

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF MARTIN LUTHER'S
VIEW ON REBAPTISM

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This study offers a biblical-theological critique of Martin Luther's position on rebaptism, with particular attention to his rejection of the practice in cases involving individuals baptized as infants, as believers, or after falling into apostasy. Through a careful examination of key biblical texts—especially Acts 19—it is argued that rebaptism should not be construed as a repudiation of the initial baptism, but rather as an expression of spiritual renewal, genuine repentance, and an enriched understanding of divine truth.

The findings suggest that, although Luther's emphasis on the singular nature of baptism rightly underscores its sacramental significance, his dismissal of rebaptism fails to account for the transformative power of faith and the ongoing process of repentance. The biblical and theological insights emerging from this study affirm that rebaptism can be a personal and meaningful act of recommitment to God. Ultimately,

the study concludes that rebaptism is both biblically and theologically defensible, serving as a public declaration of renewed faith and deeper spiritual conviction.

Adventist University of Africa
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A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF
MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEW ON REBAPTISM

A thesis
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by
Elicky Kiplimo Lagat

May 2025

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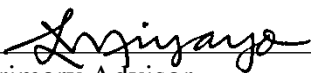
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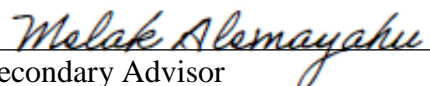
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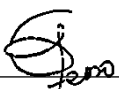


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This project is dedicated to my dear wife, Magdaline Lagat,
for her support and our daughter, Chloe Jepchumba

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Baptism is one of the doctrines that cuts across most Christian denominations, if not all. One reason it is administered as a sacrament is to signify church membership; whether young or old, this is the only way.¹ The remission of sins is another reason baptism is practiced in the Christian church. David Wright supports this view, asserting that even children are to be baptized,² though he does not state whether children have sinned or not, for it is believed that the parent is the one to believe on behalf of the infant.

Christian believers remain divided on the issue of baptizing an individual a second time, commonly referred to as rebaptism. On one hand, some advocate for the rebaptism of those who were baptized as infants, those who have backslidden, or those whose initial baptism did not invoke the Trinitarian formula. The rejection of infant baptism and the corresponding call for rebaptism emerged prominently in the 16th century AD, when a group of reformers embraced adult or believer's baptism, arguing that baptism should only follow a personal confession of faith in Christ. As a result, they insisted that all individuals who had received infant baptism be baptized

¹ T. H. Lyle, "Reflections on 'Second Baptism,'" *Indian Journal of Theology* 21, no. 3 (1972): 170-176.

² David F. Wright, "One Baptism or Two? Reflections on the History of Christian Baptism," *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988): 7-23.

again. This movement gained historical traction when Conrad Grebel performed the first known adult baptism on Georg Blaurock, an ex-priest, on 21 January 1525, in the home of Felix Manz in Zurich.³

It was here that re-baptism began during the protestant reformation. Ulrich Zwingli came up with the name Anabaptists, deriving it from the word meaning to re-baptize in Greek, and had a disdainful connotation then. Many others were re-baptized after accepting this new teaching, and others who made them to be seen as rebels, especially by other reformers opposed to rebaptism. They were persecuted, but they increased in number from one place to another in Switzerland.⁴ These Anabaptists knew well that subjecting one to a second baptism was punishable by death and hence denied that they were re-baptizers to avoid death. They believed that the public confession of sin and faith was to be sealed by baptism by immersion of adults and not infants. Children were not punishable for sin until the time they would be able to distinguish between good and evil, when they would exercise their free will, repent, and come to be baptized.⁵

Supporters of rebaptism for the forgiveness of sin base their argument on Acts 19:4-7, where Paul advised those who had received the baptism of John to be baptized again in the name of Jesus Christ. One of them is John Thomas, who claims that when one wants forgiveness, the only way to be forgiven is through rebaptism if he or she

³ Lewis Spitz, "Anabaptists," *Lexicon Universal Encyclopedia*, ed. Lexicon Publications (Beechwood, NJ: Lexicon, 1987), 387.

⁴ *The Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, s.v. "Anabaptists," accessed 1 July 2024, <https://sk.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/encyclopedia-of-religion-in-america/chpt/anabaptists>.

⁵ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "repentance," accessed 1 July 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/repentance-religion>.

had been baptized before, for no one can be forgiven sin unless they are baptized.⁶ The church of the Latter-day Saints believes that when one is baptized, all sin is purged, and one remains clean unless he or she goes back to sin.⁷ Infant baptism is not regarded as enough, for they do not believe in baptizing infants, and therefore, there is a need to re-baptize those who receive infant baptism. Seventh-day Adventists also believe that those who go back to sin will only be admitted back into church membership through rebaptism.⁸

Rebaptism is also required for those who were not baptized using the three divine names. Theodore calls them heretics because they did not practice baptism using the names that were given to them.⁹

On the other hand, some oppose rebaptism for any reason, arguing that one can be baptized only once. Augustine makes it clear to the leaders of the church concerning backsliders or heretics, “For as those who return to the Church, if they had been baptized before their secession, are not re-baptized, so those who return, having been ordained before their secession, are certainly not ordained again.”¹⁰

Porter expresses the relationship between baptism and circumcision. He says that admission to Judaism was sealed by circumcision and acceptance of the law, the

⁶ Alexander Campbell, “Richmond Letter,” *The Millennial Harbinger*, accessed 11 May 2023, https://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/mh1835/RLCEV.HTM.

⁷ D. Michael Quinn, “The Practice of Rebaptism at Nauvoo,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 18, no. 2 (1978): 226-232.

⁸ Herbert Kiesler, “The Ordinances: Baptism, Foot Washing, and Lord’s Supper,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2000), 582.

⁹ J. Erickson, “George D. Metallinos, I Confess One Baptism Interpretation and Application of Canon VII of the Second Ecumenical Council by the Kollyvades and Constantine Oikonomos,” *Saint Vladimirs Theological Quarterly* 41 (1970): 77-80.

¹⁰ J. R. King, “On Baptism, Against the Donatists,” in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: A New Translation*, ed. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1970), 3:228.

same way admission to the Church is sealed by baptism.¹¹ Basing their argument on Ephesians 4:4-6, they claim that Paul just explains baptism and not rebaptism. The reason why there is no mention of rebaptism by Paul is enough not to accept it in the church.¹² Campbell on this was against Thomas for even re-baptizing the deacons for the remission of sin.¹³ For the Catholic-Orthodox, there is no need for the rebaptism of those who already went through it, either when they were infants or adults. They state, “It is our common teaching that baptism in water in the name of the Holy Trinity, as the Christian’s new birth, is given once and once only.”¹⁴ This made them not accept rebaptism, believing that such had received baptism biblically.

