.20; 10:15.

\textsuperscript{362} One such “sin” came to be known as the “Encratite heresy” attributed to Tatian, which forbid marital sex after baptism. This may have been one of the main causes of baptismal delay until one’s deathbed in the East. See Hall, \textit{Doctrine and Practice}, 18.

\textsuperscript{363} For additional sources on Basil’s writings of baptism, see Ferguson, \textit{Baptism in the Early Church}, 582, n.2.

\textsuperscript{364} Basil the Great, \textit{Exhortation to Baptism} 6, referenced by Ferguson, \textit{Baptism in the Early Church}, 584.
precede baptizing the disciple, since a disciple “comes to the Lord for the purpose of following him, and so of hearing his words, believing in him and obeying him.” 365 The catechumen must confess the faith of the church and in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which was perfected in the act of baptism.

Basil tied the benefits of baptism to the divine persons. Having been baptized in the name of the Father, we are called sons of God. Having been baptized in the name of the Son, one is placed in Christ. Having been baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit, one is born again. 366 The neophyte received a new name at baptism signaling one’s new life. Baptism was “an inviolable agreement to follow the Lord in all things.” 367

Like many before him, Basil taught that baptism was saving baptism, resulting in the forgiveness of sins on the basis of faith. Faith is expressed when one is regenerated through grace in baptism. 368 Further, it meant one had entered into the death and resurrection of Christ and should die to sin (Rom 6:3-4). 369 Thus one was expected to live a life in the Spirit resulting in the fruit of holiness. 370

Gregory was bishop of Constantinople (AD 379-381), a bishopry interrupted by stints of retirement and reentry into the ministry. He was given the title “the theologian” and was a


366 Ibid., 585, citing Basil, On Baptism 1.3. Basil reverses the order of the Trinity in this explanation as a rhetorical device to emphasize the order of conversion. One must also keep in mind his work of defending the deity of the Holy Spirit against the Pneumatomachi.


368 Ibid., 589, citing Basil, On the Holy Spirit 15.36.

369 Ibid., 587, citing Basil, On Baptism 1.1-1.3.

370 Ibid., 588, citing Basil, On the Holy Spirit 15.35.
prolific writer with 1200-1500 of his manuscripts surviving. For the purpose of this research, the focus will primarily be on Orations 40 and On Holy Baptism written around AD 380.

Gregory held baptismal regeneration by water and Spirit, common in his day based on the understanding of John 3:5. Baptism is described as confession to God, transformation into the likeness of Christ, purification of body and soul, enlightenment, gift of faith, grace, and anointing with the Spirit. McKinion notes, “He explained that in baptism one symbolized outwardly what is an inward reality.” This inward transformation results in “a purer manner of life.”

Gregory considered catechumens “on the porch” to whom he extended the invitation to come inside the house, which was to enter the church (and salvation) by means of baptism. He urged inquirers not to delay this decision because one did not know what the future may hold. Gregory had catechumens prepare for baptism by sleeping on the floor, fasting, praying, vigils, tears, confession of sins, exorcisms, and compassion for the needy. Reflecting the theological

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371 Frederick W. Norris, “Gregory of Nazianzus,” Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 492. Gregory wrote more than 17,000 verses of classical Greek poetry with Christian themes.


373 Ferguson, 600. Gregory refers to three births: the natural birth, the birth of baptism, and the birth of resurrection.

374 Ibid., 593.


377 Ibid., Orations 40.16.

378 Ibid., Orations 40.31 and 40.27.
controversy of his day, he makes much of baptizing in the name of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{379} Faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was prerequisite to baptism and the faith which must be confessed verbally at baptism,\textsuperscript{380} a requirement that could pose difficulties for sickbed and infant baptism.\textsuperscript{381}

Gregory taught that the one who is baptized is transformed into a new creature. Thus, there is a clear indication of a changed lifestyle post-baptism. Describing the enlightenment that comes with baptism, Gregory wrote,

Enlightenment is the splendor of souls, the conversion of life, the pledge of the conscience to God [1 Pet 3:21]. It is the aid to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage of God, the dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of faith, the key of the kingdom of heaven, the change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodeling of the whole person.\textsuperscript{382}

Gregory’s thought on baptism was consistent with his predecessors and the theologians of his time. Baptism was the occasion for a divine act of transformation resulting in a new way of living. Catechism both explained the essence of faith and set the expectations of life to come.

Gregory of Nyssa, brother of Basil, was bishop of Nyssa from AD 372-395. His works related to baptism include \textit{Catechetical Oration}, \textit{On the Day of Lights}, and \textit{Against Those Who Defer Baptism}. He wrote \textit{Catechetical Oration} to aid teachers in instructing candidates for baptism. In it, the catechumen was taught to declare one’s faith in the Trinity equally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{383} Upon first glance, this seems standard doctrine of the day. However,

\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., \textit{Orations} 40.41-42, 44-45.
\textsuperscript{380} Ibid., \textit{Orations} 40.26.
\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., \textit{Orations} 40.28.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., \textit{Orations} 40.3.
\textsuperscript{383} Ferguson, 605, citing Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{Catechetical Oration} 38.
Gregory taught that only those who are baptized by faith in the uncreated, holy Trinity entered into eternal life. Those who were baptized denying the divinity of the Son and the Spirit were baptized into false belief and did not obtain eternal life.\textsuperscript{384} One was a birth from above while the other was a birth from below. This highlights the essential nature of accurate, biblical, pre-baptismal catechetical instruction.

Gregory’s favorite baptismal concept was regeneration. He understood Titus 3:5 to indicate one was washed in baptism and was born again in the water. He held that one must be born of water and the Spirit, consistent with his predecessors and contemporaries (John 3:5). When one is born from above, it inevitably resulted in a changed life.\textsuperscript{385} The new birth made one a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ whose purity believers should imitate. Gregory’s multiple meanings of baptism include: taking off the old self, escaping from the devil, and being enlightened. Further blessings included “forgiveness of punishments, release from bonds, kinship with God, a free person’s boldness of speech, in place of a servile humiliation an equal honor with the angels.”\textsuperscript{386} Gregory also saw baptism as a participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was not only a spiritual resurrection but anticipates a physical resurrection in the future. Gregory writes, “We rehearse beforehand in the water the grace of the resurrection so that we might know that to ascend again from death is equally easy for us as to be baptized in water.”\textsuperscript{387} Gregory devotes the last chapter of \textit{Catechetical Oration} to the moral

\textsuperscript{384} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{385} Ibid., 610, citing Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{Catechetical Oration} 40.

\textsuperscript{386} Ibid., 615, citing Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{On the Day of Lights} 9.

\textsuperscript{387} Ibid., 611, citing Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{Catechetical Oration} 40.
implications of baptism. He challenges the believer to become what one has declared in baptism. He writes, “What you have not become, you are not.”

The Cappadocian Fathers continued the heritage of delayed baptism for the purpose of catechesis, with a strong emphasis on repentance, faith, and the expectation that all who are baptized would walk faithfully with Christ.

Ambrose

Ambrose was bishop of Milan AD 374-397. He was diligent to urge people to express faith in Christ by entering the catechumenate early in life, rather than delay (due to the threat of penance for post-baptismal sins). Those who turned in their names for baptism entered into a personal and deliberate instructional process with Ambrose to prepare one’s heart and mind for one’s baptism at Easter. His pre-baptismal instruction process is preserved in *On Repentance*. His post-baptismal instruction can be found in two sources *On the Sacraments* and *On the Mysteries*. Ambrose catechized both formally and informally. Informally, Ambrose catechized through the weekly liturgy of the Word, as the church prayed and sang, and as he preached the Scripture. Formally, he took it upon himself to give direct instruction to catechumens, a

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388 Ibid., 616.

389 *On the Sacraments* is an unedited, series of six sermons explaining the sacraments, while *On the Mysteries*, though similar in content appears to be an edited version of the same themes for public distribution. Ambrose explains his reasons for delaying such instruction: “1) To disclose the mysteries to those who were as yet uninitiated would be the betrayal of a sacred trust; 2) It is better to let the light of the mysteries make its own appeal to those who come fresh to them than to introduce them by a discourse.” For more, see J.H. Srawley, ed. *St. Ambrose. On the Mysteries and the Treatise On the Sacraments by an Unknown Author*. Trans. by T. Thompson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919), xiii.

390 William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1985), 93. Ambrose primarily catechized catechumens by way of sermons preached during Mass. When Augustine wrote to Ambrose asking which book would be best to study in preparation for his baptism, Ambrose wrote back suggesting he read the book of Isaiah. Augustine attempted to read it, but found its opening chapter unintelligible and put it down. One might wonder why Ambrose suggested he read the book of Isaiah. Some suggest he hastily replied with a
process that could take years as many postponed baptism until their deathbeds. Paulinus wrote that regarding baptism, Ambrose by himself labored more than the five succeeding bishops of Milan did together.\footnote{Homes Dudden, \textit{Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times}, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 115, citing Paulinus, \textit{Vita Ambrosii}.} Interestingly, Ambrose was not formally catechized himself, but learned by tradition, mentoring, and study how to effectively catechize others. And though catechumenates were instructed in groups by way of weekly sermons, Ambrose provided much more personal instruction of \textit{competentes} during Lenten catechism.\footnote{Harmless, 94.}

Each January, during the Feast of Epiphany, Ambrose urged catechumens to turn in their names for baptism, for which his catechism would begin in earnest at Lent.\footnote{ Ibid., 90.} For those who signed up (\textit{competentes}), Ambrose personally and systematically instructed them through readings, psalms, and a series of sermons from the Old Testament. These sessions were held twice a day, Monday through Friday at 9:00a.m. and 3:00p.m (not Saturday). His format was to use biblical models, primarily from the Patriarchs and biblical morals from the book of Proverbs to teach catechumens the Christian faith and the Christian life. He wrote, “We have given a daily sermon on morals, when the deeds of the Patriarchs or the precepts of the Proverbs were read, in order that, being informed and instructed by them, you might become accustomed to enter upon random suggestion, misdiagnosing the needs of his catechumen. However, it seems that Ambrose assigned the reading of Isaiah to Augustine because Ambrose was planning to preach on Isaiah during the period of Augustine’s catechism. See further David C. Alexander, \textit{Augustine’s Early Theology of the Church: Emergence and Implications}, 386-391, v.9 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 102, citing D.F. Wright, “Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in \textit{Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, The History of Its Interpretation}, v.1/1, (1996), 703. Wright suggests Ambrose may have taught on Isaiah in Milan in 386 or early 387. Augustine’s own perspective on why Ambrose assigned him Isaiah was, “I think because more clearly than others he [Isaiah] foretold the gospel and the calling of the Gentiles.” For more see Augustine, \textit{The Confessions of St. Augustine: Bishop of Hippo}. Translated by E.B. Pusey (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1950), 201.
the ways of our forefathers and to pursue their road, and to obey the divine commands, whereby renewed by baptism, you might hold to the manner of life which befits those who are washed.” 394 Harmless suggests Ambrose’s focus during Lent was moral education rather than orthodox views, believing *competentes* needed models to imitate and basic moral principles.395 During this preparation Ambrose exhorted the whole congregation to declare a proper fast. Alexander explains this fast was daily for six weeks, ending each day at 3:00 p.m., refraining from flesh, fish, eggs, and dairy products.396 Ambrose contrasted this humble act of self-denial with the feasting and drinking of the people of Milan. Rather than treating oneself to the finer things in life, one should use one’s resources to help the poor. He urged the *competentes* as athletes in training to commit to rigorous spiritual discipline so as to win the victory on the day of baptism.

During Lent, Ambrose also performed the “mysteries of the scrutinies” on the *competentes*. This was a series of exorcisms which renounced the devil’s influence on the candidate’s life and included a physical examination. This was viewed as a sanctifying of the body and the soul.397

On the Sunday before Easter, Ambrose took the *competentes* to see the baptistry where he delivered the Creed to them with a brief instruction of each phrase. He announced, “It is now the time and the day for us to hand over the Symbol: a Symbol which is a spiritual seal, a Symbol which is our heart’s meditation and, as it were, an ever-present guard, a treasure within our breast.” 398 The Creed was explained to be precious, was to be internalized, and to be guarded.

395 Harmless, 94-95.
396 Alexander, 85.
397 Harmless, 96.
398 Ibid., 96, quoting Ambrose in *Explanatio symboli* 1.
He further explained the meaning of the term *symbollum* meaning “contribution.” This was a finance term describing how business people lumped their *symbola* contributions together into one sum, which was kept inviolable and free from fraud. They too, lumping together their profession of faith, must keep it inviolable together, free from fraud. Upon completion of the handing over of the creed, Ambrose had the *competentes* sign themselves with the sign of the Cross. He then recited the Creed, first alone, then once more with the *competentes* joining him. Ambrose then explained the Creed phrase by phrase, stressing the orthodox view of the Trinity. He aided the *competentes* with memory aids such as, “For just as there are twelve Apostles, so are there twelve phrases.” Further, he organized the major topics of the Creed into groups of four: 1) Father, Son, incarnation, death/burial; 2) resurrection, ascension, seating at the right hand, judging the living and the dead; 3) Spirit, Church, remission of sins, resurrection of the body.” The Creed was not to be written down (*disciplina arcani*) but committed to memory and repeated daily.

The rite of initiation began on Holy Saturday night with the ceremony of *ephphatha* or *aperitio*, the “opening of the ears” in which the Ambrose touched the ears and nose of the *competente*. This was to open one’s ears to the words about to be pronounced over them by the priest. The candidate entered the baptistry where a deacon or presbyter anointed the body with oil (like an athlete about to wrestle). With the candidate facing west (toward the devil’s face), the bishop asked the *competente* if he renounced the devil and his works, to which the *competente* would reply, “I renounce.” Again, do you renounce the world and its pleasures? The *competente* 399 Ibid., 98. 400 Ibid., 11.
replied “I renounce.” He would then turn to the East to look Christ in the face. Upon the 
competentes’ seeing the baptismal waters, the bishop would consecrate the baptismal water by 
way of an exorcism over the water and an invocation and prayer of consecration that the holy 
Trinity may come down.401 Next, the competente descended into the baptismal pool, attended by 
the bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Ambrose conducted baptism as a triple immersion, 
reemphasizing the Trinity. 402 Ambrose “used the baptismal faith in the three divine persons to 
argue for the co-equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”403 Each competente was asked if he 
believed in God the Father, if he believed in God the Son, if he believed in God the Holy Spirit. 
With each, the candidate was immersed and the whole of the old life was absolved. The newly 
baptized ascended from the pool as the bishop anointed the head with myron (myrrh, chrism), 
symbolizing the gift of eternal life. Ferguson explains this anointing is associated with eternal 
life, an enrichment of human faculties by grace, and the priestly and royal anointings of the Old 
Testament but (notably) not with the giving of the Holy Spirit.” 404

A distinctive for Ambrose’s baptismal ceremony was foot washing and the reading of 
John 13, which followed the anointing with myron.405 Then, the newly baptized were clothed in

401 Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, 636-637.

402 Harmless, 54, explains, “Catechists particularly focused on the intricate Trinitarian debate—partly 
because this was the faith into which catechumens would be baptized and partly because this was the faith that 
catechumens would have to defend in public fora.”

403 Ibid., 646.

404 Ibid, citing On the Mysteries 6.30 and On the Sacraments, 4.1.3.

405 Ibid., citing Ambrose, On the Sacraments, 3.1.4-6. There is debate over Ambrose’s understanding of 
foot washing. He initially taught that it washed away inherited sin, while baptism washed away personal sins. This 
was based on the devil tripping Adam and poisoning his feet, necessitating the washing of the feet as a symbol of 
washing off the poison of the devil. Though Ambrose held it as a sacrament and means of sanctification, in time, this 
belief was diluted to symbolize the humility of welcoming one’s guest into one’s home, just as the neophytes were 
being welcomed into the church.
white robes as a sign of the forgiveness of sins, union with Christ, and a pure life. Next, the candidates were given the spiritual seal, associated with the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:21-22. This seal was pronounced through a prayer and the sign of the cross on the forehead of each neophyte by the bishop as the Holy Spirit was given. The neophyte then proceeded to the altar and received the Eucharist and joined in the Lord’s Prayer with the people of God. The following week, Ambrose conducted a daily Eucharist while explaining the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist to the neophytes.406

Ambrose brought some innovations to baptism and instruction, such as anointing the nose and ear, explaining the meaning of baptism after baptism, and foot washing. Yet in most ways, his baptismal practice followed the pattern of the fourth century: delayed baptism, pre-baptismal instruction of both the faith and morality, repentance and faith, the expectation of a changed life, and a strong connection to the bishop and the local church.

**Fifth Century**

Baptism in the fifth century continued the pattern of previous centuries, as many theologians maintained the practices of delayed baptism and pre-baptismal instruction with an

406 Ibid., 645, citing Ambrose in Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke 6.2. Interestingly and perhaps counterintuitive to modern instruction, Ambrose devoted attention to the meaning of baptism in his post-baptismal catechism. In On the Mysteries, he explains the typologies of baptism in their biblical order. The mystery of baptism was seen when the Spirit moved upon the face of the waters at creation. The flood of Noah combined water (baptistry), wood (cross), the dove (the Holy Spirit), and the raven (sin) in one picture. The Exodus from Egypt pictures guilt and sin being drowned in the Red Sea of baptism. Marah’s bitter water turned sweet by the branch, was the font being sanctified by the cross. In On the Sacraments, Ambrose instructs the neophytes that the bishops invocation is parallel to Elijah calling fire down from heaven on the altar and Elisha calling on the name of the Lord and the axe head floating. Baptismal healing from sin is pictured in the paralytic getting healed at the pool of Bethesda when the angel stirred the waters. For more on the baptism symbol of the pool of Bethesda, see Ferguson, 641, citing Ambrose in On the Mysteries 3.9-3.18; Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke 4.51; On the Sacraments 2.4.11. Further, Ambrose taught that baptism was a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and of the believer, regeneration, and justification. For more on baptism’s symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and of the believer, see Ferguson, 643, citing Hugh M. Riley, Christian Initiation (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 242-250. For more on baptism as regeneration, see Ferguson, 644, citing Riley, Christian Initiation, 305-312.
emphasis on faith and the changed life. These themes are found in varying degrees in the writings of theologians such Cyril, bishop of Alexandria (AD 412-444), Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus (AD 423-460), Proclus, bishop of Constantinople (AD 434-446), Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna (AD 431-451), Leo the Great, bishop of Rome (AD 440-461), John the Deacon, possibly later John, bishop of Rome (AD 523-526), Quodvultdeus, bishop of Carthage (AD 437-457), and Theodore bishop of Mopsuestia (AD 392-428). However, this section will focus in detail on the baptismal preparations of perhaps the most prominent theologians of the fifth century: Augustine, bishop of Hippo.

Augustine

407 Faith and repentance are often noted in renunciation of Satan and adherence to Christ.


409 For more, see Theodoret, Commentary on Isaiah 1:16.


411 For more, see George E. Ganss, St. Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons, Fathers of the Church 17 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953).


413 For more, see E.C. Whitaker, Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy, revised and expanded by Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003).


As bishop of Hippo (AD 396-430), Augustine urged catechumens to turn in their names for baptism by Lent which was traditionally the season for instructing *competentes* for baptism at Easter. Augustine’s 1) demanding penitential discipline; 2) scrutiny and exorcisms; and 3) mix of public and private catechesis. Augustine himself describes his catechetical process as catechize, exorcize, and scrutinize. For Augustine, catechism was more than simply teaching the content of the faith, but also included teaching about a changed life, moral living, or as Augustine liked to express it, “faith laboring in love.” Augustine, against much criticism, guarded entrance into the Church by requiring both faith and morals prior to baptism. Those who turned in their names had their lives investigated, their sponsors and neighbors questioned, and were required to declare their resolve to live a worthy life. In addition to the interview, the catechist personally provided an introductory instruction to Christianity that included a survey of Christian history. If the applicant declared faith in the preliminary instruction, but still refused to live accordingly, the investigator was to “refuse them baptism if they resist correction and publicly declare themselves inflexible.” Augustine believed that the applicant for baptism should have already begun living “a life resonating in harmony with sacred baptism.” Thus, for Augustine, Lenten

416 Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 244. Harmless notes that in *Epistola* 258.4-5 (Parsons, 32:252), “Augustine writes to an educated catechumen named Marcianus to convince him to end his procrastinating and to ‘enroll his name among the *competentes.*’”

417 Ibid., 245.

418 Ferguson, 781, citing Augustine in *On Faith and Works*, 6.9.

419 Harmless, 247, quoting Augustine in *De fide et operibus* 25.46.

420 Ferguson, 779. Augustine’s *On Catechising the Uninstructed* was written for this purpose of preliminary instruction in Christianity.

421 Harmless, 248, quoting Augustine in *De fide et operibus* 18.33 (Liguori, 283-84-altered).

422 Ibid., 250, *De fide et operibus* 26.48.
catechism was a time to refine the lifestyle already begun leading up to baptism. Even with these strong “safeguards,” Augustine admits they offered no guarantee that some less-than-worthy candidates would slip through.”

If the applicant made declaration and demonstrated a lifestyle consistent with the declaration, the applicant was formally admitted as a *competente*, signed with the cross on the forehead with an invocation for God’s protection, received the laying on of hands with a prayer of benediction, and tasted salt, “a symbol of a preservative against corruption and of wisdom.” Upon these rites, the *competentes* set out on “a strict ascetical regimen.” *Competentes* were expected to fast each day until 3 P.M. which included abstaining from meat and wine and, if married, from sex. The fast was lifted on Sundays and Holy Thursday, but was required of all the faithful and *competentes* on Holy Saturday. Throughout Lent, *competentes* distributed alms (a practical outworking of morals in Augustine’s view) and occasionally spent all night praying. *Competentes* were not allowed to bathe during Lent, creating discomfort and breaking with social norms. They bathed on Holy Thursday in preparation for baptism on Holy Saturday. Augustine invited all the Church to participate in many of these disciplines during Lent.

During Lent, *competentes* received daily group instruction through sermons. However, they received private instruction as well. These private times of explanation were given 1) after the scrutiny; 2) on the handing over of the Creed; 3) on the giving back of the Creed; and 4) on the handing over of the Lord’s Prayer.

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423 Harmless, 250, *De fide et operibus* 19.35.
424 Ferguson, 779, citing Augustine in *On Catechising the Uninstructed* 26.50.
425 Harmless, 251.
426 Ibid.
The first rite of catechizing *competentes* involved the scrutiny. Augustine alludes to this rite in *Sermon 216*, but a clearer description is given by his friend, Quodvultdeus of Carthage. *Competentes* kept watch all night, praying, singing psalms, and brandishing weapons against the devil.427 *Competentes* entered the room with their heads bowed down to demonstrate humility, stripped off their cloaks and stood barefoot on goatskin, symbolizing the renunciation of their sins and that they were no longer among the goats, but among the sheep. An exorcist then invoked the name of the redeemer and heaped curses on the devil, commanding him to get out.428 The exorcist also breathed on (*exsufflatio*) the candidate, essentially spitting out the demonic breath with the God-given force of the breath of the exorcist. The *competentes* then formally renounced Satan.429 Thus, *competentes* were being rescued by God from the kingdom of darkness and being transferred to the kingdom of the Son, passing “from debt to solvency, from slavery to freedom, from the pangs of labor to the joy of new birth, from the desolation of exile to the consolation of coming home.”430

On the Saturday two weeks before Easter, Augustine held the ceremony of the handing over of the Creed (*traditio symboli*). Augustine recited the Creed and then explained it phrase by phrase. This was the first time the *competentes* had heard the Creed which was part of the *disciplina arcani*. This rite is described in Augustine’s *Sermon 212, 213, 214*, and *On the Symbol*. During the next week, the *competentes* with the help of their sponsors committed the Creed to memory. Then on the following Saturday, one week prior to Easter, they recited the


428 Ibid., 264, citing Augustine in *Sermon 216*.

429 Ibid., 265, citing Quodvultdeus in *De symbolo* 1.1.

430 Ibid., 277.
Creed back to the bishop from memory (a kind of dress rehearsal for Holy Saturday’s *redditio symboli*). Following this recitation, a sermon, such as *Sermon 215* was given, reemphasizing the core elements of the faith and explaining the importance of writing the words of the Creed on one’s heart. Like Ambrose, Augustine explained *symbolum* with the analogy of merchants and solidarity. Augustine used multiple rhetorical devices to explain the Creed ranging from analogy, to paradox, to juxtaposition, to allegory.

On the same Saturday, one week before Easter, Augustine handed over the Lord’s Prayer to the *competentes*. This rite was called the *traditio orationis*. A Gospel text such as Matthew 6:7-15 was read and a brief sermon was given explaining the Lord’s Prayer line by line. (Four of these sermons have survived, *Sermons 56-59*). The candidates were required to memorize and recite the Creed (what to believe) and the Lord’s Prayer (whom to believe). At about the same time, a week prior to Easter, a major scrutiny was performed which involved a physical exam, cursing of the devil, an *exsufflatio*, and a renunciation of the devil.

The week of Easter was filled with activity. As mentioned above, fasting was conducted but was broken on Holy Thursday and a bath was given, primarily for hygiene. On Holy Saturday, a final sermon, similar to *Sermon 229*, was given on the meaning of baptism. Prior to entering the baptistry, each individual *competente* was required to recite the Creed, then to prepare for baptism, which was the climax of the Saturday night Easter vigil. As the

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431 Ibid., 278.
432 Ibid., 287.
433 Ibid.
434 Ferguson, 782.
435 Ibid., 785.
competentes and clergy proceeded toward the baptistry, the congregation sang Psalm 42. The candidates stripped and entered the font, males separated from females for modesty. The competentes received the baptism of regeneration in the name of the Trinity. In baptism, one dies to sin and “are alive by being reborn in the baptismal font.” The newly baptized, whom Augustine called infantes, received new white robes to wear the entire next week. Then, the infantes joined the rest of the congregation for their first Eucharist, symbolizing their incorporation into the church. Incorporation into the church was not just symbolic for Augustine. He believed the church absorbed new believers into itself, transforming them. He wrote, “the church sanctified by chewing, swallowing, and digesting sinners, by assimilating them into itself and sharing its life with them.” And Augustine kept the believer dependent on the church holding that “outside the church sins are not forgiven, for the church alone has received the pledge of the Holy Spirit without whom is no forgiveness of sins.”

This brief description of Augustine’s baptismal process indicates he followed the doctrines and traditions of his predecessors. Baptism was delayed in order to teach the candidate the faith and the life that was expected after baptism. He emphasized faith, repentance, a changed life (required before and expected after baptism), and immediate incorporation into the church.

Chapter Two has examined twenty-two different Church fathers and/or documents from the second to the fifth century. These sources, some dating back to the time of the apostles, reveal the common baptismal practice to be: 1) An appeal, typically around Christmas time

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437 Ibid., 787. After baptism, Augustine performed the chrismation and the laying on of hands. These symbolized that the church as a royal priesthood had incorporated the newly baptized into the body of Christ.

438 Burns, Jr. and Jenson, 616, referring to Augustine, *Sermo Denis* 15 (313B).3.

439 Bromiley, 114, citing *Enchiridion* 65.
through Epiphany, to have individuals turn their names in to enter catechism; 2) Instruction typically included a time of repentance, scrutiny, memorization, exorcism, etc. all of which took place before baptism during Lent; 3) Baptisms typically took place at Easter, coinciding with the celebration of the Lord’s resurrection; and 4) Upon baptism, the neophytes entered into the church to receive their first Eucharist, incorporating the newly baptized into the church. Four hundred years of evidence points to the fact that there were no theological reservations about baptism being the culmination at the end of several weeks of preparation. Rather, it was advantageous for both healthy churches and healthy church members to invest knowledge and set high expectations upon those who declared faith in Christ.
CHAPTER THREE: A HISTORICAL CASE FOR THE USE OF CATECHISMS IN THE REFORMATION

At first glance, it may seem quite a leap to jump from the baptismal practices of the fifth century to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially considering the changes that occurred during the one thousand year interval between the church fathers and the reformers. In many ways the late Middle Ages was a bleak time. Lindberg describes it as a time of disease, famine, wars, rebellions, and urbanization. It was a time when confidence in the church as the symbol of stability and shared values was being questioned. The church existed in the midst of significant political and social changes, and underwent theological changes, many of which set the stage for the Reformation.

Many trace the watershed moment of change back to the fourth century conversion of Constantine in AD 312 and the subsequent passage of the Edict of Milan in AD 313. Christianity became both personally endorsed by the emperor and legally sanctioned by the government, setting the stage for Christianity’s rapid expansion. With it came changes in church practice. As Constantine’s Roman armies conquered lands under the banner of the cross, people were simultaneously incorporated into both the Roman Empire and Christianity. One might rightly question whether these “incorporations” were actual conversions. One might also predict

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440 For an excellent treatment of the socio-economic and theological conditions in Europe in the late Medieval period just prior to the Reformation, see Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 22-53.

441 Hammett, 88, citing Robert G. Clouse, Richard V. Pierard, and Esein M. Yamauchi, *Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture Through the Ages* (Chicago: Moody, 1993), 109. The Edict of Milan (313) made Christianity legal and soon it became the predominant religion in the Empire. Hammett notes that at the time, Christianity made up 10 percent of the population. Within a century, it made up 90 percent of the population. Persecution tended to keep the standard of church membership high. Constantine’s favor made membership socially desirable and flooded the seminaries with candidates for the priesthood. This led to a merging of church and state.

442 Ibid., also notes this happened in other parts of Europe. For example, Clovis’, king of the Franks conditional conversion that if God helped him win battles he would become a Christian. Subsequent to his baptism, he had three thousand of his “still pagan soldiers” baptized.
that with mass conversions came mass baptisms, making the typical forty-day Lenten pre-baptismal catechism of previous decades more and more obsolete. This change coupled with the normalization of infant baptism gradually changed catechism from a pre-baptismal process into a post-baptismal educational practice.443

As a generation passed, Christianity became increasingly superficial. Among adults, rather than experiencing conversion via personal faith, becoming a Christian was one’s inheritance as a citizen of a nation, with little requirement to understand or to live out the faith. Adults who had been incorporated into Christianity by conquest had their children baptized as infants, multiplying baptisms of the unconverted. Stark writes, “the Church made it very easy to become a Christian—so easy that actual conversion rarely occurred.”444

In the centuries that followed, the church developed doctrines and church practices which not only set the stage for the Reformation, but also signaled a theological drift away from Scripture and the Fathers. The church of the fourth and fifth centuries developed Origen’s doctrine of original sin.445 The doctrine held that all human beings were born guilty of sin, having inherited guilt from Adam and stood in need of forgiveness and regeneration, which occurred in

443 The exception to this was those who as adults had entered catechetical instruction but delayed their baptisms until near death to avoid post-baptismal sins and penance.


445 Kelly, 181, references Origen who believed that all souls are preexistent and come into the world sinful. Thus, infants come into the world with original sin in need of redemption. Thus, infant baptism is necessary to cover original sin. Origen states in Against Celsus 7.50 “…the prophets…tell us that a sacrifice for sin was offered even for new-born infants, as not being free from sin. They say, ‘I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me; also ‘They are estranged from the womb;’ which is followed by the singular expression, ‘They go astray just as soon as they are born, speaking lies.” Origen, Against Celsus 7.50. New Advent. Accessed December 21, 2019. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04167.htm. Augustine further developed the doctrine of original sin, retaining infant baptism. For Augustine, “the essence of original sin consists in our participation in, and co-responsibility for, Adam’s perverse choice. In this way by nature of being part of the human family, even infants ‘participated’ in Adam’s sin. Thus, infants are in need of redemption to remove the guilt if original sin. See J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 364.
baptism. Thus, baptism was urged upon all, for if one died unbaptized, one was damned whether one was an adult, child, or infant. To justify baptizing an infant who could not express faith, the church developed the practice of *fides alienas* whereby sponsors (godparents) were allowed to answer the pre-baptismal questions regarding the faith on behalf of an infant. In infant baptism, the infant’s guilt of original sin was removed and salvation was granted. While the doctrine of original sin was supported by Scripture (Rom 5:12,13), its application to infants led to the normalization of infant baptism making pre-baptismal catechism obsolete.

As a result of so many new converts by conquest, birth, and infant baptism, the church faced yet another theological dilemma. While baptism provided forgiveness for original sins (in the case of adults, venial sins committed prior to baptism), how would the church address post-baptismal sins? Over the centuries, the church came to believe that Matt 18:18 “…whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” gave it the power to grant forgiveness. This view led to the development of confession, wherein one sought forgiveness by confessing one’s sins to a priest. Additionally, it was required that confession be thorough and done properly. If done incorrectly or incompletely, one’s sins remained unforgiven. Ozment explains that correct confession must be:

- simple (concerning oneself, not gossip about others); humble; done with the resolve to avoid future sin; done with faith in forgiveness; often; in person (not by messenger or by letter); exact; voluntary (not done out of fear of pain); done with shame; complete; made in seclusion with the priest (*heimlich*—although openly [*offenbarlich*] when woman are the penitents); bitter; prompt (done soon after the sin); powerful and convincing; without

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446 It’s not that there were no adult baptisms. As mentioned above, conquests of war resulted in adult baptisms. Further, as a result of the doctrines of baptismal regeneration and penance for post-baptismal sins, many adults in the Roman Empire were tempted to postpone their baptisms until their deathbeds. For example, Ambrose wasn’t baptized as an infant, only later receiving the rite in order to qualify as a presbyter and then bishop of Milan. History also records how Augustine’s mom withheld baptism from her son. He intentionally chose to delay his baptism (due to fear of post-baptismal sins and penance) until coming under the teachings of Ambrose in Milan. It was common to find bishops urging people to “turn in their names” (usually around Christmas) and to enter into catechism with a view of being baptized at Easter.
excuses (no blaming the Devil); and executed with an attitude of submissiveness to the priest’s judgment.\textsuperscript{447}

Placing such power in the hands of church officials made the practice of confession susceptible to abuse and reinforced one’s insecurity in obtaining eternal salvation. Salvation was assured to no one, and good works and good conduct never guaranteed it absolutely. This outlook mixed with church officials seeking personal gain through assigned penance put congregants at the mercy of a corrupt system.

