

# **Anti-Nicene Excerpts on Baptism**

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## **Writings on Baptism:**

Justin Martyr  
Tertullian  
Origen  
Clement of Alexandria  
Cyprian

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	ii
The First Apology of Justin [A.D. 110-165] .....	1
The First Apology of Justin [A.D. 110-165] .....	1
Tertullian, On the Baptism of John [A.D. 145-220] .....	1
Tertullian; Chap. XII: On the Necessity of Baptism to Salvation [A.D. 145-220] .....	3
Tertullian, On Baptism [A.D. 145-220] .....	3
Tertullian: The Significance of Baptism [A.D. 145-220] .....	4
Tertullian: Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation [A.D. 145-220] .....	4
Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom [A.D. 185-255] .....	5
The Pastor of Hermas [A.D. 160] .....	5
Clement of Alexandria [A.D. 193-217] .....	6
Cyprian [A.D. 200-258] .....	7
Recognitions of Clement .....	8
Clementine Homilies .....	9

## Introduction

Christians are commanded to be imitators of the apostles and note faithful Christians (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). By noting those who taught the truth immediately after the apostolic period, we may better refute the false doctrines which have been propagated from the beginning.

The following excerpts are of Christian writings on salvation and baptism. From them we see that Christians wrestled with the same false doctrines concerning salvation against which we fight today. Later in the Anti-Nicene period, we also see that men began introducing the false doctrine of affusion.

Many false teachers today tell their followers that their doctrines of salvation (e.g., salvation before and without baptism) have always been taught by Christians. These excerpts expressly disprove such assertions.

The following excerpts are the teachings of men and are to be taken in that context. These excerpts are not authoritative.

These excerpts are in the public domain and not copyrighted. Footnotes that are not pertinent to understanding the text have been omitted.

Allan McNabb

### **The First Apology of Justin [A.D. 110-165]**

Note here: Justin writing concerning baptism, here about half through the chapter.

And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by his name alone. For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God; and if any one dare to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness. And this washing is illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understanding. And in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus, he who is illuminated is washed.

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 1; The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyre, Irenaeus; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 183)

### **The First Apology of Justin [A.D. 110-165]**

Note here: Justin writing concerning the Eucharist (Lord's Supper).

And this food is called among us *Εὐχαριστία* [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ enjoined. (Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 1; The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyre, Irenaeus; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 185)

### **Tertullian, On the Baptism of John [A.D. 145-220]**

We have spoken, so far as our moderate ability permitted, of the *generals* which form the groundwork of the sanctity of baptism. I will now, equally to the best of my power,

proceed to the rest of its character, touching certain minor question.

The baptism announced by John formed the subject, even at the time, of a question, proposed by the Lord Himself indeed to the Pharisees, whether that baptism were heavenly, or truly earthly: about which they were unable to give a consistent answer, inasmuch as they understood not, because they believed not. But *we*, with but as poor a measure of understanding as of faith, *are* able to determine that that baptism was *divine* indeed, (yet in respect of the command, not in respect of efficacy too, in that we read that John was *sent by the Lord* to perform this duty,) but *human* in its nature: for it conveyed nothing celestial, but it fore-ministered to things celestial; being, to wit, appointed over *repentance*, which is in man's power. In fact, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees, who were unwilling to "believe," did not "repent" either. But if repentance is a thing human, its baptism must necessarily be of the same nature: else, if it had been celestial, it would have given both the Holy Spirit and remission of sins. But none either pardons sins or freely grants the Spirit save God only. Even the Lord Himself said that the Spirit would not descend on any other condition, but that He should first ascend to the Father. What the Lord was not yet conferring, of course the servant could not furnish. Accordingly, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find that men who had "John's baptism" had not received the Holy Spirit, whom they knew not even by hearing. That, then, was no celestial thing which furnished no celestial (endowments): whereas the very thing which *was* celestial in John - the Spirit of prophesy - so completely failed, after the transfer of the whole Spirit to the Lord, that he presently sent to inquire whether He whom he had himself preached, whom he had pointed out when coming to him, were "HE." And so "the baptism of repentance" was dealt with as if it were a candidate for the remission and sanctification shortly about to follow in Christ: for in that John used to preach "baptism *for* the remission of sins," the declaration was made with reference to a *future* remission; if it be true, (as it is,) that repentance is antecedent, remission subsequent; and this is "preparing the way." But he who "prepares" does not himself "perfect," but procures for another to perfect. John himself professes that the celestial things are not his, but Christ's by saying, "He who is from the earth speaketh concerning the earth; He who comes from the *realms* above is above all;" and again, by saying that he "baptized in repentance only, but that One would shortly come who would baptize in the Spirit and fire;" - of course because true and stable faith is baptized with *water*, unto salvation; pretended and weak faith is baptized with *fire*, unto judgement.