Martin Luther did not accept the rebaptism of either the one who was baptized when an infant or the one who had gone back to sin, that is, apostasy. He was talking of those who received baptism and went back to sin, that if they came back, they would only appeal to the covenant of baptism and remind God of it, and they would still be forgiven even without being re-baptized.¹⁵ He believed that baptism is a sacrament that cannot be wronged, just as ordination cannot be sinned against. It remains in the life of a person who has been baptized, even if he or she goes back to

¹¹ Anthony R. Cross, “Spirit and Water Baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13,” in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 132-148.

¹² Anthony R. Cross, “One Baptism, (Ephesians 4:5): A Challenge to the Church,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of REO White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 184-185.

¹³ Alexander Campbell, “Introductory Lecture,” presented at the Bethany College Addresses, Bethany, West Virginia, November 1841.

¹⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Baptism and ‘Sacramental Economy’: An Agreed Statement*, PDF file, June 3, 1999, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/baptism-and-sacramental-economy.pdf>.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, trans. Martin H. Bertram (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 43.

sin, for any sin after baptism will not be counted but will be blotted out.¹⁶ When such a person decides to come back to the church, there is no need to re-baptize, for it is like taking Christ to the cross for the second time.

On infant baptism, Luther accepted that even when they are adults, that same baptism will still be valid, for there is only one baptism as recorded in Ephesians 4:5. Luther explains that infant baptism is enough, and one just needs to believe that he was baptized and should continue living a Christian life.¹⁷ Baptism is one, and there is no repeating it, as one is circumcised only once without repeating it.

Luther's position concerning those who were baptized while infants was that rejection of infant baptism and being baptized the second time is moving from righteousness of faith to righteousness of works.¹⁸ Concerning those who became apostates, human error and wickedness after baptism will not make it improper as long as it had been administered correctly by the baptizer following the biblical order of baptizing using the Divine triune names. When they come back to faith, in case of those in apostasy, it makes that previous baptism complete.¹⁹

Statement of the Problem

Martin Luther did not accept the rebaptism of either the one who was baptized when an infant, or a believer, or the one who had gone back to sin, that is apostatized. According to Luther, baptism is a one-time sacrament, it is not repeatable. Basing on

¹⁶ Haugh T. Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1943), 166.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament II*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 341-374.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Silcock and Stephen Pietsch, *Luther@500 and Beyond: Martin Luther's Theology Past, Present, and Future* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 1-100.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, *Church and Ministry II*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff, trans. J. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1958), 247.

Ephesians 4:5 (“one Lord, one faith, one baptism”), Luther emphasized that rebaptism undermines the efficacy of God’s covenantal promise, hence rejected rebaptism, arguing that one baptism is sufficient in a person’s life, even in circumstances of apostasy and a desire to return to faith, because he believed that baptism is God’s unchanging act of grace and not a human choice.²⁰ Luther rejected the Anabaptists’ idea that baptism requires an adult confession of faith to be valid, firmly believing that baptism is a divine act of God and does not require repetition because faith is not required even at the moment of baptism.²¹ According to Luther, if a person renounces their faith after being baptized, their baptism is still valid; therefore, even if they decide to repent and return to a good, regular standing in faith, they only need God’s grace and do not need to be re-baptized.²² Is Luther’s view on rebaptism, as mentioned above, Biblically and theologically valid?

Purpose of the Study

This study critiques Martin Luther’s view on rebaptism from biblical and theological perspectives. It examines whether Luther’s rejection of rebaptism aligns with biblical teachings, particularly in passages like Acts 19:1-7. This text introduces Paul, who rebaptizes those who have gained a fresh understanding of the truth. Another purpose of this study is to assess the implications of Luther’s stance on rebaptism for contemporary Christian communities regarding church membership,

²⁰ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 231.

²¹ Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, trans. Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 27.

²² Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 859.

repentance, discipline, and doctrinal integrity. This study also illuminates the role of baptism in the lives of believers and the church.

Significance of the Study

This study answers the question of whether rebaptism should be practiced by the Christian church or not. Secondly, it shows what necessitates rebaptism and how one goes about it. It contributes to the doctrinal understanding of re-baptism from a biblical-theological perspective. Finally, it contributes to the work of shepherding, which includes bringing back the lost in a biblically acceptable manner.

Delimitations of the Study

While some scholars have addressed the topic of re-baptism, infant baptism, and the form of baptism, this research specifically focuses on critiquing Martin Luther's perspective on re-baptism from a biblical-theological standpoint. This study does not address the correct form of baptism or age for baptism because the issue for Luther was not the mode or age of baptism, but its significance.

Operational Definition of Terms

Here is the definition of terms as used in this paper:

Baptism: It is the term used broadly to encompass various practices that are accepted as baptism by various denominations, though immersion is viewed as a theologically and biblically correct one.

Rebaptism: This term is used to denote a repeat of baptism in any form that is accepted by those who practice it. It can be from the accepted form of sprinkling to immersion. Both are accepted to be baptisms; hence, there is a repetition of it if one who had received sprinkling for baptism receives immersion for baptism.

Methodology and Study Procedures

The study is a critical evaluation of Luther's understanding regarding what the Bible says about the issue of rebaptism. Luther's view is contrasted with the biblical view to highlight their similarities and differences. Analyses and synthesis of the two views are done to come up with a conclusion on whether Luther's view on rebaptism is biblically and theologically valid or not. This is possible through the use of published materials like books, encyclopedias, journals, periodicals, bulletins, articles, and dissertations. Unpublished works from the internet, theses, and others are also used.

The study uses the following procedure: Chapter one deals with the preliminary matters of the study, that is, the background, the problem, the purpose, the significance, the delimitation, and the methodology of the study. Chapter Two reviews related literature and studies on rebaptism under the categories of supporting, opposing, and moderate views. Chapter three analyzes Martin Luther's view on rebaptism, including his theological background and method. Chapter four critiques Luther's view on rebaptism from the perspective of the Bible, and thereafter, chapter five gives a summary, conclusion, recommendations, and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this second chapter, we explore the contentious topic of rebaptism and the various issues surrounding it. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different perspectives that exist on this topic. We start by examining the origins of rebaptism and comparing the views of those who advocate for it with those who oppose it. Furthermore, we explore the differing opinions of the Anabaptists and the Reformation Church on this matter. We also consider the views of individuals who fall somewhere in between, neither fully supporting nor completely rejecting rebaptism.

