THE QUESTION

Did the early church teach that baptism is needed for salvation?

Asked by a THF member on September 3, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 47 early Christian passages and 116 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-that-baptism-is-needed-for-salvation

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Yes, these writers treat baptism as the normal way God forgives sins and gives new birth, and they condemn refusing it out of contempt. But some also say a repentant believer is not lost when death or necessity prevents baptism, as with martyrs. Salvation is by grace, and it must be kept.

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

Salvation comes by grace, not by our works

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

John Chrysostom contrasts the Law, which asked for works, with grace, which saves and makes people righteous through faith. Methodius quotes Paul to the same effect: we are saved by grace, not of ourselves and not of works, so no one can boast.

1 “The Law requires not only faith, but also works. But grace saves and makes a person righteous by faith.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Commentary on Galatians* 3 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 41, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 “Since grace and truth certainly came by Jesus Christ, as John 1:17 says, and since by grace we are saved, according to the apostle's word, "and that not of yourselves, nor of works, lest any man should boast," in Ephesians 2:8-9, by the will of God the Word was made flesh and was found in form as a man, as Philippians 2:7 says.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Methodius,** *Concerning Free Will* 1 (c. 270–311 AD) **Source 34, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Baptism was where sins were washed away

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

Justin Martyr, describing the church's practice, says the person who repents and chooses new birth receives forgiveness of past sins in the water. Chrysostom says the laver of grace cleanses any sinner who comes to it.

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3 “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) **Source 8, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

4 “And if any man is effeminate, or a fornicator, or an idolator, or a doer of whatever evil you please, or if he is full of all the wickedness there is among men, if he falls into this pool of waters, he comes up again from the divine fountain purer than the sun's rays.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Instructions to Catechumens* 1 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 37, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Refusing baptism out of contempt condemns

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

The Apostolic Constitutions treats baptism as required, quoting John 3:5 and Mark 16:16. A person who scorns baptism is judged as an unbeliever. The fault in view is contempt, not being kept from baptism by events.

5 “No, the one who, out of contempt, refuses to be baptized will be condemned as an unbeliever and rebuked as ungrateful and foolish.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 31, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Necessity does not cancel a believer's salvation

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

The early Treatise on Re-Baptism argues that when necessity stops the full rite, this cannot take salvation from a believing, repentant person. It gives martyrs as an example: when they shed their blood for Christ, the lack of water baptism does them no harm.

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6 “And if this is so, and the occurrence of any of these things cannot take salvation away from a man who believes, then you yourself also admit that when the mystery of the faith is, in a sense, divided, and is not, as you argue, completed when necessity interferes, this cannot take salvation away from a believing and repentant man.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 42, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

7 “This is as in the case of martyrs who hear the word: the baptism of water is lacking without evil.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 47, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Cornelius received the Spirit, then was baptized

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

The same treatise notes from Acts that the Spirit fell on believers before water baptism. Yet Peter still asked who could forbid water for them. Receiving the Spirit first did not make baptism unnecessary.

8 “Further, as you are not ignorant, the Holy Spirit is found to have been given by the Lord without baptism of water to men who believe, as it is written in Acts of the Apostles in this way: “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.”

later in the same passage

“Then Peter answered, ‘Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?’”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 42, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 6 OF 7

Learners who died unbaptized were not dismissed

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

Cyprian speaks of learners who died before they could be baptized. He calls their turn to the truth no small benefit, though death stopped them before the completion of grace. He still insists that the living be baptized.

9 “This is no small benefit of truth and faith, which they had reached by leaving error, although, being stopped by death, they had not received the completion of grace.”

later in the same passage

“But those who are still alive should be baptized with the baptism of the Church, so that they may obtain remission of sins.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 27, page 8** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

New life given by grace must be kept

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

Chrysostom urges the baptized not to return to their old deadness. God wants us to take part by guarding the life He gave. Irenaeus warns that those who refuse to obey God lose their place as His children, as disobedient sons lose an inheritance.