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 3; Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 673-4)

**Tertullian; Chap. XII**  
**Of the Necessity of Baptism to Salvation [A.D. 145-220]**

When, however, the prescript is laid down that "without baptism, salvation is attainable by none" (chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, "Unless one be born of water, he hath not life"), . . .

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 3; Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 674-5)

**Tertullian, On Baptism [A.D. 145-220]**

1. Happy is our sacred mystery of water. For by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life. An essay on this subject is worthwhile. First, it will instruct those who are new in the faith. Secondly, it will teach those who have been content with merely believing. Because of their ignorance, they have a probable faith that is untried. They have not made a full examination of the [Christian] traditions. As a consequence, a viper of the Cainite heresy, having recently become familiar in this region, has carried away a great number with her venomous doctrine. She has made it her first aim to destroy baptism. This is quite fitting, because vipers, snakes, and lizards are generally attracted to arid and waterless places.

However, we little fishes are born in water, after the example of our *Ichthys* Jesus Christ. And we have safety in no other way than by permanently abiding in water. So that monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine, knew very well how to kill the little fishes - by taking them away from the water!

Footnote: The Cainites were a gnostic sect that taught against water baptism. They believed that Cain, Esau, Judas, and the people of Sodom all had special divine knowledge hidden from most other humans. They circulated a spurious "Gospel of Judas."

Footnote: The Greek word *ichthys* (fish) was an acrostic for "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior."

2. The perversity of her false doctrine is very great. It shakes the faith, and it can

entirely block a person from receiving the faith. In fact, it opposes the faith on the very principles of which the faith consists! Absolutely nothing makes men's minds more hardened than the simplicity of the divine works which are visible in the *act* [of baptism]. Particularly, when this is compared with the grandeur promised in the *effect*. The resulting attainment of eternity is deemed unbelievable merely because the act is one of great simplicity - without pomp. For without any type of unusual preparation, a man is lowered in the water. With the utterance of a few words, he is dipped, and then rises again not much the [physically] cleaner.

(Tertullian, translated by David W. Burcot, *A Glimpse At Early Christian Church Life*; Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing Co., 1991; p. 93-4)

### **Tertullian: The Significance of Baptism [A.D. 145-220]**

To an extent, there is a spiritual parallel to the simple act: Since we are defiled by sins, as if by dirt, we should be washed from those stains in water. However, sins do not show themselves on our physical skin. For example, no one carries on his skin the spot of idolatry, or fornication, or fraud. Rather, persons of that kind are foul in the *spirit*, which is the author of the sin. After all, the spirit is lord; the flesh is merely the servant. Yet, they mutually share in the guilt: the spirit, because it commands; the flesh, because it serves the spirit. Therefore, after the waters have been given medicinal virtue through the intervention of the angel, then the spirit is bodily washed in the waters, and the flesh is likewise spiritually cleansed.

(Tertullian, translated by David W. Burcot, *A Glimpse at Early Christian Church Life*; Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing Co., 1989; p. 98)

### **Tertullian [A.D. 145-220]: Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?**

13. But the heretics provoke further questions. They say, "Baptism is not necessary for those to whom faith is sufficient. After all, Abraham pleased God by a sacrament of faith, not water." But in all cases it is the *later* things that have conclusive force. The later [revelation of God] prevails over the earlier. Granted, in former days there was salvation by bare faith, before the suffering and resurrection of the Lord. But now faith has been enlarged, and has become a faith that believes in his birth, suffering, and resurrection. So the ordinance [of faith] has been amplified by the addition of the sealing act of baptism.

This is, so to speak, the clothing of the faith which was previously bare, which now cannot exist without its proper law.