Anabaptists

In the 16th century, a group of reformers rejected the practice of infant baptism and instead adopted rebaptism for individuals who had reached an age of making informed decisions, including the profession of faith. This group became known as the Anabaptists. Like the Protestant churches, the Anabaptists believed in the importance of visible and disciplined church members. However, they insisted that baptism should only be administered to those who could make a conscious profession of faith and genuinely believed in becoming members of the visible church.¹

According to Donald Smeeton, the term “Anabaptist” is a loosely fitting garment that

¹ Brian C. Brewer, “Anabaptism,” *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation (EMLR)*, ed. Mark A. Lamport (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 1:15.

encompasses a multitude of movements. These movements were not direct descendants of Calvin or Luther, making the term all the more challenging to define accurately.²

The Anabaptists refused to accept that they were merely repeating baptism. Instead, they claimed that they were performing the first and true baptism based on the faith of the individual being baptized. Unlike the infant baptism practice that relied on the faith of someone else, they believed that genuine faith was required for baptism. The Anabaptists saw themselves as genuinely restoring the New Testament Church, rather than reforming it, as they believed that the Church had strayed from its original teachings.³

It is believed that this group started from the city of Zurich in Switzerland, then spread to other parts of Germany and many parts of Europe.⁴ The first Swiss Anabaptist assembly came about due to a disagreement between Ulrich Zwingli's students and him concerning the pace of reforms in Zurich. Zwingli's students felt that the reforms were moving too slowly, and he needed to accelerate the process. Conrad Grebel led the group that separated from other reformers by re-baptizing each other. Two brethren in the group contended that baptism should be based on a profession of faith by an individual of age and not on infants. This demarcated the group from other reformers and marked the beginning of the Swiss Anabaptist movement.⁵

² Donald D. Smeeton, "Calvin's Conflict with the Anabaptists," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 46, accessed 3 April 2025, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1982-1_046.pdf.

³ Brewer, "Anabaptism," *EMLR*, 1:15.

⁴ J. Horsch, "The Origin and Principles of the Anabaptists," *Review & Expositor* 8, no. 3 (1911): 406-419.

⁵ Brewer, "Anabaptism," *EMLR*, 1:16.

This event is considered to be the first instance of rebaptism during the Reformation era. It marked the beginning of the Anabaptist Church, which accepted and practiced rebaptism. Despite facing persecution and exile, many members of the Anabaptist Church refused to recant their teachings and beliefs even when confronted by Lutheran leaders. They were willing to die rather than renounce their faith.⁶

Anabaptists' Brief History during the Reformation

Anabaptists seem to reject tradition and prioritize only the scripture, using patristic literature and the arguments and counterarguments surrounding baptismal history, but recent scholarship challenges this view. Scholars like Klager and Lučić Gonzalez suggest a close relationship between Anabaptism and tradition.⁷

Early Anabaptists, while committed to sola scriptura, recognized the continuity of the Holy Spirit and situated themselves within a broader tradition of faithful Christian witness. They utilized patristic literature to demonstrate the historical legitimacy of their beliefs and practices, presenting detailed historical narratives to refute accusations of innovation.⁸

⁶ Brewer, "Anabaptism," *EMLR*, 1:16.

⁷ Andrew P. Klager, "'Truth Is Immortal': Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480-1528) and the Church Fathers" (PhD Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2011), 23, accessed 10 March 2024. <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/2485/1/2011klagerphd.pdf>.

⁸ Andy Alexis-Baker, "'Lest I Make You a Tertullian': Early Anabaptist Baptismal Narratives and Patristics," *Perichoresis* 17, no. 4 (2019): 99-102.

Theologian scholars like Zwingli⁹ and Oecolampadius,¹⁰ influenced by humanist principles, saw the Anabaptist narrative on baptismal history as a threat and sought to counteract it by appealing to early church fathers like Augustine.¹¹ However, Anabaptist leaders like Hubmaier engaged deeply with patristic theologians to defend their beliefs, emphasizing the alignment of Anabaptist tradition with Scripture and the universal church throughout history.¹²

The debate also involved prominent figures like Luther, who initially dismissed Anabaptist arguments but later acknowledged that early fathers practiced rebaptism, especially of the heretics, and that infant baptism is unbiblical, though he never rejected it. However, Luther maintained his practice based on tradition, highlighting the divergent views within the Reformation movement regarding the interpretation of historical texts and the authority of tradition in matters of faith.¹³

While there are several groups of Anabaptists, the one that is best known for rebaptism is the Munster revolutionaries. Thomas Munster led this group in taking over the city, believing that they were establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Many individuals were baptized and re-baptized in anticipation of the new kingdom.

⁹ Huldreich Zwingli, "Huldreich Zwingli's Refutation against the Tricks of the Catabaptists," in *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1901), 108-111, accessed 3 April 2025, https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/1682/Zwingli_0763_EBk_v6.0.pdf.

¹⁰ Johannes Oecolampadius, "A Confession of Basel," accessed 21 April 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Confession-of-Basel>.

¹¹ Andy Alexis-Baker, "'Lest I Make You a Tertullian': Early Anabaptist Baptismal Narratives and Patristics," *Perichoresis* 17, no. 4 (2019): 93-110.

¹² Balthasar Hubmaier, "On Infant Baptism against Oecolampad," in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 81-83.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. William R. Russell (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 239-258.

The Munster revolutionaries' actions were controversial and drew criticism from other Anabaptist groups, ultimately leading to their downfall.¹⁴

Views in Support of Rebaptism

Believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Believing in Jesus as Messiah and the son of God was one of the views that made rebaptism acceptable, as Campbell supported that anyone who had been baptized without accepting this was to receive baptism again or be re-baptized.

In June of 1812, Campbell and four other members, including his father and wife, received rebaptism by immersion, following the scriptural commandment and belief of the Messiah to be the son of God. His influence also played a significant role in convincing others to believe in the practice.¹⁵ In support of this, David Lipscomb, initially a believer of infant baptism, later became a proponent of re-baptism. However, his views on the matter were not much on the remission of sin as others propagated; he believed that baptism was an act of obedience and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord, and remission of sins was a reward that came after fulfilling the command of being baptized. He argued that if someone had been baptized because they had accepted Jesus as Lord and were willing to follow Him and His will, but did not know about the forgiveness of sins, then they should not be re-immersed when they come to such knowledge. Re-baptism should only be necessary if someone has not accepted Christ as their savior.

¹⁴ Robert Rodgers, "An Introduction to the Anabaptists," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 36-45, accessed 3 April 2025, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1982-1_036.pdf.

¹⁵ Douglas A. Foster, "Churches of Christ and Baptism: An Historical and Theological Overview," *Restoration Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2001): 80, accessed 3 April 2025, <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/restorationquarterly/vol43/iss2/2/>.

The emphasis on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was the main reason one should receive rebaptism, as he wrote, “Be baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This is frequently expressed by “in” or “into” the name of the Lord Jesus.” To be in one of these names or persons is to be in all. In Christ are many blessings; no human being can know all. God has revealed a few that appeal to our conditions of the persons.”¹⁶ It was on this reason or view that Barton wrote of Warren, who taught and re-baptized many, including ministers who had not received baptism on this name. This understanding of baptism was a significant departure from traditional Christian teachings, and it caused considerable controversy and debate among believers. Nonetheless, Warren’s discovery and the subsequent rebaptisms of ministers and crowds marked a significant shift in the way baptism was understood and practiced in their community.¹⁷

Church membership. Church membership is one of the reasons one was baptized, as in the book of Acts, where 3,000 were baptized and welcomed to be members of the church of Christ. It also applies as one of the views that support rebaptism, that if one would like to change from one church to another, as Foster wrote of Campbell that members were not accepted who were not immersed in the fellowship of the visible church, as he preached and upheld this belief throughout his life.¹⁸

Other churches that discipline their erring members would require one to regain his or her membership through rebaptism. The Church of the Latter-day Saints

¹⁶ Jimmy Raymond Allen, *Rebaptism* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Books, 1991), 212-214.

¹⁷ Barton Warren Stone, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone* (Nashville, TN: Cane Ridge, 1847), 144.

¹⁸ Foster, “Churches of Christ and Baptism,” 85.

believes that it is necessary when one to join this church from another church. Some members of the church who were in transgression can be re-baptized before joining the church after first having lost their membership by excommunication. After rejecting the teaching of the church and its doctrines, and following the opposite, such calls for removing membership in some churches, like the Latter-day Saints church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, can be reinstated through rebaptism.¹⁹ When such has repented and would like to renew their belief in the doctrine of the church and their trust in God would need to be re-baptized to be accepted as a church member. It is therefore important to take one through rebaptism if either coming from another denomination and has received baptism or has lost his or her membership because of heresy and would like to come back to believing the church doctrine.

Remission of sin. Another view that supports rebaptism is the one on remission of sin. It is believed that if one had received baptism either as a rite of passage or for church membership and not for remission of sin and forgiveness of the same, then they needed to receive a baptism again. Scott was one of the scholars who preached and asked many to be baptized and re-baptized for the forgiveness of sins. He continued to teach and baptize others on the same premise of remission of sin, becoming a significant influencer during his time on the concept of rebaptism.²⁰

John Thomas believed strongly in rebaptism, as he considered it to be the remission of any sin. He preached about this topic passionately, as he had received rebaptism himself. As he continued to preach, some deacons accepted his message

¹⁹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 62-63.

²⁰ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell: Embracing a View of the Origin, Progress and Principles of the Religious Reformation Which He Advocated* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 1870), 2:212-21.

and resigned from their positions to receive re-baptism. They claimed that they were still babies in the work and the word of Christ.²¹

The teaching of Scripture. Any baptism that did not align with the teaching of the Bible doctrine was not accepted as baptism and therefore became another supporting view for rebaptism. Such baptism was first questioned if biblical, and if not, then one had to be repeated. Fenison wrote about the Landmark Baptists and Anabaptists on the issue that they do not accept previous baptisms administered by other denominations or other Baptist denominations. The Landmark Baptist Church, however, asserts that scriptural baptism meets the requirements of the scriptures. If the baptism fails to meet these requirements, then it is not considered baptism at all, but just another form of getting wet. Fenison suggests that the Landmark Baptist Church's belief in valid baptism aligns with the Anabaptists' views. Both advocate for baptism that follows biblical doctrines and requirements, and they do not recognize any other form of baptism. The Landmark Baptist Church's belief in the validity of scriptural baptism is the basis for its rejection of other forms of baptism.²²

Believing on behalf of the candidate. Focusing on the relationship between faith and baptism, those who advocated for infant baptism believed that children could be believed for by the believing parents or guardians, which was termed to be unbiblical and does not follow scriptures, hence fails in sola scriptura. The Anabaptists used this as a view to support rebaptism. They believed that only those who confess should participate in the sacrament. As a result, infant baptism was

²¹ John Thomas, "Anabaptism." *The Apostolic Advocate* 1, no. 6 (October 1834): 121-129.

²² Mark W. Fenison, *Why Be Re-baptized*, PDF file, n.d., https://static.secure.website/wscfus/3107401/uploads/Why_be_Rebaptized.pdf.

considered inappropriate and should not be practiced if it is to follow the sola fide principle.

The Anabaptists stopped practicing infant baptism and started teaching rebaptism to those who had received infant baptism, which they did not believe to be baptism at all. The Anabaptists believed that individuals must have a personal confession of faith and follow the teachings of Christ to be baptized validly. This belief was a significant departure from traditional Christian teachings, and it caused significant controversy. The Anabaptists based their teaching on faith and baptism on Martin Luther's teachings, questioning whether faith was a requirement for the sacrament to be effective. They believed that only those who confess should participate in the sacrament and that infant baptism was inappropriate. Therefore, they stopped practicing infant baptism and started teaching rebaptism to those who had received infant baptism. The Anabaptists' teaching on baptism was a significant departure from traditional Christian teachings and caused significant controversy.²³

Views against Rebaptism

Baptism is the grace of God. Those who don't accept or believe in rebaptism have some views with them. One, they believe that baptism is the grace of God that is conferred once and for all. If an individual has been baptized and later falls into public sin, they are not re-baptized to remove their sin. Instead, they must confess their sins, repent, and then be anointed with sacred Chrism to reconcile with the Church. For those who would like to join the church from other denominations, this group believes that those who have undergone baptism using the Trinity are welcomed into the Church officially without being baptized again.

²³ Brewer, "Anabaptism," *EMLR*, 1:16.

According to the agreed statements, “baptism in water in the name of the Holy Trinity, as the Christian’s new birth, is given once and once only.” They believe that it confers the indelible seal of the King and is the definitive entry of an individual believer into the Church, which cannot be repeated. While the grace of baptism may be compromised by serious sin, the modes prescribed for recovering grace are repentance, confession, and anointing with the sacred chrism. The Orthodox Church specifically has always recognized the repetition of baptism as a sacrilege.²⁴

Faith supersedes age and form. Infant baptism is viewed as baptism that cannot be repeated for this group because, to them, faith is more important than the form or age of the one to be baptized. Infants have faith that makes baptism effective as they grow up in life.²⁵ The belief that only adults or those who are present can truly believe and be baptized is flawed. Those supporting this view assert that even children have faith and can believe, and therefore, their baptism should not be questioned or doubted.²⁶ They argue that as long as there is testimony that an individual has been baptized, there is no need for rebaptism. Baptism is therefore considered a one-time sacrament, and there is no acceptance of rebaptism at any point, regardless of any spiritual fluctuations.²⁷

Not biblical. Those who reject rebaptism view it as unbiblical by quoting Ephesians 4:5, which talks of one baptism. To them, it is not possible to repeat it, for by doing so, it is going against the scripture and is heretical.²⁸

²⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Baptism and ‘Sacramental Economy,’* PDF file.

²⁵ Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 239-250.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 250-258.

²⁷ Lyle, “Reflections on ‘Second Baptism,’” 170-176.

²⁸ Wright, “One Baptism or Two?” 11-13.

Using Mark 16:16, they claim that no person can genuinely discern the authenticity of another person's faith, not even the priest who does baptism. These, therefore, should be left to God and the individual alone who may not be even sure of whether he or she has that faith or not at the time of baptism, claiming that, "even if you baptized a person a hundred times a day, you would not at all know if he believes."²⁹ They therefore held that, once a person is baptized, faith will come and finish that sacrament if one thinks that it was not present, but will not need another baptism as long as it was done correctly.³⁰ This view holds that repetition of baptism is not biblical, especially to those who supported it with the notion that infants had no faith during their first baptism and should now believe to receive it correctly.

Re-baptizing one for the forgiveness of sins, especially the apostate, was not welcomed by this group, saying that when one receives baptism either as an infant or a believer, no sin can make it invalid. Led by Luther, they emphasized that the first baptism should be accepted as valid and should not be revoked or repeated. Regarding apostasy, they believed that if an individual has sinned, they should repent and return to the Church, but not be re-baptized. They argued that the first baptism remains valid, and there is no need to repeat it. To him, rebaptism is like playing with the sacrament of baptism and failing to acknowledge the validity of the first baptism.

But verily baptism can be correct and sufficient even if the Christian falls from faith or sins a thousand times a year. It is enough that he rights himself and becomes faithful, without having to be re-baptized each time, then why should not the first baptism be sufficient and proper if a person truly becomes a believing Christian?³¹

²⁹ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 247.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

³¹ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 248.

For those who have deviated from the Orthodox faith but seek to return to it, they are accepted by submitting to a process of confession and renunciation of all other heresies that do not align with the true teachings of the Apostolic Church. They are then anointed with holy chrism on specific parts of their body, which is declared as a seal of a gift of the Holy Spirit.³²

Salvation is by grace and not works. The Laestadians were a group that shared many similarities with the Lutherans, but they differed in their views on rebaptism. They believed that only God could awaken the need for salvation in one's heart through His grace, and not the working of men. According to their belief, when an individual realizes that they are in a state of sinfulness and that there is nothing they can do to save themselves, their remorseful heart is sufficient to believe that their sins are forgiven through the death and resurrection of Christ. They are saved by faith through God's grace, and at this point, the Holy Spirit leads them to forsake their sinful behavior. Despite practicing infant baptism, the Laestadians believe that faith is received during baptism and that it is valid. Therefore, there is no need for rebaptism, even if an individual leaves the church for some time or apostatizes. The group's belief in the sufficiency of God's grace and the Holy Spirit's role in leading individuals to a life free from sin remains a significant aspect of their theology.³³

Church canons. The rule of the church and its leadership can be violated if a priest practices rebaptism, especially in the Roman Catholic Church. This, therefore, is one of the views that makes rebaptism not practiced as recorded in their canons,

³² Johanna Manley, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox: Daily Scripture Readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 1126-1130.

³³ Everett Ferguson, "Rebaptism," *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation*, ed. Mark A. Lamport (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 1:406.

recorded by St. Clement, which address issues surrounding baptism, ordination, and rebaptism. Canon 47, in a similar manner, prohibits bishops from re-baptizing anyone who has already received baptism, even if they received it at a young age and desire rebaptism. Furthermore, the impious are not to be baptized. Canon 57 decrees that there is to be no re-baptism, re-ordination, or transfer of service for bishops. It is therefore made clear that any bishop or presbyter who re-baptizes an individual who has already received baptism, or who fails to baptize someone who has not yet received baptism, will be deposed for disregarding the significance of the cross and death of the Lord. The Church's position on re-baptism is thus firmly established and supported by canonical law and religious doctrine.³⁴

Baptism equals circumcision. Another view was equating baptism with circumcision so that when one had been circumcised, there would not be a repetition of it, no matter how far one could become an apostate. Supporting Johnson, who rejected this view, Scott said, the baptism received by the apostolic churches of Christians, such as Rome, should not be renounced, and a new baptism should not be repeated. This is because there is only one Baptism, similar to how there was only one circumcision. Scott argues that circumcision was not repeated when Israel became apostate, but those who were circumcised were still accepted at Jerusalem and admitted to the Passover. This demonstrates that there was no need for a new circumcision of the flesh.³⁵

³⁴ George D. Metallinos, *I Confess One Baptism...: Interpretation and Application of Canon VII of the Second Ecumenical Council by the Kollyvades and Constantine Oikonomos* (Daphne, Greece: St. Paul's Monastery, 1994), 117-131.

³⁵ Scott Culpepper, *Francis Johnson and the English Separatist Influence: The Bishop of Brownism's Life, Writings, and Controversies* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), 101-120.

On the same note, he seems to suggest that only teachings and admonitions will be enough, and one is admitted to partaking in the Passover bread and wine. “Baptism means beginning, and it cannot be done again. It is by definition impossible to have more than one rite of initiation. It is as foolish to petition for ... citizenship when you already are a citizen; and to seek adoption when you are already adopted. Baptism is ever to be remembered but not to be repeated.”³⁶ As circumcision cannot be repeated after one has been initiated into the Israel community, but be remembered that after one who was circumcised goes against the covenant, so is baptism for those who apostasize after receiving baptism.

Moderate Views on Rebaptism

Lack of satisfaction. One of the views in this group is the fact that one might not be satisfied with the first baptism and hence would want rebaptism. To them they allow one to be baptized for the second time upon request. The Free Methodist Church takes a balanced approach to the topic of rebaptism. They allow individuals to be re-baptized if they feel unsatisfied with their initial baptism. This practice is believed to clear the conscience of those who were baptized as infants and now feel that it was not done in a scriptural manner. They prioritize the believer’s conscience, meaning they may or may not choose to re-baptize based on the individual’s decision.³⁷

Biblical support. Another view is that rebaptism is biblical under some circumstances. After the rebaptism of 12 individuals in the book of Acts, it is

³⁶ Michael Green, *Baptism: Its Purpose, Practice and Power* (Arroyo Grande, CA: Monarch Books, 2018), 61.

³⁷ Real Gagne, *The Free Methodist Understanding of Baptism in the Light of John Wesley’s Teaching and the American Methodist Tradition* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1991), 12-14.

recommended that rebaptism should only be administered rarely and wisely, for there is no record of any other practice in the Scripture by Paul or any other Apostle. To them, cleansing comes from the grace of God through Christ in case of any other sin after baptism. This daily cleansing can be symbolized by foot-washing, which represents the washing away of sins. Any other baptism should only occur if there is definite apostasy or if one has not been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ through immersion. The emphasis is that “when one has been baptized into Christ, rebaptism is called for only if there has been a definite apostasy from the beliefs and standards that fellowship with Christ requires. Exceptions to this general rule would be cases like apostasy. Baptism into the name of Christ is the pledge of entrance into the covenant of salvation and is intended to be a permanent and abiding experience.”³⁸ It is therefore possible to receive second baptism when one becomes an apostate and would like to come back to the fellowship. It should be encouraged so to those who are apostates.

Scriptural new truth. The new truth from the scripture should be another reason for rebaptism, and it should be moderate, for one should confess, and request, and not be forced to. From the biblical perspective, the twelve Ephesians who received rebaptism got a new truth that warranted it. “Evidently, Paul held that rebaptism was in order because they had received vital new truths after their baptism. The reception of additional basic truths warrants rebaptism.”³⁹ One of the issues surrounding rebaptism is the lack of clear examples from the scripture. For instance, the Bible does not record instances where Paul re-baptized others after teaching them

³⁸ “Unto What?” [Acts 19:3], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 6:372.

³⁹ Kiesler, “The Ordinances,” 12:587-611.

new truths, such as the state of the dead and resurrection, as was the case with the Corinthian church. The Corinthian believers previously held the belief that when one dies, one continues living in heaven. However, after Paul taught them the new truth, many believed in waiting for Christ to resurrect those who died believing in Him. Thus, the lack of specific examples in the Bible makes it difficult to pinpoint clear instances of rebaptism.

Summary

In summary, this topic of rebaptism remains a controversial issue among scholars and theologians. Both sides of the debate carry arguments that warrant a thorough examination before making any decision. It was the Anabaptists, a group that rejected infant baptism, that first raised questions about the biblical validity of the practice, which sparked the interest of other reformers. Baptism for the remission of sins became a significant topic of discussion among scholars, with each adding their thoughts and perspectives. Rebaptism has been a significant topic of discussion, especially regarding those who received infant baptism, those who did not receive Trinitarian baptism, those who were sprinkled or underwent other forms of baptism, and those who have apostatized. Notably, scholars and theologians who advocate for rebaptism did so after studying the scriptures before preaching and teaching others. While some view faith in Jesus as the prerequisite for baptism, others consider salvation as it needs no human effort, including baptism, but comes freely from God.

Infant baptism, which is the preference of parents, is viewed differently by those who advocate for rebaptism. They argue that baptism should be a conscious decision to follow the will of God and become a member of Christ's church. They contend that biblical doctrines should be followed rather than the doctrines of men, which was the case with infant baptism. Those who oppose rebaptism argue that

baptism is a grace from God and that when one betrays it, they should confess, repent, and receive anointing instead of rebaptism. They also argue that claiming that infant baptism is not valid is not true, as believing is through faith and not a visible action. They claim that since there is no biblical scripture that forbids the baptism of children and vice versa, infant baptism should not be stopped.

According to them, the sacrament of baptism is taken lightly and misused, unlike other sacraments. Those who are neither for nor against rebaptism interpret scripture not because of the word “rebaptism” but rather through a general understanding of the Bible. They do not force people to be rebaptized, nor do they accept those who did not receive biblical baptism. Rebaptism is only called for when one becomes an apostate, recants biblical doctrines, and opposes the church order and beliefs. When such a person comes back to the church and wants to be part of the fellowship, they are advised to receive baptism again.

CHAPTER 3

MARTIN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF RE-BAPTISM

Background of Martin Luther's Theology of Rebaptism from 1st to 4th Century

It is evident that during the first century, there was the practice of immersion of adults using natural water bodies till the early second century when a document from the church allowed the pouring of water three times on the head if there was the absence of water or a person being baptized was not able to be immersed and there was no warm water.¹ This practice of immersion of adults continued into the 4th century when it started to change step by step.²

One of the earliest theologians, Tertullian and Clement in the 3rd century, had a theology on baptism and paedobaptism that became common at the time of reformation. Tertullian said that when the name of God is invoked, His power through the Holy Spirit comes and sanctifies the water to be used for baptism there and then which brought close the thought of infant baptism.³ He did not question the believer's baptism nor the infant one but he promoted both as long as it was done correctly with

¹ Brian C. Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments: A Contemporary Protestant Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 164-165, accessed 8 April 2025, https://reader.1lib.sk/read/b2342653de02da4ce48ed58b84c9e5821b38e6a91d3f13fd0dfc2b2b62c70237/21621160/9ac116/martin-luther-and-the-seven-sacraments-a-contemporary-protestant-reappraisal.html?client_key=1fFLi67gBrNRP1jiPy1&extension=epub&signature=4c6da6733480253faba85cc11bce9a22108f03237f728e0319531e1e3f241bae&download_location=https%3A%2F%2F1lib.sk%2Fd1%2F21621160%2F890359.

² Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 365-367.

³ Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism: The Text Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (London, UK: Wipf and Stock, 1964), 29-33, accessed 3 May 2024, https://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_bapt/evans_bapt_intro.htm.

water and word. It was during this 3rd century that a document with apostolic tradition was adopted which supports infant baptism and gave liturgies for those of age that can confess and respond appropriately. He explains more on baptism that it washes away all the accumulated sins and it will avail anything to baptize an infant who has not committed any sin hence should wait until is of age when he can understand baptism. He therefore used this tactic of waiting for an infant to be of age and understanding as a strategy for managing sin.⁴

Cyprian who was the bishop of Cartage supported the baptism of believers through immersion⁵ as Origen argued that the Apostles did infant baptism hence both forms were practiced at the time.⁶ This can be confirmed for Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Nazianzus, Jerome among others were baptized in adolescence as a spiritual safeguard against infant mortality,⁷ baptism could be administered if threatened by danger according to Gregory of Nazianzus.⁸

Augustine of Hippo, a significant figure in early Christianity, profoundly influenced the theology of baptism, particularly in the Western Church. Augustine's work during the transition from the late Roman Empire to the early medieval period

⁴ Brian C Brewer, "'To Defer and Not to Hasten': The Anabaptist and Baptist Appropriations of Tertullian's Baptismal Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 106, no. 3 (2013): 287-308.

⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, "Epistle 58," ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, accessed 8 April 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050658.htm>.

⁶ Gerardo Oudri, "Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments: A Contemporary Protestant Reappraisal by Brian C. Brewer," *Lutheran Quarterly*, 2019, 337, accessed 8 April 2024, https://www.academia.edu/103336549/Martin_Luther_and_the_Seven_Sacraments_A_Contemporary_Protestant_Reappraisal_by_Brian_C_Brewer.

⁷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 379.