10 “Since then it has given us life, let us remain living and not return again to our former deadness.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 6 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 36, page 8** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

11 “Just as, among people, those children who disobey their fathers are disinherited but remain their children by nature, yet legally lose their inheritance; so it is with God—those who do not obey Him are disinherited by Him and cease to be His children.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 11, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages discusses the thief on the cross or deathbed conversions directly.
- Cyprian does not say plainly what becomes of learners who died before baptism, only that their faith was a real benefit.
- 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 47 early Christian passages and 116 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–47, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 48–51, in Bible order), then 112 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 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 *47 passages from 16 writers*

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English; on point 2) “the water, indeed, it is written, in reference to the Israelites, that they should not receive that baptism which leads to the remission of sins, but should procure another for… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 2–5*

2 *Shepherd* (on point 7) Lord, that it is great and glorious, and that He has given His Spirit to those who are worthy of repentance." "Then why, sir," I said, "did not all these… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Shepherd* (on point 7) “my questions." He said, "Go on." And I said, "Sir, I heard some teachers say that there is no repentance except the one that happens when we go down into… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Shepherd* (on point 7) “have saved you, if you remain steadfast… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Shepherd* (on point 7) useless to their Lord because they have taken on savage habits. Therefore, these people have repentance in their power, unless they are found to have denied from the heart. But… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (1885 English) “all them that repent, the Lord grants forgiveness, if they turn in penitence to the unity of God, and to communion with the bishop… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* “as faith cannot do the works of unbelief, nor unbelief the works of faith… [continues online] **read ›**

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Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *First Apology* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** “order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 1) “works deliverance from death to those who repent of their wickedness and believe upon Him… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 10*

10 *Diatessaron* 46 (1885 English; on point 7) “15:6 And if a man abide not in me, he is cast without, like a withered 23 branch… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 11–14*

11 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 11, page 5** “when they should be converted and come to repentance, and cease from evil, they should have power to become the sons of God, and to receive the inheritance of immortality… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Against Heresies: Book III* (on point 1) but not a different god, because truly there is but "one God, who justifies the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith." Zacharias, prophesying, exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English; on point 7) “not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, not effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 1) God raised from the stones, and placed beside him who was made the leader and forerunner of our faith. This man received the covenant of circumcision after being justified by… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 15–19*

15 *Instructor* 1.6 (on point 2) 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… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Stromata* 2.6 (on point 1) we discover that faith is the first movement toward salvation, after which fear, and hope, and repentance, advancing together with temperance and patience, lead us to love and knowledge. Therefore… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Stromata* 5.1 (1885 English) “we must, by being formed for what is good, acquire an inclination for it… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Stromata* 2.13 (on point 7) then, a person from among the Gentiles, who has turned from that old way of life to faith, has received forgiveness of sins once. But if someone sins after this… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Stromata* 1.7 (on point 1) “Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 20–21*

20 *On Baptism* 12 “answer those who claim that the apostles were not baptized. For if they had received John's human baptism, and were desiring the Lord's baptism, then the Lord Himself… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *De Fuga in Persecutione* 7 (on point 7) “who shall endure to the end shall be saved… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 22*

22 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (1885 English; on point 2) “he who comes down in faith to the layer of regeneration, and renounces the devil, and joins himself to Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 23–25*

23 *Commentary on John* 6 (on point 2) repentance,” teaching that the benefit of baptism is connected with the intention of the person baptized. To him who repents it is salutary, but to him who comes to it… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 5 (on point 7) “by sloth and negligence to fall from happiness into wickedness and ruin, to such a degree that, through too great proficiency, so to speak… [continues online] **read ›**

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25 *Against Celsus* 1 (1885 English) “observe that he says, firstly: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 26–30*

26 *Epistles* (on point 2) moreover, the very question asked in baptism is a witness to the truth. For when we say, “Do you believe in eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through the… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Epistles* (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** “they who still abide in life should be baptized with the baptism of the Church, that they may obtain remission of sins, lest by the presumption of others they remain… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Epistles* (on point 2) 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 ›**

29 *Treatises* (1885 English; on point 4) “and teaching that this is a baptism greater in grace, more lofty in power, more precious in honour— a baptism wherein angels baptize— a baptism in which God and His… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Epistles* (on point 7) I am amazed that some are so stubborn that they think repentance should not be granted to the lapsed, or that pardon should be denied to those who repent, when… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 31–32*

31 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 5, page 3** “3:5 And again, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved… [continues online] **read ›**

32 *Apostolic Constitutions* concerning baptism, O bishop or presbyter, we have already given instruction, and now we say this: you shall baptize as the Lord commanded us, saying, “Go and teach all nations… [continues online] **read ›**

Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 33*

33 *Disputation with Manes* 1 (on point 2) “said: "Is baptism, then, given on account of the remission of sins… [continues online] **read ›**

Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · sources 34–35*

34 *Concerning Free Will* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “certainly grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, John 1:17 whence also by grace we are saved, according to that word of the apostle, and that not of yourselves… [continues online] **read ›**

35 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English; on point 1) “certainly grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, John 1:17 whence also by grace we are saved, according to that word of the apostle, and that not of yourselves… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 36–41*

36 *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 6 (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** “the death that He died, He died unto sin once: Romans 6:9-10 and He will not have us always saved by grace: for so we shall be empty… [continues online] **read ›**

37 *Instructions to Catechumens* 1 **Quote 4, page 3** for what reason, someone says, if the laver takes away all our sins, is it called, not a laver of remission of sins, nor a laver of cleansing, but a… [continues online] **read ›**

38 *Instructions to Catechumens* 1 (on point 2) gift, and then fell away, to renew them again to repentance," Hebrews 6:4-6. It is also called baptism: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

39 *Commentary on Galatians* 3 (1885 English; on point 1) “if he who was before grace, was justified by Faith, although plentiful in works, much more we… [continues online] **read ›**

40 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 2 (1885 English; on point 1) “where grace is, works are not; where works, it is no more grace… [continues online] **read ›**

41 *Commentary on Galatians* 3 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “the Law requires not only Faith but works also, but grace saves and justifies by Faith. Ephesians 2:8… [continues online] **read ›**

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Anonymous · *sources 42–47*

42 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quotes 6, 8, page 4** "as you are not ignorant, the Holy Spirit is found to have been given by the Lord without baptism of water to men who believe, as it is written in… [continues online] **read ›**

43 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 "Although they were already righteous and, as we have said, had been baptized with the Lord's baptism, just as the apostles themselves had been, yet on the night when… [continues online] **read ›**

44 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (1885 English) "in Jesus, which is the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, death is reasonably despised, although, if they continue as they are, they cannot be saved… [continues online] **read ›**

45 *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 ›**

46 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (1885 English; on point 5) "in peace. Luke 7:50 From all which things it is shown that hearts are purified by faith, but that souls are washed by the Spirit… [continues online] **read ›**

47 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quote 7, page 4** "And even up to this point, that whole heretical baptism may be amended, after some time has passed, if a man should survive and amend his faith. For our God… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *4 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

48 **Mark 16:16** He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned. **read ›**

49 **Luke 12:50** But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! **read ›**

50 **John 3:5** Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **read ›**

51 **Acts 10:44** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *112 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 32:34

Numbers 11:26

Deuteronomy 32:10 · 32:23

Psalms 18:26 · 110:4 · 145:18

Proverbs 11:5

Isaiah 1:16 · 14:12

Jeremiah 2:12 · 2:13 · 5:8 · 6:16

Ezekiel 47:1

Matthew 3:11 · 3:15 · 3:17 · 4:3 · 5:8 · 5:11 · 9:2 · 9:29 · 10:22 · 10:28 · 10:32 · 10:37 · 11:11 · 11:27 · 12:38 · 16:21 · 18:17 · 19:14 · 19:17 · 24:4 · 24:23 · 24:27 · 25:29 · 28:19

Mark 6:13 · 8:38 · 10:38 · 14:27

Luke 1:35 · 1:38 · 7:37 · 7:48 · 7:50 · 9:26 · 10:18 · 10:21 · 14:11

John 1:3 · 1:13 · 1:17 · 1:18 · 1:26 · 3:3 · 3:8 · 3:9 · 3:36 · 4:10 · 5:19 · 6:40 · 7:17 · 7:38 · 7:39 · 13:9 · 19:34 · 19:37

Acts 1:4 · 2:38 · 4:12 · 6:1 · 11:15 · 15:7 · 15:9 · 15:13 · 19:2

Romans 1:17 · 4:3 · 8:5 · 8:35 · 8:38

1 Corinthians 1:2 · 1:19 · 1:20 · 12:13 · 13:11 · 13:12 · 14:20

2 Corinthians 5:21 · 6:10

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Galatians 3:23 · 3:26 · 3:28 · 4:7
Ephesians 5:8
Philippians 2:7
1 Timothy 1:18
Titus 3:5
Hebrews 6:4 · 10:26 · 10:39 · 12:16
James 4:8
1 John 3:9 · 5:19
Revelation 2:9 · 21:8 · 22:1

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