For the law of baptizing has been imposed, and the formula prescribed: "Go," he says, "teaching the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt. 28:19) "Unless a man has been born again of water and Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of the heavens." (John 3:5) Those words have tied faith to the necessity of baptism. Accordingly, all who became believers after that time were baptized. So it was that Paul was baptized when he believed. This is the meaning of the direction which the Lord had given him when he was struck with blindness, "Arise, and enter Damascus; there it shall be demonstrated to you what you ought to do." This meant he was to be baptized, which was the only thing he lacked. For he had sufficiently learned and believed the Nazarene to be "the Lord, the Son of God." (Acts 9:1-31)

(Tertullian, translated by David W. Burcot, [A Glimpse at Early Christian Church Life](#); Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing Co., 1989; p. 109-10)

**Origen [A.D. 185-255]:  
An Exhortation To Martyrdom**

XXX. Let us also remember the sins we have committed, and that it is impossible to receive forgiveness of sins apart from baptism, that it is impossible according to the laws of the Gospels to be baptized again with water and the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, and that baptism of martyrdom has been given to us. This is what it is called, as is evident from the fact that "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" is followed by "or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mk. 10:38).

(Origen, translation by Rowan A. Greer, [Origen](#); New York, NY: The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York., 1989; p. 61)

**The Pastor of Hermas [A.D. 160]:  
Regarding Baptism (Immersion) and Repentance**

And I said to him, "I should like to continue my questions." "Speak on," said he. And I said, "I heard, sir, some teachers maintain that there is no other repentance than that which takes place, when he descended into the water and received remission of our former sins." He said to me, "That was sound doctrine which you heard; for that is really the case. . . ."



(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 2; Fathers of the Second Century, Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 22)

### **Clement of Alexandria [A.D. 193-217]:**

The Instructor , Book I: Chap. VI. The Name Children Does Not Imply Instruction In Elementary Principles (excerpts from)

. . . The same also takes place in our case, whose exemplar Christ became. Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. "I," says He, "have said that ye are gods, and all sons of the Highest." This work is variously called grace, and illumination, and perfection, and washing: washing, by which we cleanse away our sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly. Now we call that perfect which wants nothing. For what is yet wanting to him who knows God? For it were truly monstrous that that which is not complete should be called a gift (or act) of God's grace. Being perfect, He consequently bestows perfect gifts. As at His command all things were made, so His bare washing to bestow grace, ensues the perfecting of His grace. For the future of time is anticipated by the power of His volition.

. . . So that in illumination what we receive is knowledge, and the end of knowledge is rest - the last thing conceived as the object of aspiration. As, then, inexperience comes to an end by experience, and perplexity by finding a clear outlet, so by illumination must darkness disappear. The darkness is ignorance, through which we fall into sins, purblind as to the truth. Knowledge, then, is the illumination we receive, which makes ignorance disappear, and endows us with clear vision. Further, the abandonment of what is bad is the adopting of what is better. For what ignorance has bound ill, is by knowledge loosed well; those bounds are with all speed slackened by human faith and divine grace, our transgressions being taken away by one Paeonian medicine, the baptism of the word. We are washed from all our sins, and are no longer entangled in evil. This is the grace of illumination, that our characters are not the same as before our washing. And since knowledge springs up with illumination, shedding its beams around the mind, the moment we hear, we who were untaught become disciples. . . .

. . . And such as is the union of the Word with baptism, is the agreement of milk with water; for it receives it alone of all liquids, and admits of mixture with water, for the

purpose of cleansing, as baptism for the remission of sins. . . .

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 2; Fathers of the Second Century, Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 215-22)

### **Cyprian [A.D. 200-258]:**

Notes: Cyprian taught that baptism was absolutely essential for salvation, but because of this belief also taught that in certain conditions clinical baptism was acceptable - this was an exception and not normal observance. Unfortunately, what Cyprian may have thought to be *better than nothing* in cases of severe illness has become heresy.

Although I disagree with Cyprian's judgement which was rejected until around the Third Century, the point that water baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation is apparent in his teachings. Also here (12) Cyprian notes by implication that clinical baptism (sprinkling and affusion) is not washing.

Epistle LXXV To Magnus, on baptizing the Novatians, and those who obtain grace on a sick-bed.

11. For since in baptism every one has his own sins remitted, the Lord proves and declares in His Gospel that sins can only be put away by those who have the Holy Spirit. . . . But if heretics and schismatics baptized without have not the Holy Spirit, and therefore hands are imposed on them among us, that *here* may be received what *there* neither is nor can be given; it is plain, also, that remission of sins cannot be given by those who, it is certain, have not the Holy Spirit. And therefore, in order that, according to the divine arrangement and the evangelical truth, they may be able to obtain remission of sins, and to be sanctified, and to become temples of God, they must all absolutely be baptized with the baptism of the Church who come from adversaries and antichrists to the Church of Christ.