⁸ Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 337.

helped consolidate diverse baptismal theologies. It provided a theological rationale for practices such as infant baptism.⁹

He argued that all humans are born with a sinful nature inherited from Adam, necessitating baptism for the remission of sin.¹⁰ Augustine emphasized the efficacy of baptism as a sacrament conveying both visible and invisible grace, incorporating believers into the church and cleansing them of sin.¹¹

For Augustine, baptism consisted of two components: the physical sign (water) and the invisible reality (justification and incorporation into the church). He stressed the importance of faith and the Word in establishing baptism's effectiveness, while also acknowledging the significance of the sacrament itself.

Ultimately, Augustine viewed salvation as exclusively found within the church, through faith and love, mediated by the sacraments, particularly baptism. His teachings shaped the theology and practice of baptism in Christianity, especially in the West where Luther would be focusing and building his theology on baptism and rebaptism as an Augustinian monk.¹²

Medieval Period

The evolution of baptism moved from the early centuries to the medieval period, with important theological and ritual developments. Emperor Justinian in the sixth century made baptism mandatory for all citizens, with infant baptism becoming

⁹ Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 338.

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, "The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love," ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), chaps. 42-43, revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, accessed 13 April 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1302.htm>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 43.

¹² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 78-79.

normative and rebaptism of Donatists becoming a capital offence though lacking uniformity on this issue.¹³ During these Middle Ages, although there was no uniform Roman rite, baptismal practices generally involved prayers, blessings, renunciations, and use of holy water, culminating in the anointing of the baptized with chrism. The Scholastic theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries elaborated on the theological significance of baptism, emphasizing its role in cleansing sins and imprinting a sacramental character on the soul for they discussed the form and matter of baptism and concluded that they are dualistic.

To Aquinas, water was the matter, while form was the Trinitarian formula. It therefore brings understanding that Luther held that immersion is unimportant so long as it was done right by the water and the Trinitarian formula. Forgiveness from baptism would need the faith of the baptizant if they were an adult or of a parent for an infant, for both original and actual sins. Despite debates over the nature of baptism's grace, laypeople often viewed it superstitiously as having magical properties. By the late medieval period, the Council of Florence codified baptism's effects as the remission of sins and the gateway to spiritual life which was to be performed by an ordained priest using the Trinitarian formula¹⁴ for the forgiveness of all sins and guilt of the same.

Reformation Period

After the medieval period, came the reformation period where remission of sins inherited by the infants was to be done only by baptizing them. However, by the

¹³ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 78-79.

¹⁴ Liam Kelly, *Sacraments Revisited: What Do They Mean Today?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 10.

time of the Reformation, the rite had undergone significant changes and condensation, losing elements such as immersion and the connection to the paschal season. Despite its widespread practice, the original significance of baptism became obscured over time.¹⁵ It then started to shift from what it meant to what they wanted it to mean.

This is the world in which Luther was born, which moulded his understanding of baptism for both infants, which was accepted wholly by the church and believers, or adult baptism fading away. Through his reforming mind on sacraments, including baptism, they received a new teaching where grace became the centre of it all, so that baptism became an external sign showing a divine promise that can be effectively received through faith. His turning away from medieval theories of work for salvation or merit of the worker made him focus on faith as the most necessary for the effectiveness of baptism, and not only on consecrated water or sacerdotal power conveyed through the one officiating it.¹⁶

He supported it with Mark 16:16 that believing is having faith though this argument did not last for long since he later supported water with the word by the one doing baptism. To him, it was not so strict that an ordained minister should perform but under special arrangements and there is no ordained minister, a lay person can perform it.

It is evident therefore that from the first and second centuries, immersion was the accepted way of baptism. Still, as time went by, it changed to the time of the reformation of Luther where infant baptism was accepted fully as true baptism both for the remission of original sin and committed sin later on. Rebaptism was discouraged for it was like not accepting the former baptism as the one that can

¹⁵ Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 210.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

forgive and lead one to salvation. This background led Luther to believe fully in infant baptism and reject adults or believers to be baptized or to repeat baptism.

Controversial Period

The background of the issue of rebaptism where Luther bases his stand seems to have its roots in the controversy between Pope Stephen and St. Cyprian of Carthage. This historical controversy surrounding the validity of baptism conferred by heretics in the ancient Church had a great impact on Luther's understanding of baptism and rebaptism. The introduction of the practice of rebaptism in Africa and Asia Minor in the third century, with figures like Pope St. Stephen and St. Cyprian of Carthage playing significant roles in the debate, is historically stated. Pope St. Stephen opposed rebaptism, affirming the validity of baptism conferred by heretics, while St. Cyprian supported rebaptism.

The debate revolved around tradition, with Pope Stephen claiming to uphold the primitive custom, while St. Cyprian argued for a more enlightened approach, especially from the scriptures. Ultimately, Pope Stephen's stance prevailed, and it became the law of the Church not to re-baptize converts from heresy. The decision was considered to be by antiquity and Apostolic tradition, and it has remained the practice of the Church since then.¹⁷

Martin Luther's Theological Methods

Martin Luther approached the issue of rebaptism primarily through theological interpretation of scripture. He argued from the baptismal perspective to bring out the reason for not supporting it using some scriptures, sacramental theology in which

¹⁷ William H. W. Fanning, "Baptism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) 2: 264, 265.

baptism to him was an untouched sacrament, and church history and tradition. The traditions of the church considered rebaptism as what came later and was not there since the conception of the church hence not valid.

The Use of Scripture

Though there are no direct bible verses that directly oppose rebaptism, Luther relied on careful interpretation of some biblical passages, such as Mark 16:16, to derive his understanding of baptism and faith. He emphasized the importance of interpreting scripture in its historical and literary context to discern its true meaning. On infants who were baptized, he claims that they had faith and that should not be subjected to another baptism when they are of age. To Luther, believing and confessing are different things so when the bible talks of belief, it talks of faith.

Mark 16:16 talks about faith and he says that no person can genuinely discern the authenticity of another person's faith not even that priest who does baptism. These, therefore, should be left to God and the individual alone who may not be even sure of whether he or she has that faith or not at the time of baptism. He corrected Anabaptists that, "even if you baptized a person a hundred times a day, you would not at all know if he believes."¹⁸ It is therefore to them upon God alone to know whether there is faith or not. If there is no faith, then to them it will come sometimes later hence no need for rebaptism as its presence completes the former baptism.

