THE QUESTION

Did the early church teach baptismal regeneration?

Asked by a THF member on July 12, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 43 early Christian passages and 139 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-teach-baptismal-regeneration

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Yes. Many early writers speak of baptism as a new birth where sins are washed away. Justin, Irenaeus, Theophilus, Clement, Cyprian and Hippolytus all link the water of baptism with regeneration and forgiveness. They also join it to repentance, faith and the Holy Spirit, not to the water alone.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Justin: born again and forgiven in water

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin describes what happens at baptism. The person who has repented and chooses to be born again receives in the water the forgiveness of past sins. He joins the new birth with repentance and free choice, not with the water alone.

1

> “Since at birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, due to our parents coming together, and were raised with bad habits and wicked training; so that we may not remain children of necessity and ignorance, but may become children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins previously committed, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe is pronounced over the one who chooses to be born again and has repented of sins.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 6, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Irenaeus calls baptism the laver of regeneration

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus says fallen man needed the laver, or washing, of regeneration. He also compares Naaman's washing in the Jordan to how we are cleansed from old sins and reborn through water and the call on the Lord's name.

2

> “And since man, regarding the formation after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the laver of regeneration, the Lord said to the man upon whom He had given sight, after smearing his eyes with clay, "Go to Siloam and wash;" thus restoring to him both his perfect confirmation and that regeneration which occurs through the laver.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book V* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 10, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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3 “For just as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes, just as the Lord has declared: "Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Theophilus sees new birth in the water

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Theophilus reads the blessing of the creatures of the waters as a sign. He says it points to people receiving repentance and forgiveness through the washing of regeneration, as many as come to the truth and are born again.

4 “Also, the things that come from the waters were blessed by God, so that this too might be a sign that human beings are meant to receive repentance and forgiveness of sins through the water and washing of regeneration—as many as come to the truth, are born again, and receive blessing from God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Theophilus of Antioch,** *To Autolycus* 16 (c. 169–183 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Clement links regeneration with being enlightened

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement says that when believers were regenerated they were enlightened, which means to know God. He explains that in baptism the sins that darken the soul are wiped away, so the eye of the spirit is set free to see.

5 “At once, when we were regenerated, we attained that perfection for which we longed. For we were illuminated, and this is to know God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 1.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 14, page 7** Read it in the library ›
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6 “As, then, those who have shaken off sleep immediately become fully awake within; or rather, as those who try to remove a film over the eyes do not supply light to them from outside, which they do not possess, but by removing the obstacle from the eyes leave the pupil free; so also we who are baptized, having wiped off the sins that darken the light of the Divine Spirit, have the eye of the spirit free, unimpeded, and full of light.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 1.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 13, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Cyprian: baptism is the second birth

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian reads Titus 3:5 to mean that regeneration happens in the washing of baptism. He calls it a spiritual second birth in Christ. He also insists that water alone does not do this apart from the Holy Spirit and the Church.

7 “For the blessed apostle declares and proves that baptism is where the old man dies and the new man is born, saying, "He saved us by the washing of regeneration,"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 32, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “Moreover, it is foolish to say that although the second birth is spiritual, by which we are born in Christ through the washing of regeneration, someone may be spiritually born among the heretics, where they say that the Spirit is not.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 31, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Hermas: forgiveness when we go into the water

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In the Shepherd, Hermas hears that some teachers say sins are forgiven when we go down into the water. He is told this is sound teaching, and that the forgiven person ought then to live in purity.

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9 “Sir, I heard some teachers say that there is no repentance except the one that happens when we go down into the water and receive forgiveness of our former sins.""

later in the same passage

“What you heard was sound teaching, for that is really so.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Hippolytus: the washing that renews believers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hippolytus pictures the Church as a ship. The net she carries is the washing of regeneration, which renews those who believe. He ties this renewal to faith and to the Spirit who seals believers.