12. You have asked also, dearest son, what I thought of those who obtain God's grace in sickness and weakness, whether they are to be accounted legitimate Christians, for that they are not to be washed, but sprinkled, with the saving water. In this point, my diffidence and modesty prejudices none, so as to prevent any from feeling what he thinks right, and from doing what he feels right. As far as my poor understanding conceives it, I think that the divine benefits can in no respect be mutilated and weakened; nor can anything less occur in that case, where, with full and entire faith both of the giver and receiver, is accepted what is drawn from the divine gifts. . . .

13. . . . And therefore, as far as it is allowed me by faith to conceive and to think, this is my opinion, that any one should be esteemed a legitimate Christian, who by the law

and right of faith shall have obtained the grace of God in the Church. Or if any one think that those have gained nothing by having only been sprinkled with the saving water, but that they are still empty and void, let them not be deceived, so as if they escape the evil of their sickness, and get well, they *should seek* to be baptized. But if they cannot be baptized who have already been sanctified by ecclesiastical baptism, why are they offended in respect of their faith and the mercy of the Lord? Or have they obtained indeed the divine favour, but in a shorter and more limited measure of the divine gift and of the Holy Spirit, so as indeed to be esteemed Christians, but yet not to be counted equal with others?

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 5; Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 400-1)

**Recognitions of Clement**  
**[authorship and authenticity skeptical]: Book VI.**

Chap. VIII. - Necessity and Baptism.

"But now I lead you to understanding by the same paths. For you see that all things are produced from waters. But water was made at first by the Only-begotten; and the Almighty God is the head of the Only-begotten, by whom we come to the Father in such order as we have stated above. But when you have come to the Father, you will learn that this is His will, that you be born anew by means of waters, which were first created. For he who is regenerated by water, having filled up the measure of good works, is made heir of Him by whom he has been regenerated in incorruption. Wherefore, with prepared minds, approach as sons to a father, that your sins may be washed away, and it may be proved before God that ignorance was their sole cause. For if, after the learning of these things, you remain in unbelief, the cause of your destruction will be imputed to yourselves, and not to ignorance. And do you suppose that you can have hope towards God, even if you cultivate all piety and all righteousness, but do not receive baptism. Yea rather, he will be worthy of greater punishment, who does good works not well; for merit accrues to men for good works, but only if they be done as God commands. Now God has ordered every one who worships Him to be sealed by baptism; but if you refuse, and obey your own will rather than God's, you are doubtless contrary and hostile to His will.

Chap. IX. - Use of Baptism.

"But you will perhaps say, What does the baptism of water contribute towards the worship of God? In the first place, because that which hath pleased God is fulfilled. In the

second place, because, when you are regenerated and born again of water and of God, the frailty of your former birth, which you have through men, is cut off, and so at length you shall be able to attain salvation; but otherwise it is impossible (underline-aem). For thus hath the true prophet testified to us with an oath: 'Verily I say to you, That unless a man is born again of water he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore make haste; for there is in these waters a certain power of mercy which was borne upon them at the beginning, and acknowledges those who are baptized under the name of the threefold sacrament, and rescues them from future punishments, presenting as a gift to God the souls that are consecrated by baptism. Betake yourselves therefore to these waters, for they alone can quench the violence of the future fire (underline - aem); and he who delays to approach to them, it is evident that the idol of unbelief remains in him, and by it he is prevented from hastening to the waters which confer salvation. For whether you be righteous or unrighteous, baptism is necessary for you in every respect (underline - aem); for the righteous, that perfection may be accomplished in him, and he may be born again to God; for the unrighteous, that pardon may be vouchsafed him of the sins which he has committed in ignorance. Therefore all should hasten to be born again to God without delay, because the end of every one's life is uncertain.

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 8; The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementine, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syria Documents, Remanis of the First Ages; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 154-5)

**Clementine Homilies (disputed as to author and authenticity):  
Homily VII. Chap. VIII. - The Service of God's Appointment.**

"And this is the service He has appointed: To worship Him only, and trust only in the Prophet of truth, and to be baptized for the remission of sins, and thus by this pure baptism to be born again unto God by saving water; . . ." Such was Peter's counsel to the men of Sidon also. And in few days many repented and believed, and were healed. And Peter having founded a church, and set over it as bishop one of the elders who were with him, left Sidon.

(Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 8; The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementine, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syria Documents, Remanis of the First Ages; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 269)