Though confession was thorough, it was not viewed as sufficient to rid the congregant of sin by itself. Punishment was also necessary. Thus, alongside the practice of confession,\textsuperscript{448} the church continued the sacrament of penance\textsuperscript{449} to prescribe punishment for sins. While no one


\textsuperscript{449} Kelly, 198, 216-219, acknowledges the origins of the sacrament of penance is uncertain. He explains that it was developed in the second century to deal with sins committed after baptism. (Pre-baptism sins were forgiven in the font). In the second century it was common to believe that there was no penance available for intentional post-baptismal sins. One recalls this teaching in \textit{Hermas} who declared the only penance is the one occurring in baptism (Later a second penance was provided. \textit{Visions} 2.2.4-5; \textit{Mandates} 4.4.4). Justin followed this line of thinking that one must live without sin post-baptism (\textit{Dialogue with Trypho} 44). However, others saw the possibility of confession and repentance for post-baptismal sins, including Clement, the \textit{Didache}, Polycarp, and Ignatius. By the third century and thereafter, penance involved public confession, an assigned period of penance, exclusion from communion, and formal absolution and restoration, a process called \textit{exomologesis}. Frank Flinn notes that in modern Catholicism the Sacrament of penance is exercised privately when the individual confesses his or her sins to a priest, who listens, assigns the penitent certain acts as reparation for the sin, and pronounces God’s forgiveness. Two additional penitential options have more recently been developed to include a communal rite with two penitents participating in the liturgy with private confession of sin and a general confession of sin in the Mass and pronouncement of forgiveness by a priest. See Frank K. Flinn, “Penance,” in \textit{Encyclopedia of Catholicism} (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 512. For more, see Patrick J. Brennan, \textit{Penance and Reconciliation} (Chicago: Thomas More, 1986); James Dallen, \textit{The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance} (New York: Pueblo, 1986).
relished the thought of “doing penance,” it was far better than the prospect of dying with post-baptismal sins on one’s record, which would have to be paid off in purgatory, the place between death and heaven where venial sins were further purged making one better fit for heaven.

It was the dread of penance and purgatory that led to the most repugnant of all fifteenth century church practices, the sale of indulgences. An indulgence held the potential of reducing penance and time in purgatory or eliminating it all together. Its benefits could be applied to the living and the dead. Originally, indulgences included things such as additional prayer, Scripture reading, and repeating the Rosary. However, in time indulgences devolved to include the option of a financial contribution to the church in exchange for reduced retribution for sins, mortem or postmortem. Both the church and municipalities benefited from sale of indulgences, leaving

450 The Latin Vulgate translated Matt 3:2 “et dicens: Poenitentiam agite: appropinquavit enim regnum caelorum.” as “do penance” i.e. do works to demonstrate sorrow over sin, rather than “metanoeite,” “repent,” which is to turn from sin or change one’s mind and behavior. Erasmus’ NT retranslation of “Poenitentiam agite,” “do penance” to “metanoeite,” “repent” was revolutionary.

451 Flinn, “Purgatory,” 536-537. Flinn explains that purgatory is an intermediate place between heaven and hell where a person can be purged of venial sins to prepare to meet God. The primary text behind the doctrine of purgatory is 2 Maccabees 12:40-45 which teaches that a sin offering can be made for the sin of the dead. Additionally, Flinn cites inscriptions inside second century catacombs showing prayer for the dead, as well as the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian. Augustine also wrote of prayers for the dead and purifying fire (City of God, 21.26). Gregory the Great wrote of purgatory fire cleansing from light sin and offering the Eucharist for the deliverance of the soul that had passed (Dialogues 4.41,57). Further Thomas Aquinas wrote of purgatory in Commentary on the Sentences 4.21.1, as well as Dante Alighieri’s poetic description in Purgatorio in Comedia Divina. The doctrine was officially sanctioned by the Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Florence (1439). For more, see Robert Ombres, Theology of Purgatory (Butler: Clergy Book Service, 1978); John A. Nageleisen, Charity for the Suffering Souls: An Explanation of the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory (Rockford, Ill: Tan, 1982).

452 Ibid., “Indulgence,” 362, states that an indulgence is “the remission of temporal punishment incurred by sin.” According to Catholic theology, even though venial sins are forgiven, they still require punishment, which usually is carried out in purgatory. However, the punishment can be reduced or eliminated by an indulgence, granted by a priest, which assigns merit to the one in need of merit. An indulgence required indulgent acts such as prayer, Scripture reading, or saying the Rosary by the recipient. Indulgences also required reconciliation, partaking of the Eucharist, and renunciation of sin. Additionally, indulgences could be granted for favors to the Empire. In 1095, Pope Urban II granted an indulgence for anyone who fought in the Crusades. Further, in the Middle Ages, indulgences were granted for monetary contributions to the church. In 1517, Pope Leo X sold indulgences to fund his church building program, including St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Under the effective salesmanship of Johann Tetzel (1465-1519), indulgences were sold based on financial donations without any requirement of indulgent acts. The Council of Trent (1567) forbade the sale of indulgences but allowed indulgences to be granted for acts of piety, a practice that continues to this day.
misinformed church members eager victims of the practice. Only when the indulgent proceeds were sent away for funding distant papal projects (such as building St. Peter’s basilica in Rome) was there an outcry against indulgences by citizens and local officials.

This was the theological landscape in which the reformers found themselves. A church corrupted by political ties, self-serving ambition, immorality, in financial straits, and inundated with human inventions which displaced faith in Christ alone with faith in religious works prescribed by the institutional church. By the fifteenth century, the need for reform was apparent. McGrath notes, “It seemed to many that the lifeblood of the church had ceased to flow through its veins.” There was growing criticism of the gap between Jesus and the Apostles and what the

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454 Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2012), 2-3. McGrath notes that ecclesiastical leaders were absent from 1 out every 14 parishes and ecclesiastical appointments were often based on family connections or political and financial status rather than spiritual qualifications. Examples include Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy securing the appointment of his eight year old, unordained son as bishop of Geneva in 1451 and Pope Alexander VI being elected pope in 1492, though he had mistresses and seven children. Contrasted with the wealthier appointments in some regions, there was disrespect of the clergy in some cities due to the clergy’s lowly living conditions, low incomes, perceived incompetence, lack of
papacy was demonstrating. Lindberg writes, “What they could see was the great gulf between the biblical image of the shepherd guiding the flock toward the heavenly city and the series of Renaissance popes who exploited the flock for their advancement in the earthly city.455 The need for reform included the need for popes to abandon immorality and political ambition, for the clergy to be more educated, and for the church organization to be simplified and cleansed of corruption. These abuses highlighted the need for reform in Christian doctrine and theology, as the church had long abandoned the essentials of NT Christianity, particularly related to forgiveness and salvation. McGrath writes, “There was an urgent need to recapture the vitality and freshness of the Christian faith.” 456 The rallying cry of the reformers was Christianismus renascens, “Christianity being born again!” 457

The reformers waged verbal war against the abuses and corruption of the Catholic church through debates, preaching, lectures, council meetings, courtrooms, and colloquies. However, by far the most effective means by which the reformers spread their views was by pen and the printing press.458 This new invention meant that Reformation documents could be produced and education, and clerical tax breaks. Disrespect was less common in rural areas where the clergyman was often the most educated person around. Further resentment was fueled in the late Renaissance by political mistrust of the pope often being Italian. For a more thorough description of anti-clerical and anti-papal sentiments around the time of the Reformation, see McGrath, 24-27. Lindberg notes Alexander VI exemplifies “the depths to which the papacy sank at this time” adding that “Alexander’s own involvement in sexual promiscuity, alleged poisonings, and intrigue made the name Borgia a synonym for corruption.” Lindberg cites another example of corruption in Julius II whose reign was characterized by warfare. His enthusiasm for the rebuilding St. Peter’s Basilica led to the indulgence system attacked by Martin Luther. See Lindberg, The European Reformation, 51-52.

455 Lindberg, 51.

456 Ibid., 4.

457 Like Renaissance philosophers, reform-minded theologians set out to discover what Christianity was like in NT times and in the patristic era, under the slogan ad fontes, “back to the sources” There they rediscovered the foundations of grace, faith, repentance, and regeneration. These sources included both the Bible and “the Fathers.” The New Testament and the Fathers writings became the blueprint for reform.

458 McGrath, 12, noting that the first European printed materials came from the press of Johann Gutenberg of Mainz around 1454.
reproduced quickly and cheaply, compared to the slow and tedious process of copying documents by hand. Especially important to the spread of the Reformation was the reprinting of the Bible and the writings of the church fathers, allowing the masses to understand and compare the church of earlier centuries with the church of the day. Luther called the new technology of printing “a gift from God” allowing his ideas to flood Europe in a matter of months. Printed materials took the form of pamphlets, tracts, letters, Bibles, sermons, theses, hymnals, song sheets, apologies, commentaries, confessions of faith, and catechisms. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the Anabaptists all utilized the power of the pen and printing. For the purposes of this research, the publications of the reformers related to baptism and catechism will be examined.

Confessions and Catechisms During the Reformation

The sixteenth century has been called the golden age of catechisms, as reformers sought to maintain the gains of the Reformation which centered on getting back to biblical Christianity. Interestingly, the Reformation spirit of casting off the restraints of the corrupt church in exchange for a more biblical church produced the need for discipline and maintaining orthodoxy among the vast variety of Protestant opinions. Ozment writes, “Protestant leaders now undertook the extremely awkward task of making religious discipline and enforced orthodoxy prominent in a religion that had succeeded primarily in the name of freedom from religious tyranny.”

Catechisms were one way that reformers provided structure for unbridled religious fervor.

Printing and distributing confessions and catechisms allowed reformers to solidify the faith and practice of the past, justify the practices of the present, and reform what was thought to

459 Ibid., 34.

460 Ozment, 152. In Ozment’s view, by the late sixteenth century, “…Protestant catechisms and church ordinances, where fully enforced, tended finally to secure religious freedom by ending it.” See further, Ozment, 164.
be insufficient. A sample of the confessions and catechisms related to baptism in the works of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, will demonstrate that while the magisterial reformers understood the need to instruct the young through catechesis, their retention of infant baptism relegated it to a post-baptismal educational program.\textsuperscript{461} It was not until the Anabaptists rediscovered believer’s baptism that catechesis could be restored to its traditional place as a pre-baptismal tool.

**The Catholic Use of Catechisms**

It is important to set forth the Catholic use of catechism in the Reformation period as a reference point for the reformer’s confessions of faith and use of catechisms. The most widely used catechism among Catholics before and during the early years of the Reformation was written by Dietrich Coelde in 1470. Ozment explains that his catechism existed in three versions. The first was a small catechism intended for simple people and children, summarizing the Catholic faith, sacraments, commandments, the church, and prayer. The second, *The Mirror of a Christian Man*, was written in 1480 and was reprinted twenty-nine times. It contained the small catechism plus fifty-three additional articles. His final version was *The Mirror of the Christian Faith*, which expanded the prior’s fifty-three articles to one hundred and twenty-two articles and was intended for clergy and the well-educated.\textsuperscript{462} The catechism included the standard instruction on the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. It also included the “Five Commandments of the Church” which set forth the church’s expectations: devout attendance of Sunday’s mass; confession of all sins and acceptance of the sacrament at least once a year; fasting during Quatember vigils, the forty days of Lent, and on the eve of the feast days of Mary

\textsuperscript{461} For an excellent book summarizing these publications during the Reformation, see Mark A. Noll, ed. *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

\textsuperscript{462} Ozment, 29.
and the twelve apostles; avoidance of the excommunicated [whose names were announced weekly at mass]; and seeking spiritual cures (confession and mass) for physical illness, since illness comes from sin. 463 Sadly, Coelde wrote, “There are three things I know to be true that frequently make my heart heavy. The first troubles my spirit, because I have to die. The second troubles my heart more, because I do not know when. The third troubles me above all. I do not know where I will go.” 464 Coelde’s work demonstrates the intensive emphasis on good works to keep one in God’s good graces, while still being unable to provide believers assurance of salvation. 465

The contrast between the Catholic church and the reformers was lucid. Would the church of the sixteenth century continue to operate on Scripture plus tradition or return to Scripture alone as the final authority for faith and practice? Would it proclaim faith plus good works or faith alone? Would it continue to practice a corrupted form of Christianity or return to pure Christianity of the apostles and fathers?

While the reformers were united in their message and cause to reclaim biblical Christianity, there were contrasts between the reformers themselves. While Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin retained infant baptism, they defended it differently. Luther held that it could be scripturally supported based on the analogy of OT circumcision equaling NT baptism, while Zwingli and later Calvin defended the practice based on a covenant theology view. These

463 Ibid. Ozment provides an excellent summary of Coeld’s articles on pages 30-32. Ultimately, Coeld’s work outlines the exhausting requirement of good works outlined by the Catholic church.


differences prevented the magisterial reformers from unifying the reform movements across Europe. However, it was the radical reformers who demonstrated the most resolve to recover the pure faith of the NT apostles and early church fathers. Though the Anabaptists agreed in principle with the magisterial reformers regarding Scripture only, justification by faith, and a desire for a pure church, they adamantly opposed all church practices that were not found in Scripture, resisted a close association between the state and church, and insisted upon believer’s-only baptism. Following is a brief overview of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the Anabaptist’s beliefs concerning baptism along with confessions of faith and/or catechisms that demonstrated these beliefs.

**Martin Luther’s Use of Catechism**

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is often thought of as the “Father of the Reformation” primarily for his early and central role in protesting the abuses of the Catholic church of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, most notably by presenting his *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517. More than his actions, it was Luther’s writings that had the greatest impact. Lindberg states, “Whereas an earlier religious figure might have been celebrated for miracles or for powers of healing, Luther was celebrated…as a bearer of texts…Luther’s literary activity is vital to an understanding of his religion and by extension of the Reformation as a whole.”466 Luther wrote two catechisms, his *Small Catechism* (1529) and *Large Catechism* (1529), which demonstrate his

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understanding that the remedy for spiritual decline in a church or community is the systematic implementation of basic Christian instruction.

Luther’s catechisms were written “to present the fundamentals of the Christian faith in simple language.”\textsuperscript{467} He believed that “everyone must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian.”\textsuperscript{468} A tour of the towns and villages of Saxony in 1528 revealed that basic knowledge of the Christian faith was not common. This was true not only of laity, but also of clergy. He wrote,

Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacraments, they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.\textsuperscript{469}

It was this tour that led to Luther writing his \textit{Large Catechism} and \textit{Small Catechism}.

Luther scolds bishops for neglecting the instruction of their congregations. He insisted that preachers not alter the form or text of the catechism when teaching the young, but rather use the same unaltered text year after year. The consequence for a learner not following the preacher’s instructions was that it be announced that he has denied Christ and is no Christian. Further they were not to be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper, could not serve as a baptismal sponsor, or engage in any other Christian privileges. More astonishing, Luther prescribed that they were to be turned over to the pope, church officials, and the devil himself. Parents and employers were not to provide him food or drink and the prince of the province was

\textsuperscript{467} Ibid., 124.

\textsuperscript{468} Ibid., citing \textit{Luther’s Works} 51:70 in \textit{Luther’s Works}, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 70.

\textsuperscript{469} Noll, 62, citing Luther, \textit{Small Catechism}, Preface.
disposed to banish him from the land. Luther’s poignant words in the Preface of his *Small Catechism* demonstrate several key contentions made in this research. First, the practice of catechism had become a post-baptismal activity intended to educate baptized believers. Second, Luther believed all believers should at least know the basics of the faith. Thirdly, without a foundational understanding of the faith into which one was baptized, supposed Christians are likely to live with little evidence of regeneration.

Perhaps many of these problems and subsequent threats from Luther could have been avoided by providing pre-baptismal instruction to candidates who were old enough to understand and commit themselves to the faith. Yet, Luther maintained infant baptism as scriptural. Luther stated, “In baptism the infants themselves believe and have their own faith…When the baptizer asks whether the infant believes, and it is answered ‘Yes’ for him, and whether he wants to be baptized, and it is answered ‘Yes’ for him…therefore it must be he himself believes, or else those who answer must be lying when they say ‘I believe’ for him.”

Perhaps in some mysterious, but seemingly illogical way, Luther believed the Word of God generated faith in the infant as the gospel was spoken over the infant in baptism, penetrating the infant’s heart and creating saving faith.

Luther was not only interested in catechesis transferring general information to the learners but was concerned that they know what each phrase meant. Thus, his preface calls for preachers to teach the meaning of the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord’s Prayer. The preacher was told to remain on the present topic until the learner had mastered the content; then

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move to the next. These truths were not only meant to be memorized but internalized into the heart and mind.\footnote{Ibid., citing Martin Luther, \textit{The Large Catechism of Martin Luther} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 9. An example of Luther’s approach can be seen in his treatment of the first commandment which was first memorized as “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Then Luther explained, “What is it to have a god? What is God? Answer: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two things belong go together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”}

Upon completion of the \textit{Small Catechism}, preachers were instructed to move to the \textit{Large Catechism} to provide richer and fuller instruction in the faith. He writes, “Expound every commandment, petition, and part, pointing out their respective obligations, benefits, dangers, advantages, and disadvantages….”\footnote{Noll, 63, Luther, \textit{Small Catechism}, Preface.} It appears that Luther applied the intensity of the early church fathers to his catechesis, yet as a post-baptismal practice.

Luther’s frustration with the spiritual condition of the villages is seen further as he urged preachers to press government officials to rule wisely and for parents to educate their children. Parents who neglected this duty were guilty of “damnable sin” and were the “worst enemies of God and man.”\footnote{Ibid., 64.} Interestingly, he admonished preachers not to create a rule requiring people to come to receive the sacraments. That would be reminiscent of the pope’s approach, from whom they had been freed. Rather, they were to instruct on the advantages and disadvantages, the blessings and dangers, and the benefits and losses; then let the people choose to attend on their own free will. With this as his preface, he methodically walked through the nine articles of the \textit{Small Catechism} in the familiar question, answer, explanation format.
Article I covers the Ten Commandments; Article II, the Creed; Article III, The Lord’s Prayer. Article IV is on “The Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach it to his household.” Luther defines baptism as “not merely with water, but it is water used according to God’s command and connected with God’s Word.” His explanation is that since God’s Word commands baptism in Matt 28:19, one should be obedient to be baptized. The benefit of baptism is that it effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe as the Word and promise of God declare in Mark 16:16 “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” Luther is careful to explain that it is not the water that produces salvation, but the Word of God connected to the water, which makes baptism the “gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5-8). Baptism signified that the old life with its sins and lusts should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, putting sin to death and that the new man should rise daily cleansed and righteous as recorded in Rom 6:4. In summary, Luther taught baptism involved obedience and faith, and resulted in a changed life. His Small Catechism concludes with articles on Confession of sins to God (V), the Lord’s Supper (VI), Morning and Evening Prayers (VII), saying Grace at the Table (VIII), and Duties of various persons from church officials, to servants, to parents, and children (IX).

Luther’s Large Catechism was provided as an aid to clergy and heads of households to instruct believers in the faith. It reads more like a series of sermons than a question and answer format. In the Preface, fathers are admonished to question their children and servants at least

474 Noll, 71-72, Luther, Small Catechism, Article IV.3.

once a week concerning the contents of the catechism. After restating his astonishment of finding old people who knew nothing of the basics of the faith, yet had been baptized and participate in the Lord’s Supper, he commenced to laying out the foundational instruction of his Large Catechism: The Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Learners were to memorize these word-for-word and recite them every morning, at meals, and each night.

Next, the Preface includes a brief article on baptism containing only a quote of Mark 16:16 and the brief comment “So much is sufficient for a simple person to know from the Scriptures concerning baptism.” The catechism concludes with an admonishment to preachers to supplement the catechism with psalms, hymns, and any other resource that reinforces these components. Learners are urged to attend worship, especially during times when these themes are emphasized, so as to learn more of the meaning behind each phrase.

Though the Preface is brief, the following articles are very detailed. He teaches the Ten Commandments one by one followed by a lengthy explanation. In Luther’s view, the first commandment of “no other gods before me” imparts its splendor on all the other. He returns to Exodus 20:5-6 “You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” to emphasize the Lord’s strong warning to obey him out of godly fear and love. He concludes that these commandments are to be “taught above all others, to be esteemed precious and dear, as the highest treasure given by God.”

476 Ibid.

The *Large Catechism*’s explanation of the Creed follows. He declares that within the Creed one finds “everything that we must expect and receive from God” and teaches us to fully know him.”478 The Apostles’ Creed contains twelve articles, yet Luther reduces it to three articles here for the ease of learning for children. It is summarized as God the Father, who reveals to us creation; God the Son, who reveals to us redemption; and God the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us sanctification.

Next, Luther unpacks the Lord’s Prayer part by part, urging men to pray. It is not sufficient to simply memorize the words of the Lord’s Prayer. One must actively participate in prayer, believing that God is just as pleased with the average person’s prayer as he was with St. Paul. Man should pray out of obedience, because God has promised help to those who pray, and because God has given one the very words he would have one pray within the Lord’s Prayer. With that, Luther delivers explanations of the Prayer phrase by phrase. Luther provided an excellent foundation for understanding the Christian life, the content of which had been practiced in the early centuries of the church.

Finally, Luther explained the sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He is clear that these are the only two sacraments sanctioned by Christ. Baptism is commanded by God in Matt 28:19 and Mark 16:16. Baptism is considered divine, that is, not an invention of man. Therefore, to be baptized is to be baptized by God, not by man. Because God has sanctioned water as the medium of baptism and commanded its use, it is more than just natural water. It is “a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water”479 based on God’s Word. When the water is joined to the Word it becomes a sacrament, a holy and divine matter and sign. He writes, “Thus, and much


479 Ibid.
more even, you must honor Baptism and esteem it glorious on account of the Word….”

Luther commends returning to one’s baptism as the source of one’s assurance of salvation. He writes, “when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless, I am baptized, but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.” After addressing the Lord’s Supper, Luther concludes his *Large Catechism*, urging fathers to teach these things to their children so that they will teach it to their children and the church may be preserved. Catechized children would also be useful and helpful to the entire church as they would be equipped “to help us believe, love, pray, and fight against the devil.”

Luther’s *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism* demonstrate a fundamental truth held by the Apostles, the church fathers, the reformers and their descendants, including Baptists: teaching the basics of the Christian faith helps to strengthen, fortify, and preserve the biblical church but only if church officials and parents are diligent to provide the instruction early and ongoing. Granted, Luther’s application of catechism is post-baptismal due to the practice of infant baptism. However, it demonstrates his belief that deficiencies in knowledge that resulted in spiritual apathy could be corrected by instruction in the basics of the Christian faith, including the meaning of baptism and the expectation of life of faith and obedience to the Scripture.

**John Calvin’s Use of Catechism**

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480 Ibid.

481 Ibid.

John Calvin (1509-1564) is perhaps best known for writing *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In *Institutes*, he systematically expounded the doctrines of the Christian faith from the Bible. This work had a significant impact on the Reformation as it explained doctrine based on the authority of the Bible, not the church or its councils.

Calvin was recruited by William Farel to help organize the newly founded reformed church in the reformed city of Geneva. Calvin reluctantly complied. He believed there were three essentials that every church should have to be well organized. First, every church needed a confession of faith. This prompted Calvin and Farel to write *The Genevan Confession* (1536), the pattern of which followed the Augsburg Confession, setting forth in twenty-one articles the convictions of the reformers and their disputes with the Catholic church. Secondly, every well-ordered church needed a church constitution, prompting Calvin and Farel to write “Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and Worship in Geneva” in 1537. Thirdly, and most pertinent to the present research, Calvin believed that every church needed “a brief compendium of the new evangelical faith.” In other words, it was a catechism.

The *Institutes* was originally intended as an evangelical catechism for the education and reformation of the churches, but Calvin soon realized “that this was much too long and difficult a work for most lay people and especially for youth.” Hesselink states that Calvin believed “faith must be undergirded and nourished by understanding, or else, after flowering briefly, it will wither and die.” Thus early in 1537, Calvin published his first catechism in French under the

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483 The first edition was published in 1536 and contained only six chapters. By comparison, the final edition published in 1559 contained eighty chapters.


485 Ibid.

486 Ibid.
title *Instruction in the Faith*, to provide instruction for youth in Geneva. Then in 1538, under the
title of *Catechism*, he translated this work into Latin which he believed would make it accessible
to a broader audience. He also hoped a catechism in Latin would promote doctrinal unity in the
churches. *Catechism* utilized a topical approach to instruction. Believing his 1538 *Catechism* was
too difficult for children to understand, he wrote an additional catechism in 1541 in French, the
*Geneva Catechism* and then translated it to Latin in 1545. The *Geneva Catechism* follows the
traditional question and answer format. Hesselink notes, that though *Geneva* is appreciated,
scholars view *Catechism* as “a masterpiece of condensation and simplicity and is unsurpassed as
a key to Calvin’s teaching.”487 A brief discussion of *Catechism*, as well as his thoughts on
baptism, will demonstrate that Calvin understood the necessity of establishing a biblical
foundation for the Christian life by way of catechism, though be it a post-baptismal exercise.

Like Luther and many others before, Calvin’s *Catechism* explains the Ten
Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. However, unlike his predecessors, he does
not place these topics at the beginning of the work. Rather, Calvin begins with a discussion of
the knowledge of God and ends with an article on the civil magistrate. *Catechism* also includes
articles on the nature of man, sin and death, the role of God’s Law, prayer, true faith, faith and
works, repentance and regeneration, justification, obedience, election and predestination, free
will, Christian hope, human traditions, pastors and the church, excommunication, and the
sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It serves as an excellent primer of Calvin’s
theological themes more fully developed in later of editions of *Institutes*.

University Press, 1954), 140.
For Calvin, salvation is the redeeming work of God toward man inevitably resulting in repentance, faith, and a transformed life. Man is born guilty of original sin, resulting in God’s image being “wiped out.” Further, man is guilty for having violated the Ten Commandments, described as God’s “most perfect rule of all righteousness” and his “everlasting will.” Man is fallen and God’s perfect Law leaves man defenseless and condemned in as state of unbelief. Apart from God’s loving, electing action, man’s depraved will is not free to turn to God but rather “desires, and strives after nothing that is not impious, distorted, evil, or impure,” leaving man as objects of God’s just wrath against sin. However, God uses man’s experience of being “pressed down under a huge weight of sins and befouled with limitless dregs,” striking him with terror and overwhelming him with despair in order to strip man of his own righteousness and power, humbling him and preparing him for salvation. In the midst of helplessness, Christ appears both as the “severe judge of crimes,” but also shines his countenance “full of grace and kindness even toward poor and unworthy sinners.” From this state, God “calls us back from error to the straight path, from death to life, from disaster to safety, from the devil’s sway into his

488 Hesselink, 9, quoting Calvin, Catechism 4.
489 Ibid., 11, quoting Calvin, Catechism 8.
490 Ibid., 17, quoting Calvin, Catechism 13. Calvin calls election and predestination “the sublime secret of the divine plan.” He held that the seed of the Word of God will only take root in those whom the Lord has by his eternal election predestined. The question of why God chose some for mercy and others for condemnation should be left to God. God’s wrath is called just in that he would be within his rights to destroy all mankind, but has graciously chosen to save some through Jesus Christ to the praise of his glory. He urges the reader “let us not—seek to penetrate into heaven itself and to fathom what God from eternity decreed for us. Such thinking can only vex us with miserable anxiety and trouble.”
491 Ibid., 10, quoting Calvin, Catechism 5.
492 Ibid., quoting Calvin, Catechism 6.
493 Ibid., 16, Calvin, Catechism 11.
494 Ibid.
own kingdom.” And God calls one to “true faith” which is contrasted with “bare knowledge of God or understanding of the Scripture which rattles around the brain and affects the heart not at all.” Rather, true faith is “a firm and staunch confidence of the heart by which we securely repose in God’s mercy promised us through the Gospel.” Readers are urged to unhesitatingly have confidence in the Promiser and to grasp his Word by faith. The result of this faith response will be justification and sanctification. In his article on sanctification by faith, Calvin emphasizes that those who have been justified will inevitably be sanctified, growing more and more in purity and innocence due to participation in the Spirit. He declares that those who claim to be saved, yet show no evidence to be deceived. He writes, “They are deceived, then, who boast in their faith in Christ while utterly stripped of the sanctification of his Spirit. Scripture teaches us that for us Christ was made not only righteousness, but sanctification as well.” Thus those who have repented and been declared righteous are transformed by the Spirit of God and will live a new life. This is further explained in the article on repentance and regeneration. Calvin explains that faith in Christ always includes repentance. Repentance is saying “farewell to the perversity of the world” as “Christ is not the minister of sin.” One is to consecrate one’s life

495 Ibid., 10, quoting Calvin, Catechism 7.
496 Ibid., 18, Calvin, Catechism 14.
497 Ibid.
498 Ibid., quoting Calvin, Catechism 16.
499 Ibid., quoting Calvin, Catechism 17.
500 Ibid.
501 A concise statement by Calvin on regeneration is found in his catechism from 1560, A Dialogue Between the Minister and the Child, sec. 330. He states, “From what does regeneration get its power? From the death and resurrection of Christ. His death has had this effect, that through it our old Adam is crucified, and our evil nature is, as it were, buried, so that it no longer has the strength to rule over us. And the renewal of our life, in obedience to the righteousness of God, derives from the resurrection of Christ.
forever to the Father’s glory. He explains further that regeneration consists of two parts: the mortification of the flesh and spiritual righteousness. He writes, “We must press with our whole life toward this meditation, that dead to sin and to ourselves, we may live to Christ and his righteousness. And since this generation is never fulfilled so long as we sojourn in the prison of the mortal body, there must be an unflagging pursuit of repentance even unto death.”

The depth of instruction is indeed remarkable remembering that Calvin wrote *Catechesis* for children, believing *Institutes* was too difficult for them to understand.

Most pertinent to this research are the articles on baptism as one of two sacraments given to the church: baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which provide the believer an opportunity to exercise one’s faith before God and man. He defines a sacrament as “an outward sign by which the Lord represents and attests to us his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith…it is a testimony to God’s grace declared to us by an outward sign.”

God uses physical elements to assist one in contemplating “lofty and heavenly mysteries.” The symbols of baptism and the Lord’s Supper point to, confirm, and seal the promises made by God in His Word. Calvin held that baptism represented two things: “the cleansing which we get in Christ’s

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502 Hesselink, 20, quoting Calvin, *Catechism* 17.

503 Ibid., 141, notes “Roman Catholics—at least since 1439—observe seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders (i.e., the ordination of priests), and matrimony.” The reformers maintained only baptism and the Lord’s Supper as they are the only one’s found in Scripture.

504 Ibid., 34, quoting Calvin, *Catechism* 27.

505 Ibid., 33, quoting Calvin, *Catechism* 26.
blood; and the mortification of our flesh which we attain from his death.” Thus, sins are forgiven (not by the water’s power, but by faith in the promise) and a new life is begun.

Calvin held that baptism declared one’s faith in the promises of God to save those who believe and are baptized. And as a confession before men, one’s baptism openly professed the “wish to be numbered among God’s people in order to worship one God in the same religion along with all godly men.”

To be sure, Calvin did not hold to baptismal regeneration. In his *Geneva Catechism* (1545) He writes, “Why do you say that Christ is to be sought in them? I mean that we are not to cleave to the visible signs so as to seek salvation from them, or imagine that the power of conferring grace is either fixed or included in them, but rather that the sign is to be used as a help, by which, when seeking salvation and complete felicity, we are pointed directly to Christ. See Calvin, *Geneva Catechism* (1545), sec.318. Accessed January 3, 2020. Reformed. https://reformed.org/documents/calvin/geneva_catachism/geneva_catachism.html. These same principles can be found in the Ursinus’ *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). See Mark A. Noll, ed., “The Heidelberg Catechism (1563),” in *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, 2004), 137-164.

Ibid., 34, quoting Calvin, *Catechism* 28.

Ibid., 143. Calvin wrote that baptism is “like a sealed document to confirm to us that all our sins are abolished, remitted, and effaced that they can never come to his sight, be recalled, or charged against us.” See Calvin, *Institutes* IV.15.1. Like Luther, Calvin urged believers to fight doubts of salvation by remember one’s baptism.

Ibid., 142, notes that in *Catechism*, the essential work of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments is not mentioned. However, in Calvin’s lengthier chapter on the sacraments in the *Institutes*, the Holy Spirit is shown to be essential. Calvin wrote that the sacraments only “properly fulfill their office when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in. If the Spirit is lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining on blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears.” Further, Calvin explained the benefits of the sacraments “are conferred through the Holy Spirit, who makes us partakers in Christ; confined, indeed, with the help of outward signs, if they allure us to Christ; but when they are twisted in another direction, their whole worth is shamefully destroyed.” See Hesselink, 142-143, quoting Calvin, *Institutes* IV.14.9; 14.16). Further, Calvin wrote in his catechism from 1560, *A Dialogue Between the Minister and the Child*, sec.327 “You do not mean that the water is a washing of the soul? By no means, for that pertains to the blood of Christ alone, which was shed in order to wipe away all our stains and render us pure and unpolluted before God (1 John 1:7; 1 Pet 1:19). This is fulfilled in us when our consciences are sprinkled by the Holy Spirit. But by the Sacrament that is sealed to us.”

Ibid., 34 quoting Calvin, *Catechism* 28. Hesselink notes, “In the *Institutes* the church is discussed at length in Book IV, which takes up almost one-third of the reformer’s classic.” Hesselink writes that for Calvin, “The church is a visible society with visible marks by which it can be distinguished. Calvin accordingly says that we have a church wherever the Word of God is purely preached and heard and where the sacraments are properly administered.” Ultimately, these two are “the visible word of God.” See Hesselink, 140, citing Calvin, *Institutes* IV.1.9; IV.14.6.
Though *Catechism* does not contain a separate article on the church, Calvin’s *Institutes* makes his position clear. In Book IV, Calvin notes that God has linked the church with means of grace, giving aids (i.e. baptism and the Lord’s Supper) to generate and nurture one’s faith and that “he has deposited this treasure in the church.”\[^{511}\] Calvin believed the “true church” exists and cannot waver or fall, but that it is not for believers to know who is reprobate and who is elect. This is known only to God and might be called the invisible church. It includes “all the elect from the beginning of the world.”\[^{512}\] However, Calvin also emphasized the visible church stating it is, “the mother through whom alone we enter life”; we cannot be “dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives”; and “away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation.”\[^{513}\] Hesselink explains that “God is not glorified nor is the church strengthened by hidden, isolated Christians. To become a Christian means to join a fellowship, and baptism is the visible mark or sign of belonging to that fellowship which is the spiritual body of Christ.”\[^{514}\]

Calvin’s high view of church attendance and hearing the word preached is evident in his *A Dialogue Between the Minister and the Child* (1560), which was a reformulated catechism based on the *Geneva Catechism* (1545). In classic question and answer format, Calvin wrote, “But are we not to take trouble and be diligent, and zealously strive by hearing and reading its teaching as it is declared to us? Yes, indeed: first each one of us in particular should study it; and above all, we are frequently to attend the sermons in which the Word is expounded in the

\[^{511}\] Bromiley, 265, quoting Calvin, *Institutes* IV.1.1.  
\[^{512}\] Ibid., 266, quoting Calvin, *Institutes* IV.7.  
\[^{514}\] Hesselink, 144. See further, Calvin, *Institutes* 15.13.
Assembly of the Christians.”\textsuperscript{515} The same work relates baptism and entry into the church. He wrote, “Baptism is for us a kind of entrance into the Church of God for it testifies that instead of our being strangers to him, God receives us as his family.”\textsuperscript{516} Calvin taught the visible church included both the elect and also many “who have of Christ but the name and outward appearance.”\textsuperscript{517} One might believe this to be a restatement of Augustine’s \textit{corpus permixtum}. However, Calvin’s teachings on church discipline, though meant to be used cautiously and with kindness, tempers this perspective. Calvin did not believe it possible to achieve an entirely pure church. He wrote, “If we are not willing to admit a church unless it be perfect in every respect, we leave no church at all.”\textsuperscript{518} When discipline was necessary, he believed God had ordained that the church uphold the standard of “a charitable judgment whereby we recognize members of the church those who by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ.”\textsuperscript{519}

As so many before him, he refers to Rom 6:1ff, declaring, “we have been baptized into Christ’s death, buried together with him in his death, that we may walk in newness of life.”\textsuperscript{520} One finds this thought further when Calvin writes, “The beginning of our regeneration and its end is our becoming new creatures, through the Spirit of God. Therefore the water is poured on the head as a sign of death, but in such a way that our resurrection is also represented, for instead


\textsuperscript{516} Ibid., sec.323.

\textsuperscript{517} Hesselink, 266, quoting Calvin, \textit{Institutes} IV.7.

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 277, quoting Calvin, \textit{Institutes} IV.17.

\textsuperscript{519} Ibid., quoting Calvin, \textit{Institutes} IV.8.

\textsuperscript{520} Ibid., 34, quoting Calvin, \textit{Catechism} 28.
of being drowned in water, what happens to us is only for a moment.” Baptism involved not just faith, but also repentance. One could see another’s faith in the act of baptism. One could see one’s repentance in a changed life. Calvin wrote, “What is the proper use of Baptism on our part? It consists in faith and in repentance. That is, assurance that we have our spiritual purity in Christ, and in feeling within us, and declaring to our neighbours by our works, that His Spirit dwells in us to mortify our natural desires and bring us to follow the Will of God.” The expectation of a changed life brought about by the indwelling power of Holy Spirit is evident.

One might predict that Calvin’s rich understanding of repentance, faith, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and the meaning of baptism would naturally lead him to practice believer’s baptism. However, Calvin maintained infant baptism, having developed Zwingli’s thinking on covenant theology resulting in a full orbed doctrine of covenantal pedobaptism. Calvin devotes an entire chapter to the subject in Institutes to address the Anabaptist challenge that there was no command in Scripture to baptize children. Bromiley explains that for Calvin, “Even if scripture does not specifically record an infant baptism, this carries no more weight than does the lack of any reference to a woman taking communion. The rule of faith which shows that women should partake of the supper shows also that infants should be baptized, for the purpose for which baptism was instituted applies no less to infants than to older persons.” Calvin, while

521 Calvin, *A Dialogue Between the Minister and the Child*, sec.326.

522 Ibid., sec.330.


525 Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, 280.
arguing in favor of infant baptism from Matt 19:13-15 and Acts 16:15, 32, appeals primarily to the eternal covenant of grace found in Gen 17:1-4,\textsuperscript{526} drawing a parallel between OT circumcision and NT baptism in what he called an “anagogic relationship.”\textsuperscript{527} He wrote, “if the covenant still remains firm and steadfast, it applies no less today to the children of Christians than under the Old Testament it pertained to the infants of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{528}

Calvin’s use of catechisms demonstrates that he understood the necessity for teaching children and families what it means to have faith, repent, be baptized, and live a holy life. Though an imminent theologian and writer, leader of the Reformation in Switzerland, and influential pastor, he recognized the need to make the faith accessible to all demographics. Perhaps catechisms contributed to the transformation of Geneva more than what history has given them credit. Also, his catechisms show that very young believers can comprehend major biblical doctrines. Perhaps to one’s detriment, the faith is often watered down to bare minimal facts in an effort to assist believers, when a more robust dialogue would be appropriate. Further, Calvin is clear that catechisms should not only include the traditional Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord’s Prayer, but also explanations on true faith, repentance, regeneration, justification, sanctification, the expectation of participation in the church, and an explanation and high view of baptism. Granted, these were applied after baptism by the paedobaptist Calvin.

\textsuperscript{526} Genesis 17:1-4 “When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.’ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ‘Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.’” See further, Calvin, \textit{Institutes} IV.16.3-6.

\textsuperscript{527} Bromiley, 280, explains what Calvin meant by an “anagogic relationship.” He writes, “Materially, the signs are one and the same; they are one in promise (God’s fatherly favor), in the thing represented (forgiveness), and in foundation (sec.4). The giving of circumcision to children shows plainly that the covenant does not change (only the outer observance has changed) and it obviously applies to Christian children, too.”

\textsuperscript{528} Hesselink, 144, quoting Calvin, \textit{Institutes} IV.16.5.
However, one could anticipate the major shift in meaningfulness and expectations in baptism if applied before baptism with ample time to delve into each subject.

**Huldrych Zwingli, Setting the Stage for Believer’s Baptism**

The historical development of catechisms in Switzerland in the early sixteenth century unfolded slowly. While some convictions such as the authority of God’s Word were common, other theological subjects were still being debated and positions being formulated. Rather than occurring as one united movement, reform in Switzerland occurred as each Swiss canton in the Swiss Confederacy determined its convictions and declared itself reformed. This canton-by-canton adoption of reform explains the practice of each canton writing its own catechism as it organized itself and desired to declare and teach its reformed faith.  

Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) led reform in Zürich, Switzerland built on the principle that “all of life, personal and communal, is to be normed by Scripture.” He was a gifted and prolific writer. Naturally, much of what he wrote during his career was prompted by the challenges of his time. He wrote summary pamphlets, sermons, tracts, letters, books, and commentaries to address Catholic abuses, answer his critics, and to provide distinctives of the

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529 Catechisms were being written in and around Switzerland. Just prior to Luther’s *Large* and *Small* catechisms being written in Germany in 1529, Switzerland saw its first reformed catechism published in 1527. James Isaac Good states, “The first Protestant catechism published in Switzerland was at St. Gall (1527), a translation of the catechism of the Bohemian Brothers,” under the title *Kinderfragen* (Children’s Issues). Like Germany, catechisms were utilized as a post-baptismal religious educational tool as infant baptism had long become standard among the Catholic church, as well as among the magisterial reformers. Other cantons produced reformed catechisms including one written by Johannes Oecolampadius (1527) entitled *Kinderbericht* (Children Report) for Basle. Others included three by Leo Jud in 1534, 1538, 1541 for Zürich, and a revision of Jud’s catechism by Kasper Grossman in 1537 for Bern. And just to the north, Strasbourg reformers wrote catechisms including Wolfgang Capito’s *Strasbourg Catechism* (1527), Matthew Kell’s *Kurze christliche Erbauung für die Kinder u. Angohnden* (1534), and Martin Bucer’s *Larger Catechism* (1534). Remarkably, Zürich had no catechism of its own during Zwingli’s lifetime. It was not until three years after Zwingli’s untimely death that Leo Jud published his *Large Catechism* in 1534 and his *Small Catechism* in 1541.

530 Lindberg, 166.
reformed church in Switzerland. His *Choice of Liberty and Freedom Regarding Food* (1522) was prompted by “The Affair of the Sausages” whereby more radical reformers defied ecclesiastical authority by breaking the Lenten fast by eating meat. The book *The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God* (1522) urged people to turn to the Bible and away from human opinions, whether from pope, church council, or church fathers. His *To Allow Priests to Marry, or at Least Wink at Their Marriages* (1522) was written to urge the bishop of Constance to abolish clergy celibacy. The *Sixty-Seven Articles* (1523) was written to argue against all things Catholic that were unbiblical, while affirming only church practices that were based on Scripture. His 1523 sermon, “The Shepherd,” described how a true pastor takes care of his flock contrasted with those who manipulate the congregation for indulgences. He wrote the tract *Those Who Give Cause for Tumult* (1524) to address the pressure of the Anabaptists for believer’s-only baptism. In his book *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525) written to King Francis I of France, Zwingli contrasts religion based on the Bible with all that religion had become in the Catholic Church, as well as his differences with Erasmus, Luther, and the Anabaptists. Also, in 1525, Zwingli wrote *Rearguard and Final Flourish with Regard to the Lord’s Supper*, distinguishing his understanding of the Lord’s Supper from Luther’s. Then again in 1527, his *Friendly Exposition*, warned Luther that his consubstantiation-ism was perilously close to the Catholic’s transubstantiation-ism. His *Exposition of the Christian Faith* (1531), published posthumously by Bullinger in 1536, was a concise summary of reformed doctrine. With so many issues to address and goals to pursue, it is not surprising that Zwingli never published a catechism for Zürich, let alone for the reformed churches of Switzerland. One might argue that a catechism for systematically training Christians, especially young Christians, may have escaped the notice of
one who was being mightily used by God to battle for and establish the reformed church’s independence from Rome.

Perhaps he never published a catechism due to the energy required to lead Zürich’s city council to adopt reformed principles. In his day, Zwingli was the leader of the Swiss Reformation. Yet more radical reformers grew concerned over Zwingli’s slow, methodical approach to implementing reforms in Zürich, as well as the church’s response to tithes, the role of government in the church, taking of oaths, and the use of images in the churches. Zwingli relied more on preaching the Word of God as a means to convince Zürich’s city council to approve reform measures. While Zwingli was willing to leave the timing of reform to the city council,531 his dissenters believed the council should have no part in the life of the church.532 Zwingli wrote of his patience and confidence in God’s Word to convince the council of the need for reform stating, “Since, however, one cannot abolish such additions all at once, it is necessary to combat them by preaching the word of God persistently and firmly.”533

The constant theological attacks and questions of Catholics, Lutherans, his fellow Swiss reformers, and the Anabaptists gave Zwingli further reason not to turn his attention toward catechesis. Opponents were attacking his views on the relationship between church and state, the Lord’s Supper as a memorial, and infant baptism, just to name a few. In response, Zwingli

531 W.P. Stephens, “The Theology of Zwingli,” in The Cambridge Companion to the Reformation, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 94, lists four criteria for the council to act in church matters: submission to the Word of God, the assent of the church, the need for peace, and the furtherance of the gospel. Stephen notes further, “Zwingli’s view of the church and society has sometimes been described as theocratic. That is appropriate if it means that the whole life of society is under the rule of God, and that both ministers and magistrates are to serve that rule. It is not appropriate, however, if taken to mean the society is subject to the ministers or the church to the magistrates.”


533 Lindberg, 199.
produced numerous publications clarifying his positions, convincing his allies, and attacking his foes. This was especially true with publications related to infant baptism and covenant theology. Stephen writes, “Before the baptism controversy Zwingli said little about baptism and in what he wrote the emphasis was on faith rather than baptism. He believed that baptism could strengthen faith, but denied that it could give faith.” As the conflict intensified, Zwingli increased his writings, publishing three works against the Anabaptists: *Baptism, Rebaptism, and Infant Baptism* (1525), *A Reply to Hubmaier* (1525), and *A Refutation* (1527).

In the very busy year of 1523, when Zwingli wrote his *Sixty-Seven Articles* and *Exposition of the Articles*, he also wrote *Ein kurze und Christenliche Inlietung* (1523) or “The Short Christian Introduction,” upon the request of the Zürich city council. It was intended to guide the pastors of Zürich in implementing the decisions for reform made at the First and Second disputation in Zürich. Some historians take this work to be the first catechism to be written in the Reformed tradition. However, Janz notes that “One can maintain this view only if ‘catechism’ is loosely defined, for this booklet was directed to the Zürich clerics who were not required by the city council to preach ‘God’s Word.’”

However, the topic of educating young people in the reformed faith did not completely escape Zwingli’s notice in 1523, as he also wrote *The Christian Education of Youth*, sometimes referred to by the title of the preface, “How One Ought to Bring Up and Instruct Youth in Good


Manners and Christian Discipline.” He indicated in the preface that he had intended many times to write on the principles that every Christian young person should know. He wrote, “Remembering that I had planned, some time ago, to write a little book on the manner of instructing and training youth and that I was prevented from carrying out what I had in mind, by many untoward circumstances…” The Christian Education of Youth is perhaps the closest Zwingli came to writing a catechism of his own.

The Christian Education of Youth (1523) could be considered a catechism in a very broad sense, but not along the lines of the traditional three part catechisms built on the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. While it retains a three-part structure, it is written as a monologue rather than with questions and answers. It was not intended for infants or school aged children, but for youth who had reached “the age in which they are clever and intelligent…and are able to swim without dry bark.” It does not appear that Zwingli intended this book to necessarily be used by the church as a primer to the reformed faith, but rather as part of Zwingli’s overall reform of the educational system of Zürich. Bromiley explains,

it is not illegitimate to regard the essay as something more than a personal admonition. It is a statement of the principles underlying the projected educational reform. That the essay is for the most part impersonal in tone and it was obviously written with a view to publication makes it quite certain that something of this was in the mind of Zwingli himself at the time when he wrote. Zwingli’s pronounced stress upon the need for education and the fact that he had very definite ideas concerning it are hardly surprising


537 Ibid., The Christian Education of Youth (1523), trans. from a reprint of the original Swiss edition, 1526 by Alcide Reichenbach (Collegeville, PA: Thompson Brothers, 1899), 52-53.

538 The Christian Education of Youth (1523) was written by Zwingli August 1, 1523 as a gift to his step-son Gerald Meyer, who had just returned from military service. It was not intended to be a formal document, but rather an aid to his step-son to help him as he started his adult life.

539 Zwingli, 55-56.
when we remember that he had himself come to a knowledge of evangelical truth partly by way of the Renaissance learning.\textsuperscript{540}

At the same time, one must keep in mind Zwingli did not draw a distinction between church education and government education, just as the church and civil government were to be in harmony. All were to be under the authority of Christ, directed by the Word of God.

In Part I, “How the Delicate Mind of Youth Should be Nurtured and Instructed in the Things Pertaining to God,” the familiar Zwinglian themes are found: the sovereignty of God, faith, the Word of God, the work of the Spirit, the providence of God, prayer, and the gospel. Zwingli writes that youth “must learn about the condition of our first parents, how they died after transgressing the law of God. Then he must learn how they, with their sins, brought the whole human race under sin and condemnation…From all this our youth will come to know his infirmities and his sin-sick condition.”\textsuperscript{541} Man is described as surrounded by temptation, poisoned by sin and vice, with no other option than to throw oneself on the mercy of God, upon which the light of the gospel will shine and Christ will redeem. All who trust him as Savior receive the gift of eternal life. In Christ, one receives righteousness, sanctification, and access to God. Though one may sin, it is as if he doesn’t, as Christ has covered all sins. This should not lead to laziness or carelessness, but rather one seeking to live a righteous life enjoying confidence and assurance in God. Zwingli writes, “We should also very early teach the young how to practice those things which please God most, those—in fact, which he is continually to us, namely, truth, justice, mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness…Therefore, every youth should see to it, in all diligence, that he strive early to walk in the way that will make him become a pious man, and that, as much


\textsuperscript{541} Zwingli, 61.
as in him it lies, his life be innocent and godlike.”

In Part II, “Those Things That Pertain to the Youth Himself,” Zwingli urges the youth to not only adorn the mind with virtue but also adorn the heart “by engaging in the Word of God, day and night.” This study should include knowledge of Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. One needed to know the OT to understand the NT, and the NT to understand the OT. From these languages one can humbly learn the wisdom of God from which comes righteous living in imitation of and dependence on Christ. Youth should learn to control the impulse to speak, the skills of effective public speaking, arithmetic, surveying, and music. Rather than growing old early with disease from imbibing, young people should grow old early with wisdom. Further, all appetites should be controlled whether the desire for food, fine clothing, “unlawful love,” or the use of firearms.

In Part III, “How Youth Should Act Towards Other Persons,” Zwingli teaches youth that virtue should be developed and used for the cause of Christianity, society, and country all the while guarding against vain ambition. Zwingli’s early thinking on society under the influence of Christianity can be detected, as he urges youth to develop empathy for others, watching out for one’s neighbor, and viewing the community as one’s household. If one engages in social occasions, which should be done rarely, one must be careful to leave the event morally better, not worse. A youth should honor one’s parents, control one’s anger, play games which engage the mind and body, conduct oneself honestly, and guard one’s mouth from speaking lies.

542 Ibid., 66-67.
543 Ibid., 68.
544 These perhaps reflect Erasmus’ influence, Zwingli’s higher education in humanism, and his commitment to ad fontes.
This brief overview of *The Christian Education of Youth* reveals in compact form not only Zwingli’s philosophy of educational reform, consisting of the harmony of religion, character, and society, but also the theological themes that informed his theology of baptism. Though distracted on a larger stage by his theological opponents, he understood the local need for teaching young people not only the good news of salvation in Christ, but also the expectation that one should imitate Christ by developing one’s character, taking sin seriously, and seeking to live a virtuous life.

Though Zwingli never published a catechism, a brief overview of his doctrines related to infant baptism, covenant theology, and the church is pertinent to this research as he very much was the primary antagonist to the Anabaptist’s positions of personal faith and repentance leading to personal conversion, believer’s-only baptism, and insistence on a regenerate church.

Zwingli’s theology of baptism centered first on maintaining infant baptism, a practice he inherited as a Catholic priest. However, his commitment to basing everything on Scripture drove him to develop a biblical basis for the practice. Further, much of his “working out” the biblical basis for the practice resulted from his battles with the Anabaptists. Zwingli believed the

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545 Zwingli’s emphasis on election, predestination, and even infant baptism did not lead him to make light of sin. Zwingli maintained the Reformation’s strong conviction of sin and the need for radical regeneration. Schaff notes, “Zwingli makes no exception, and describes the corruption and slavery of the natural man almost as strongly as Luther…He derives sin from the fall of Adam, brought about by the instigation of the devil, and finds its essence in selfishness rather than love for God. He goes beyond the Augustinian infralapsarianism, which seems to condition the eternal counsel of God by the first self-determination of man, and he boldly takes the supralapsarian position that God not only foresaw, but foreordained the fall, together with the redemption, that is, as a means to an end, or as the negative condition for the revelation of the plan of salvation. He fully admits the distinction between original or hereditary sin and actual transgression, but he describes the former as a moral disease, or natural defect, rather than punishable sin and guilt. It is a miserable condition (*conditio misera*). He compares it to the misfortune of one born in slavery. But if not sin in the proper sense of the term, it is an inclination or propensity to sin (*propensio ad peccandum*), and the fruitful germ of sin, which will surely develop itself in actual transgression. Thus the young wolf is a rapacious animal before he actually tears the sheep.” See Philip Schaff, “Zwingli’s Distinctive Doctrines,” in *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., Vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877). Bible Hub. Accessed 01/08/20. https://biblehub.com/library/various/creeds_of_christendom_with_a_history_and_critical_notes/_52_zwinglis_distinctive_doctrines.htm.
Anabaptist’s insistence on believer’s baptism called into question salvation through Christ alone, leading to Zwingli’s development of his covenant theology which brought “coherence to his view of baptism whether administered to adults or children.”  

He argued that the Anabaptist’s emphasis on an outward action (baptism), like Catholics, took the focus off of Christ. Baptism was given to the church because of man’s weakness and simply as a pledge of the reality of salvation for the covenant people of God. Thus, baptism was a pledge of what God would do if one had faith and was baptized, not a sign of what had been done inwardly for the individual.

His developing baptismal theology can be seen in December 1524 when he wrote that in the Bible, “baptism is the initiation both of those who have already believed and those who were going to believe” and that baptism was given that people “might learn Christ afterwards.” Secondly, based on Col 2:11 he wrote that baptism replaced circumcision, as it was given to infants as a sign of prior faith. Thirdly, based on Matt 19:13-14, he held that to refuse baptism to infants was to refuse their coming to Christ. Against those who argued that there is no NT command or instance of infant baptism, Zwingli held that, while there is no explicit command, it was more likely than not that infants were part of the household baptisms of 1 Cor 1 and Acts 16. While there may be no command, neither is it prohibited. Zwingli pushed back further stating that Anabaptists are guilty of what they accused him of. Against the view that since God did not command infant baptism, the church should not command it, he states neither did God forbid it and the church should not forbid it. Further, he argued that since the NT gives no clear instruction on infant baptism, one should turn to the OT for guidance, a method employed by

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546 Ibid.

Christ in his earthly ministry. Hence, Zwingli’s parallel of baptism with circumcision. Hence, Zwingli’s parallel of baptism with circumcision.

Against those who pointed to faith preceding baptism in Mark 16:16, he argued that this verse applied only to adults to whom the gospel was preached, not to infants and that it was not standard for people to be examined by the apostles before baptism.

Zwingli’s covenant theology was refined in his *A Refutation* (1527) against Balthasar Hubmaier. The covenant is to be understood as God’s covenant with man, rather than man’s covenant with God. It is God’s promise to the person, not the person’s promise to God. Baptism is therefore a pledge or sign of God’s promise to the person, not man’s promise to live a godly life. This was a shift for Zwingli as he had held that baptism was a pledge by the parents to raise their baptized infants in the ways of the Lord. Now, the pledge was understood as the one-sided pledge of God based on unconditional election. Zwingli believed the covenant in the NT was not a new covenant but a continuation of the covenant with Abraham, and thus operated on

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549 The Anabaptist argued against this position, holding that even Christ who was circumcised on the eighth day was still baptized at thirty years of age.


551 Philip Schaff, “Zwingli’s Distinctive Doctrines,” in *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., Vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877). Bible Hub. Accessed January 8, 2020. https://biblehub.com/library/various/creeds_of_christendom_with_a_history_and_critical_notes/_52_zwinglis_distinctive_doctrines.htm. Schaff’s notes are helpful for understanding Zwingli’s view on infant baptism. He writes that Zwingli, “teaches repeatedly that all elect children are saved whether baptized or not, whether of Christian or heathen parentage, not on the ground of their innocence (which would be Pelagian), but on the ground of Christ’s atonement. He is inclined to the belief that all children dying in infancy belong to the elect; their early death being a token of God’s mercy, and hence of their election. A part of the elect are led to salvation by a holy life, another part by an early death. The children of Christian parents belong to the Church, and it would be ‘impius’ to condemn them. But from the parallel between the first and the second Adam, he infers that all children are saved from the ruin of sin, else what Paul says would not be true, that ‘as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Cor. xv.22). At all events, it is wrong to condemn the children of the heathen, both on account of the restoration of Christ and of the eternal election of God, which precedes faith, and produces faith in due time; hence the absence of faith in children is no ground for their condemnation. As he believed in the salvation of many adult heathen, he had the less difficulty in believing that heathen children are saved; for they have not yet committed actual transgression, and of hereditary sin they have been redeemed by Christ. We have therefore much greater certainty of the salvation of departed infants than of any adults.”
the same basis. The OT God of Abraham is the same God of NT. The OT covenant with God is
the same covenant of the NT. The children born under the OT covenant with Abraham are the
same as children born under the NT to God’s covenant people. Lawson explains,

…birth to Christian parents within the ‘covenant’ community, for Zwingli, seemed to
convey membership in that community automatically. That is, birth to Christian parents
already constituted their divine ‘election’ to salvation and so their baptism was simply an
external sign of what was true for them already ... as a sign of membership in the
covenant community, infant baptism had its parallel with circumcision among the
Jews.\footnote{Kevin Lawson, “Baptism, Communion, and Confirmation in the Reformation Movement: Impact on
of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 244.}

Thus, for Zwingli, baptism was “a witness to God’s saving work through His covenant with His
people.” Baptism made the infant a member of a community of Christians where they could
of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2004), 276.}
He infers infant baptism from Jesus’ blessing the children (Luke 18:15-17) and the household baptisms in Acts and the Epistles. According to Johnson, Zwingli viewed
baptism as a pledge “that the infant, who by birth to Christian parents is already part of God’s
elect and now solemnly dedicated, will be brought up in the Christian faith and so one day make
his or her own faith response.”\footnote{Ibid., citing M.E. Johnson, The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and
Interpretation (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 249.}
The expectation was that the child would indeed follow Christ as he or she was to be taught, making the teaching ministry of the church critical for fulfilling
this rite. One can recognize how this view could lead to the multiplication of catechisms in
Zwingli’s circles. But instruction was not only by catechisms but also through the preaching of
the Word and teaching children how to read it. Further, Zwingli envisioned schools creating “an
environment of prayer where the Word could be taught and children could learn to pray” all done as an “aid to the work of the Holy Spirit.” From this approach, Zwingli anticipated that children would grow up with the “right faith to discern more accurately and fully God’s will for the conduct of one’s life and the content of one’s belief.”

In 1530, Zwingli wrote *Questions Concerning the Sacrament of Baptism* in response to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s argument for believer’s baptism. Stephens explains Zwingli’s arguments: “First, as we cannot know who are the elect and who are the reprobate, it is wrong to drive from the church the children of Christians to whom God’s promises belong. Secondly, if only those who have faith should be baptized, then nobody can be baptized, for we cannot know for certain about other people’s faith.” According to Wright, “Zwingli was the first person in the history of the church to sever faith from baptism.”

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556 Ibid., 288.

557 Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490-1561) was a German (Silesian) reformed theologian who wrote mostly on his differences with Catholic (transubstantiation) and Lutheran (consubstantiation) views of the Lord’s Supper. Though Zwingli found agreement with Schwenckfeld that the actual physical body of Christ was not in the bread of the Eucharist, Schwenckfeld did not hold to Zwingli’s memorial view. Rather, he believed that the “spiritual body” of Christ was in the bread, which when ingested acted as a seed helping the believer grow by spiritually feeding the soul of the participant. This view developed from his Christology which understood Christ’s body to contain two natures, one physical and one spiritual. In his doctrine, Christ’s physical body gradually conceded more and more to the divine nature leading up to the cross. When Christ said, “This is my body” at the Last Supper, he meant this is my spiritual body. He published his view in his *The Great Confession on the Glory of Christ* (1541). For more, see Peter C. Erb, “The Life and Thought of Caspar Schwenckfeld of Ossig.” Christian History Institute. Accessed January 8, 2020. https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/life-and-thought-of-caspar-schwenckfeld. Schwenckfeld also rejected Zwingli’s view of the continuity of the covenant between the OT and NT and baptism as the NT equivalent to OT circumcision. He also rejected infant baptism in favor of believer’s baptism to the chagrin of Jud and Bullinger. Schwenckfeld declared that he was in no one’s camp, being neither Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Zwinglian, or Anabaptist. See further, Andrew Pettegree, ed., *The Reformation: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, Vol.1 (New York: Routledge, 2004). As an aside Schwenckfeld wrote a catechism in 1531 entitled *Catechismus von ettlich=//en Hauptarti/ckeln des Christlichen Glaubens / vnd / vom Grund und anfang der Seleen seligkeit* (Augsburg: Silven Ottmar, 1531).


baptized either because they exercised faith or because it was thought that faith was granted to them in baptism. Zwingli held that faith was irrelevant in baptism. For Zwingli, infants could be baptized before faith because election precedes faith. The church is made up of the elect and thus there is no conflict in baptizing elect infants who would come faith. Of this contention, Zwingli wrote in *On Baptism*,

> In this matter of baptism—if I may be pardoned for saying it—I can only conclude that all the doctors have been in error from the time of the apostles. This is a serious and weighty assertion, and I make it with such reluctance that had I not been compelled to do so by contentious spirits, I would have preferred to keep silence…

At many points we shall have to tread a different path from that taken either by ancient or modern writers or by our own contemporaries.  

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School of Theology. Accessed January 6, 2020. https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2018/baptism-communion-and-confirmation-in-the-reformation-movement-impact-on-ministry-with-children-in-churches-today-part-i. Lawson, citing M.E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 239. Lawson explains that Zwingli differed from Luther concerning how faith comes about in baptism. For Luther, the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith in the sacrament of baptism. “That is, infant baptism testifies to the reality that faith and repentance are not prerequisites for baptism but, rather, life-long consequences of baptism.” Further, Lawson states, “In the Lutheran tradition, baptism began the journey of faith and the Church was to provide instruction and nurture to encourage the growth and maturing of that faith given by God. Instruction in the faith was provided through the use of the catechisms that Luther developed for children (*Small Catechism*) and adults and clergy (*Large Catechism*). These provided instruction on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the sacraments. The order was intentional, to help the learner understand the demands of the Law and how they were fulfilled through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” What Zwingli rejected was that baptism was a “means of grace.” Lawson writes, “For him, faith came through the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the person. Baptism was to be used as a sign of the internal reality that God had already accomplished.” Thus, it was not that faith was unnecessary at baptism, but that it was not the means by which God saved. Stephens notes, “There were fundamental elements in Zwingli’s theology which made him deny the traditional view that baptism is a means of grace and that it is necessary to salvation. For him the traditional view called in question the sovereignty of God, the centrality of Christ, and the freedom of the Spirit. It was also in conflict with the clear witness of Scripture that some were baptized who were not saved and some were saved who were not baptized. His view of baptism was bound up with his understanding of salvation, and with his understanding of man, which would not allow that the soul could be affected by what is bodily.” See further, W.P. Stephens, "Baptism," in *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011). doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198263630.003.0010.

560 Wright, 111, n.16.

For Zwingli the universal church is “both scattered throughout the world and gathered together in one body by the Spirit. It does not come together visibly on earth, although it will do so at the end of the world. Like Augustine and Luther, Zwingli spoke of the church as visible to Christ, but invisible to us. It is discerned only by faith.”\textsuperscript{562} As to the purity or holiness of the church, Zwingli believed, “The church is not holy because of any inherent holiness; nor are its members holy by virtue of being priests or religious. It is holy only as it remains in Christ. Those who rely on him are without spot or wrinkle just as he is without spot or wrinkle.”\textsuperscript{563} Like Augustine and Luther, Zwingli held to a “mixed church” of believers and unbelievers, wheat and tares. This position came into direct conflict with the Anabaptists who believed the church should only admit believers and discipline and/or excommunicate those who did not live holy lives.

Though Zwingli does not stand in the long line of theologians who produced and insisted on the use of catechisms in their churches, he moved the Reformation forward in several ways: First, he championed the principle of basing all faith and practice on the authority of Scripture. Secondly, he raised the standard of believing that preaching God’s Word was the source of changing lives and society. Thirdly, he played a major role in helping to rescue Christianity from the abuses and non-biblical practices of the Catholic church. Fourthly, he gave to Protestantism the “memorial view” of the Lord’s Supper, which was embraced by his rivals, the Anabaptists. Fifthly, he sought to find a biblical basis for the practice of infant baptism, developing the doctrines of election and predestination in the process. Finally, and perhaps most important for this research, he served as the catalyst that propelled sixteenth century Swiss Anabaptists into the

\textsuperscript{562} Stephens, “Theology,” 91.

\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., 91-92.
relentless pursuit of pure Christianity. By his resistance and engagement with them especially relating to infant baptism, Anabaptists were able to develop biblical arguments and more clearly articulate what it meant to be a regenerate church and to baptize only believers, two doctrines that are at the center of this thesis.

The Anabaptist’s Use of Catechisms

If the root of the Reformation was a return to the authority of the Word of God, the branches of that tree were the Lutherans, the Calvinists, the Zwinglians, and the Anabaptists. These four branches have been conveniently divided into two camps: the magisterial reformers and the radical reformers.\footnote{Packull, 194.} Magisterial reformers “designates those who received support from or collaborated with the temporal authorities, whether civil or princely. The radicals, by choice or default, received no such support.”\footnote{Ibid.} It should be noted that the radical reformers were made up of a variety of groups. Packull lists, “evangelical rationalists, antitrinitarians, Anabaptists, spiritualists, and rebellious peasants.” Then among these groups, there was great diversity. Again, Packull writes, “The uninitiated may well despair as to the variety of crusading, pacifists, evangelical, antitrinitarian, sabbatarian, communistic, apocalyptic, mystic-spiritualistic, and biblically literalistic Anabaptists. Any attempt at distilling theological essence from such manifest variety seems at best a hazardous undertaking.”\footnote{Ibid.} With so many variations, the best approach for this research is to choose a representative leader of one of the branches of

Anabaptists, who held a developed theology of baptism and who wrote or utilized a catechism. Among the radical reformers, “no group took more seriously the principle of sola Scriptura in matters of doctrine and discipline than did the Anabaptists.”\textsuperscript{567} The representative Anabaptist who will be discussed is Bulthasar Hubmaier, who wrote \textit{On the Christian Baptism of Believers} (1527) and was also the target of two of Zwingli’s writings \textit{A Reply to Hubmaier} (1525) and \textit{A Refutation} (1527).

Before taking a closer look at Hubmaier’s life and work, a brief history of the differences that arose between Anabaptist and the magisterial reformers is in order. While agreeing that the Bible is the source of all faith and practice, the central point of contention for the radicals was the magisterial reformers’ continued practice of infant baptism.

The canton of Zürich, Switzerland was a hotbed of Reformation activity in the 1520s. Zwingli was working to fulfill his vision of a Christian society, whereby the church and government worked in harmony to proclaim the gospel and expand God’s kingdom. Life in Zürich could be a model of virtue because the law required conformity, laws made by the magistrates for ministers and parishes.\textsuperscript{568} The Anabaptists\textsuperscript{569} wanted the opposite “a new church


\textsuperscript{568} Blackburn, 139, gives the example of the law of keeping the Sabbath. “We ordain that every man, be he noble-born or a commoner, be he of high or low estate, man or woman, child or servant, shall attend church-service every Sunday at least, at the set time of public worship, except he be prevented by sickness or other sufficient cause.” Blackburn notes further, “All inns must be closed before and during church hours. Gambling, cursing, all excess in eating, drinking, and dress were forbidden; small public houses were to be closed after nine o’clock every evening. Many holidays were declared to be ‘vain pastimes of popish extraction,’ and no longer tolerated. The ministers must enforce these laws with the aid of the magistrates. This board of moral discipline had power over church members, summoning, trying, reprimanding, suspending, or excommunicating offenders.”

\textsuperscript{569} McGrath, 10, notes “The term Anabaptist owes its origins to Zwingli (the word literally means ‘rebaptizers’), and refers to what was perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Anabaptist practice- the insistence that only those who had a personal public profession of faith should be baptized.” Further, McGrath writes, “Although Zwingli professed faithfulness to the sola scriptura principle, Grébel argued that he maintained a number of practices including infant baptism, the close link between the church and the magistracy, and the participation of Christians in warfare- which were not sanctioned or ordained in Scripture. In the hands of such radical thinkers, the
made up of true believers, a voluntary church independent of the state.” One might see Zwingli’s insistence on the civil authority’s approval of reforms as an expression of cowardice. Rather, it was an expression of his faith in the Word of God to change hearts and minds. As noted earlier, Zwingli wrote, “Since, however, one cannot abolish such additions all at once, it is necessary to combat them by preaching the Word of God, persistently and firmly.” This church and state cooperative spirit and Zwingli’s patient approach to reform could only be tolerated so long by the likes of Conrad Gröbel (1498-1526) and Felix Mantz (1498-1527). These leaders and their followers sought reform (as did Zwingli) of a number of practices and in the Catholic church: the prohibition against eating of meat during Lent, clergy celibacy, sola scriptura became radicalized: reformed Christians came to believe and practice only those things explicitly taught in Scripture. Zwingli was alarmed by this.”

Lindberg, 200. Further, McGrath notes, “By ‘reforming’ the medieval church, Luther had merely altered the external appearance of a corrupt institution that had no right to be called a Christian church.” See further, McGrath, 149.

Ibid.

Conrad Gröbel’s Anabaptist views on baptism are preserved in Letter 63 Gröbel to Müntzer, September 5, 1524. Lindberg refers to Gröbel as the founder of the Anabaptists. See, Lindberg, 198.

Felix Mantz’s Anabaptist views are preserved in Protestation und Schutzschrift, written in December 1524 and presented to the Zürich Council.

By 1522, the patience of the reformers with Zwingli and the city council was growing thin. At Lenten season, Christoph Froschauer, a printer in Zurich and a group of a dozen others (including Zwingli) determined to break the medieval tradition of fasting by eating meat, defying ecclesiastical authority. This became known as “The Affair of the Sausages.” The authorities arrested Froschauer who hosted the meal, but not Zwingli how attended but did not eat. However, Zwingli threw his support behind the incident proclaiming in his sermon “On the Choice and Freedom of Foods” on March 23, 1522 that “Christians are free to fast or not to fast because the Bible does not prohibit the eating of meat during Lent.” For more, see Lindberg, 200, citing E. J. Furcha, ed., Huldrych Zwingli, 1484-1531: A Legacy of Radical Reform (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1985), 86.

In July of 1522, the reformers determined to keep up the pressure for change, sending the petition To Allow Priests to Marry, or at Least Wink at Their Marriages to the bishop of Constance requesting he abolish the celibacy rule for priests in Zürich. One recalls that Zwingli was already cohabitating with the widow Anna Reinhart and publicly married her in April 2, 1524, just three months before the birth of their first child. For more, see Lindberg, 164.
justification by faith, the use of images, and the nature of the Eucharist. The difference they had with Zwingli was their desire for “stringent and speedy application of sola Scriptura to all church reforms.” Zwingli was not so inclined. Rather, he patiently waited for Zürich’s city

576 Justification by faith was settled in Zürich as part of the First Zürich Disputation, held January 1523. It was one of the issues addressed in Zwingli’s Sixty-Seven Articles (1523). Lindberg notes, “The articles affirmed salvation by grace alone, insisted upon full and final authority of Scripture, and rejected the pope, the mass, good works for salvation, the intercession of the saints, monastic orders, a celibate clergy, penance, and purgatory.” See, Lindberg, 170.

577 Iconoclasm, the practice of removing, destroying, or desecrating images and/or statues in Catholic churches of the sixteenth century, is believed to have been fueled (at least in Germany) by Karlstadt’s tract On the Abolition of Images (1522). As more of a mystic, Luther was not opposed to images, but rather held onto symbolic ritualism. However, of Karlstadt, Lindberg notes, “On page after page he emphasized that images are against the first commandment. There is no excuse, (Karlstadt) argued, in the claim that an image—even the crucifix—point beyond itself to God. Christians are to abolish images, just as in the Old Testament law, and God forbids images no less than murder, robbery, adultery, and the like.” See Lindberg, 102. On June 20, 1524, the iconoclasts of Zürich made quick work of destroying all things popish, in defiance of the Swiss Diet (1524). Schaff writes, “In the presence of a deputation from the authorities of Church and State, accompanied by architects, masons and carpenters, the churches of the city were purged of pictures, relics, crucifixes, altars, candles, and all ornaments, the frescoes effaced, and the walls whitewashed, so that nothing remained but the bare building to be filled by a worshiping congregation. The pictures were broken and burnt, some given to those who had a claim, a few preserved as antiquities. The bones of the saints were buried. Even the organs were removed, and the Latin singing of the choir abolished, but fortunately afterwards replaced by congregational singing of psalms and hymns in the vernacular (in Basle as early as 1526, in St. Gall 1527, in Zürich in 1598). ‘Within thirteen days,’ says Bullinger, ‘all the churches of the city were cleared; costly works of painting and sculpture, especially a beautiful table in the Waterchurch, were destroyed. The superstitious lamented; but the true believers rejoiced in it as a great and joyous worship of God.’” Interestingly, Schaff notes of Zwingli “that he was not opposed to images as such any more than to poetry and music, but only to their idolatrous use in churches. In his reply to Valentin Compar of Uri (1525), he says, “The controversy is not about images which do not offend the faith and the honor of God, but about idols to which divine honors are paid. Where there is no danger of idolatry, the images may remain; but idols should not be tolerated. All the papists tell us that images are the books for the unlearned. But where has God commanded us to learn from such books?” He thought that the absence of images in churches would tend to increase the hunger for the Word of God.” For more, see Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 58-59. Another Swiss Anabaptist who strongly opposed images was Louis Haetzer (1500-1529), who wrote The Judgment of God Our Spouse as to How One Should Hold Oneself toward All Idols and Images (1523). Further, on September 1, 1523 Leo Jud, Zwingli’s successor at Einsiedeln and new pastor at St. Peter’s Church in Zürich preached against images. Lindberg writes, “In the Zürich suburb of Zollikon, Jacob Hottinger followed Jud’s advice and interrupted the mass with a diatribe against idolatry which led to the chopping up of a large crucifix as firewood for the poor.” See Lindberg, 199.

578 Zwingli and Anabaptists agreed on the Lord’s Supper being a memorial to the Lord’s death, against the Catholic’s “real body” view and Luther’s “real presence” view. However, Zwingli’s patience with the council can be seen as it was not until April 11, 1525 that the Zürich city council reheard and approved Zwingli’s demand for the abolition of the mass in Zürich. On April 13, 1525, Zwingli conducted the first “memorial view” communion service in the Great Minster. For more, see J.A. Wylie, The History of Protestantism (New York: Cassell and Company, 1899), 470.

579 Packull, 195.
council to hear theological debates and rule in favor or against, which was the case in the *First Zürich Disputation* (1523) and the *Second Zürich Disputation* (1525). The *Second*, held January 17, 1525 is most significant to this research as baptism was one of the main foci of the meeting. Zwingli argued for infant baptism while the Anabaptists argued for believer’s baptism. Zwingli’s compromising and “hastening slowly” prompted Gröbel to label Zwingli a false prophet. Gröbel wrote to his brother-in-law Vadian that “whoever thinks, believes, or says that Zwingli acts as a true shepherd, thinks, believes, and speaks wickedly.”

The council sided with Zwingli ruling that clergy and parents must baptize infants by the eighth day or be banished. Despite this order and additional disputations that year, the radicals continued to rebaptize adults who had declared faith in Christ but had only received baptism as infants. This prompted the council to declare in March 1526 that anyone caught rebaptizing would be put to death by drowning. In defiance, Conrad Gröbel and others gathered at Felix Mantz’ home and baptized George Blaurock, who then baptized fifteen other adults, which led to the spread of radical reformer gatherings and re-baptisms through many cantons. Stephens notes, “The first to suffer this way was Felix Mantz, March 5, 1527.” These events surrounding proper baptism served as the point of departure of the Anabaptists from Zwingli. The years to come were marked by fierce debate between pedobaptists and credobaptists.

*The Schleitheim Confession (1527)*

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580 Lindberg, 200, citing Furcha, 86.


582 Ibid.
The theological diversity in the radical ranks and the ever-widening divide between the beliefs of the magisterial and radical reformers (especially related to baptism and the Lord’s Supper), prompted the radicals to compile a confession of faith, distinguishing them from others. This task fell to the former Benedictine monk of South Germany, Michael Sattler who gathered Swiss Brethren at Schleitheim in the canton of Schaffhausen, and composed the *Schleitheim Confession* on February 24, 1527. It was never adopted as an “official” statement by all parties, but it did serve to explain “the specific convictions that set these Anabaptists apart from what the document calls the ‘papists and antipapists’” (that is the unreformed Catholics and non-Anabaptist reformers). Its seven brief articles were the result of intense study of the Bible, especially as they defined baptism, not as infant baptism but as believer’s baptism, which ran headlong into ruthless, tradition-bound Catholic and reform opponents. In a sobering reminder, Noll notes, “Michael Sattler was burned at the stake for his beliefs.” The articles are 1) baptism; 2) The Ban [Excommunication]; 3) Breaking of Bread; 4) Separation from the Abomination; 5) Pastors in the Church; 6) The Sword; 7) The Oath. These are discussed briefly below.

It is perhaps not coincidental that baptism is the first article of the *Schleitheim Confession of Faith*. It reads:

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

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583 Noll, 49.
584 Ibid.
foundation and testimony of the apostles. Mt. 28, Mk. 16, Acts 2, 8, 16, 19. This we wish to hold simply, yet firmly and with assurance. Its emphasis is on the proper candidate for baptism, which is one who has repented and believed. This struck at the heart of the doctrine as practiced by Catholic and the magisterial reformers, who continued to baptize infants based on historical precedence, varying doctrines of original sin, and ever-developing theologies such as covenant theology. Anabaptists knew that as long as the pope held the hope and power of eternal salvation through baptism, the people would be bound to the corrupt system. The Schleitheim also expected an amended life by all those who were baptized.

The second article, referring to “the ban” expresses the Anabaptist value of a regenerate church that takes seriously the responsibility of holding one another accountable to live out the faith pledged to the Lord and to the church in baptism. Based on Matthew 18, an errant member would be warned twice before the action of the church to openly discipline the member by excommunication. This was done prior to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, to maintain the unity and purity of the church, and so as not to endorse one who was not fulfilling one’s baptismal vow.

The third article describes the requirement that only those who have been scripturally baptized may participate in the Lord’s Supper. In a straightforward manner, the Schleitheim declares one cannot follow the devil and the world and be part of the Lord’s table. One who lives in darkness has no part in light.

The fourth article calls for all followers of Christ to separate from the evils of the world and not to keep company with those who walk in such ways. Unbelievers are called “a great abomination before God” who only produce abominable things. One is either good or bad, believing or unbelieving, light or darkness, out of the world or in the world, Christ or Belial. This withdrawal extended to all popish and antipopish church services, drinking houses, and civic affairs. It also applied to military service (sword and armor), committing adherents to nonresistance.

The fifth article addresses the character, duties, and conduct of pastors, which include having a good reputation, teaching, reading, warning, disciplining, enforcing the band, conducting the Lord’s Supper, and caring for the flock. It also calls for the church to support the pastor and how to biblically address accusations of misconduct by the pastor. Recognizing the real danger of being a radical reformer, instructions are given to immediately replace a pastor the same hour should he be banished or martyred for the faith.

The sixth article speaks to the sword in more detail. The sword is recognized as ordained by God outside the perfection of Christ, to punish the wicked. This is acceptable for civil magistrates. However, in the church, the only weapon that is to be wielded is the ban. Christ is held up as the example of one who was meek and lowly, chose non-violence, and offered forgiveness to those who crucified him. The article instructs believers not to take each other to court and not to accept positions in the magistrate. In every way, the Christian is to be contrasted and separated from the evil world system.

The seventh and final article concerns the oath, which prohibits all swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or one’s own head, as one has no power over one’s own life. This power rests in God. In the end, the believer’s answer is to be yes or no.
In summary fashion, the *Schleitheim* restates its purpose as to prevent “the entry of false brethren and sisters among us.” One can detect the aim of the document as an effort to return to the New Testament and early church practice of repentance, faith, believer’s baptism, living a pure life, and maintaining the church as a regenerate body. This is the document alongside the Bible that guided Anabaptist and reveals the values incorporated into Balthasar Hubmaier’s theology.

**Balthasar Hubmaier’s Defense of Believer’s Baptism and the First Anabaptist Catechism**

Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528), an influential Anabaptist pastor and leader in Moravia believed that only believer’s should be baptized. This made him a convenient target of Zwingli’s attacks. In response to Zwingli, he wrote treatises and a catechism defending himself against these attacks.

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586 For an excellent comparison of *Lehrtafel* (1526) and *Kinderfragen* (1522) see Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia 1526-1628: A Study of Origins and Contacts* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969). Zeman does not conclude that *Lehrtafel* was dependent on *Kinderfragen*. Their similarities are attributed to their common opponent, the Roman Catholic Church. Graffagnino disagrees, holding that Hubmaier appears to at least be aware of *Kinderfragen*, due to their nearly identical baptismal practices, similar language, content, and concepts, as well as common friends such as Göschl and Zeising. See Jason J. Graffagnino, “The Lighthouse of the Reformation: Nikolsburg and Hubmaier’s Catechism,” in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell, III. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 115-136. Graffagnino makes an interesting observation related to prebaptismal catechism. He notes, “The Czech Brethren had been practicing prebaptismal catechism of adults coming into the community of faith for several decades prior to Hubmaier’s arrival at Nikolsburg…Prior to the ‘acceptance of the sacraments’ the adult inquirers were instructed extensively using catechization.” Further he states, “The prebaptismal catechetical practice of adults coming into the community of the *Unitas Fratrum* included: 1) hearing the evangelical message preached, which leads one to repentance; 2) being instructed thoroughly through catechization; 3) a testing of one’s faith prior to baptism, followed by a baptismal pledge; and 4) triune baptism by pouring and washing.” Graffagnino, “The Lighthouse,” 132. Hubmaier’s baptismal practice after arriving at Nikolsburg mirrored this process. Space does not permit a full discussion of this additional branch of evidence of prebaptismal catechism among the reformers, but it is worthy of additional research.

587 There were leading Anabaptist theologians throughout Europe in the sixteenth century, all of whom made significant contributions to the cause of believer’s baptism and a regenerate church. There was Menno Simons (1496-1561) in the Netherlands; Giulio Gherlandi (1520-1562) in Italy; Ambrosius Spittelmayer (1497-1528); Wolfgang Brandhuber (d.1529); Oswald Glait (d.1546) Hans Schlaffer (d.1528); and Leonhard Schemer (d.1528) of Austria; Wolfgang Capito (1478-1541) though not an Anabaptist, he was a Strasbourg reformer who opposed infant baptism and was a friend to many Anabaptists; John Smyth (1565-1612) more of a Mennonite in England and then Amsterdam; (John Smyth’s affiliation is debated as to whether he was Anabaptist or Baptist); Bernard Rothmann (1495-1535) in Münster; Jakob Storger (d.1537); Hans Denck ((1500-1527); Pilgrim Marpeck (1495-
The Reformation was spreading in Germany and Hubmaier was not immune to its influences. He was friends with the reformers in Germany, but found he had more in common with the reformers of Switzerland. Remarkably, Hubmaier attended the First Zürich Disputation (1523) and heard Zwingli’s arguments from his Sixty-Seven Articles (1523). Hubmaier joined the chorus of opposition against the abuses of the mass and the use of images. Loserth and Estep, Jr. write, “He declared that the Bible alone must decide such questions; the Mass is not a sacrifice, but a proclamation of Christ's testament, which commemorates His bitter suffering and His sacrifice of His life; as a sacrificial offering the Mass benefits neither the living nor the dead.”

Thus, Hubmaier “stopped baptizing infants between 1521 and January 1523.”  

Hubmaier faced opposition in Waldshut where he pastored and beyond. Casni explains, “he was accused of having joined ‘Luther’s new religion,’ of having represented several cities during the other debate with Zwingli in Zürich, and of having misinterpreted the Scriptures in his sermons.” A Catholic delegation from Ensisheim sought to have him arrested, extradited, and turned over to the bishop of Constance. The citizens and council of Waldshut defended

1556); Michael Sattler (1490-1527) and Hans Hut (1490-1527) in Central and Southern Germany. One notices the young age at which so many Anabaptist leaders died. Gherlandi, Spittelmayr, Brandhuber, Glait, Schlafler, Schiemer, Storger, Sattler, Hut,* and Hubmaier all died a martyr’s death for holding to believers only baptism.  

*Hans Hut died in a fire by asphyxiation the night before his sentencing, which on the following day convicted his dead body and sentenced it to be burned at the stake. For an excellent source of Anabaptist work in the 1520s and beyond in Germany, see Kat Hill, Baptism, Brotherhood, and Belief in Reformation Germany: Anabaptism and Lutheranism 1525-1585 (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2015). Among those contemporary with Hubmaier, Hill includes Hans Hut, Melchior Rinck, Hans Römer, Volkmar von Hildburghausen, Michael von Uettingen, and Georg von Staffelstein.


590 Ibid., “Balthasar Hubmaier and His Eighteen Articles,” 45-65.
Hubmaier’s innocence. The threat of arrest by Catholic authorities persisted causing him to flee to Schaffhausen on September 1, 1524. While there, in the midst of such turmoil, Hubmaier continued the debate with his reformed opponents writing *A Serious Christian Appeal* (1524), *Axiomata - The Thesis Against Eck* (1524), *Von Ketzern und ihren Verbrennern* (1524), and *Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* (1524). He became more and more engaged in the battle for *sola Scriptura*.

In 1525 he published *Oeflentliche Erbietung*, “offering to prove in a public debate that infant baptism had no foundation in Scripture.” 591 Though no one accepted the challenge of a public debate, his overt provocations continued to stoke the fire of conflict with the Swiss Reformers, particularly Zwingli. Months later, Hubmaier’s pursuit of scriptural baptism and church reform in print and pulpit culminated into personal practice when on April 14, 1525 Hubmaier officially joined the Anabaptists by being baptized by Wilhelm Reublin. 592 Estep offers the details:

…in April 1525, Wilhelm Reublin, who had been driven out of Zürich, sought refuge in Waldshut. Here he baptized Hubmaier and about sixty others. On Easter Sunday, Hubmaier himself baptized over three hundred people out of a milk pail. The Monday after Easter witnessed the observance of the Lord’s Supper in a simple apostolic manner. In the following days, many others were baptized and footwashing was engaged in by the newly baptized. In every way possible Hubmaier sought to reproduce the pattern of what he considered the New Testament faith and practice. 593

591 Ibid.


These events did not escape Zwingli’s notice. Though his hands were full in Zürich doing battle with Conrad Gröbel and Felix Mantz, Zwingli began a three-part engagement with Hubmaier on infant baptism, publishing the first entitled *On Baptism, Rebaptism, and Infant Baptism* in May, 1525. In *On Baptism*, Zwingli attacked Anabaptist views on infant baptism and developed his philosophical defense of infant baptism apart from faith. Yoder writes,

> The most basic distinction is that made between "inner" baptism (subjective faith) and "outer" (water) baptism, which renders illusory any attempt to correlate the two. Since the essential claim of the Anabaptists was precisely that faith and water baptism must be bound together, Zwingli’s dualism, building on philosophical postulates which he considered unchallengeable, seemed to be a sufficient answer. Freed from any connection with personal faith, baptism may then be equated with circumcision as the sign of a child’s being externally reckoned to belong to God's people.

Zwingli claimed to have silenced his opponents with scriptural defenses for infant baptism. However, Hubmaier referring to Zwingli’s use of fire and sword to suppress the Anabaptists retorted, "These are the weapons by which Zwingli has overcome the Anabaptists, as he falsely calls them, although he persistently boasts that he has done it with Scripture. — I have heard many who could bring forth no other argument to protect their ungodly infant baptism, than to

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594 One recalls Gröbel and Mantz courageously followed Hubmaier’s lead, rebaptizing George Blaurock and fifteen others at Mantz’s house in Zürich in March 1526. It is interesting to note that Hubmaier’s work in Waldshut, South Germany and Conrad Gröbel’s work in Zürich, Switzerland are only about thirty miles apart.

595 For an excellent book on Zwingli and Hubmaier’s theologies and written debates, see John Horsch, *Infant Baptism: Its Origin Among Protestants and the Arguments Advanced for and Against It* (Scottsdale, PA: Self Publishes, 1917). Horsch cites both Loserth and Hegler as declaring Hubmaier superior to Zwingli on the issues of baptism. Horsch quotes Loserth as stating, “In point of scholarship and concentrativeness, he surpassed his opponents, such as Zwingli, by far.” Horsch quotes Hegler as stating, “…in Scripture proof and partly also in partial consequence Hubmaier was Zwingli’s superior.” Again from Loserth, “…only by carrying the conflict over into the political field was he able to hold his own. With fire and the sword he overcame the dissenters or expelled them from the land.” See Horsch, *Infant Baptism*, 77.

say: Well, Zwingli has maintained it with Scripture; and if they are asked, with what Scripture, they cannot point to one." In response to Zwingli’s *On Baptism*, Hubmaier published his classic *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* in December 1525. In this book, Hubmaier demonstrated that there was no biblical basis for infant baptism and that preaching and faith were essential to someone being baptized.

Hubmaier’s theology of baptism is on display in *On the Christian Baptism* as he describes the five types of baptism in Anabaptist theology. First, there is baptism in water, which was obedience to the Lord’s command and the act of pouring water over one who confessed one’s sins and counted themselves as among the number of sinners, leading to a changed life. Secondly, there is baptism in water for or into a change of life. It was the same as the first type, except this one was to lead a person into a new life under the rule of Christ. Third, there is baptism in the Spirit and fire which described how the Spirit of God used the Word of

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597 Horsch, 78, citing Hubmaier, *Gesprech* following A4a and A4b.


599 Graffagnino, 31, citing M. Rothkegel, “Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia,” in J.D. Roth and J.M. Stayer, eds., *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*. Brill’s Companion to the Christian Tradition, Vol. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 163-215. By the time Hubmaier wrote *Catechism*, he had narrowed his five types of baptism to three. He describes baptism in terms of the water, Spirit, and the blood. The dialogue between Leonhart and Hans follows: Leonhart: How many kinds of baptism are there? Hans: Three kinds. Leonhart: what are they? Hans: A baptism of the Spirit, a baptism of water, and a baptism of blood. Leonhart: What is baptism of the Spirit? Hans: It is an inner illumination of our hearts that takes place by the Holy Spirit, through the living Word of God. Leonhart: What is water baptism? Hans: It is an outward and public testimony of the inner baptism in the Spirit, which a person gives by receiving water, with which one confesses one’s sins before all people…publicly and orally vows to God and agrees in the strength of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that he [or she] will henceforth believe and live according to his divine World…Leonhart: What is baptism of blood? Hans: It is a daily mortification of the flesh until death. Graffagnino notes that “After the composition of his catechism, Hubmaier modified his baptismal practice to include: 1) Hearing the Word of God preached, which leads to repentance; 2) instruction through catechism; 3) a profession of one’s faith followed by a baptismal vow; and 4) triune baptism by pouring or sprinkling.”
God to make the confessing sinner alive and whole again by fire. It described the inner change that occurred in every born again believer. Fourth, there is baptism of rebirth, in which one is reborn out of water and Spirit delivering one from the fear of sin and guilt replacing it with eternal assurance by the Word of God. Finally, there is baptism in the water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ which was the public confession and testimony of faith in Jesus Christ before the church.600

On the Christian Baptism stirred the ire of Zwingli and the Catholic authorities who closed in on Waldshut again in December 1525, resulting in Hubmaier and his wife fleeing to Zürich where Zwingli had both Hubmaier and his wife arrested.601 While in prison, Hubmaier asked for a disputation with Zwingli which was granted. The disputation was unlike previous in Zürich, this time hosting Hubmaier, Zwingli, Jud, Myconius, Schmid, Hofmeister, Binder, and four members of the city council. Hubmaier’s strategy was to quote Zwingli on the baptism issue, charging him with previously agreeing that children should not be baptized until they had been instructed in the faith. To Hubmaier’s shock, Zwingli claimed he had simply been misunderstood. Still in the end and to the surprise of many, Hubmaier agreed to recant his position on infant baptism. His recantation was accepted by the small city council and the full Council of Two Hundred the next day. Hubmaier was ordered to read his abnegation before the congregation of the Fraumünster immediately following Zwingli’s sermon on December 29, 1525. However, when he took the podium, rather than recanting he stated, “Oh what anguish and

600 Ibid., 27, citing Hubmaier, 99-100.

601 Loserth and Estep, “Hubmaier,” https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hubmaier,_Balthasar_(1480%3F-1528)&oldid=145471. Loserth and Estep claim that by time Hubmaier had reached Nikolsburg, Zwingli was responsible for at least twenty Anabaptists being arrested and had preached that Anabaptists should be beheaded.
travail I have suffered this night over the statements which I myself have made. I can and I will not recant.”

In 1526, Hubmaier secretly left Zürich and wound up in Nikolsburg, a Reformation-friendly city where he prospered. According to Loserth and Estep, by 1526 Nikolsburg had become the center of the Anabaptist movement, with the population swelling to twelve thousand after Hubmaier’s arrival. This was partially due to Hubmaier’s work of converting a Lutheran church to Anabaptism, but also due to a friendly Anabaptist nobleman named Leonhard von Lichtenstein. It was his estate where Hubmaier found refuge when arriving at Nikolsburg. To the mix of a strong leader and the support of the nobility was added the arrival of Simprecht Sorg, also known as Froschauer. He moved his entire printing operation to Nikolsburg to help propel the Anabaptist movement. These components caused Anabaptism to flourish. Hubmaier is reported to have baptized six-thousand believers while there.

While in Nikolsburg, Hubmaier wrote eighteen publications. They included *Gespräch auf Meister Ulrich Zwinglis Taufbüchlein von dem Kindertauf* (Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism)

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Book on Infant Baptism. In Gespräch, he argued that there is no scriptural foundation for infant baptism and that one can only become a follower of Christ by teaching and faith. All those who had not been instructed were excluded from baptism, particularly infants who know nothing of baptism. Loserth and Estep summarize Hubmaier’s position in Gespräch: “(1) no element, only faith, cleanses the soul; (2) baptism cannot wash away sins; (3) it is therefore only a testimony of the inner faith and a sign of the obligation of a new life; (4) whether infants are God’s children may be left to God; (5) Noah’s ark rather than circumcision is a figure of baptism; (6) only adult baptism is founded upon Scripture. Infant baptism is not of God.”

He wrote two works on the freedom of the will, Freedom of the Will I and Freedom of the Will II, in which he developed his theology of divine grace and man’s free response. Though it is God’s will that all should be saved, man must accept this offer of grace by faith in order to be saved. Another was On the Sword in which Hubmaier’s distinctives from regular Anabaptists is noted. Hubmaier believed the government was ordained by God to conduct just war and believers were allowed to participate. Regular Anabaptists were pacifists, believing in a stricter separation of church and state). Of most significance to this research was his Eine christliche Lehrtafel or A Christian Catechism. It is written in a dialogue format between Leonhard and Hans and sets forth the Anabaptist faith.


608 One recalls the debate between Erasmus and Luther on free will. Erasmus wrote De Libero Arbitrio (1524) against Luther’s De Servo Arbitrio (1525). Hubmaier agreed with Erasmus that God made man’s will good and free, while Hubmaier’s opponents held that human will is created either good or evil by divine decree. For more see on Hubmaier’s understanding of grace and free will by Jason J. Graffagnino, “Balthasar Hubmaier: The Theologian of the Anabaptists. Nikolsburg and Catechetical Instruction: A Labor of Love,” in Perichoresis, Vol. 15: Issue 4 (2017), 13-32. For an excellent comparison of Hubmaier’s free will and Luther and Calvin’s bondage of the will, see Michael W. McDill, “Balthasar Hubmaier and Free Will,” in The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell, III. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 137-153.
C. Arnold Snyder described Hubmaier’s catechism as “particularly valuable as a beginning reference point for identifying Anabaptist distinctives because it was a ‘very early and unusually comprehensive Anabaptist expression of theological and ecclesiological fundamentals.’ It was written in December 1526 and is significant as Graffagnino notes, “Hubmaier composed his catechism in order to provide a manual for baptismal candidates.” If true, this would be a huge step toward the pattern of the church fathers, using catechism as a pre-baptismal instrument instead of a tool of post-baptismal education. Klager believes there is evidence that Hubmaier had access to the baptismal practices of the church fathers through Zwingli. He holds that though neither Hubmaier nor Zwingli state directly that they conferred about the church fathers, Hubmaier states that they considered the practice of the early church. In his accusation that Zwingli had once conceded that baptism should be delayed so that children could be properly instructed, he concluded with the phrase, which is “why in prior times they were called catechumens.” Further evidence exists in that Hubmaier cites only one church father who is not represented in Zwingli’s library at the time of their meeting. The twelve

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611 Ibid., 24.

612 For an interesting suggestion that Hubmaier had access to the writings of the church fathers through Zwingli’s library, Andrew P. Klager, “Balthasar Hubmaier’s Use of the Church Fathers: Availability, Access, and Interaction,” in Mennonite Quarterly Review, 84, January 2010, 5-66. Armour agrees, holding that Hubmaier’s statement on delayed baptism for instruction in prior times refers to his study with Zwingli of the church fathers at their meeting under the Graben. See Rollin Armour, Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998). See also Changkyu Kim, Balthasar Hubmaier’s Doctrine of Salvation in Dynamic and Relational Perspective (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 76-78.

613 Klager, 21.

614 Ibid. Though no catalogue of Zwingli’s library exists, a large portion of his library exists in the Zentralbibliothek in Zürich. Further work by Walther Köhler and Johann Martin Usteri has help reconstruct the
Fathers listed in both Zwingli and Hubmaier include Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. Ten of these are discussed in this research and were known known to practice credobaptism and catechism prior to baptism. Armour agrees with Kragler that Hubmaier accessed the Fathers through Zwingli’s library. He writes, “It is very likely that Hubmaier had examined the Fathers from very early in his questionings about baptism, for his conversation with Zwingli in 1523 included the point of early Christian baptism practice.”

Hubmaier envisioned his catechism would be used not only for adults but for children and youth of believers so that they might grow up surrounded by the teachings of Christ. Zeman observes that the complex language of the catechism indicates perhaps Hubmaier lost sight of the latter application.

Still the need for an instrument for pre-baptismal instruction was needed and Hubmaier responded. In the introduction, Hubmaier writes to Göschl:

> We have long known well that a Christian life must begin with the teaching from which faith flows, and that accordingly water baptism follows afterward in accord with its institution by Christ, by which a person in a public confession of his faith makes his first entry and initiation into the holy, universal Christian church (outside of which there is no salvation) for the forgiveness of sins…Your Grace [Göschl] knows and recognizes that it is not enough to know that one must be taught and instructed before receiving baptism…but that it is also necessary to say what it is that one should first learn and know.


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617 Graffagnino, 30, quoting Hubmaier, 341.
Upon this basis, Hubmaier wrote the first Anabaptist catechism.

Hubmaier’s *Catechism* is divided into two parts. The first includes the knowledge of God, salvation, baptism, and the church. The second includes the Lord’s Supper, worship, human nature and eternal redemption. It is written as a dialogue between Leonhard and Hans and contains ninety-nine questions and answers.

Graffagnino finds the theme of love throughout Hubmaier’s *Catechism*. Hubmaier writes in the section on salvation that love is the characteristic of true faith. Leonhard asks, “What is dead faith?” Hans replies, “One that is unfruitful without works of love, James 2:17.” Leonhard then asks, “What is living faith?” Hans replies, “One that produces the Spirit and works through love, Galatians 5.” This was not salvation by works but the emphasized the fruit that salvation emanating from living faith would produce.