10 “And the net that she carries with her is the washing of regeneration that renews those who believe, and from this also come these glories.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 26, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not explain later debates about exactly how baptism and faith work together.
- They say little here about the baptism of infants.
- Hermas also raises the hard question of sin after baptism, which these passages do not fully settle.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 43 early Christian passages and 139 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–43, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (source 44, in Bible order), then 138 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in

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THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *43 passages from 17 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19, in living water. But if you do not have living water, baptize… [continues online] **read ›**

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · source 2*

2 *Epistle of Barnabas* "us further explore whether the Lord showed any concern to foreshadow the water of baptism and the cross. Regarding the water, it is written about the Israelites that they should… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Shepherd* **Quote 9, page 5** "except the one that happens when we go down into the water and receive forgiveness of our former sins." He said to me, "What you heard was sound teaching, for… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 6) "are they who have heard the word, and wish to be baptized in the name of the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 5*

5 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* "was born and baptized, that by His passion He might purify the water… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 6–8*

6 *First Apology* **Quote 1, page 2** "and ignorance, but may become children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins previously committed, the name of God the Father and Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 1) "baptism he spoke of is the only thing that can purify those who have repented; and this is the water of life. But the cisterns you have made for yourselves… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *First Apology* (on point 1) "and say is true, and commit to living accordingly, are instructed to pray and ask God for the remission of their past sins with fasting, while we pray and fast… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 9*

9 *To Autolycus* 16 **Quote 4, page 3** "that human beings are meant to receive repentance and forgiveness of sins through the water and washing of regeneration—as many as come to the truth, are born again, and… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 10–12*

10 *Against Heresies: Book V* **Quote 2, page 2** "man, regarding the formation after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the laver of regeneration, the Lord said to the man upon whom He had given sight, after smearing his… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: "Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Against Heresies: Book I* (1885 English; on point 2) "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… [continues online] **read ›**

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Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 13–19*

13 *Instructor* 1.6 **Quote 6, page 4** "is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Instructor* 1.6 **Quote 5, page 3** "Clearly. Then He did not learn anything more from him? Certainly not. But is He perfected by the washing of baptism alone, and sanctified by the descent of the Spirit… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Stromata* 2.13 (on point 6) the person who has received forgiveness of sins ought not to sin anymore. For besides the first and only repentance from sins, which is from the sins of the former… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Instructor* 1.6 (1885 English; on point 4) "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… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Instructor* 1.6 (1885 English; on point 4) "5:24 Thus believing alone, and regeneration, is perfection in life… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) "these three are one. For in the Saviour are those saving virtues, and life itself exists in His own Son… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Instructor* 1.6 (1885 English; on point 4) "as the regeneration was conformably spiritual, so also was the nutriment of man spiritual… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 20–23*

20 *On Baptism* 5 "to all understanding of spiritual powers, give to their idols this same power of filling waters with the same effect. But they deceive themselves with widowed waters. For by washing… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *On Baptism* 13 (1885 English) "comparison with this law of that definition, Unless a man have been reborn of water and Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of the heavens, has tied faith… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *On Baptism* 9 with all his forces, Exodus 14:27-30. What figure is more clearly fulfilled in the sacrament of baptism? The nations are set free from the world by means of… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *On Baptism* 10 "same nature. Otherwise, if it had been celestial, it would have given both the Holy Spirit and remission of sins. But no one either pardons sins or freely grants the… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 24–27*

24 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (1885 English; on point 7) "water and the Holy Ghost. This is the water in conjunction with the Spirit, by which paradise is watered, by which the earth is enriched, by which plants grow, by… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (on point 7) good, then, are all the works of our God and Savior. And what gift, again, is more necessary than water? For by water all things are washed and fed, cleansed… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 1 **Quote 10, page 5** love of Christ, which binds the Church. And the net that she carries with her is the washing of regeneration that renews those who believe, and from this also come… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (on point 7) "baptize with the baptism of repentance, but He confers the gift of adoption. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 28–29*

28 *Commentary on Matthew* 13 (1885 English) "they received this commission to discharge concerning them, from what time by the laver of regeneration, Titus 3:5 through which they were born as new-born babes, they long… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Commentary on John* 6 (1885 English) "it is for forgiveness of sins that this washing is given… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · source 30*

30 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 29 (1885 English; on point 5) "it is who effects with water the second birth as a certain seed of divine generation, and a consecration of a heavenly nativity, the pledge of a promised inheritance, and… [continues online] **read ›**

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Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 31–36*

