



Infant Baptism 2

One way to insure a belief or practice is ingrained into the minds of individuals is to make it mandatory with the threat of persecution and death. Such is the history of infant baptism in the church following the first century. It is thought by some religious historians that Polycarp, a student of the apostle John who was martyred in the mid second century, was baptized as a child based on his statement that he had served God for eighty and six years. Polycarp was killed at the age of eighty-six. The history of infant baptism is difficult to trace in the early centuries but theologians began to write of it later on. Some of the details from a variety of sources are given here to show how this erroneous doctrine gained a powerful foothold in the church during the apostasy. Justin Martyr (100-166 A.D.) wrote of the practice as being widespread as did Irenaeus around 185. Similar statements are also found in the writings of Origen (185-254) and Cyprian (215-258) church historians. The 66 bishops who met at the council of Carthage around 254 declared that no one should be hindered from baptism and the “grace of God ... especially infants and the newly born.” These individuals referred to the “divine mysteries” and saw a need for all to escape the “pollutions of sin” believing that all were born with the inherent sin nature of mankind including the guilt that was brought into the world by the sin of Adam. Augustine (354-430) is said to have written that the “custom of our mother church in baptizing infants must not be accounted needless, nor to be believed other than a tradition of the apostles.” Instructions for baptizing infants, including those who were born ill were passed down from bishops to clergy and held to be a necessity to remove the guilt of “original sin” early in life. Over the centuries there were those who opposed this teaching often doing so with the danger of being branded as heretics and persecuted for this stand. Some who rejected this idea are reported to have been beheaded for their opposition. During the 6th century parents were required by the emperor Justinian to present their children for baptism and in the 7th century it was

mandated that all unbaptised infants should have this “sacrament” administered. The Inquisition also followed this, persecuting and killing those who did not submit to the practice. As the years passed another doctrine, that of Limbus Infantum, arose teaching that unbaptized infants who died went to a realm that did not enjoy the pleasures of Heaven, but existed in a void called Limbo and were free from the pain of punishment. As was stated in the previous articles on infant baptism and original sin, these are human doctrines that had their roots in the thinking and misguided interpretations of humans. Nowhere in the scriptures do we read of any command to impose baptism on anyone and the examples of conversion found in the book of Acts detail the submission of adults to the Gospel who were of a reasoning age and able to voluntarily seek salvation through obedience. There are no statements in the New Testament to support the notion of sin as an inherited trait, nor are there any examples of children being baptized for the remission of sins. Persecution and mandatory compliance to such a doctrine caused many to accept this, however, adding to the confusion over the true doctrine of the New Testament. The added idea of Limbo, a neutralized place of holding for the departed spirits of unbaptized infants is also not found in the scriptures. We are all to be held accountable for those things done in the flesh (**2 Cor 5.10**). Infants are unable to comprehend and repent of sin, nor are they capable of making a choice to be saved. All of these ideas have their roots in the mind of man and have obscured the true meaning of obedience. Salvation is not something that can be applied against one’s will but is the answer of a good conscience toward God (**1 Pet 3.21**).

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