The theme of love also relates to the church’s practice of discipline. At the heart of Hubmaier’s ecclesiology is that “Faith, man’s response to the proclaimed Word, is the foundation of the church. Only the faithful are qualified for baptism and church membership.” Upon becoming a baptized member, one accepts the collective responsibility to lovingly hold one another in the fellowship accountable to the vow made at baptism. Hubmaier calls this “fraternal admonition.” Related to this responsibility is Hubmaier’s doctrine of the keys.

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618 Zeman, 332-333.


keys represent the powers given to the church by God. Goncharenko explains, “Belonging originally to God, this power was transferred to Christ at his incarnation and to the church at the time of Jesus’ ascension…This power of the keys, according to Hubmaier, was given to the church as a whole and not to its leadership, or to one person…Of the two keys given to the church, the first key was the key of forgiveness, or loosing, by which the church exercised the power it received from Christ to open the door of heaven to that sinner who was truly repentant of sin and to receive that sinner into the community of saints.”622 It was this key that Hubmaier understood gave the church the tremendous responsibility of ensuring a regenerate church membership.

It was the second key given to the church that Hubmaier called “brotherly admonition.” In Catechism Leonhard asks, “What is fraternal admonition?” Hans replies, “One who sees his brother in sin and goes to him in love and admonishes him fraternally and quietly to abandon such sin.” This mutual accountability kept one in proper relationship to the church. If one was found straying from the fold, the Lord’s Supper was to be withheld. If one refused to repent, excommunication was the scriptural course of action. Goncharenko notes, “The doctrine of church discipline, therefore, was key to Hubmaier’s ordinance of baptism because it set in motion the plan to protect the purity of one’s commitment made at baptism and to keep the overall church body unstained by the world.”623

The love found in the Lord’s Supper is called “testimonial love,” whereby believers oblige themselves to one another. Just as they share the bread and cup, they pledge to sacrifice

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623 Ibid., 172.
their body and blood for one another. It is a public sign and testimonial of love. When asked if the body and blood become the real body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), the answer was an unequivocal “no.” Though including an apologetic against Catholicism, Hubmaier’s focus in the Lord’s Supper was on mutual admonition and love among the true church.

The theme of love continues in the article on worship. When Leonhard asks in what does the sum of preaching lie, Hans replies “In love.” In other words, preaching should result in one loving God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbor as oneself.

Love extends to the section on human nature and redemption. Hubmaier uses the analogy of a father and son when discussing good works and rewards. A son’s desire to serve and seek to please his father is not motivated by pay but by love. It is the power of the Word of God that sets the Christian free to obey God out of love. McDill writes, “Hubmaier is claiming that once a Christian receives the Word of Christ and trusts his truth, God gives him the power to live an amended life.” His opponents accused him of adding works to justification, admonishing him that justification is not in willing or running. Hubmaier agreed that though it does not depend on the willing and running in one’s strength, “if God is merciful to us and has offered us mercy through his divine Word, then we can well will and run.” Put concisely, “Hubmaier does not deny the Augustinian view of God’s grace and man’s inadequacy but understands these as only one side of the truth. The other side, which balances it and completes the full account of the

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624 Graffagnino, 26, citing Hubmaier, 354.
625 Ibid., 354-355.
626 Ibid., 362.
truth, is of course, human free will and responsibility.”\textsuperscript{629} It is from this perspective that Hubmaier could expect a changed life once one had been saved and baptized.\textsuperscript{630}

Hubmaier insists that the process of baptism is: preach, hear, faith, repentance, confession, [catechism], and baptism. Baptism is the public profession of one’s faith and declared allegiance to Christ. It is followed by a Christian life accountable to the church that is an ongoing public profession of faith and declared allegiance to Christ.

Hubmaier’s role in restoring Protestant theology back to its foundation on the Word of God was unique in that while he is counted among the Anabaptists, he channeled his energies into the issues that were most essential: 1) sola Scriptura; 2) believer’s-only baptism; 3) use of catechesis as a pre-baptismal preparation; 4) the expectation of an amended life connected to the church; 5) the church’s responsibility to ensure a regenerate church membership. His strategy was simple: rely on the Word of God for faith and practice. He championed believer’s-only baptism, which by extension dismantled the basis for infant baptism and necessitated returning to the early church practice of pre-baptismal instruction of those who professed faith in Jesus Christ. Though his catechism is not traditional in the sense of containing the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, it is in keeping with stressing the meaning and importance of repentance, faith, baptism, and the pure church. Though his particular branch

\textsuperscript{629} Ibid., 149-150.

\textsuperscript{630} Neither Hubmaier nor other Anabaptists held to corpus permixtum. For an excellent summary on corpus permixtum among the Anabaptists, see John Hammett, \textit{Biblical Foundations}, 87-91. Hammett lists three objections to the argument that since the church was mixed for 1000 years prior to the Reformation, then the church did not see an incompatibility between a mixed church and Scripture. First, though it was common for 1000 years, it was not common for the first 400 years of church history. Secondly, the 1000 years of a mixed church coincided with a period of relative biblical ignorance. Thirdly, the believers-only church has grown more and more prevalent in the past 500 years.
of Anabaptism was reabsorbed into others within a century, these biblical principles resurfaced in Protestant groups to come.631

This chapter’s discussion of the reformer’s writings and practices pertaining to baptism and catechisms demonstrates they all made contributions in varying ways and degrees in returning the church to NT and early church practices. They all stood for *ad fontes* and *sola Scriptura* which helped them correct the major non-biblical abuses of the Catholic church such as ending the mass, penance, confession, indulgences, and purgatory. They all strongly connected baptism with involvement in the church. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli also maintained the doctrine of *corpus permixtum*. Yet while eliminating much, the magisterial reformers only modified some traditional practices. Luther championed justification by faith removing the belief in baptismal regeneration from Lutheran churches. Yet, he maintained the images and symbols in the churches and infant baptism based on the doctrine of original sin. He restored catechetical instruction by writing two catechisms, but implemented it as a post-baptismal educational tool. Calvin and Zwingli both worked with civil authorities to bring about societal reforms alongside church reforms that included elevating the preaching of the Word of God, removal of icons, ending the mass, ending clerical celibacy, and engaging in the debate over baptism. Calvin contributed a catechism that was the basis for future reformed catechisms, but relegated its teaching to a post baptismal practice. Zwingli’s contribution to baptism was not in writing or

631 Graffagnino, “The Lighthouse,” 124, n54. Graffagnino cites evidence that Hubmaier’s catechism reached Great Britain. In a 1543 polemical tract written by John Bale, bishop of Ossory, against Edmund Bonner, bishop of London, Bale notes that one of the books confiscated in the Catholic resurgence was Hubmaier’s *The Cathecisme of Pacimontanus*. Bale wrote positively of Hubmaier, “Of Balthasar Hiebmeir Pacimontanus ys the thyrd caetchysme, whom in dede I knowe not but by name, as I have redde yt in other mennys writings. But I conceyue here the better opynyon of hym, for that lorde hath condemned him amonge these menne, whose doctrine I knowe to be pure and perfyght.” See further John Harryson [John Bale], *Yet a Course at the Romysh Foyx* (Zürich, 1543), sig. G3v; quoted in Irvin Buckwalter Horst, *The Radical Brethren: Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graf, 1972), 94.
implementing catechesis, but rather his extensive writings in defense of infant baptism. Perhaps inadvertently, he helped to strengthen Anabaptist baptismal theology related to believer’s-only baptism and refine their thinking resulting in the production of Anabaptist catechisms. What made Anabaptists and especially Hubmaier’s baptismal theology and practice most like NT and early church practice was linking *sola Scriptura* to believer’s-only baptism, preceded by catechesis, with the expectation of an amended life and acceptance of the responsibility to ensure a regenerate church membership through church discipline and the ban. This structure will prove foundational for Baptist theology in the centuries to come.
CHAPTER FOUR: A HISTORICAL CASE FOR THE USE OF CATECHISMS IN BAPTIST HISTORY

Baptists are no strangers to catechisms. From their earliest days, catechisms were all around them. Then upon earning name and independence, they produced their own confessions, covenants, and catechisms. These tools played a significant role in the growth of Baptists in both England and America by way of doctrinal distinctives, evangelism, and education. Baptist catechisms were a key part of the Baptist effort to help the unconverted come to faith, repent of one’s sins, understand the meaning and purpose of baptism, connect with the local church, and live a life that evidenced regeneration. Upon discovering Baptists’ origins, this chapter will trace several Baptist catechisms from the seventeenth through the twentieth century, highlighting their commonalities and their goal of an informed faith.

To discover the history of Baptist catechisms, one must return to the origins of Baptist life during the English Reformation. More specifically one must discover the genesis of the Baptist doctrine of believer’s baptism.632 The majority of scholars, such as McBeth, Hudson, Whitsett, Dexter, Whitley, Whit, and Baker, hold that Baptists were birthed out of English Separatism laying bare infant baptism as unbiblical and necessity of reforming the Church of England. The minority view, held by able scholars such as Estep, Payne, Underwood, Mosteler, Horst, and Bender, traces Baptist DNA, particularly believer’s baptism to Anabaptists who fled to England and Holland to escape continental persecution. Though intriguing, it is not essential to this research to engage this debate, other than to know which tradition to comb through to find the use of catechisms among Baptists. Therefore, though it seems tenable that Anabaptists shared

632 McBeth, 49, notes four sources of Baptist life: 1) The outgrowth of English Separatism; 2) The influence of biblical Anabaptists; 3) The continuation of biblical teachings through the ages; and 4) The succession of organized Baptist churches through the ages.
a belief in believer’s baptism and may have provided reinforcement and refinement to Smyth and Helwys’ baptismal doctrine, it seems most likely that Baptists originated out of English Separatism, passing through Holland due to persecution by the Church of England, and ultimately giving birth to the first Baptist church on English soil.633

Catechisms were no anomaly to the English of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.634 The Church of England,635 as it separated from Roman Catholicism by the Act of Supremacy (1534), soon published both statements of faith and catechisms. In 1549, during the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), the Church of England commissioned Thomas Cranmer to write and publish its first Book of Common Prayer to guide its liturgy. In many ways, it was a copy of the Roman Catholic liturgy complete with godparents answering the priest’s questions on behalf of the infant the priests questions regarding renunciation, belief in the Trinity, being anointed, and given a commemorative white vesture. More pertinent is the inclusion of the chapter on confirmation by which children are catechized.636 It contained among other articles the traditional Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. It also contained instructions

633 Ibid., 61, concludes, “The most reliable historical evidence confirms that the Baptist denomination, as it is known today, originated in the early seventeenth century. This does not mean, however, that Baptist viewpoints did not exist before that time,” as they simply “reflect the doctrines of New Testament Christianity.” Thus, Baptists did not invent these doctrines, they rediscovered them.

634 For an intriguing account of the many catechisms in England, see Ian Green, The Christian’s ABC’s: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c.1520-1740 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Green states that 1043 new catechisms were published between 1530-1740. See Green, 51.

635 One recalls that England’s Reformation, though influenced by the magisterial reformers, had a trajectory of its own. It was primarily fueled by King Henry VIII’s determination to separate from Roman Catholicism to legitimize his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. From this impetus, the Church of England was established with many parallel structures and abuses of power of the Roman church from which it broke away. Those within the Anglican church who desired a purer church, sought reform. They became known as the Puritans, who sought to reform the existing church from within. Some among the Puritans grew dissatisfied with the pace and progress of reform and determined to break away or separate. This mixed group were referred to as Separatists which would become Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and more. Their religious meetings and activities were outlawed and eventually they were banished from England.

636 McBeth, “A Catechism: That is An Instruction that is to be Learned by Every Child,” 244-248.
for the administration of baptism, which was to be given to infants, only on Sundays or holy
days, and in the English tongue.\textsuperscript{637} The second \textit{Book of Common Prayer} (1552) took on a more
Protestant tone, mostly pertaining to communion, whereby transubstantiation was removed,
masses and prayers for the dead discontinued, and removal of the ideas of penance and
purgatory. Related to baptism, the exorcism was removed from the preparatory process.\textsuperscript{638} The
catechism remained the same. The second edition coincided with the \textit{Forty-Two Articles} (1552)
which was decidedly Calvinistic and retained infant baptism in Article XXVIII. However, the
1552 \textit{Book of Common Prayer} was only used for a short time due to King Edward VI’s early
death. With Queen Mary’s reign (1553-1558), everything Protestant was restored to Catholicism
until Elizabeth’s reign (1559-1603), when the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} (1552) was reinstated.
This 1552 edition became the basis for the 1662 \textit{Book of Common Prayer} which contained a
significant change in the article on baptism. Added to “The Ministration of Public Baptism of
Children” and “The Ministration of Private Baptism of Children” was an article on “The Order
of Baptism for those of Riper Age.” As infant baptism became the issue of the Separatists in the
early 1600s, it is interesting that the Church of England added an article that essentially
articulated the Baptist argument that people old enough to make a profession of faith, should be
instructed in the faith and then baptized. The Church of England appeared to have been
conceding the argument, at least as it applied to non-Anglican adults. The catechism in the 1662
\textit{Book of Common Prayer} (which is still in use) remained the same containing the Creed, the
Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. To settle ongoing religious disputes, Elizabeth

\textsuperscript{637} “Of the Administration of Public Baptism,” \textit{The Book of Common Prayer 1549} (New York: Church
Kaledare Press, 1881), 232.

\textsuperscript{638} Roger Beckwith, “For the More Explanation and For the More Perfection: Cranmer’s Second Book of
sought a compromise with her own *Act of Supremacy* (1559) and *Act of Uniformity* (1559) which combined elements from Catholicism and Protestantism. This made no one happy leading to intense protests from without and within the Anglican Church. By 1593, the *Conventicle Act* required all to attend the Anglican Church and made other religious gatherings unlawful. This led to the migration of many Separatists from England to Holland.

As the sixteenth century gave way to the seventeenth, persecution increased and Separatists began boldly publishing treatises of protest against the Anglican church. From the Pioneer Church came Robert Brown’s *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie* (1582). Then in 1587, Henry Barrow published *Four Causes of Separation* followed in 1588 by John Greenwood who wrote *The True Church and the False Church*. From Francis Johnson’s Ancient Church, came Henry Ainsworth’s “True Confession” (1596). While many Separatists groups sought to throw off the man-made traditions of the Anglican Church, returning to the simple and pure practice of NT Christianity, many retained the practice of infant baptism based on covenant theology.

John Smyth (1570-1612) differed with the Church of England on infant baptism, which he equated with spiritual adultery. From 1600 to 1602 he served as the “city lecturer” in Lincoln where his sermons called out the specific sins of prominent civic leaders by name. Soon he was removed from this position, but continued to work toward the purity of the church, writing *The Bright Morning Starre* (1603) and *A Paterne of True Prayer* (1605). In 1606, Smyth occasionally preached at the parish church in Gainsborough during the absence of its negligent pastor. When authorities heard of his preaching again, they ordered him to preach no more. Upon this order, Smyth broke with the Anglican Church and began meeting with a Separatist group in

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639 Ibid., 32
Gainsborough, a group that included John Robinson, William Brewster, William Bradford, and Thomas Helwys. The group grew so large that their gatherings exposed them to persecution under King James I. Thus, they divided into two groups: the Robinson-Brewster-Bradford group and the Smyth-Helwys group. In 1607 both groups migrated to Holland to escape the threat of persecution at first meeting with the Ancient Church. By 1609, Smyth had become convinced of believer’s baptism, prompting him to write his *Short Confession of Faith* (1609) in which in Articles Twenty-nine and Thirty he denounced infant baptism and endorsed believer’s baptism. He convinced his group to dissolve their church and reconstitute themselves on the basis of believer’s baptism. For Smyth, “a church must include only true Christians, therefore, baptism must be applied only to professed believers.” Consequently, Smyth baptized himself, then Thomas Helwys, then forty others, founding the first Baptist church (1609) in Holland. Smyth’s Baptist-like views were anything but consistent. He vacillated between defending his se-baptism (self-baptism) to repudiating it, ultimately requesting re-baptism by the Dutch Mennonite Church who declined. Not all of Smyth’s followers agreed with his repudiation. Among these were Helwys along with several other church members who maintained the legitimacy of their baptism and determined to exclude Smyth from the newly

640 The Robinson-Brewster-Bradford group maintained infant baptism (but only if both parents were faithful Christians). The congregation moved from Scrooby Manor in Amsterdam (1608), to Leyden (1609), and then left for America on the *Mayflower* (1620) and became the Congregationalist Church of New England. For more on Robinson’s doctrine of baptism, see Walter Herbert Burgess, *John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers: A Study of His Life and Times* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), 145.


642 Timothy and Denise George, 31-33.

643 McBeth, 35.
founded Baptist church. In 1612, Smyth died unaffiliated with any particular church. His remaining followers merged into the Mennonite Church.644

Helwys and his group returned to England in 1611 and started the first Baptist church on English soil in London. It was a General Baptist church, holding to freedom of the will to believe and be saved and that one may lose one’s salvation.645 Despite the threat of persecution, the church maintained their Separatist principles, pivoted away from Calvinism making room for free will, and continued the practice of believer’s baptism. Helwys’ doctrine of baptism is reflected in his Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam (1610) where in Article 13 he states, “That every Church is to receive in all their members by Baptism upon the Confession of their faith and sins wrought by the preaching of the Gospel, according to the primitive Institution, (Matthew 28:19) and practice, (Acts 2:41). And therefore Churches constituted after any other manner, or of any other persons are not according to Christ’s Testament.”646

With this backdrop of Baptists distinguishing themselves from other radicals and Separatists, Baptists began organizing associations of churches and publishing confessions, covenants, and catechisms. Below, one will find that Baptists hold a rich heritage of catechesis, emphasizing the importance of faith, repentance, believer’s baptism by immersion, and the amended life.

644 McBeth, 33.
645 Ibid., 32.
Though all English Baptists emerged from Separatism, Particular Baptists in England came on the scene a generation after the General Baptists. The Particular Baptists held to Calvinism and were more moderate toward the views of the Church of England considering it in a sense a true church, though differing with it on infant baptism. In 1644, seven churches, led by John Spilsbury’s church at Wapping, constituted themselves as Particular Baptists, distinguishing themselves as Calvinist, for believer’s-only baptism, and then going a step further than General Baptists in declaring that baptism was to be by immersion. It is this unique (at the time) practice that led to their being nicknamed “Baptists” in 1644. At first Baptists rejected the term as they did being called “Anabaptists.” Instead, they preferred to be called “Brethren,” “Brethren of the Baptized Way,” or “Baptized Churches.” While modern Baptists draw from both General and Particular groups, McBeth claims Particular Baptists have held more influence.

In 1644, having organized and distinguished themselves as a unique group, Particular Baptists produced the first major Baptist confession of faith, *The London Confession* (1644). Decidedly Calvinistic, *The London Confession* (1644) held that the atonement was for the elect.

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647 The Wapping church, with its first pastor John Spilsburg, was the first Particular Baptist church and until recently was the oldest Baptist church still in existence in London. See Nettles and Weaver, 40. See below, Hercules Collins, the author of the *Orthodox Catechism* (1680) was the third pastor of the Wapping church. For more on the life of Hercules Collins, see G. Steve Weaver, Jr., *Orthodox, Puritan, Baptist: Hercules Collins (1647-1702) and Particular Baptist Identity in Early Modern England* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Reprecht, 2015). For more on John Norcott, Wapping’s second pastor see Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1823), 3:295-301.

648 McBeth, 45-48. In the “Kiffin Manuscript,” the church minutes from the Jacob church, records, “Baptism also it ought to be by dipping ye body into ye Water, resembling Burial and riseing again. 2 Col: 2.12. Rom: 6.4. McBeth writes that immersion was recovered sometime between 1640-1641, but may have not been uniform among the churches. Baptists had begun to accept and use the name for themselves by the mid-1650s. It would not be until the 1750’s that they would fully embrace the term.

649 Ibid., 49.
only, yet still one must repent and believe in order to be saved. In some ways, the confession upholds well-known Baptist positions such as believer’s-only baptism. However, it stands out in Baptist history as it pronounces that baptism should be by dipping or immersion. This was not only the biblical mode of baptism, but also pictures that the baptized have died to sin, been buried with Christ, and now walk in the newness of life. Further, it looked forward to the day when the bodies of those who’ve died in Christ will be raised to reign with Christ. Article Thirty-nine reads, “That baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament Church, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are disciples, or taught, who upon profession of faith, ought to be baptized.” While adding the word “taught” further defines what a “disciple” is and rules out infant baptism, it also highlights that for Particular Baptists, a person’s professed faith is an informed faith. Article Forty continues,

The way and manner of the dispensing of this ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water: it being a sign, must answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the washing the whole soul in the blood of Christ. Secondly, that interest the saints have in the death, burial, and resurrection. Thirdly, together with a confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under the water, and riseth again, so certainly shall the bodies of the saints be raised by the power of Christ.

Then, a marginal note is added that “The word Baptizo, signifying to dip under water, so as with convenient garments both upon the administrator and subject, with all modesty.” In The London Confession (1644), Particular Baptists set themselves apart as Calvinist, baptizing by

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650 The Westminster Shorter (1646) and Longer Catechisms (1647), written shortly after The London Confession (1644), were an attempt to unify the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. Oddly, while they teach that an unbelieving adult, outside the visible church, is required to confess faith in order to be baptized (consistent with the Baptist position), they did not require it of infants whose parents were in the covenant of grace.

651 Timothy and Denise George, Confessions, 46.

652 Henry Clay Vedder, A Short History of Baptists (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1897), 143. Vedder notes, “English Baptists were accused by their opponents of baptizing converts in a state of nakedness, and doing other scandalous things, hence the statement in parenthesis was necessary, and the 1651 edition of the Confession add these words: ‘Which is also our practice, as many eye-witnesses can testify.’”
immersion informed believers, who had repented resulting in one’s dying and rising with Christ. The one baptized is incorporated into the visible church and is allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper (Article Thirty-three). As a body, the whole church is to hold one another accountable to live the new life professed in baptism. Should one go astray, the church is to exercise loving discipline up to the point of excommunication, in the effort to maintain a regenerate church (Articles Forty-two through Forty-seven). *The London Confession* (1644), as one of the first major Baptist statements of faith, set forth significant Baptist convictions related to the nature of the church and its responsibility to guard the gateway in (believer’s-only) and holiness within (regenerate living).

*A Catechisme for Babes, Or, Little Ones* (1652)

By the mid-seventeenth century, Baptists had organized and distinguished themselves from other Separatist groups by writing and publishing a formal statement of faith, emphasizing the essential role of believer’s baptism by immersion and its relationship to the regenerate church. Their position against baptizing those who could not profess faith due to young age did not prevent them from engaging in the essential task of instructing young people in the faith.

653 In the *Second London Confession* (1689), Article Twenty-nine addresses baptism with the same requirement of a profession of repentance and faith, baptism by immersion, with the expectation that the baptized will walk in newness of life. In four statements it reads: 1. Baptism is an Ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party Baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ to live and walk in newness of Life. 2. Those who do actually professe repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience, to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance. 3. The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. 4. Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance. Interestingly, it contains an extensive apology against infant baptism in an Appendix. The *Second* has only thirty-two Articles, down from fifty Articles in the First. “The 1677/1689 London Confession of Faith.” Christian Ethereal Library. Accessed January 21, 2020. https://www.ccel.org/creeds/bcf/bcfc29.htm#chapter29.
This commitment to an informed faith is expressed in Henry Jessey’s *A Catechisme for Babes, Or, Little Ones* (1652).

The subtitle *Suitable To Their Capacity More Than Others Have Been Formerly* reveals Jessey’s concern that biblical Christianity be written not only in terms of treatise, confessions, and covenants, but also in language that makes faith in Jesus accessible to the young. Jessey notes that catechisms had been used by Mr. Perkins, Mr. Elton, Mr. Egerton, Mr. Ball, Dan Rogers, and others to instruct, youth and elder people. However, these instruments contained things such as Greek and Latin. Therefore Jessey, not finding a suitable catechism for children, set out to produce one in such plain language that a very young child, just able to stammer and very weak in capacities, could understand. *A Catechisme for Babes* is arranged in the familiar question and answer format with Scripture references following each answer. It also contains the Ten Commandments and the Great Commandment to love the Lord with all one’s heart and one’s neighbor as one’s self. And uniquely, Jessey includes a rhyming poem entitled, “The Chief Heads of This Catechism Fitted for Children’s Capacity” that summarizes the faith and assists the child in memorization. Rhyme is also used in the section “Why the Law was Given.” Prayers are also provided, to teach the child to pray in the morning, before and after meals, and before bed. The catechism is designed to be progressive, accommodating a child’s maturation with the later parts addressing the four conditions of every man: what one 1) was; 2) is; 3) may be; 4) must be all aimed at leading the child to know Christ. Though the questions address broad topics such as God’s nature and His creation, *A Catechisme for Babes* tackles significant doctrines like the fall, sin, death, the cross, and Resurrection, heaven, hell, and the final judgment. One must receive Christ by repentance and faith and then live a life consistent with God’s Word in order to go to heaven. Though baptism is not mentioned at all, *A Catechisme for Babes* was both an
evangelistic tool and a prebaptismal tool that could be used effectively to lead one to repentance and an informed faith, so that one’s baptism was the outward sign that one had received new life and that new life was expected to be evidenced by the way one lived.

*The Child’s Instructor or A New and Easy Primer (1664)*

Lest one thinks that catechisms for children escaped the attention of the English magistrates, this short catechism resulted in Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) being arrested, tried, and sentenced to forty days in jail for publishing *The Child’s Instructor* which violated the *Act of Uniformity*. In the verdict it is recorded that the catechism contained, “by way of questions and answers, these positions, contrary to the book of *Prayer*, and the Liturgy of the Church of England: rejection of pedo baptism, laymen having abilities to preach the Gospel, and Christ shall reign personally upon the earth for a thousand years.” His book was burned and he was required to stand in the pillory in the middle of multiple towns with a placard declaring that he had been convicted of writing a seditious and schismatical book. He served his time, but rather than admitting he had erred, he stood in the midst of town, defended himself, and preached “the truth with great boldness.”

The catechism contained questions and answers pertaining to baptism. The question, “Who are the right subjects of baptism?” was answered, “Believers, or godly men and women only, who can make confession of their faith and repentance…. Again, to the question, “Why

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655 Nettles, 75.

may no infants be received into the church now, as they were under the law,” the answer is given, “Because the fleshly seed is cast out, tho’ God under that dispensation did receive Infants in a lineal way by generation; yet he that hath the key of David, that openeth and not man shutteth, an no man openeth, hath shut up that way into the church, and hath opened the door of regeneration, receiving in none now but believers.” Infants who die without baptism are declared to be “members of the kingdom of glory, tho’ they be not members of the visible church.” Those who practice infant baptism are described as in error and those who “make not God’s holy word their rule, but do presume to open a door, that Christ hath shut, and none ought to open.”657 As was becoming standard in early Baptist life, this catechism appears to have been intended to instruct children of churchgoers and was not indicated for use with adult converts. However, the attention given it by the public indicates its influence extended beyond Keach’s London church. Keach upheld the nature of the church as a regenerated gathering of believers, baptized upon the profession of faith, in which the word of God and sacraments are administered.658 His developed theology of the church is richly displayed in The Glory of the True Church and Its Discipline Displayed (1697), which is essentially a church manual, wherein all baptized are called to enter into a covenant with the church and to be held accountable to faithfully live out one’s baptism. Those baptized from another church must give account of their faith and baptism and have their lives examined before admittance. The church is to be kept pure by practicing the power of the keys, the first being suspension and the second being excommunication. The work concludes with a beautiful covenant calling on members to be devoted to Christ and to one another. The

657 Nettles, 75-76.

descriptions found in *The Glory of the True Church* were based on Scripture and provided clear expectations of what it meant to be baptized and become part of the true church. Those unwilling to comply would do well to soberly consider the covenant one was making in baptism with regard to the church. These principles are the strong heritage of Baptists related to believing, being baptized, and belonging to a church. The expectations were high and clear. In keeping with chronological order, *Keach’s Catechism* (1693), also known as *The Baptist Catechism* will be examined below.

*The Orthodox Catechism* (1680)

Hercules Collins (1646-1702), a Baptist pastor in London, published a revised edition of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), entitled *The Orthodox Catechism* (1680). Collins had three purposes in writing this catechism: 1) It would function as a tool for pastoral instruction; 2) It was a polemic against false teaching; and 3) It was a plea for doctrinal unity. Having become the pastor at Wapping just four years earlier, Collins adapted the *Heidelberg* to better instruct his congregation. For example, while the *Heidelberg* lists the Ten Commandments and explains them later, Collins lists them one by one explaining and applying each as he went along. This pastoral and teaching concern reveals this catechism was utilized primarily as a post-baptismal tool to ground his congregation in the faith. Collins wrote, “Now for as much as I have taken a

659 Nettles and Weaver, 41, note that Collins was significant among the early Particular Baptists because 1) He was a prolific writer for Baptist causes, 2) He was among the original signers of the *Second London Confession* (1689), 3) He was listed among ten other prominent London pastors as endorsing *The Gospel Minister’s Maintenance Vindicated*, demonstrating his prestige among Baptists of his day.

660 *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), also known as the “Palatinate Catechism,” is a Protestant catechism written by Zacharias Ursinas in Heidelberg, Germany in response to the *Council of Trent* (1563). It is divided into fifty-two sections, a section being taught each Lord’s Day by the elder. It is considered one of the most influential Reformed catechisms ever written. A side by side comparison of the *Heidelberg* with the *Orthodox* is provided in James R. Renihan, ed. *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004).

661 Nettles and Weaver, 42.
great deal of pains in gathering these broken fragments together for your utility and profit, I hope you will take a little pains to read it, and more to live it; and I pray do it seriously and observingly. Read it humbly and frequently, read it with prayer and meditation, then am I sure thou who art a true Christian wilt love it more and more.”

He then urges its use upon parents who are concerned for their children.

Collins was also concerned to defend Baptists against charges of heresy associated with some rogue members of the Particular Baptists, such as Thomas Collier who had helped adopt the *Somerset Confession* (1656), but held unorthodox views on the Trinity. Collins laid out orthodox theology in his catechism to prevent heresies from taking root. Collins also aimed to position Baptist orthodoxy alongside the great reformed groups of the past. By basing his catechism on the great *Heidelberg Catechism*, he could demonstrate doctrinal alignment and reformed lineage.

The basic structure of the *Orthodox Catechism* follows the *Heidelberg*: 1) Man’s Misery; 2) Man’s Redemption; and 3) Thankfulness to God. All the topics of the *Heidelberg* are found in the *Orthodox* and both contain the Apostles’ Creed, the Sacraments, and the Lord’s Prayer, though Collins adds explanatory notes along the way. It is interesting that Collins retains the term “sacrament” rather than “ordinance” when referring to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, especially considering the *Second London Confession* (1689), of which Collins helped write, which intentionally changed “sacrament” to “ordinance” to distinguish it from the *Westminster Confession* (1646). Nettles and Weaver hold that it indicated a lack of unanimity on the part of Particular Baptists. Fowler believes it reveals that British Baptists held to baptismal

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662 Ibid., 59, quoting Collins, *The Orthodox Catechism*, Prelude.
663 Nettles and Weaver, 46.
sacramentalism. However, it seems best to see this simply as Collins’ maintaining the word used by Calvin, Bullinger, and Melanchthon. Another surprise found in the Orthodox is that it didn’t change the language of the Lord’s Supper, but maintained the sixteenth century phrase, “my soul is no less assuredly fed to everlasting life with his body, which was crucified for me, and his blood, which was shed for me; than I receive and taste by the mouth of my body the bread and the wine, the signs of the body and the blood of our Lord, received at the hand of the minister.” Though calling the Lord’s Supper a “sign and pledge,” Collins perhaps held that the partaker experiences communion with the Lord in the Supper through the Spirit, which is very close to Calvin’s “spiritual presence” view of the Lord’s Supper.

Most notable for the purposes of this research is Collins’ change to the article on baptism. Interestingly, the question “What is baptism?” is non-existent in the Heidelberg. Thus, Collins adds the question “What is baptism?” and inserts the statement from the Second London Confession for the answer. There was also a fundamental difference between the Particular Baptist Collins and the pedobaptist reformers over the proper mode and candidate for baptism. As a Particular Baptist, Collins held that baptism is by immersion and only for confessed believers. Many reformers held to affusion and infant baptism. Again, Collins inserts the words found later in the Second London “Immersion or dipping of the person in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by such who are duly qualified by Christ.” While the Heidelberg adherents would have held to infant baptism, Collins uses the Second London text to


answer the question of proper subjects, “Those who do actually profess repentance toward God, faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.”667 This is followed by an extended argument against covenant theology and infant baptism. Collins added one other addition to the article on baptism, insisting that it include the “Laying on of Hands” upon the baptized. This General Baptist practice was not common among Particular Baptists. Collins believed this practice coupled with the prayer of the minister increased the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, enabled believers to hold fast to their faith, and helped them fight against the world, flesh, and the Devil.668

Consistent with earlier Baptist catechisms, *Orthodox* instructs on the role of the church in disciplining errors, heresies, and wickedness. This reinforces the expectation that those who have believed and been baptized into the church will live the amended life. Those who go astray or refuse are subject to biblical admonishment and if necessary being shut out of the church, which is equivalent to being shut out of the kingdom. Only upon repentance and close scrutiny of the penitent’s life was one readmitted.669 The abandonment of the old life is reinforced further in the final section “Of Man’s Thankfulness,” whereby believers are instructed to die to self and mortify the old man along with the expectation of good works as the fruit of saving faith.670

Following tradition, *Orthodox* includes the Ten Commandments with explanations and applications, as well as instruction in the Lord’s Prayer. Like many catechisms before his, Collins includes the Apostles’ Creed, but also adds the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.671


668 Ibid., 50, citing Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism*, 34.

669 Ibid., 86.

670 Ibid., 87-88.

671 Ibid., 100-102.
and Weaver believe the addition of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds was to help address and counteract the Trinitarian controversy with Thomas Collier.

This lengthy catechism stands out among its contemporaries due to its parallel with the *Heidelberg*. However, it is very akin to other Baptist catechisms of the seventeenth century in its insistence on believer’s baptism by immersion, incorporation into the church, with the expectation of a changed life, and the loving boundary of church discipline to encourage faithfulness. Still, it remains primarily a post-baptismal tool in Collins’ application to help guide believers in faith and practice. It is only potentially pre-baptismal as parents voluntarily make use of the catechism with their children to raise them in “the True Articles of Christian Faith.”

**St. Paul’s Catechism (1687)**

Thomas Grantham (1634-1692) first wrote *St. Paul’s Catechism* (1687) for his family, but then made it available to General Baptists at large. This Arminian instruction is built around Heb 6:1,2 divided into six parts: 1) Repentance from Dead Works; 2) Faith Toward God; 3) Baptisms; 4) Laying on of Hands; 5) Resurrection from the Dead; and 6) Eternal Judgment.

The Introduction makes clear this is a pre-baptismal tool that may be utilized to inform both servants and children about the Christian faith prior to being saved and baptized. It can also be utilized to instruct young Christians and assumes Christian households. There are also brief statements as to the nature of God in the introduction. The catechism utilizes the dialogue format, with the Father as Teacher answering questions put forth by his Son the Learner.

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672 Ibid., 59, citing Collins, *The Orthodox Catechism*, Preface.
While Grantham subscribes to the authority of Scripture, there are theological issues with *St. Paul’s Catechism*, namely its stress on man’s ability to obey God so that God will accept him. This is made possible by God’s universal grace which begins man’s walk with God but then is merited as man obeys. Also, Grantham seems to indicate that all men can find their way to God apart from the gospel, as man can only know God if he has God’s grace extended to him. There is no fixed standard for all the world to believe the gospel to be saved. Rather, each man is judged by God by the amount of Light and Knowledge given to him by God. Thus, where there is no grace, there is no duty owed.

*St. Paul’s Catechism’s* Arminianism is made clear in the section on the six principles of Heb 6:1,2. Grantham discusses the necessity of repentance and faith which are made available by God, but rejects God’s offer as irresistible. Man, having free will, must choose to respond, otherwise he would not be held responsible for his choice. He explains that one comes to know sin through the law, and more specifically through the Ten Commandments, as well as the Great Commandment in Matt 22:37-40. Grantham discuss the nature and necessity of faith for salvation, which is “a firm belief in the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures, and particularly concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” However, it is here that God judges man not on the basis of firm faith, but on the extent of the Light given, in essence a soteriological sliding scale. In the midst of his discussion on what it means to have faith in the Son, Grantham inserts the


674 Ibid., 17.

675 Ibid., 23
Nicene Creed and further supports the clause of faith in the Son and the Holy Spirit with additional Scripture.

Most pertinent to this research is an examination of Grantham’s principle on baptisms. He explains there are three types of baptism: baptism of repentance for remission of sins, baptism of the Holy Spirit, whereby one receives the promise of the Spirit, and baptism of afflictions. When the inquiring son asks what is the profit of being baptized, the father answers, “The same profit which thou mayest expect in thy sincere obedience to God in any other Ordinance: That is, pardon of sin, and eternal life, is made sure to thee in God’s way, (if thou art faithful in what thou dost, as God requires they faith and obedience). Here, Grantham’s Arminianism is on full display, requiring obedience in order to receive grace. Grantham seems to anticipate the misperception that faith is placed in baptism for salvation rather than in Christ. He explains that though the Bible seems to indicate salvation comes through baptism, it is Christ who is held out in baptism, just as the Bible declares that one is saved through preaching, yet it is Christ who is held out in preaching. A brief discussion is provided on the nature of the church which is constituted by faith, repentance, and baptism. Yet without baptism, there can be no church. Baptism is to be administered by immersion and only to the repentant believer who is to be fully clothed. Baptism in the Spirit means receiving the Spirit which results in the fruit of the Spirit. Somewhat surprising from the Baptist Grantham is his explanation that the gifts of the Spirit continue and include prophesies and speaking in tongues. Grantham concludes his six

676 Ibid., 24-25.
677 Ibid., 35.
678 Ibid., 36.
679 Ibid., 39.
principles requiring the laying on of hands after baptism, promise of the resurrection of the dead, and the warning of eternal judgment.

In keeping with traditional catechisms, Grantham includes the Lord’s Prayer in his section, “On the Duty of Prayer,” complete with explanation and application. The instruction follows that it is not necessary to always use the exact words of the Lord’s Prayer, but it is recommended as it is to pray the exact words given to one by God. Additional ordinances are given in this section. First, preach the Word in order to edify, exhort, reprove, correct, and comfort. Second, partake of the holy bread and cup. Finally, Grantham concludes with instructions to obey one’s superiors and honor the king.

Differences in Arminianism and Calvinism aside (not to mention Grantham’s apparent leaning toward universalism), it is noteworthy that Grantham assigned this catechism for the purposes of evangelism and ongoing instruction. This makes it applicable as a pre- and post-baptismal instrument, providing for an informed faith at baptism and growth in the faith afterwards. Further, Grantham’s St. Paul’s Catechism sets forth the essentials of faith, repentance, believer’s baptism, and expectation of a changed life which consistently appear in Baptist catechisms.

Keach’s Catechism (1693)

No other catechism has helped articulate the Baptist faith more than Keach’s Catechism (1693), also known as the Baptist Catechism. Nettles and Weaver state, “Perhaps more than all others combined, this catechism defined what it was to be a Baptist throughout the eighteenth century and for some years into the nineteenth.” Keach’s preface to the catechism puts this work’s relation to the Westminster Shorter Catechism into perspective:

680 Nettles and Weaver, 113.
Having a desire to show our near Agreement with many other Christians, of whom we have great esteem; we some years since put forth a Confession of Faith, almost in all points the same with that of the Assembly and Savoy, which was subscribed by the Elders and Messengers of many churches, baptized on the profession of their faith: and do now put forth a short account of Christian principles, for the instruction of our families, in most things agreeing with the Shorter Catechism of the Assembly. And this we were rather induced to, because we have commonly made use of that Catechism in our families, and the difference being not much, it will be more easily committed to memory.681

This close relationship between the two has caused some to describe the Westminster Short Catechism (1648) as the father of Keach’s Catechism (1683), hereunto referred to as the Baptist Catechism.682

In 1693, Benjamin Keach and William Collins were commissioned to draw up a catechism to be used for the instruction of children and servants.683 William Collins along with Nehemiah Cox had published the 1677 version of the Second London Confession which was adopted in 1689.

There are three occasions related to the Baptist Catechism that demonstrate its longevity and its connection to Baptist churches in America. Taking these occasions chronologically, in America, the Philadelphia Association began using the Baptist Catechism to instruct youth sometime prior to 1738. In 1738, the Association makes reference to the Baptist Catechism when it sought to raise money to have it reprinted. The minutes note, “Agreed, that since the catechisms are expended, and few or none to be had, and our youth thereby not likely to be instructed in the fundamentals of saving knowledge, that the several congregations we represent


682 Ibid.

683 Nettles and Weaver, 115, citing the June 1693 General Assembly of Particular Baptists resolution.
should consult among themselves what they can raise for so good a design…” 684 The Association found itself in need of reprinting it again in 1761 as a survey of the number of copies needed by the churches was issued. A similar survey occurred again in 1779. The Association’s confidence in the catechism’s effectiveness can be seen in 1774, when some churches had become lax in using it to instruct its youth. The Association urged them in this so “plain and important a duty” and recommended to the churches “to consider and promote the same.” 685 Twenty years later, the Association passed a resolution recommended that the churches should “institute the catechizing of children in their respective congregations.” 686 Clearly, American Baptists of the eighteenth century believed in the effectiveness of catechisms for instructing young people in the faith, particularly the Baptist Catechism.

Another occasion describes Charles Spurgeon’s endorsement of the Baptist Catechism in London in the nineteenth century. Spurgeon was known to stand for truth and preach the truth without compromise. Doctrinal clarity and purity were essential. This was demonstrated in 1855 when he sponsored the reprinting of the Baptist Confession of Faith to advance the gospel. Alongside the Confession, Spurgeon used a shortened version of the Baptist Catechism (omitting the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer) to teach the youth. He wrote,

In matters of doctrine you will find orthodox congregations frequently changed to heterodoxy in the course of thirty or forty years, and that is because, too often, there has been no catechizing of the children in the essential doctrines of the Gospel. For my part, I am more and more persuaded that the study of a good Scriptural catechism is of infinite value of children…. Even if the youngsters do not understand all the questions and answers…yet, abiding in their memories, it will be infinite service when the time of understanding comes, to have known these very excellent, wise and judicious definitions of the things of God….It will be a blessing to them—the greatest of all blessing…a

684 Ibid., 119, quoting Minutes, 39, from the 1738 Philadelphia Association.
685 Ibid., 120, quoting Minutes, 141, from the 1774 Philadelphia Association.
686 Ibid., quoting Minutes, 297, from the 1794 Philadelphia Association.
blessing in life and death, in time and eternity, the best of blessings God Himself can give.

This demonstrates the continued popularity and usefulness of the Baptist Catechism in London into the nineteenth century.

One other occasion occurred in the American South in 1813. Richard Furman (1755-1825), the longtime pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina (1786-1825) used the Baptist Catechism as a tool of education and evangelism in his church. In 1813, the Charleston Association had it printed and recommended its use among its churches. Of note, before there was a “Sunday School” program for education, one of Furman’s youth who had been catechized stated,

We had no Sabbath school then, but we had the Baptist Catechism, with which we were as familiar as with the Lord’s Prayer. At our quarterly seasons, we children of the congregation repeated the Baptist Catechism standing, in a circle round the font. … We had to memorize the whole book, for none knew which question would fall to them….This practice was of incalculable benefit, for when it pleased God to change our hearts, and when offering ourselves to the church for membership, we knew what the church doctrines meant and were quite familiar with answering questions before the whole congregation, and did not quake when pastor or deacon or anyone else asked what we understood by Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification. Oh no; we had been well taught. …What a pity that such a course of instruction has been abandoned.687

This testimony was recorded in the Southern Baptist Convention’s Foreign Mission Board’s publication on women in mission which commended Richard Furman’s work in missions in 1913. Though proven effective in evangelizing the lost and providing a rich, meaningful, informed faith for baptism, the catechism had fallen to neglect within one hundred years of Furman’s celebrated use.

687 Nettles and Weaver, 114, quoting Fannie E. S. Heck, In Royal Service (Richmond: Education Department, Foreign Mission Board, 1926 [Original copyright 1913]), 26-27.
The *Baptist Catechism* was not limited to Furman and South Carolina. Associational minutes and other documents indicate that it was also used in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee. This is significant as it shows that catechisms had influence in Baptist churches even prior to the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, making them a strand of Southern Baptist DNA.

Baptism is described systematically over the course of several questions. The first instance is in Question 93 “What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption? The answer follows: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the Word, baptism, the Lord’s supper, and prayer; all which means are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” This article follows on the heels of articles defining faith and repentance and precedes Questions 96-100 which all pertain to baptism.

Question 96 asks, “How do baptism and the Lord’s supper become effectual means of salvation? The answer: “Baptism and the Lord’s supper become effectual means of salvation, not for any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of the Spirit in those that by faith receive them.” Here the emphasis is on faith, not the outward act.

Question 97 asks, “What is baptism?” The answer: “Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament instituted by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized a sign of his fellowship with

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688 Ibid., 123.

689 Ibid., 140, quoting Keach, *The Baptist Catechism*, 93. This answer included above is the old answer, which sounded like sacramentalism in keeping with the goal of maintaining as many of the same words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* as possible. However the answer was changed in 1795. To make it more Baptist, the old Answer was replaced with “and the ordinances as additional means of building up believers in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.” See Nettles and Weaver, 123.
Him, in His death, burial, and resurrection; of his being engrafted into Him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up himself unto God through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.”

This classic Baptist definition includes the necessary basics for all preparing for baptism, highlighting baptism as a symbol (sign), picturing four realities in the new believer’s life.

Question 98 carries over from past catechisms the important definition of who can be baptized. The Answer given is “Baptism is to be administered to all who actually profess repentance toward God, faith in and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to none other.”

Believer’s baptism is the bedrock of Baptist baptismal theology.

Question 99 rehearses the stance against infant baptism as unscriptural, while Question 100 requires baptism to be by immersion in the triune name of God according to Christ’s command. Question 101 orders all those who are baptized to “give up themselves to some particular and orderly church…that they may walk in all the commandments of ordinances of the Lord blameless.”

Interestingly, the Baptist Catechism does not include the Creed, but follows tradition by including the Ten Commandments with explanations and the Lord’s Prayer. Nettles gives high praise to the Baptist Catechism writing,

The doctrine of depravity dominates articles 18-23. Election, particular atonement, and effectual calling pervade articles 24-36 and are correlated with the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ. Admirable in its comprehensive sweep of theology, the catechism also treats justification, sanctification, adoption, union with Christ, the law, resurrection, eternal destinies, church, ordinances, prayer, faith, repentance, and sin as well as other connected doctrine. The lives of God’s people would be edified by thorough acquaintance with the whole counsel of God as presented by the Baptist Catechism.

690 Around 1849, Benjamin Beddome wrote, A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism in which he includes a helpful commentary on Question 99, infant baptism. See the summary at Nettles, 114. See further, Benjamin Beddome, A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism (Port St. Lucie, FL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2006).

691 Nettles, 78.
One of the strengths of the Baptist Catechism’s questions and answers on baptism is the sequence. The catechism instructs the reader in the meanings of faith, repentance, and baptism, weaving the expectation of a changed life throughout, ending with the expectation that the baptized will be connected and submitted to a local church. These are the essentials that likely made a difference in one’s experience in baptism as well as the life that followed one’s baptism.

**A Catechism or Instruction for Children and Youth**  
**Fundamental Doctrines Christianity (1763)**

Dan Taylor was a General Baptist pastor in the Lincolnshire Association in England. The history of General Baptists in England in the 1700s is marked by a lack of ministers and educational, disciplinary, and theological debates.\(^{692}\) Within Taylor’s Association, there were vigorous debates over the deity of Christ, the atonement, justification by faith, and regeneration. Taylor described them as “the sentiments of Arius and Socinus.”\(^{693}\) Some defended these doctrines, while others denied them, which led the Association to split into Free Grace General Baptists (New Connection of General Baptists) and the Old General Baptists.\(^{694}\) This catechism was written (and republished eight times by 1810)\(^{695}\) to set forth biblical Christianity for General Baptists.

*A Catechism* is a lengthy work in the traditional question and answer format. A brief summary will suffice for getting the general flow, followed by a closer inspection of the large section on baptism. Section I focuses on the authenticity, inspiration, authority, and uses of

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\(^{692}\) Ibid., 122.

\(^{693}\) Ibid., 123, citing Dan Taylor in Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Self Published, 1811), 483-484.


\(^{695}\) Nettles, 123.
Scripture. Section II declares God to be creator and preserver of all things. Section III covers the attributes of God such as omnipresent, immutable, and eternal. Section IV is on man’s purity and perfection at creation, followed by the devastating results of the fall in Section V. Section VI places a heavy emphasis on the grave depravity of man followed by the seriousness and variety of sin in Section VII. Then Taylor transitions toward the good news, describing the necessity and worth of forgiveness in Section VIII. Section IX covers the nature and necessity of regeneration, in which he establishes that saving faith which comes by hearing the good news results in a radical inward and outward change, described as the “fruit of holiness.” 696 In Section X, man is portrayed as being helpless in sin, with good deeds benefiting him none for salvation. Section XI somberly warns the reader of eternal punishment for those who die in sin. Nettles notes the Arminian tone of Section XII by Taylor’s insistence that “no sinner is excluded from God’s desire to save, Christ’s provision of salvation, the right to hear the gospel, or the Lord’s invitation to salvation.” 697 Section XIV denounces justification by works and announces eternal life as a free gift. In Section XV, the question and answers explain repentance as a forsaking of one’s wicked ways, and faith which is believing the promises of God. It is continued faith that keeps one during temptation and helps one overcome. In Section XVI, the reader is urged to receive salvation, be justified by faith, and experience the happiness, grace, hope, and power of the Lord. Section XVII contrasts the happiness of knowing the Lord with the misery of the sinners. In foreboding terms, he reminds the reader of God’s wrath, displeasure, and curse ending in everlasting destruction. Section XIII covers the duty of converted persons which is to love and

696 Ibid., 138, citing Taylor, A Catechism or Instructions for Children and Youth Fundamental Doctrines Christianity, 8th ed. (London: Self Published, 1810), IX.19.

697 Ibid., 124.
obey God. Obedience is put forth as evidence of conversion, just as disobedience is evidence of a lack of conversion. In Section XIX, Taylor encourages the reader to belong to a gospel church, which is “a society of persons professing faith in Jesus Christ, and love to him and agreeing to come together, for divine worship.” The true church with Christ as head is contrasted with the state church which the reader is justified in dissenting and separating from. Christ and His kingdom is understood as distinct from all civil government. Every man should be free to interpret the all-sufficient Scripture for himself.

Finally, one comes to Section XX, Taylor’s section on baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This section alone contains fifty-one questions, thirty-five of which are on baptism, though granted many of the answers are quite short. Baptism is described as being from God, commanded by Jesus, practiced by the Apostles, and granted to those who confess sin and show fruit of repentance. Questions 18-25 address the familiar foe of infant baptism. It is declared to be nowhere found in Scripture and cannot be accounted for by household baptisms, nor Jesus blessing the children. Ultimately, infant baptism is called vain and useless worship and relegated to a commandment of man. Questions 26-31 declare immersion to be the proper mode which is then reinforced with the examples of John the Baptist, Jesus, the eunuch, and the imagery of being buried with Christ in baptism. Readers are urged to not change the ordinance which God established. Question 35 urges readers to be baptized “at the first opportunity,” which would on first appearance argue against delayed baptism. Questions 36-51 Taylor sets forth the proper practice of the Lord’s Supper. A Catechism concludes with Section XXI with a reminder that death and judgment await all. Heaven and all its happiness awaits the believer. Hell and all its torments awaits the sinner.

698 Ibid., 149, quoting Taylor, A Catechism, XIX.1.
The extent to which Taylor went to explain all the doctrines, but especially baptism demonstrates the importance he placed on young people understanding the rich meaning of the ordinance and the expectations that come with submitting to it. Perhaps this also reflects his deep, personal struggle with infant baptism as an Anglican which left him unsettled until finally he concluded baptism was to be by immersion at Gamston in Notts, February 1783 and left to join the General Baptists in May 1783. In keeping with Baptist catechisms of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, *A Catechism* highlights the need for faith, repentance, pre-baptismal catechism (especially of the youth to bring them to faith), believer’s baptism, the instant and ongoing connection to the local church, and the expectation of a changed life as evidence of conversion.

*The First Principles of the Oracles of God (1783)*

John Sutcliff (1752-1814) was the influential, zealous, cautious, and sincere pastor of the Baptist church at Olney (1775-1814) in Buckinghamshire. Many know him more as the friend of John Newton and Andrew Fuller, as well as William Carey’s pastor. His strengths were his “consistency, reliability, propriety, and devotional insight.”

Sutcliff wrote *The First Principles of the Oracles of God (1783)*. It was written in the familiar question and answer format (130 in total) and was meant to be completed and then gone over a second time. It is unique in its questions on natural inability and moral inability, as well as

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699 For more on Sutcliff’s life and ministry, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his Friends, and his Times* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1994), 141.

700 Nettles and Weaver, 171, note “In 1791, it was Sutcliff’s sermon on ‘Jealousy for God,’ from 1 Kings 19:10 that crystalized the conviction of Carey that something must be done immediately for evangelizing the heathen.” Carey’s famous *Enquiry* was the result.

701 Ibid., 170.
containing neither the Creed, Ten Commandments, nor the Lord’s Prayer. Frankly, the answers to the questions are very brief with little to no explanation. Taken as a whole, Sutcliff provides an overview of theology with his main concern that the reader make the affairs of one’s soul one’s chief concern. And more specifically as the subtitle indicates, it urges children to know God through Jesus Christ. Nettles and Weaver state, “Sutcliff’s catechism still resounds with the strong evangelistic concern characteristic of Baptist catechisms.” A summary of the topics of the catechism are below, with comments on the doctrines related to conversion, baptism, and the church.

After introducing the doctrines of God’s attributes, divine revelation, and the Trinity, one finds a strong emphasis on the law, human depravity, and the work of Christ on the Cross. He touches on the sovereignty of God, unconditional election, and effectual calling. Staunchly Calvinist, Sutcliff’s grasp of the relationship between duty and grace and the spiritual life is discussed, including repentance, faith, love, and the new birth. Then he discusses pardon, justification, adoption, and sanctification. Then he comes to the church, the ordinances, and last things.

Of special interest are the questions pertaining to conversion, baptism, and one’s relationship to the church. Sutcliff addresses the foundational doctrines related to conversion, namely repentance and faith, in Questions 87-90. Question 87 asks: What is repentance? The answer is: Repentance is a change of mind, arising from a conviction that we have been in some error. Question 88 follows with the question: Wherein is repentance discovered? The Answer:


703 Ibid., 173.

704 Ibid., 187, citing Sutcliff, 87.
Repentance is discovered in sorrow for, and forsaking of whatever we see was wrong.\textsuperscript{705} This definition of repentance immediately calls to mind that repentance is not simply changing one’s mind, but also changing one’s behavior once acknowledging what was wrong. Question 89 asks: What is faith? The answer is: Faith is a cordial belief of the testimony God has given us in His Word. This is followed by Question 90: How does it appear to be genuine? The answer: It appears to be genuine, by the influence of divine truth, working effectually in the heart and life. Thus genuine faith believed with one’s mind, works itself out in one’s outlook and behavior. Then, lest one claim to love God without obeying God, \textit{A Catechism} explains in Question 92: How is it (love) seen? The answer: It is seen in reverencing His authority, and obeying His commands. This love is the product of having been born again and becoming a new creature (Question 93). The motif of a changed life continues in Questions 94 and 95. Question 94 asks: Why is such a change (referred to in the answer to Question 93) necessary? The answer given is “It is necessary on account of the reigning enmity of the heart against God.” The depraved human heart needs replaced with a heart that loves, enjoys, and desires to obey God. Perhaps against an Arminian view which might suggest that humans have the power within themselves to change, \textit{A Catechism} asks in Question 95 “But cannot such a change be effected without an almighty work of the Spirit of God? The Answer: No, for the enmity of the heart is so strong and deeply rooted, that none but an almighty power can overcome it. This change of heart results in one’s thinking of God as holy, glorious, amiable; God’s law as holy, just, and good; the gospel as holy, gracious, and loving; sin as hateful; holiness as the brightest ornament; and the Lord Jesus Christ as “infinitely lovely in His person, office, and work.”\textsuperscript{706} What richness of perspective is

\textsuperscript{705} Ibid., citing Sutcliff, 88.

\textsuperscript{706} Ibid., 188-189, citing Taylor, 97-102.
infused into young mind. And in case the reader has missed the transforming nature of God’s salvation, Taylor highlights pardon, justification, and adoption in route to the question on sanctification, which is defined as “the work of the Holy Spirit, in which we are fitted to serve and enjoy God, by being gradually conformed to His image.” Taylor follows up with emphasis on the eternal security of one’s salvation that cannot be forfeited as it is guaranteed by “an everlasting and well-ordered covenant.”

This brings the catechism to the topic of baptism. Taylor introduces it by describing the proper candidate. Question 110 asks “Have these persons, (referred in to in the previous build-up of questioning) as children of God, any peculiar privileges of an outward nature in this world? The Answer: Yes, they have a right to all the privileges of the Lord’s house, particularly the holy ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper. Though not explicit, Question 110 is Taylor’s way of stating that only believers who have been transformed by the power of God can be baptized. One might desire more commentary from the gifted pastor of Olney. However, Question 111 is straightforward and unadorned asking “What is baptism?” The Answer: Baptism is a solemn immersion or burial in water, of the party to whom it is administered, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” It is noteworthy that he does exclude all from the ordinances who do not “properly understand their true design” intimating that instruction in the doctrine of baptism is a prerequisite for participation. A Catechism’s only reference to the church is the brief statement made in Question 26 when it is asked “And in associating with His people?” The Answer given is “Yes, for if I love God, I shall love to unite with His people.” When one remembers that this

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707 Ibid., 190, citing Taylor, 108.
708 Ibid., citing Taylor, 109.
709 Ibid., citing Taylor, 111.
catechism is aimed at the hearts and minds of youth, it is consistent that Taylor would give the most basic descriptions of each topic. Yet he covers the essentials and provides foundational understanding of what it means to become a Christian, to enter the church, and to live out one’s faith in love for God.

**Robert Baylor Semple’s Catechism (1809)**

In 1646, the Puritan writer John Cotton (1584-1652) wrote and published a catechism entitled *Milk for Babes, Drawn out of the Breasts of Both Testaments. Chiefly for the Spirituall Nourishment of Boston Babes in either England: But May Be of Like Use for Any Children* (1646) which stayed in publication for over 200 years. In sixty-four questions and answers, it taught children about sin and the law, the Ten Commandments, the church, grace, the covenant, salvation, the sacraments, and final things. This Puritan catechism is being included in a chapter on Baptist catechisms because it is referenced as being used by Baptists in Virginia in the late eighteenth century. Robert Baylor Semple (1767-1831), the early American pastor, historian and leader of Virginia Baptists records in a 1785 resolution by the General Committee of Baptists that “It was then consulted, whether it would not be desirable to establish among the Baptists some uniform mode for the solemnization of marriage. Upon which it was resolved to adopt and recommend the form laid down in the Common Prayer-Book, leaving out a few exceptionable parts, and that it be printed together with the catechism entitled *Milk for Babes.*”

Perhaps Cotton’s *Milk for Babes* was chosen for its simplicity and focus on the gospel. It asks such clear and forthright questions of its students: how is one saved, what is faith, what is repentance, what is newness of life, and what is the church? Cotton’s questions related to

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710 Semple, 62.
baptism are two. The first is “What are the seals of the Covenant now in the days of the Gospel?”
The Answer: “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper”\textsuperscript{711} The second question is “What is done for you in Baptism?” The Answer is “In Baptism, the water is a sign and seal of my washing with the blood and Spirit of Christ, and thereby of my ingrafting into Christ: of the pardon and cleansing of my sins; of my rising up out of affliction; and also of my Resurrection from the death at the last day. All of the traditional elements important to Baptists are included there, perhaps minus the covenant language which would have been important to Cotton and his Massachusetts Bay Colony congregation at Boston.

Just because catechisms were recommended and available to early Baptists in America doesn’t mean they were utilized. In a footnote, Semple lamented, “It is much to be deplored that this, or some other form of religious instruction for children, has not been in more common use among the Baptists.”\textsuperscript{712} Apparently, while Virginia Baptists agreed doctrinally with other southern states by adopting the Philadelphia Confession of Faith in 1783,\textsuperscript{713} they lagged behind South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi,\textsuperscript{714} and Louisiana who made use of the Baptist Catechism (Keach’s) around this time. The need for a catechism for Virginia Baptists


\textsuperscript{712} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{713} The General Association of Baptists adopted the Philadelphia Confession of Faith at the meeting in Powhatan County, VA October 1783.

\textsuperscript{714} Another Virginia Baptist leader, William Carey Crane (1816-1885), eventually migrated to Mississippi (as well as Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas) is said to have been “publishing in lessons a ‘Baptist Catechism.’” See Cathcart, 289.
is addressed again at the General Association meeting in King William County, Virginia on October 8, 1796. Semple records,

A circular letter was composed on the religious education of children, which subject was also taken up upon the following query: How ought the religious education of children be conducted? Answer. By the use of catechisms; and we recommend for the present such as may be judged useful. A committee was also appointed to compose a suitable one for the use of the members of the Association.\textsuperscript{715}

Semple indicates that the publishing of this new catechism was delayed as opposition arose arguing for the sufficiency of Scripture. While the principle has been long held by Baptists, in practice it is interesting that the health of Baptist churches in Virginia was lamented as the “lifeless state of religion in all the churches.” At the General Association meeting in Mathews County, Virginia on October 14, 1809, the Association took up the issue of catechisms again. Semple records that the Association,

proposed to recommend to parents, &c., the use of a catechism that had been lately published for the religious instruction of children. This catechism, though too long deferred, had really been published in conformity to the resolution of the Association in their session in 1796. It, however, met with great opposition upon the principle that nothing of the kind was necessary; that the Bible was sufficient; that things of that kind had a dangerous tendency towards lessening the dignity of the Scriptures; that the most corrupt and absurd statements had been inculcated through catechisms.\textsuperscript{716}

Apparently, the catechism proposed in 1796, though delayed, was published prior to this Association meeting. James B. Taylor states that Semple wrote this himself for the instruction of children and that it was highly approved.\textsuperscript{717} There is no historic record of the catechism’s title or publication information. Semple records one further possible reference to it from the minutes of the General Meeting of Correspondence at Tarwallet meetinghouse in Cumberland County,

\textsuperscript{715} Semple, 86.
\textsuperscript{716} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{717} James B. Taylor, \textit{Virginia Baptist Ministers}, Series 1, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1859), 317.
Virginia on October 28, 1809. The concern over the religious education of children was discussed. It was recommended “to parents the use of catechisms, and especially one lately published for use of the Baptist society.” One assumes this referred to Semple’s catechism.

In 1810, Semple wrote *A History* and from this account we learn that the practice of baptism and use of catechisms was anything but uniform for Virginia Baptists. Baptisms, though not necessarily by design, were often delayed. Reasons for this may include first, Baptists grew rapidly due to revivals which sometimes yielded hundreds of converts at a time.\footnote{Semple, 102.} It took time to organize, inform, and baptize so many. Secondly, rural Baptist churches were scattered throughout the frontier and had few ordained ministers to conduct baptisms, which was a requirement of eighteenth century Virginia Baptists.\footnote{Ibid., 265. The requirement that baptisms can only be conducted by ordained ministers was changed in 1791.} Sometimes, Semple’s record simply states that a person was saved and baptized a few months later.\footnote{Ibid., 215.} More or less, it was common for baptisms on the frontier to be delayed. Semple’s record also shows that baptism always tied one to the local church.\footnote{Ibid., 210, 215.} One was expected to attend and support the church upon baptism.\footnote{Ibid., 266.}

Further, Virginia Baptists practiced church discipline\footnote{Ibid., 266.} which Semple calls the “axe of discipline” indicating the expectation that though revivals made many converts who were baptized into the church, one was expected to live out one’s faith or face excommunication from
the body. As a catechism for children, it was designed to be a pre-baptismal catechism, but was also a pre-conversion catechism intended to lead children to Christ.

**A Scripture Catechism for the Instruction of Children and Servants (1848)**

Robert Ryland (1805-1899), a distinguished Virginia minister, pastored the First Baptist Church of Lynchburg, Virginia for five years, was president of Richmond College in 1840, and pastored the first African Baptist Church in Richmond until 1865. It was during his pastorate of the African Baptist Church that he wrote *A Scriptural Catechism for the Instruction of Children and Servants* (1848). Nettles notes that “it was designed specifically for the ‘Oral Instruction of Colored People of the South,’” though it was also used in Sabbath schools and Bible classes. It contains fifty-two chapters, one for each week of the year and systematically teaches the learner biblical theology. Its aim is overtly evangelistic with “a heavy emphasis on holy and grateful living.” It is unique in placing the Ten Commandments as a prelude to the catechism and the answers to the questions being direct scriptural quotations.

Baptism is mentioned multiple times in *A Scriptural Catechism*. The first is in Lesson X.2 in response to the question “Did any occasion ever occur on which the three persons of the God-head were made manifest?” The answer is given from Matt 3:17 in the account of Jesus’ baptism. In Lesson XLI.12 on The Church, the question is posed, “Is baptism the appointed method of confessing Christ?” The answer is from Gal 3:27 where all who’ve been baptized

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725 Ibid., 82, 215.

726 Nettles, 160.

727 Ibid.

have put on Christ.729 In XLI.21, baptism is listed as one way the church promotes unity from Eph 5:3-6.730 The actual Lesson on Baptism is in XLIV. Without reprinting all twenty-nine questions and answers, a summary will suffice. The learner was taught that the first baptism in Scripture is of John the Baptist in the water of the Jordan River. It was divinely sanctioned by God, demonstrated obedience to God, and pointed to the coming of the Savior. The Apostles were authorized to baptize by Christ and baptized in water by immersion, just as did John the Baptist and other NT baptisms including Jesus’. The Apostles preached the faith and baptism was commanded, but that faith should always precede baptism. NT hearers obeyed the command with gladness. The learner is to understand that baptism avows one’s allegiance to Christ, represents one’s faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, is an emblem of one’s purification and salvation, declares one’s death to sin and life to righteousness, and initiates one’s union with the church. Baptism is an evidence of love for Christ, a love that issues itself in obedience to Christ’s commands.731

One can see from this summary that Ryland took seriously the responsibility of informing children and servants of the nature and importance of the act of baptism. In these twenty-nine questions, baptism is given is rightful place of honor subsequent to faith and repentance, with the expectation that one will be active in the local church and live a life of obedience to the Lord’s commands.