31 *Epistles* **Quote 8, page 4** Or if they say that the power of baptism comes from the greatness of the name, so that those who are baptized anywhere and in any way, in the name… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Epistles* **Quote 7, page 4** "3:5. But if regeneration is in the washing, that is, in baptism, how can heresy, which is… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 5) "that I was enabled to acknowledge that what previously, being born of the flesh, had been living in the practice of sins, was of the earth earthly, but had now… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 5) "therefore it behooves those to be baptized who come from heresy to the Church, that so they who are prepared, in the lawful, and true, and only baptism of the… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Epistles* (on point 5) and His God is rewarded by Christ, and receives forgiveness of sins and the sanctification of baptism! But by what power can the one who denies God the Creator, the… [continues online] **read ›**

36 *Epistles* (on point 5) Since in baptism each person has his own sins forgiven, the Lord proves and declares in His Gospel that sins can be taken away only by those who have the… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 37–38*

37 *Apostolic Constitutions* "them the laver of regeneration and the garment of incorruption, which is the true life… [continues online] **read ›**

38 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) "You who has formerly said by Your holy prophets to those that be initiated, Wash and become clean, Isaiah 1:16 and hast appointed spiritual regeneration by Christ, do Thou… [continues online] **read ›**

Commodianus, *c. 250–300 AD · source 39*

39 *Writings* "baptism, the coarse dress of your birth is washed… [continues online] **read ›**

Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 40*

40 *Disputation with Manes* 1 "said: "Is baptism, then, given on account of the remission of sins… [continues online] **read ›**

Anonymous · *sources 41–43*

41 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 "I drink of, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38). For He knew that those men had to be baptized not only… [continues online] **read ›**

42 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (1885 English) "And to these things you perchance, who art bringing in some novelty, may immediately and impatiently reply, as you are wont, that the Lord said in the Gospel: Unless a… [continues online] **read ›**

43 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 "Therefore, for those who begin a discussion of saving and new baptism, that is, spiritual and evangelical baptism, the first thing that comes before them is the announcement that is… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *1 verse, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

44 **John 9:7** and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he went away, washed, and came back seeing. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *138 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 9:18

Exodus 15:25 · 32:34

Deuteronomy 32:10 · 32:23

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Psalms 18:26 · 110:4

Isaiah 1:18 · 18:1 · 46:12

Jeremiah 2:12 · 2:13 · 5:8

Ezekiel 47:1

Matthew 3:7 · 3:11 · 3:13 · 3:17 · 4:3 · 9:29 · 10:42 · 13:19 · 14:25 · 19:17 · 21:23 · 21:25 · 21:32 · 25:29 · 27:24 · 28:19

Mark 1:4 · 2:8 · 4:36 · 5:9 · 5:15 · 10:38 · 11:30

Luke 1:76 · 7:18 · 7:37 · 10:21 · 10:35 · 12:50 · 14:11 · 15:7 · 20:4

John 1:3 · 1:4 · 1:6 · 1:9 · 1:16 · 1:17 · 1:33 · 2:1 · 2:5 · 3:3 · 3:5 · 3:9 · 3:30 · 3:36 · 4:6 · 4:10 · 5:1 · 6:40 · 7:37 · 7:38 · 7:39 · 8:35 · 13:1 · 14:16 · 14:18 · 15:20 · 16:6 · 16:13 · 19:34 · 19:37 · 20:22

Acts 1:4 · 2:17 · 2:38 · 5:31 · 9:1 · 11:15 · 15:7 · 19:1 · 19:4

Romans 6:4 · 8:5 · 8:7 · 8:9 · 10:10 · 16:20

1 Corinthians 1:18 · 1:20 · 2:12 · 3:2 · 3:13 · 4:13 · 7:14 · 7:40 · 12:3 · 12:8 · 12:13 · 13:11 · 14:20 · 15:46

2 Corinthians 1:21 · 4:13 · 5:5 · 5:21 · 6:16 · 7:1

Galatians 1:15 · 3:23 · 3:26 · 3:28 · 4:7 · 5:17

Ephesians 5:8

Philippians 2:7 · 4:3

Colossians 1:25 · 2:13

1 Thessalonians 4:8 · 4:9

1 Timothy 1:4 · 4:1

Titus 3:5

Hebrews 3:12 · 6:4 · 6:8 · 10:26 · 11:3 · 12:16

1 Peter 2:2

1 John 3:9

Jude 1:1

Revelation 22:1

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY