

There was a growing tendency to link the matter with baptism, particularly as the polemicists had a larger role in the theological arena. Baptism was increasingly thought of as a means into Christ's death and while the particular subjects of baptism offered a ground for debate, the concept of baptism seems not to have. Faith was needed prior to baptism and confession for sins following baptism was often required -- or taught, at least. Many Old Testament signs were seen as indicating the important role of baptism and if one is not well rounded in reading the fathers, one may think them guilty of a baptismal regeneration. This is not the case, but their language is strong as the find baptisms the means of entering the death of Christ. The death of Christ opens this testimonial way for us. In proper context, baptism to the fathers, is the seal of life and the proof of the reality of spiritual transaction. You will find some differences among them on the fuller treatment of the topic but they do not confuse its efficacy with that of Christ's death. However the particular working out of the manner in which Christ's death becomes our means of deliverance is not well expressed in the fathers.

2. Regarding Regeneration

Regeneration is accomplished by responding to grace, entering into faith by way of baptism, and making an open identification in the company of the church. Origen develops this more completely with an initial salvation built on faith and repentance, and a higher salvation that comes with knowledge and understanding so leading to a life of good works. Such schemes are to be tightly guarded against as they easily lead to a dualistic sort of Christianity which is self-defeating to the average Christian and suggests (although does not state) an inadequacy in the provision of Christ for all parties.

This essential exercise of faith is universally called for and faith in the "god-man" with obedient trust to His mandates is the prescribed method of "knowing" regeneration.

3. Observations:

The character of life in an age of persecution forced a more serious view of the Christian calling than most of us have had to face. The responsibilities and dangers made a more penetrating situation. There was no room for the "easy belief" or a non-life-changing Gospel.

The only problem with this is that sometimes in the face of such situations the simplicity of what would seem to the the heart of the Gospel message is obscured by the demands of the time. One must seek to understand the historic connexions well if one is to comprehend the development of doctrine in the face of circumstances such as this.