*The Baptist Scriptural Catechism (1850)*

729 Nettles, 110.

730 Ibid., 114.

731 Ibid., 119-124.
American Baptist pastor,\textsuperscript{732} writer, and reviver, Henry Clay Fish (1820-1877) wrote \textit{The Baptist Scriptural Catechism} (1850). The subtitle indicates that the direct audience was for “advanced members of the Sabbath school and Bible classes.” This places this catechism alongside the majority as a useful tool for pre-baptismal/pre-conversion instruction but also as an ongoing educational instrument. Fish’s revivalist style is indicated at the end of each section as he asks a rhetorical question from the previous discussion. For instance, at the conclusion of the article on faith, Fish asks, “Are you a believer, or does the wrath of God abide on you in unbelief?”\textsuperscript{733} His lengthy catechism covers the existence of God, the Scriptures, the character and attributes of God, angels, the law, obedience motivated by love, the person and work of Christ, faith, repentance, salvation, the sacraments, holiness of life, the security of the believer, death, the soul, judgment, heaven, and hell. His goal is evangelistic and his theology is Calvinistic.

\textit{The Baptist Scriptural Catechism} includes key doctrines that are common in Baptist catechisms and essential for the unconverted, newly converted, and converted to understand. Regeneration is defined as being born again by the mysterious work of the Spirit by way of the Word, resulting in a moral change. Holy love for God is the evidence one can expect from regeneration.\textsuperscript{734} True repentance, which is deep sorrow for having wronged God and issues itself in a hatred of sin and love for holiness, involves confession of sin, forsaking one’s evil ways, and is required for salvation.\textsuperscript{735} Faith is defined as belief or confidence in the declaration of another. True faith is the consent of the heart as well as the consent of the will. Thus, Fish defines saving

\textsuperscript{732} Fish pastored the First Baptist Church of Newark, New Jersey for 27 years. An interesting observation in this research is that pastors with long tenures are often the authors of catechisms.

\textsuperscript{733} Nettles and Weaver, 15.

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., 215-216, citing Henry C. Fish, \textit{A Baptist Scriptural Catechism}, VIII.

\textsuperscript{735} Ibid., 216-217, citing Fish, IX.
faith as “A firm, entire, hearty reliance on Christ for salvation” which is evidenced by the Savior becoming precious to the believer, the believer overcoming the world, and maintaining good works.\textsuperscript{736} Fish’s lesson on sanctification further sets forth the expectation that one who has true faith and repentance will live a progressively holy life.\textsuperscript{737} With this backdrop of systematic theology, Fish writes that “baptism is the immersion of the believer in water and is obedience to Christ, symbolic of his sufferings, burial, and resurrection. It is the permanent institution of the church.”\textsuperscript{738} In this concise statement one finds baptism is for believers, by immersion in water, in obedience to Christ, the symbol of the cross and Resurrection of Christ, and connects the believer to the church. When paired with Fish’s excellent descriptions of faith, repentance, regeneration, and sanctification, one suspects this catechism proved effective in preparing people for conversion, subsequent baptism, and subsequent righteous living.

\textit{Notes and Questions for the Oral Instruction of Colored People (1857)}

In 1857, E.T. Winkler the pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina (1854-1868) was called upon to write a booklet suitable for instructing slaves in the American South. Nettles and Weaver note, “Because such a large percentage of the population was involved in plantation life in Charleston including many members of First Baptist Church, one of the great concerns of the church was the religious instruction of its slave population. The minutes of monthly business meetings record baptisms of large numbers of slaves.”\textsuperscript{739} In addition to

\textsuperscript{736} Ibid., 218-219, citing Fish, X.

\textsuperscript{737} Ibid., 220-223, citing Fish, XII.

\textsuperscript{738} Ibid., 196, citing Fish, XIV.

\textsuperscript{739} Nettles and Weaver, 200. See further, Robert A. Baker and Paul J. Craven, Adventure in Faith: The First 300 Years of the First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 295.
evangelism and baptism, two additional steps were taken by First Baptist Church to achieve its goal of providing religious education to slaves: the planting of the Morris Street Church which received freed slaves at the end of the Civil War and the writing of Notes and Questions for the Oral Instruction of Colored People (1857).\footnote{Janet Duitsman Cornelius, Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 129. Cornelius notes that William Capers, Catechism for Little Children and for Use on the Missions to the Slaves in South Carolina (1833) was one of the most used catechism for slaves, second only to Charles Colcock Jones’s, The Religious Instruction of the Negroes (1842).}

Winkler urged that masters and pastors had an obligation to educate the slaves and to do so required Sabbath schools to be established. Nettles and Weaver note, “Ministers who worked consistently for many years in this task noticed a profound generational difference in the slave population. The enlightening and elevating effects of the gospel marked its recipients with distinct traits of intellectual and emotional maturity.”\footnote{Nettles and Weaver, 201-202.} What should be true for any and all who undertake catechism, especially at a young age, was observed in catechized slave children. Again, Nettles and Weaver write, “when they are converted and come before the church to relate their religious experiences, instead of recounting the wild fancies and absurd dreams, so common among the more adult applicants for membership, their statements of the work of grace upon their hearts are generally clear and evangelical, and in many cases most edifying and impressive.”\footnote{Ibid., 202.}

Winkler’s catechism provided the curriculum for this ambitious goal. One notices immediately the brevity of each question and answer. Uniquely lessons end with a hymn of praise to God. Also unique to this catechesis for slaves is the article on meekness that precedes the questions and answers on meekness, appearing to aim at keeping the enslaved from
rebellion. Contained in fifty-two lessons, Winkler’s design began with doctrinal lessons on God, Scripture, the nature of God, the Trinity, Creation, the Fall, Grace of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Repentance, Faith, Justification, Adoption, and Sanctification. Also included are lessons on the Law, the Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes. His section on Christian Institutions include: the Church, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.

Of special interest for this research are Winkler’s lessons on repentance, faith, sanctification, the church, and baptism as these are central to one’s conversion experience, subsequent baptism, and the life that is lived afterwards. In Lesson XXI, Notes and Questions describe sorrow and grief over sin and shame for how one has treated one’s Maker and Creator. Repentance includes confession to God and forsaking of the sins confessed, beginning a new life. Those who do not repent will perish. This summary is followed by brief questions and answers pertaining to repentance and a closing hymn, “Sinners Called to Repentance.”

Lesson XXII teaches faith. Faith is defined as believing that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for one’s sins, trusting Him for pardon, holiness, and eternal life. True believers will demonstrate faith by one’s life, seen in love, faithfulness, perseverance, and resisting temptation. This again is followed by brief question and answers and the closing hymn, “Faith Desired.”

Lesson XXV addresses sanctification, which in glowing terms Winkler describes as new life of the new creature, with eyes that see truth, heart softened, with affections set above, set on obedience. This new life is planted by God, watered by the Spirit, and prepared to bear fruit. Through God-given fear one does not depart from God. Through Christ’s prayers, one’s faith

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743 Ibid., 226, citing Winkler, X.I-II.


745 Ibid., 63-65.
does not fail. The abiding Holy Spirit guarantees they will not be tempted more than they can bear. Questions and answers reinforcing this summary are followed by the hymn “A Closer Walk with God.”

Lesson XLV is the lesson on the Church. *Notes and Questions* is careful to distinguish between the universal, invisible church and the local, visible church. In favor of the local or particular church, it is defined as a company of believers who meet regular to worship God and keep the ordinances. The members support the ministry of the Word and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. Questions and answers are followed by the hymn “Love for the Church.”

Central to this research is *Notes and Questions* Lesson XLVI on Baptism. The lesson teaches that Jesus commanded baptism, that it is a sign that one’s sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus, and that one is giving up one’s life to live for Christ. Only those who’ve repented, believed, and promise to live for Christ should be baptized. As if a throwback to the past, infant baptism is declared to be unscriptural. *Baptism* was to be by immersion in water in the name of the Trinity. Sprinkling water or pouring was not baptism. The lesson closes with the hymn “Baptismal Signs and Blessings.”

In systematic fashion, the learner hears the good news that God will save them through faith and repentance, that baptism is significantly meaningful as it declares one’s sins have been forgiven by the blood of Jesus, that one has pledged one’s life to God, and has been incorporated into the church to live a life of holy obedience with others. *Notes and Questions* (though developed in and applied to those suffering in the travesty of American slavery) is an excellent

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746 Ibid., 69-71.
747 Ibid., 115-117.
748 Ibid., 118-120.
example of a simple, yet thorough instructional tool that could potentially lead one to Christ, but also prepare one for the monumental event of one’s baptism and the devoted life within the church that was to follow.

**Compend of Christian Doctrines Held by Baptists (1866)**

W.W. Everts (1814-1890) was a Baptist minister who served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Chicago for twenty years (1859-1879). In 1866, he published a catechism entitled, *Compend of Christian Doctrines Held by Baptists*. Nettles notes three unusual features of *Compend*. First, it does not entirely escape the influence of its historical proximity to the Civil War. Secondly, the questions on the family and beatitudes are without precedence, including the role of man and woman, and parents and children. Third, church successionism (III.30) finds its way into the catechism, tracing Baptist origins to the Apostles. The claim is that Baptists are older than Protestantism or the Papacy. 749 Other unique features include Everts’ use of human intuition, universal rationality, pagan religion, and science as the basis for answers that are ultimately proven by Scripture. 750 He includes sections on the Law, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Beatitudes.

Pertaining to the current research, *Compend* contains seven questions on baptism, as well as articles common to Baptist catechisms on regeneration, the church, and sanctification. Regeneration is “The work of God’s spirit convincing man of sin and helplessness disposing him to righteousness, and enabling him to reform his life and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as his

749 Nettles, 170.

750 Ibid., 170-171.
Sanctification is defined as “The progressive conformity of the believer to the divine law through the Word and Spirit of God,” which demonstrates the consecration of the heart, mind, and body. This is followed by detailed instruction on what it means to consecrate the heart, mind, and body.

The chapter on the Church takes up twenty-two questions. The church is defined as “His ‘calling’ or followers taken collectively, or any number of them personally associated for his worship and glory.” In true Baptist fashion, the government of the church is said to be vested in the membership, not in ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Baptists churches are summarized and defined by:

- Exaltation of the Scripture as the rule of faith and practice, voluntary Christian profession, symbolized by baptism of believers, orderly observance of the Lord’s Supper; covenant meeting, circumspect approach to the Lord’s Supper; prayer meeting, as a more certain authority and no less importance than the more imposing order of public worship; congregational government; careful instruction of the rising generation in the family and Sabbath school and zealous devotion to the spread of the gospel at home and abroad.

Chapter III includes baptism in a list of positive institutions (Baptism, Lord’s Supper, Church, Sabbath, Family, and State). It defines baptism as immersing believers in the name of the Trinity. It symbolizes regeneration and new birth, that is that the person professes Christ, is obeying Christ’s command, and that one has been raised from the dead. Baptism is limited to believers by the Great Commission, in examples of baptism in Scripture, and in the voluntary response of believers to be baptized. Infant baptism enjoys neither the precept nor the inference.


753 Ibid., 188, citing Evert, III.14.

754 Ibid., 190, citing Evert, III.31.
in Scripture. Therefore, it cannot be understood as being commanded in the NT. Compend stands in a long line of Baptist catechisms that call for salvation by grace through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ’s work on the Cross, followed by believer’s baptism by immersion, and a life devoted to the church lived in obedience to Christ’s commands.

_A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine (1878)_

James P. Boyce (1827-1888) was a Southern Baptist pastor, educator, and leader devoted to the truth found in Scripture and the theological integrity of Southern Baptists. He pastored the First Baptist Church of Columbia, South Carolina (1851-1855), became a professor of theology at Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina in 1856, and faculty chair of the newly formed The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Greenville, South Carolina in 1859. Here, Boyce taught systematic theology and published _Abstract of Systematic Theology_ (1887), which contained in a much expanded form or the “fleshing out” of his catechism. The need for his catechism is addressed in the preface of the decidedly Calvinistic _A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine_ (1878). Boyce wrote,

The author of this brief Doctrinal Catechism knows of no work of the kind in circulation among Baptists. Keach’s Catechism, generally called the ‘Baptist Catechism’ is scarcely used at all. No reason can be assigned for this, except that it is too difficult for children. …The aim has been to bring the truth taught within the comprehension of children of ten to twelve years old and upwards. …Pastors of churches, Superintendents and Teachers of Sunday Schools, and pious parents, are urged to consider how far a partial recourse at least to catechetical instruction may tend to restore the vigorous piety of bygone days.


756 Nettles and Weaver, 233.

757 Nettles, 228, quoting James P. Boyce, _A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine_, Revised ed. (Louisville: Caperton & Cates, 1878), Preface.
Subjects addressed in the catechism include the authority of the Bible, the attributes of God, creation, providence, the fall, the person and work of Christ, the order of salvation, the church, the ordinances, and eschatology. Interestingly, this champion of Scripture does not include Scripture references after each question and answer, a practice typical of many catechisms, nor does he include the traditional Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord’s Prayer in his catechism. Though the date listed above is accurate for the catechism’s revised edition, an earlier edition appeared in 1874. However, the first edition was published in 1864 by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention which initially printed 2,500 copies in June, 1864 and another 7,500 in September.\textsuperscript{758}

Of particular interest to this research is Boyce’s sections on regeneration and sanctification, repentance and faith, good works, baptism, and the Sabbath. Regeneration is described by way of questions and answers as being born again by the essential work of the Spirit of God, resulting in a new heart and an enlightened mind, which loves and practices holiness. He includes sanctification immediately after regeneration, explaining that regeneration does not make one perfectly holy, but that sanctification makes one progressively holy throughout life. Sanctification is defined as “a change produced by the influence of the Spirit, by which we gradually increase in the love and practice of holiness.”\textsuperscript{759} Boyce defines repentance as “sorrow for sin, accompanied by a determination, with the help of God, to sin no longer.”\textsuperscript{760} True repentance is when one hates sin because it is sin, not just sorrow that comes from fear of detection or punishment. Simply put, faith is “believing what the Bible tells us about Jesus, and

\textsuperscript{758} Nettles and Weaver, 231.

\textsuperscript{759} Ibid., 246, citing James P. Boyce, \textit{A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine}, Revised ed. (Louisville: Caperton & Cates, 1878).

\textsuperscript{760} Ibid., 247.
trusting our salvation in His hands.” He sees a distinction between those who believe the Bible with one’s mind but not with one’s heart. His section on good works follows his questions and answers on justification which is by faith. Good works always follow true faith, which are only possible as God supplies the grace to perform them. These works are performed out of love and obedience, adding nothing to one’s salvation. They are “fruits and evidence of a changed heart and of love to God,” performed for his glory.

Baptism is the duty ascribed by God to those who have believed. It is done by immersion in water, in the names of the Triune God by which the person professes to believe in the Trinity and promises himself to serve Him. The water represents that one’s sins are washed away and immersion pictures the believer’s union with Christ in His death. Only those who have exercised faith can be baptized as baptism declares one has experienced what it pictures. It is within the section on the Lord’s Supper that Boyce briefly points to church membership. Only those who’ve been regenerated, baptized, and incorporated into the church have access to the Lord’s Supper, which is “a church ordinance and a token of church fellowship.” After discussing the meaning of the Lord’s Supper, Boyce provides instruction on the Sabbath, which is “one day of the week, which God requires to be kept as a day of rest, and holy to Him.” For the Jews it was Saturday, which commemorated the completion of God’s creation. For Christians it is Sunday, the Lord’s Day, as it was the day on which Christ arose and reminds the believer of the

761 Ibid.
762 Ibid., 248-249.
763 Ibid., 251-252.
764 Ibid., 253.
765 Ibid.
completed work of redemption. Interestingly, he does not go so far as to indicate the Sabbath as including gathering with other believers for worship.

As being intended for use by parents and churches, A Brief Catechism apparently was used as a pre-conversion/pre-baptism tool for evangelism and education. It is interesting to note that his target age range was ten to twelve years old, which one might assume indicates Boyce’s understanding of when a child might be able to understand salvation and its associated doctrines. In short answers, delivered in easy to understand terms, Boyce’s catechism is consistent with earlier Baptist catechisms’ emphasis on salvation by faith and repentance. And by these truths being written in accessible questions and answers, it reveals the priority of not just wanting one to be converted and baptized, but that one would have an informed faith, understanding the rich meaning of baptism, and the expectation that one will be connected to the community of faith and has devoted oneself to live a life of love and obedience to God.

**A Catechism of Bible Teaching (1892)**

John A. Broadus (1827-1895), was a Virginia Baptist pastor and theologian, who pastored the Charlottesville Baptist Church [currently Park Street Baptist Church] in Charlottesville, Virginia (1850-1859) before taking the position of professor of NT Interpretation and Homiletics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina in 1859. He succeeded James P. Boyce there as president from 1889-1895. It was not just his eloquence that caused him to be considered by many the greatest preacher of his day, but his commitment to the truth of Scripture. Though a man with renowned intelligence and knowledge,

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766 Ibid., 253-254.
his catechism reveals a tender concern to make the great truths of Scripture accessible to children.

This commitment is expressed in *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* (1892), within which fifteen lessons are divided into two parts: one for all students and the other for advanced students. Broadus’ intention was to make his catechism, “intelligible to children, adequate as the foundation for future thinking, and correct as far as they go.” The answers to the questions are accompanied by Scripture references. This “thoroughly Baptistic and cautiously Calvinistic” catechism begins with God as creator and preserver of all things, known by His works and Word. It covers the Providence of God, the Word of God, salvation, the Savior, the Trinity, the work of Christ, regeneration and faith, justification and sanctification, the church, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s Day, the Christian life, and the future life. Of special interest to this research are his sections on regeneration, repentance and faith, sanctification, the church, and The Lord’s Day.

Broadus takes up the topic of regeneration in Lesson VIII. He defines it as “God’s causing a person to be born again,” which is not literally being born a second time but being internally changed. This change is produced by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and gives one a new heart that hates sin and desires holiness. One can only know regeneration by the effects in one’s life, the proof of a new heart being that one lives a new life. Advanced questions and answers include explanations for: 1) how water is related to baptism in John 3:5, Titus 3:5,


768 Nettles and Weaver, 257, note that on the subject of election, Broadus’ position was that predestination and free will must both be true as both are plainly taught in Scripture.

and Rom 6:4; and 2) how God gives His renewing Spirit to those he purposed to save (Eph 1:3,4).

Repentance and faith are discussed in Lesson IX. Repentance of sin means that one changes one’s thoughts and feelings about sin, determining to forsake it and live for God. It is necessary for salvation and involves sorrow because sin is wrong and offends God. Faith is “believing Christ to be the divine Savior, and personally trusting in Him for our salvation”\(^770\) and is necessary for salvation. The requirement of faith rules out infant baptism as a means of salvation. One is saved by personally believing on Christ. He states, “…faith and true repentance will always carry the other with it.”\(^771\) The advanced questions on repentance and faith include the reason why some may believe the Bible and yet not be a Christian. Broadus explains that this is due to one not being willing to forsake sin and perhaps an underlying lack of faith is Christ.

The section on sanctification is coupled with justification, as it is in other catechisms. Broadus maintains the standard of a sinner being justified by faith apart from works. However, he explains that all who are justified will produce good works. Sanctification is God making the heart and life holy of one who has experienced the new birth. One’s faith does not deserve justification, but only brings one into union with Christ, for whose sake one is justified. While justification occurs all at once, sanctification is gradual and increasing. He declares, “The only sure proof of being a true believer is growing in holiness and in usefulness, even to the end.”\(^772\)

Lesson XI’s description of baptism is straightforward without gloss. Baptism is explained to be for every believer, as Christ has commanded it and is serves as a declaration of our faith. It

\(^{770}\) Ibid., quoting Broadus, IX.5.

\(^{771}\) Ibid., 281, quoting Broadus, IX.11.

\(^{772}\) Ibid., 283, quoting Broadus, X.10.
is to be by immersion, which signifies that we are dead to sin and have been buried and raised with Christ. And in water, which signifies purification from sin. He is clear that baptism is the picture of regeneration and forgiveness, not the means. Broadus’ explanation of baptism in the names of the Trinity highlights that one accepts Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “our Sovereign and Savior.” This is unique language for Broadus and emphasizes that in baptism one is turning over one’s life to God’s control. This is significant instruction for one contemplating baptism and reinforces the expectation that one’s life has changed in regeneration and will be lived differently. His next question and answer solidifies the case for new living, stating, “It is the duty of all who have been baptized to live that new life of purity and obedience which their baptism signifies (Rom 6:4).” The advanced questions on baptism pertain to whether one can be baptized without immersion which Broadus declares, “No” as it would not obey the Lord’s command and will not represent the burial and Resurrection of Christ. One should always aim to strictly obey the Word of God. The only exceptions may be when one is very ill or there is scarcity of water.

The section on the Lord’s Day (XII) is important to this research not in its explanation of the OT Sabbath and NT Lord’s Day, but for its description of what Christians did in the Bible on the Lord’s Day. Broadus answers, “They met for public worship, heard preaching, took the Lord’s Supper, and gave money to religious objects.” Modern day believers should keep the Lord’s Day just as NT believers kept the Lord’s Day. This instruction implants into the heart and mind of the young that becoming a Christian and being baptized leads one into a lifetime of

774 Ibid., XI.7.
775 Ibid., 287, quoting Broadus, XII.8.
connection to the local church. Broadus’ section on the Christian Life gives examples of the changes that are expected to one’s way of life. One will cease lying, stealing, speaking evil of others, coveting, and seeking revenge, but rather loving one’s enemies and seeking purity in words, thoughts, and feelings with the aid of the Holy Spirit. These better ways are summed up in Broadus’ Lesson XIV on Imitation of Christ, wherein one finds the example of obeying parents, using the Bible to help endure suffering, publicly worshipping, privately praying, doing good to all, loving enemies, loving Christians, and fixing one’s hope in the future life.

Broadus’ *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* systematically lays out who God is and how one can know Him through personal faith and repentance. He establishes the significance of baptism, not as a formality of obedience alone, but as a declaration of Jesus as Lord and Savior. He sets forth clear expectations for the learner regarding church attendance and living a life that evidences one has been regenerated. Teaching these on the front end of baptism allows the new believer to enter the baptismal waters informed as to what has and is expected to occur on the other side of baptism. Unfortunately, this is the last major Baptist catechism published and recommended by the Southern Baptist Convention.

This chapter has demonstrated that Baptists have a long history of utilizing catechisms, and unfortunately also of laying them aside in neglect. While this study has not been exhaustive of all Baptist catechisms, it provides sufficient evidence that Baptists have known the importance of catechisms for distinguishing themselves doctrinally and the prioritizing the

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776 Ibid., 288-289, citing Broadus, XIII.

evangelism and education of children and youth since their inception. Baptists should not frown upon or shy away from the use of catechisms, but rather embrace them as a means of returning to their heritage of the significance of believer’s baptism and regenerate church membership.
CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS OF DELAYED BAPTISM AND PRE-BAPTISMAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Alongside the historic Baptist principles of the authority of Scripture, the autonomy of the local church, believers’ baptism, and religious freedom, the Southern Baptist Convention’s unifying theme has been the Great Commission, expressed through cooperative missions. The Preamble to the SBC Constitution describes its intention of “organizing a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort, for the propagation of the gospel.” In May, 1845 the SBC was established to better organize missions among Baptists in the south.

Southern Baptist Publishing

While many may know the SBC’s heritage of commitment to the Great Commission, perhaps fewer know the central role of publishing in the first half century of the SBC’s existence. Naturally, its missions focus required a publishing arm to produce, publish, and promote distinctly Southern Baptist literature to meet the needs of its churches. The original Sunday School Board was created by the SBC in 1863, located in Greenville, South Carolina. Cathcart notes, “The board within three years published several excellent little question-books and catechisms, works by Drs. Boyce, B. Manly, Jr., and Rev. L.H. Shuck which still retain a position of favorites in the South.” He continues, “in the fourth year the board...continued to


780 Cathcart, The Baptist Encyclopaedia, 1086. The years 1863-1866.
publish various useful catechisms, question-books, and a Sunday School-hymn book.” 781 One mustn’t overestimate the position the new Board was in, as if it was poised to flood the market with Southern Baptist literature. The effects of the Civil War greatly hindered both the publication of new materials and the flow of resources to the churches. B.F. Riley writes, “No literature was to be had except the remnants of stocks left on shelves of book dealers, together with an occasional useful book found here and there in a private house. But with the scanty material on hand, and much of that crude, the Board resolved upon the publication of a number of books.” 782 It was in this environment that the first Southern Baptist catechism was published by James P. Boyce, the legendary SBC theologian and seminary president, writing *A Brief Catechism for Bible Doctrine* in 1864, 783 alongside other Sunday School books for children, *Infant Class Question Book* by L.H. Shuck and *Little Lessons for Little People* and *Child’s Question Book of the Four Gospels* by Basil Manly, Jr. These names are among SBC royalty and indicated that the importance of instructing children using a questions and answer format was worthy of the Convention’s greatest hearts and minds.

781 Ibid.


783 Nettles and Weaver, 231, note that “Broadus, in his *Memoirs of J.P. Boyce*, gives 1874 as the date of Boyce issued his *Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine*. He then states that a revised edition appeared in 1878. These dates are correct as far as they go, but they fail to draw attention to the first appearance of the catechism in 1864. A report of the Southern Baptist Board in 1864 lists Boyce’s catechism as one of its publications. The notice summarized the vital information. ‘A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine, by J.P. Boyce contains twenty lessons, suited for children of ten or twelve years, and upward. It brings out the “doctrines of grace” and the views of Baptists. Of this, 2,500 were issued in June, 1864, and 7,500 more in September, of which about 2,000 remain.’” See further B.F. Riley, 279; See also United States Bureau of Education, “Education Report 1898-99,” in *Report of the Commissioner of Education Made to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1898-99* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1900), 1154.
Though the Sunday School Board served its purpose well during the Civil War, support eroded after that War, leading to the Sunday School Board’s dissolution in 1866. Those who opposed the Sunday School Board all along continued to believe the work of promoting Sunday School across so large an area as the Southern United States was too much for one agency. Rather, Sunday School and its promotion was best left up to the state conventions. Thus, the states took up the task. Cathcart writes, “…each Southern State through its State Mission, or Sunday School Board, is now diligently, zealously, and prosperously carrying forward the Sunday-school work within its own borders.”

The debate as to whether or not to reestablish a new board for publishing Sunday School helps continued over the next twenty-five years. Minutes record its discussion at the SBC Annual Meetings in Augusta (1885), Montgomery (1886), Louisville (1887), Richmond (1888), Memphis (1889), and Fort Worth (1890). Those who opposed a new publication board believed it unnecessary as the American Baptist Publication Society supplied excellent resources for Baptists, including some by the SBC’s own authors. Those in favor a reestablishing a publishing arm for the Convention wanted a publication board that would distinguish Baptist churches in the South from those in the North. Finally, at the Annual Meeting in Birmingham, 1891 the SBC determined it best to no longer depend on others to produce its literature and

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784 Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 3, 1086. The only publication that continued uninterrupted until the relaunch of the new Sunday School Board in 1891 was *Kind Words*, a Sunday School paper through the Home Mission Board. What began as a small children’s piece eventually expanded. In 1885, the Home Mission Board took over its publication under the title of *Kind Words Sunday School Periodicals*, including student and teacher books, and quarterlies.

785 Ibid., 1087.

publications. Thus, the (new) Sunday School Board was established in 1891 and headquartered in Nashville.\textsuperscript{787} It determined “its chief business (to be) in issuing Sunday School literature in such form and teaching as best suits the needs of the Baptist churches of the South.”\textsuperscript{788} The first new project proposed was to publish uniquely Southern Baptist literature which included the publishing of Broadus’ \textit{Catechism for Bible Teaching} (1892).\textsuperscript{789} Yet, over the course of the next several years, the SBC moved away from the time tested effectiveness of catechisms to a new philosophy of educating Southern Baptists.

The turn of the century marked the turning point of the SBC Sunday School Board away from catechisms toward graded lessons and quarterlies. In 1900, under the leadership of T.P. Bell, the \textit{Kind Words Series} was changed to the \textit{Convention Series}, marketing the Convention as the publisher of its own materials. At the time the series consisted of \textit{Kind Words}, \textit{Child’s Gem}, \textit{The Teacher} and three quarterlies (primary, intermediate, and advanced). To these were added \textit{Graded Lessons}, made up of the \textit{Biblical Series} and the \textit{Exrabiblical Series}. An additional curriculum for youth ministry was added called the B.Y.P.U. (Baptist Young People’s Union) \textit{Quarterlies}, a separate curriculum from Sunday School materials designed specifically for teenagers to train them “in church life and for their culture in the things of Christ.”\textsuperscript{790} Remarkably within a decade of the last catechism published by the Southern Baptist Convention, the Convention had completely abandoned the production, publication, and promotion of catechisms and transitioned to a periodical/lessons approach to biblical instruction. Frost shared an

\textsuperscript{787} Frost, 7.
\textsuperscript{788} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{789} Nettles, “Encouragement to Use Catechisms,” 12.
\textsuperscript{790} Frost, 33.
advertisement from around 1900 for the Sunday School Board, touting its increased scope and variety.

Figure 1. 791

![500x500](SUNDAY_SCHOOL_AND_B_Y_P_U_SUPPLIES.png)

Frost boasts that the production of resources in several grades, produced and mailed across the United States each quarter, resulted in millions upon millions of copies sold, an immense volume of business, and unprecedented profits for the Board. 792 In 1910, T.P. Bell urged the Convention to authorize the Board to “enter, at as early date, as possible, on the work of supplying to the brethren of our churches books, tracts, hymns and songbooks, and indeed all

791 Ibid.

792 Ibid., 34. The Board invested the excess funds in interest-bearing securities and surrendered interest to the denomination. Additionally investments were made in the Reserve Fund, the Equipment and Endowment Fund, and The Permanent Bible Fund.
supplies for churches, Sunday Schools, missionary societies, Young People’s Unions, such as are suitable and desirable.” While the periodical/lesson approach to education was based on Scripture and provided Christian education to churches with the goal of providing products to help churches accomplish their aims, it neglected systematic theological instruction provided in catechisms that had proven effective for centuries.

Consequently, since 1892, the SBC publishing arm has neither published nor promoted a thoroughly Baptist catechism for use as either a pre-conversion/pre-baptismal or a post-conversion/pre-baptismal tool, opting instead for the periodical/lesson approach to Bible instruction. These observations are not to diminish the significant role the Sunday School Board’s publications played in discipling Southern Baptists. However, it highlights a clear shift in philosophy, leaving a theological deficit of knowledge pertaining to the essential doctrines of the faith. This in turn made one less informed about the faith and thus less prepared for baptism.

793 Ibid., 48.


795 A brief online review of a few of the larger national Baptist organizations in the United States proved that most do not produce, publish, or promote catechism among their constituencies. Here’s a summary of those organizations: The American Baptist Publishing Society (now Judson Press), having published catechisms a century ago, has no catechisms available at judsonpress.com; The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship lists no catechisms available through their publishing arm Nurturing Faith; The General Baptist Ministries publishing arm, Stinson Press lists no available catechisms; The National Baptist Convention’s Sunday School Publishing Board offers no catechisms. The Reformed Baptist Academic Press published Hercules Collins, The Orthodox Catechism. Michael C. Haykin and G. Stephen Weaver, eds. (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014). The only Baptist organization reviewed that offers a Baptist catechism is the The National Association of Free Will Baptists, which offers a link to the online Free Will Baptist Catechism at nafwb.org.
Baptist catechisms are currently being written, but they are written by non-SBC authors and published by publishing companies other than those of the SBC. Perhaps it is more than coincidental that the abandonment of catechesis around 1900 in the SBC coincides with an ever-growing SBC membership rolls filled with Baptists who have professed Christ and been baptized, yet lack a core knowledge of biblical faith, are loosely connected to the local church, and often lives that lack evidence of regeneration. Southern Baptist pastors and churches then spend a lifetime playing catch up to building a theological foundation that could have been supplied at the beginning of one’s Christian life through catechism.


The responsibility for the neglect of catechesis cannot be blamed solely on the shift in publishing priorities. Perhaps, another contributor has been the way the SBC trains its pastors in its colleges and seminaries. Some ministerial students report that, though receiving more than adequate training for preaching, administrating, and leading churches to share the gospel, they received little to no instruction on how to move a new believer from conversion to meaningful baptism and then to commitment to the local church. As a grateful graduate of a Cooperative Program supplemented SBC seminary education, this writer was given no training regarding assimilation of new believers and certainly not in the role and use of catechisms. It seems ministerial students could be better equipped for ministry by teaching them what to do after a person is converted before the person is baptized. Rather than a quick interview or a crash course in theological basics, SBC pastors and churches would do well to enroll converts in a pre-baptismal, systematic, unhurried, catechetical process that includes time tested components from the church fathers and reformers, such as the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, as well as the nature of God, the nature of man and his problem with sin, the person and work of Christ, the meaning of faith and repentance, regeneration, justification, sanctification (with the expectation of an amended life), the meaning of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, one’s relationship to the church, and final things.

Some may object that this would require a long delay in one’s obedience to be baptized. However, the objection seems somewhat disingenuous considering that it is common for Southern Baptist churches to delay baptism several weeks for practical reasons, such as family schedules, church events, and other life circumstances. For example, most converted individuals invite extended family to attend the baptismal ceremony, which with travel and other competing family events, such as vacations and involvement in community organizations, requires
postponement. Another example is that churches with seasonal pageants or plays may have their baptistries concealed by stage props requiring the candidate to wait several weeks for the baptistry to be cleared of décor. Further, one may delay one’s baptism due to health issues, postponing the baptism until after an upcoming surgery and recovery. Still further, some churches plan special outdoor baptisms in rivers, streams, lakes, oceans, and ponds necessitating delay. These serve as practical examples of how SBC churches already practice delayed baptism by default. Churches could maximize the intervening time with pre-baptismal instruction which holds the potential for baptizing true believers with a richly informed faith, resulting in a more meaningful baptism, and a deeper commitment to the local church in the long run. Returning to the use of catechisms, specifically as a post-conversion/pre-baptismal tool would have three major implications for the Southern Baptist Convention, its pastors, and its churches. It would contribute to recovering a regenerate church membership, make baptism more meaningful, and increase involvement in the local church.

Recovery of a Regenerate Church Membership

At the core of this thesis of delayed baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal catechesis is the goal of recovering and maintaining a regenerate church membership for the glory of God and the good of his people. This subject is central to Baptist identity just as J.D. Freeman wrote back in 1905, “The principle of regenerate church membership more than anything else, marks our distinctiveness in the world today…as a safeguard to the Church from intrusion of unregenerate life.” Hammett adds that historically Baptists, “limited church membership in ways other

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churches did not, namely, to those truly regenerate.”

At the heart of the issue is how Baptist churches receive members. Historically, Baptists, with the conviction that they were responsible to ensure the purity of the church through believer’s baptism, held more of an exclusive view of receiving new members. The Somerset Confession of 1656 states, “in admitting of members into the church of Christ, it is the duty of the church, and ministers whom it concerns, in faithfulness to God, that they be careful they receive none but such as do make forth evident demonstration of the new birth, and the work of faith with power.” The Second London Confession (1689) stated, “The Members of these Churches are Saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; and do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves, to the Lord & to one another by the will of God, in professed subjection to the Ordinances of the Gospel.” In stronger language than Baptists are accustomed to today, the Summary of Church Discipline (1773) describes the qualifications for church membership which include first, true conversion, described as “an entire change of nature,” so as to avoid making “the church of Christ a harlot by opening the door of admission so wide as to permit unbelievers, unconverted, and graceless persons to crowd into it without control.” The second qualification was that candidates for membership should

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800 Ibid., 89, citing William Lumpkin, Baptist Confessions of Faith, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 211.


802 Ibid., citing James Leo Garrett, Jr., Baptist Church Discipline (Nashville: Broadman, 1962), 34-52.
have “some competent knowledge of divine and spiritual things.” Thirdly, becoming a member required “lives and conversations…such as ‘becometh the gospel of Christ.’” To determine these qualifications, the “candidates must come under examination before the church,” which Hammett suggests could take weeks. If approved by the church, the pastor was to review the “rules and orders of God’s house” with the candidate. Then the candidate would agree to the church covenant. These requirements seem to have been common practice among Baptists until at least 1833 when such descriptions and qualifications noted above were left out of the *New Hampshire Confession.*

The first two qualifications for admittance to membership are remarkable: 1) true conversion and 2) to have some competent knowledge of divine and spiritual things. One could find no better way to meet these two prerequisites than requiring catechesis of all who would be baptized into membership. Catechesis would also go a long way in guiding applicants into a life that would meet the third criteria as well.

The issue of regenerate church membership is not only a concern in centuries past. It was the subject of a resolution at the 2008 SBC Annual Meeting in Indianapolis. While reiterating the church as a local congregation of baptized believers and acknowledging the problem of membership vs. attendance in SBC churches, it reminded churches of the scriptural mandate to seek to restore those who’ve strayed, urged churches to maintain a regenerate church

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803 Ibid., 91-92. Hammett suggests several reasons why the standard of admitting only those who had showed evidence of regeneration was changed: 1) a reductionist understanding of conversion; 2) the myth that church membership is either necessary for or guarantees salvation; 3) the influence of individualism that refuses to question or limit another’s right to join the church when they think they’re ready; 4) a reluctance to appear judgmental of other’s conduct; and 5) the simple desire to inflate numbers and increase baptisms. To these, Haines would add: 1) individualism; 2) a more optimistic view of humanity; 3) a general ‘secularizing of values and procedures’ in American churches, along with a revulsion against harsh discipline. See Hammett, *Biblical Foundations,* 113, citing Stephen Haines, “Southern Baptist Church Discipline, 180-1939,” in *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 (1985): 25-26. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations,* 96, states the *New Hampshire Confession* (1833) “eventually supplanted the *Philadelphia Confession* in terms of its importance to Baptists in America. Its statement on the church, with only minor changes, was adopted by Southern Baptists in *The Baptist Faith and Message* of 1925, and was essentially retained in the 1963 and 2000 revisions.”
membership by acknowledging the necessity of spiritual regeneration and the Lordship of Christ for all members, urged churches to maintain accurate membership rolls, and repent of the failure to live up to Jesus’ command of church discipline in Matt 18:15-18. This indicates that the issue is no secret in the SBC and remains an ongoing problem.

This thesis contends that reintroducing catechesis as a post-conversion, pre-baptismal tool for instructing new believers in the faith will go a long way in recovering a regenerate church membership. Deweese holds that many of the problems related to an unregenerate church membership “begin with the widespread absence of pre-baptismal training in Baptist life. Baptismal candidates are not sufficiently informed of the expectations which the church will have on them in the areas of doctrine and conduct.” He continues stating, “a church does injustice both to its new members by depriving them of essential knowledge in key biblical, historical, theological, and practical matters, and to itself by lowering the standards of entrance into its membership.”

Thus it behooves pastors and churches to develop a process to discern the spiritual readiness of a candidate for baptism. Dever suggests that a candidate’s spiritual condition can be somewhat determined by circumstances. It is important to help a person know if they have truly been converted. He notes,

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804 Deweese, 14.

805 Ibid.

806 Dever, Nine Marks, 110-124. True Conversion is one of Dever’s 9 Marks of a Healthy Church. True Conversion is the positive side of a related negative phrase “easy beliefism.” In Gregory R. Frizzell, Releasing the Revival Flood (Union City, TN: The Masters Design, 2005), 202, the author lists Five Factors Producing Inadequate Professions of Faith, two of which relate to this research: a) Churches often fail to give effective biblical counseling and instantly receive those desiring membership. More thorough training of pastors (or those assigned to counsel those seeking baptism and membership) and greater examination of the inquirers life would contribute to greater certainty of the inquirer’s profession of faith; b) Some churches are not thorough in dealing with the very young or uninformed who inquire about being a Christian. Frizzell writes, “Many who are subjected to inadequate and shallow counseling as children later realize their early decisions were not genuine.” This practice contributes greatly
The candidate’s desire is itself necessary but not sufficient evidence. Regular attendance at meetings of the church is still more evidence. Certainly the church should observe the person’s life to help ensure that he is not self-deceived….It takes time to manifest whether public professions of conversion are real….Time—whether a few weeks or a few months—will allow the pastors and others in a congregation to watch and have their initial conclusions confirmed by the continuing discipleship of the one desiring baptism.\textsuperscript{807}

The pastor is on the front lines of making a determination of the candidates’ readiness for baptism in the interview. A team of others can be employed to confirm the pastor’s conclusions. Then, the person’s request for baptism, along with the pastor’s and evaluation team’s affirmation can be brought before the church for approval.\textsuperscript{808} Dever suggests questions can be asked in an evaluation interview to discern the person’s understanding of the gospel, their willingness to sign a statement of faith and church covenant and their participation in the life of the congregation. Then, the pastor can summarize membership duties. Dever comes close to suggesting pre-baptismal instruction when he states, “Once it is determined that someone is to be baptized, he should be prepared. In the church, teaching is the responsibility of the elders. It is the responsibility of these undershepherds, then, to instruct those who are to be baptized (Heb 13:17; to an unregenerate membership, marked by unamended living, disconnect from the church, confusion about saving faith, and in some cases true conversion and rebaptism later in life. For contrasting views on “easy believism,” among American theologians see, Lewis Sperry Chafer, \textit{Systematic Theology}, Vol. 3 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1953) and Augustus Strong, \textit{Systematic Theology} (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1912). For a more popular treatment of the subject, see “Q&A: Billy Graham’s Warning Against an Epidemic of ‘Easy Believism,’” in \textit{Christianity Today}, October 15, 2013. See further, David P. Gushee, “Jesus and the Sinner’s Prayer: What Jesus Says Doesn’t Match What We Usually Say,” in \textit{Christianity Today}, March 2007. 72. \textit{Gale In Context: World History} (accessed January 29, 2020). https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ apps/doc/A160590154/WHIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=WHIC&xid=57dce923.

\textsuperscript{807} Ibid., “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church,” in \textit{Believer’s Baptism}, 333.

\textsuperscript{808} John Hammett, “Where We Went Wrong and How We Can Get Right,” in \textit{Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches}, 112-113, describes the practice of Baptist churches in Brazil. He writes, “Upon profession of faith, a new convert was placed in a new convert’s class for six to thirteen weeks. The central purpose of this class was to make as sure as humanly possible that the individuals involved had understood the gospel and were making valid professions of faith. After the class, the next step in the process of preparation for baptism was speaking to the congregation. Candidates described their experience of conversion and answered questions from the pastor and congregation concerning what they believed about Christ, their experience of conviction of sin, and their understanding of the gospel. Only then did the congregation vote to baptize the individuals.”
Dever also suggests the candidate undergo a membership class before baptism. Once completed, baptism can be planned. The pastor can help the baptismal candidate express his personal testimony in the water by asking questions such as “Do you make profession of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?” and “Do you promise, depending on God’s grace, to follow him forever in the fellowship of this church?” These questions are followed by a brief personal testimony of the person’s regeneration. Dever’s suggestions are insightful and doubtless contribute significantly to a regenerate church membership. Yet he stops short of saying what form a pastor’s instruction should take for those who “are to be baptized.” A robust catechism would fit the bill and would be best used just after Dever’s initial evaluation interview, then followed up on to see if the candidate understands the faith. Chances are, one will.

Many rightly advocate for a membership class to better connect new believer’s to the local church, wherein a church explains what the church believes. However, these classes mixed with church vision, church history, statement of faith, covenant, constitution and bylaws, local church and CP giving, spiritual gift inventories, etc. could be reserved for post-baptism. However, a distinctly Southern Baptist catechism used between one’s profession of faith and baptism, will give the new believer the proper foundation for understanding spiritual regeneration, the meaning of baptism, the life that one must live in relation to Jesus Christ as Lord and the church. Besides, one is not “a member” until after baptism. A membership class should follow on the heels of baptism class and water baptism.

For Baptists, baptism is the entry gate into church membership and must be safeguarded.

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810 Ibid., 338.
In times past, the safeguarding of the entrance into church membership and the purity of the church through church discipline was called “the power of the keys.” The key to the front gate was believer’s baptism and key to back gate was restorative church discipline. Baptists in their devotion to obey the commands of Christ practiced these diligently. Perhaps many know of Baptists’ devotion to obey Christ’s command to baptize only believers, but know less of Baptist’s historical devotion to practice church discipline.

Discipline was common among Baptists for moral violations and doctrinal deviation. It was not invoked for sins of a weak brother, but rather for one who fell into sin and rebelliously refused to admit the sin and repent. Baptists viewed it as a restorative and protective practice, one used as a last resort. And it was never final, as the door of repentance and reconciliation was always open to the offender coming back to the Lord.

Often when church discipline is proposed, the difficult question is asked of how one determines which sins are worthy of confrontation? Hammett suggests that Scripture provides the guideline of it being any sin that one refuses to acknowledge as sin, but particularly for “matters that affect the church, either in its reputation in the community (sins that are a matter of public knowledge) or its unity (sins that have disrupted fellowship between two or more members of the church), or its doctrine (a member teaching or advocating unscriptural doctrine). And the public portion described in Matt 18 should only be applied after repeated attempts to resolve the issue privately. A pre-baptismal catechism alongside regular practice of


812 McBeth, 196-197.

813 Hammett, Class Notes, 98.
the Lord’s Supper and use of a church covenant could all serve as a preventative of deviant beliefs and behaviors that would warrant discipline. Catechesis could provide prevention on the front end of the life of faith, as one builds one’s life on a firm foundation of proper belief and expectations of an amended life. The regular practice of the Lord’s Supper provides prevention when celebrated “often” and as a reminder of the pledge made to the Lord and the church in baptism. The church covenant reviewed regularly at the Lord’s Supper and annually by all members provides prevention reminding one of the vows made as a church member.

Hammett states that recovering meaningful membership is a battle worth fighting. He offers four reasons pastors and churches should engage the fight. First, the fight to recover of meaningful church membership should be the number one priority of Southern Baptist churches because of the effect it would have on the SBC churches’ corporate witness. There is an evangelistic impact when the world sees that those who belong to a church have had their lives changed. Secondly, corporate health would be strengthened. It is next to impossible to obey the commands of Scripture (love, forgive, grow, etc.) if church members are unregenerate or living disobediently to the commands of Christ. Third, there is tremendous potential in the spiritual awakening of millions of lost church members. Those who mistakenly think their profession of faith, baptism, and membership guarantees them a place in heaven, yet live a life with little to no evidence of regeneration should be confronted for the sake of their souls. Imagine the impact of millions of unregenerate Southern Baptist church members being born again. Fourth, fighting to recover meaningful membership is worth it because it would honor Christ. Christ is honored by those who continue in loving commitment to him and to the church. The converse is also true, continuing to neglect addressing the issue of unregenerate church membership dishonors Christ.

To achieve this, Hammett recommends pastors return to the use of a church covenant as the basis for membership and conduct within the church, reform the process of baptism and church membership, and reinstitute the process of redemptive church discipline.\textsuperscript{815} Alongside the church covenant, a catechism would provide an ideal centerpiece for reforming the baptism process, especially if used as a post-conversion/pre-baptismal instrument and would aid in preventing the need for church discipline in the future.

**More Meaningful Baptism**

In this writer’s experience, preparation for baptism in the average Baptist church has often been insufficient for upholding the importance of the ordinance. No doubt, pastors have been diligent to ask candidates the basic questions related to “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). And doubtless, brief explanations of baptism’s symbolic meaning, such as the wedding band,\textsuperscript{816} have been offered. However, where a pastor goes from there is anything but standard. This writer received no instruction in SBC seminary classes in pastoral ministry on how to prepare a candidate for baptism. There were no pointers on how to discern the readiness of a candidate beyond a profession of faith. The small to medium size churches that this writer has pastored initially had no policy or process to ensure that only true believers were baptized. The pastor had no option but to take the candidate’s profession of faith, as uninformed as it may be, as sufficient cause to move forward. Assuming this is common among many of the 50,000 SBC churches, Southern Baptists can do more to ensure more meaningful baptisms. And catechesis can contribute significantly to this end.

\textsuperscript{815} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{816} Just as the wedding band is an outward symbol of marriage between a man and a woman, baptism is the outward symbol of one’s union with Christ.
The research above demonstrates that in the Patristic era, catechesis was used specifically as a tool for baptismal preparation. In Baptist history, catechisms prepared the way for people to understand the gospel, be saved, and be baptized. Today, a catechetical process could include baptism’s meaning at two ways. First, if a church chose to include the Baptist Faith and Message as part of the process, special emphasis could be placed on Article VII, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” It could be required that the candidate memorize this article and its accompanying scriptures. Secondly, several questions about baptism could be included in the question and answer portion of the catechism. Such as, “Why is one to be baptized?”; “Who are the proper subjects of baptism?”; “What is the proper mode of baptism?”; “What does baptism symbolize?”; “How is baptism a pledge to Christ?”; “How is baptism a pledge to the church?”; and “What kind of life must one live after baptism?” These two components with additional explanations from the catechist would greatly contribute to the candidate’s heart and mind being filled with scriptural knowledge of baptism on the day one stands in the water.

The phrase “seeking a more meaningful baptism” does not mean that one’s baptism event was not memorable, emotional, sentimental, or special. Many may claim their baptisms were all these things and more without the use of a catechism. However, a catechism would raise the bar of understanding of what has happened internally and what one’s external baptism means for living an amended life. This is more consistent with Jesus’ instruction in Luke 14:25-34 to “count the cost” before declaring oneself to be a follower. Further still, Paul’s exhortation in Rom 6:1-14 referring to death to sin and “walking in the newness of life” raises one’s expectations and highlights baptism’s meaning. A catechism, which would delay baptism by a number of days, that explains repentance, saving faith, regeneration, the meaning of baptism, sanctification, and one’s relationship to the church prior to baptism would add significant
meaning to one’s experience in the water. Baptism can once again be not only a declaration of faith and belonging to Christ, but a pledge of one’s life to Christ.

Unfortunately, this approach is not consistent with the recent strategy of the SBC. SBC President J.D. Greear and SBC Executive Committee President/CEO Ronnie Floyd recently called for a “Baptism Sunday,” for September 8, 2019 in which pastors were encouraged to urge attendees to believe the gospel and be baptized on the spot. Greear, while acknowledging the objections over concern of insincere professions, pressed on in promoting immediate baptism on this special day, based on his understanding that “every single time baptism is recorded in the New Testament, without exception, was spontaneous and immediate.”

Greear reasoned that his church counsels candidates before baptism to ensure they understand the meaning of the gospel and baptism. He wrote,

> Every one of our churches ought to do everything in its power to ensure that everyone who comes forward to be baptized understands the Gospel and the significance of what they are doing. Just because the decision is more immediate doesn’t mean it should be hasty or sloppy. During baptism services at our church, for instance, we individually counsel every person who comes forward. Those conversations take time -- often extending into the next service -- and we always end up turning some people away. But that moment is important, because it starts a conversation about what it means to follow Jesus.

The “time” Greear refers to is the interval between services. Compare this to the forty day to three-year pattern of the Patristics. Consider the extensive background in scriptural knowledge of those who were baptized immediately in the New Testament. Further, consider the use of catechisms in early Southern Baptist history that instructed children toward faith, providing an

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informed faith by the time one was baptized. In light of these considerations, it seems a brief
time of counseling conducted by pastors or other trained staff falls far short of the Christian
heritage. While one shares Greear’s concern for declining baptisms in the SBC and shares his
burden for the lost to be saved, it seems in the long run that an immediate baptism Sunday as a
solution to declining baptisms will only exasperate the problem of Baptists lacking commitment
to the local church.

Along with Greear, Floyd predicted that the “Baptism Sunday” plan would set churches on
fire and explained it was designed to “recapture the culture of the early church. Those early
believers were baptized immediately upon their responses to trust and follow Jesus as their
Lord.” Floyd rightly holds that Southern Baptists should celebrate believer’s baptism and few
would doubt Floyd’s sincere motive that people come to know Jesus. However, while rightly
emphasizing the urgency of sharing and believing the gospel, the strategy erred in pairing that
urgency with baptism. The Scripture does not command it, the course of church history does not
support it, and Baptist history did not emphasize it. To the contrary, Scripture indicates the
timing of baptism varied by circumstances, church history for nearly five centuries showed the
wisdom of catechetical instruction prior to baptism, and Baptist history appears at least neutral
on the timing and adamant in its insistence on only baptizing true believers. The response from
the pastors and the autonomous churches of the SBC was at best mixed. Looking back, it seems


the campaign along with its slogan will go into the annuls of SBC history as yet another promotional effort to turn around the declining numbers of baptisms in the Convention. It is this writer’s conviction that the campaign, though motivated by a genuine desire to see people saved and a loving concern for the health and longevity of the Convention, relied upon the faulty position of immediate baptism in the NT, was promoted as a pragmatic solution to a much deeper issue, and potentially exasperated the problems of an unregenerate church membership in Southern Baptist churches.

More baptisms do not equate to more meaningful baptism. The SBC does not need more individuals baptized who are uninformed about the faith. Rather, the SBC should reform its process of what to do with the precious ones who turn in faith to Christ. Rather than rushing them into the waters and working hard to follow up with what one’s faith and baptism meant, the SBC should urgently share the gospel, lead people to Christ, and then honor the significance of this life-changing event by investing time and knowledge into the new believer’s life regarding faith and practice by way of a Southern Baptist catechism.

**Commitment to the Local Church**

By the mid twentieth century, it seemed there were no limits to the growth of the Southern Baptist Convention. Baptisms, attendance, and giving were all growing. Church membership reached its all-time high of 16.3 million members in 2003. However, since then, the SBC has lost more than a million members and is on pace to lose 100,000 this year in spite of starting new churches and launching new initiatives. Baptisms are at a 70 year low and only half the children that are raised Southern Baptist remain Southern Baptist.820

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The primary concerns in the SBC continue to be the discrepancy of membership vs. attendance, declining baptisms (which is often attributed to lack of evangelism), and concerns for Cooperative Program giving. Consider how a six-week intensive baptism class for new believers, built around a Southern Baptist catechism could impact Southern Baptist churches and the major concerns of the SBC. In this class, new believers would be exposed to an overview of the Baptist Faith and Message, as it is the doctrinal centerpiece of the Convention. The traditional inclusion of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer would be added along with a review of the local church covenant. The class leader would then systematically walk the new believer through the questions and answers of the catechism with special attention to the essentials of regeneration, repentance and faith, and sanctification with their accompanying


824 Hammett, Biblical Foundations, 116-120 argues that a church covenant is the basis upon which a church can hold members accountable. Understanding and accepting the church covenant should be part of every new member’s process, including new believers as they are incorporated into the church by baptism. See further Deweese, Community of Believers, 19.
scriptural texts, all of which would be memorized. The catechism would be commensurate with the person’s age and/or cognitive ability. Special emphasis would be given to the meaning of the ordinances along with their inseparability from the church. High expectations based on Scripture would be established for faithful attendance in worship and small group, giving, service, evangelism, and missions. To these, the catechist (ideally the pastor or pastoral staff) would supplement in areas most needed. Upon satisfactory completion of the baptism class, the pastor along with a small team of others specifically trained for the purpose of evaluating baptism candidates, determine if the candidate understands the faith and is prepared to pledge themselves to Christ and His church. Then, a special day of baptism would be scheduled that includes not only the candidate and his family, but also the entire church in the celebration of the event, climaxing in the sharing of the Lord’s Supper with the newly baptized. Granted, this would be an unreasonable expectation if the church chose to baptize on a weekly or monthly basis. However, if the church adopted a policy of baptizing on particular dates throughout the year, this process holds the potential of elevating baptism to its proper level of importance.

This model stands in contrast to some church baptism processes which provides a brief interviews with new believer before baptism. It also goes beyond some baptism and/or new

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825 This suggestion goes beyond the Baptist and Reformation heritage of urging parents to teach the catechism to their children. It returns to the Patristic tradition of the bishop being the catechist. This added responsibility may require a shift in pastoral duties making time for such an investment. However, it potentially provides: 1) A greater bond between pastor and new believer; 2) By extension, a greater bond between the new believer and the church; 3) Greater assurance for the congregation that every baptismal candidate has been systematically and uniformly instructed in the essentials of the faith and values of the local church; and 4) A more meaningful baptism on the day of the event. This is not to say that parents could not also be involved in nightly or weekly contributions to the catechetical process.

826 To the Patristic tradition of baptizing on Easter and Pentecost, Baptists could incorporate baptism Sundays on a quarterly basis, coinciding with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.
believers’ classes\textsuperscript{827} which briefly emphasize the basic meaning of baptism and explanations of church life. This model addresses the SBC’s greatest concerns while upholding the Baptist conviction of believer’s baptism, raises the level of the importance of baptism, and increases the likelihood that the newly baptized will become engaged in the local church. This engagement, especially if followed up with a new members’ class, would manifest itself in practical ways as well, such as more faithful attendance in worship and small group,\textsuperscript{828} increased commitment to serve, and more faithful giving to the local church which in Southern Baptist life can mean an increase in Cooperative Program receipts.

In addition to these benefits, catechesis could increase evangelism. Beougher notes that one of the main reasons Southern Baptists do not share their faith more often is because of three common fears.\textsuperscript{829} First, there is the fear of not knowing enough. Secondly, there is the fear of failure. Third, is the fear of rejection. Beougher sees fear positively in that it teaches one to depend on the Lord and therefore can be a good thing. This is true. However, catechesis can greatly reduce the fear of not knowing enough, by providing systematic and coherent instruction on the person and work of Christ, man’s condition, and the remedy of regeneration through repentance and faith. And as a result, the new believer could immediately start sharing his faith,

\textsuperscript{827} For more on designing and using catechisms in new believers’ classes, see Clinton E. Arnold, “Early Church Catechesis and New Christians’ Classes in Contemporary Evangelicalism,” \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society}, No.1 (March 2004).

\textsuperscript{828} Nettles, “An Encouragement to Use Catechisms,” 13-14, explains the connection between meaningful worship (in particular listening to preaching) and catechesis. He writes, “In each of these (preaching, teaching, and meditation), not only does the person who is well catechized have a distinct advantage, the use of a catechetical approach is a basic element of the procedure itself. Those who have good Scripture knowledge gain more from good preaching. If, in addition, they have been trained to see the coherent structure of biblical truth and can define its leading principles, their knowledge of Scripture is more precise and thorough.” He continues quoting Matthew Henry, “Catechizing does to the preaching of the word the same good office that John the Baptist did to our Saviour, it prepares the way.”

not just by describing his experience, but by explaining the process. Catechesis allows new baptized believers to immediately be involved in the Great Commission, which Wheeler and Whaley call “an immediate call and necessity.”

Consider the potential impact of someone so recently made new, obediently sharing with others from a love for Christ and an informed faith how others can know Christ. Wheeler and Whaley write, “When a person responds to the gospel and is genuinely redeemed, he or she is immediately connected to the process of becoming a reproducing disciple.” This is true, but rather than skipping catechesis and enrolling a new believer in lengthy evangelism training or worse ongoing bible studies of how to live the Christian life, which Wheeler and Whaley call linear training, why not tap into the joy and excitement of the new catechized and then baptized believer who can immediately engage in evangelism of others? Catechisms can also increase evangelism in families as catechisms naturally contain the gospel systematically unfolding the problem of sin, the Savior, and salvation by repentance and faith. The use of catechisms by families to evangelize their children is consistent with Deut 6:4-9 and 2 Tim 3:15 as well as Baptist history, as bringing children to salvation was one of the primary motives of early Baptist catechisms.

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830 David Wheeler and Vernon M. Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-based Evangelism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 98-99. Churches should continue to emphasize and train every believer to share one’s faith with others by sharing one’s story, intentionally instigating conversations that includes the gospel, sharing one’s testimony, answering questions of inquirers, volunteering to serve others, being available in life’s crises, building friendships with the lost, being a good listener, praying for the lost, and living out one’s faith.

831 Ibid., 34-35.

832 Ibid., 112.

833 Ibid., 111-112, provide an excellent explanation of the difference between linear and cyclical training in discipleship.

834 David Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism is...How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 121-324. This list is among the many discussed in Earley and Wheeler’s book.
In 2014, the *SBC Pastor’s Task Force on SBC Evangelistic Impact and Declining Baptisms* issued its report. The Task Force acknowledged first, that baptisms in the SBC peaked in 1970, stayed steady for a number of years, but then began to decline around 2008. This was despite the population of the United States increasing significantly over the same time period. Secondly, not all churches had been diligent in reporting baptisms (or any other statistic) to the SBC. Thirdly, churches reported few adult baptisms and an ever increasing trend of baptizing children 5 and under. The Task Force concluded these realities to be a spiritual, leadership, discipleship, Next Generation, and celebration problem. It is interesting that each category could be improved with the use of catechism.

First, the spiritual problem resulting in a lack of concern for the lost would be improved by catechesis if intentionally used evangelistically by keeping the goal of conversions ever before a pastor and church, from one generation to the next. Catechisms in Baptist history were born out of concern for children’s spiritual rebirth and well-being. Secondly, the leadership problem, whereby leaders are inundated with everything else besides evangelism would be greatly improved, especially if the pastor served as the catechist, investing time and knowledge into the lives of those he will baptize. The potential for long-term benefits for the pastor and his congregation are remarkable. He would connect with every newly baptized member on a personal level, creating a spiritual bond which ties the individual to the local church. His preaching ministry would benefit as each newly baptized member listens with a base of theological knowledge, making the faith more coherent. And perhaps most importantly, he would know that he contributed significantly to baptizing only believers by ensuring each newly baptized member understood the faith and its expectations. Thirdly, the discipleship problem

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would be addressed if the instruction of every person began in earnest before baptism, including
the expectation that all baptized believers attend church, live a regenerate life, and share their
faith. The catechist should be cognizant that what is believed to be the first step of discipleship
may in fact be an occasion for evangelism. The instruction should include an “opt in”
opportunity as the gospel, which may have been vague or misunderstood, becomes clear during
the process of catechesis. Likewise, as the demands of the faith are shared, catechesis should
have an “opt out” option if in the course of instruction, one determines one does not truly believe
or does not agree to amend one’s lifestyle. Fourthly, the Next Generation problem of dropping
out of church as teenagers or young adults could be greatly improved by making sure childhood
conversions are genuine, baptisms are more meaningful, and the faith can be clearly articulated.
This is in contrast to a model of childhood conversions based on praying a sinner’s prayer,
followed by little to no theological instruction, which often results in parents and youth pastors
trying to convince a young person to live out the faith throughout adolescence. Catechesis, early
in the professed believer’s process would provide greater certainty on the part of church leaders
in baptizing only converts and provide a more solid foundation for the new believer’s walk with
Christ. Fifthly, the celebration problem which points to churches’ tendencies to celebrate other
measures of church health other than baptisms, could be improved by raising the importance and
significance of baptism through intense catechetical instruction leading up to the baptism day.
Just as the church fathers made much of one’s completion of catechesis and baptism on Easter
with one’s first celebration of the Eucharist with the church body, Southern Baptists could make
much of baptism as a celebration of new life, completion of pre-baptismal instruction, and the
grand entry into the life of the church, marked by signing the church covenant and symbolized
by one’s partaking of the Lord’s Supper with the church family for the first time. Unfortunately,
the Task Force’s recommendation did not include a return to the use of catechisms and certainly not as a post-conversion, pre-baptismal tool. Instead, it commended prayer for spiritual awakening, a recommitment to regularly share one’s faith, a commitment to make disciples who regularly share their faith, to intensify efforts to reach the Next Generation, and a commitment to make baptisms and those who share their faith occasions of celebration. While these are noble commendations, their familiarity among Baptists may inadvertently cause them to ring hollow. Though the recommendations are consistent with the call of the last one hundred years of SBC history, the Convention would do well to go back further into Baptist heritage to find a more robust theology of baptism that included the use of catechisms and higher expectations for the Christian life and one’s connection to the local church.

As SBC churches are autonomous, each with its own unique history and personality, pastors and churches must use wisdom in implementing the catechetical strategy recommended above. Unfortunately, many in Baptist churches are unaware of the SBC’s history of using catechisms. To some, even the term “catechism” sounds un-Baptist and understandably so considering the lapse of time since the last publication. Acknowledging this unfamiliarity, pastors and churches would do well to consider using terms such as “pre-baptismal instruction,” “baptism class,” or “new believer’s class” to implement this important component in reclaiming a regenerate church membership. For some, it would require the approval of a church vote. For others, it would be a simple policy change agreed upon by church leaders. Based on the experience of this writer, it would seem best for pastors to consider the following protocol. First, pastors should be convinced in their own minds of the need for pre-baptismal instruction. Ideally, this would become part of a minister’s training at all SBC bible colleges and seminaries. Secondly, pastors should share their convictions with other church leaders and appropriate
committees, fully informing those closest to the core of the church of the positive potential of this method. Thirdly, pastors should share the vision of pre-baptismal instruction with the congregation. This could be done as part of a sermon series on regenerate church membership, baptism, and spiritual growth. In most average sized Southern Baptist churches, this suggested policy and procedural change would likely go before the church for consideration. It would seem most effective if a baptism class was part of a sequence that included the use of a Southern Baptist catechism alongside an up-to-date church covenant, followed by a new members’ class, and enrollment into a small group after baptism is complete. These suggestions could move SBC churches from just acknowledging that what we’re doing is not working to a tangible plan for improving our evangelism, baptism, discipleship, and connection to the local church by more carefully guarding the entry gate of believer’s baptism.

The subjects of catechisms, baptism, and church membership warrant additional research not covered above. Additional studies might attempt to answer the following questions. First, what impact did persecution have on Baptist baptismal practices and church membership in England? Is there evidence that it hindered Baptist growth? Secondly, in comparing Baptist and Mennonite disciplinary practices, what impact did the additional component of the “ban” have on Mennonite church membership? Did this form of social pressure improve behavior? Thirdly, what role did church covenants play in improving early American Baptist church attendance? As most covenants address one’s relationship to the church, is there evidence that churches which emphasize a church covenant have better member involvement? Fourthly, did the ending of delayed baptism in Baptist churches for the purpose of evaluating one’s conduct coincide with the ending of Baptist publications of catechisms? What impact would the reimplementation of evaluation prior to baptism have on long-term commitment to the local church? Fifthly, what
role did catechisms play in adult conversions in Baptist history? What evidence, if any, exists that any and all converts were exposed to catechesis in Baptist churches? Sixthly, what would be the anticipated, long-term impact on SBC world missions if a catechism was required for all new believers? Would it prove foundational for purer and stronger Baptist churches around the world? Seventhly, how would the implementation of a post-conversion, pre-baptismal Southern Baptist catechism help prevent church dropout rates, especially among teenagers? Eighthly, how could the SBC commitment to Sunday School quarterlies/lessons be combined with a requirement of a pre-baptismal catechetical instruction upon conversion? Ninth, what impact would a purer Baptist church membership enhanced by catechetical instruction have on the church’s corporate witness and sharing the gospel? And finally, how would the implementation of delayed baptism and a post-conversion, pre-baptismal Southern Baptist catechism impact the age of baptism in Baptist churches?

The SBC is deeply loved and appreciated by this writer along with millions of others who have served and been served by this great Convention. This love prompts one to consider how one may help the SBC in areas of growing concern, such as attendance, declining baptisms, CP giving, and evangelism. While there are doubtless innovative ideas into which the Lord will guide her, the SBC would do well to acknowledge first, that Scripture provides the theological space necessary to delay baptism in order to meet the Scripture’s command to only baptize believers. Secondly, it would do well to consider the practice of delayed baptism and use of catechisms among the church fathers as a means of thoroughly preparing new believers for the life of faith. Third, it would do well to acknowledge the use of catechisms among the radical reformers and early Baptists, as well as Southern Baptists as part of maintaining a regenerate church membership. The practice of delayed baptism for the purpose of pre-baptismal instruction
from a Southern Baptist produced and published catechism, stands on the solid ground of biblical warrant and historical precedence for significantly contributing to the recovery of a regenerate church membership in the Southern Baptist Convention.
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