So I contend that if they want to do justice to this passage, 'whoever believes' according to their understanding, they must condemn rebaptism much more earnestly than the first baptism. Neither the baptizer nor the baptized can maintain his position, for both are uncertain of their faith, or at least are in constant peril and anxiety. For it happens, indeed it is so in this matter of faith, that often he who claims to believe does not at all believe; and on the other hand, he who doesn't think he believes; but is in despair, has the greatest faith. So this verse, 'whosoever believes' does not compel us to determine who has faith or not. Rather, it makes it a matter of every man's conscience to realize

¹⁸ Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 35: 240.

that if he is not saved he must believe and not pretend that it is sufficient for a Christian it be baptized. For the verse does not say, ‘whoever knows that he believes or, if you know that anyone believes,’ but it says, ‘whosoever believes.’ Who has it, has it. One must believe, but we neither should nor can know it for certain.¹⁹

He therefore held that once a person is baptized, faith will come and finish that sacrament if one thinks that it was not present but will not need another baptism as long as it was done correctly.²⁰ Using Mark 16:16, he stated that believing in the word of Christ in addition to water is a sacrament that no sin can put away and removes the guilt, hence becoming a source of strength in one’s daily life.²¹

Using 2 Timothy 2:13, Luther discussed that a penitent would benefit if they prioritize the reconciliation of their baptism by recalling the promise of God which they had forsaken, and pleading it before their Lord. He said that this act of remembrance serves as a poignant reminder of their baptismal covenant and the assurance of salvation it entails, despite their lamentable departure from its faith and truth. It would not, therefore, need any rebaptism for the Lord would have forgiven through faith and the penitent would find solace in the unyielding faithfulness of God, who remains true to His promise even in the face of human frailty.²²

Basing his argument on Titus 3:5, talking on regeneration, Luther brought in the analogy of the children of Israel, where they turned to the experience of Exodus from Egypt in times of repentance after they sinned against God.²³ He argued that the significance of remembering God’s deliverance and returning to Him was enough

¹⁹ Luther, *Basic Theological Writings*, 353.

²⁰ Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 35: 210.

²¹ Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 263.

²² Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 35:158-160.

²³ *Ibid.*, 158.

than going back again to the whole process of the exodus. Just as the Israelites recalled their liberation from bondage, believers are urged by Luther to reflect on their spiritual exodus through the washing of regeneration and not to go back to baptism. Luther said that this remembrance is particularly poignant in the sacrament of communion, where the believer encounters the tangible symbols of Christ's sacrifice and the ongoing renewal of their baptismal covenant.

Luther seems to be teaching that a Christian who has received baptism finds assurance that salvation cannot be forfeited through sin unless one forsakes faith, whereas he also said that it can still come back after some time. To him, all sins, except that of unbelief,²⁴ are removed through faith in God's promise, reaffirming the immutable truth of God's grace and forgiveness.

Quoting 2 Peter 1:9, Luther rebukes those who seem not grateful for the first baptism that, no matter the amount of sin, baptism would never lose its efficacy but instead, its enduring power and the unwavering faithfulness of God's promise will ever remain. Those who drift to sin abandon faith in the promise but the ship for salvation remains steadfast, offering redemption to all who return to the firm foundation of God's truth through faith.²⁵ Those who have been categorized as with sin of unbelief, if they will repent and would want to come back to fellowship should be given a chance but though Luther didn't recognize or imagine that they can repent, this is where rebaptism publicly would work.

²⁴ Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 159.

²⁵ Ibid.

Sacramental Theology

Luther's understanding of baptism as a sacrament ordained by God influenced his views on rebaptism. He believed in the efficacy of baptism as a means of grace, cleansing individuals from sin and initiating them into the Christian community. It seems that Luther wrote intensely on baptism encountering the Anabaptists movement who were seen to be re-interpreting the catholic and traditional view of baptism. Luther at first was more concerned with the outer form than its inner significance which changed later trying to bring justification doctrine into it. He believed that baptism is the work of God and therefore cannot be repeated. He argued that it is founded in the word of God and not invented by men.²⁶ Though done by men, Luther said that they are just instruments but it is God Himself doing it for he invented it and ordered men to do whether the baptizer is righteously or not, as long as it is done in the trio name.

Luther is seemingly saying that human has no part in deciding who to baptize and how but following the word of God which in this case is the doctrine and the church dogma. Since he emphasized the baptism being of God, it is necessary to conclude that the church should still come with a teaching that accepts rebaptism which they have not. It is therefore not acceptable to practice it but just to baptize and leave one to continue with life without any care because humans are God's hands but the work is His.²⁷ As a sacrament, Luther talked of the presence of the trinity during baptism in the way he promoted the presence of the real body and blood of Christ

²⁶ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 75-86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

during the Lord's supper,²⁸ where God the Father sanctifies with His voice as Christ sanctifies with His body and Holy Spirit sanctifies baptism with His presence.²⁹

The combination of water and the word makes baptism a sacrament of one time without a need for repetition even if faith was absent at the time of baptism or the one performing lacks faith. This claim from Luther makes faith not important and contributes nothing to baptism but accepting what baptism is. Baptism therefore will remain valid even when one has lost faith in Christ for it is bound to the word of God and not in faith.³⁰

The word of God that makes baptism valid shows that it is not the work of man least be repeated with human reasons which he termed to be salvation by works and not by the grace through faith. Though the word and baptism are two separate concepts, they are firmly united hence becoming a sacrament that no sin would make it invalid at any point till resurrection that will be completed regeneration.

Luther seems to suggest that the word of God is the one cleansing one from sin and not the water of baptism so that the word binds the work of the Holy Spirit at Baptism which may not be biblically correct since the scripture talks of baptism as not the one that cleanses but the blood of Christ and baptism is just but a sign. The reformer said that when a sign which is baptism accompanied by the word of promise it becomes a sacrament so that this sign is chosen according to him by God to

²⁸ Miron Claudiu, "Luther's Understanding of Baptism," TheoLogikon, October 8, 2010, accessed 13 April 2025, <https://mironclaudiu.wordpress.com/2010/10/08/luthers-understanding-of-baptism/>.

²⁹ David Mathis, "'This Is My Beloved Son': A Father's Glimpse into the Heart of God," *Desiring God*, published February 5, 2021, accessed 21 April 2024, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/this-is-my-beloved-son>.

³⁰ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 52.

represent the physical act, which becomes a physical word and enables one to participate in the sacrament fully in his or her body.³¹

Luther's emphasis here is that one has to fix ears and eyes on this physical word to avoid going from one place to another, doubting the power of baptism, hence requesting another one because we are not fully convinced in our thoughts.³² It is the Holy Spirit of God that comes in to give more power when the word during baptism is cherished and given its place without any doubt, for this baptism by word and water tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all how the spirit might come to you.³³

Martin Luther, by placing greater emphasis on the sacramental aspect of baptism rather than its spiritual significance, appears to miss the mark. In Christian life, the spiritual dimension is what truly matters, as it signifies the relationship between the baptized individual and God. Sacraments are meant to point one to Christ, who cleanses all sin, not merely to the elements of water and the spoken word.

It is also important to understand that Luther's theology of justification by faith played a central role in shaping his views on baptism. He emphasized that faith, whether present at the time of baptism or arising afterward, greatly contributes to salvation. However, he did not explicitly address the fate of those who were baptized but never came to faith before their death. He briefly concluded that such individuals would be lost. Therefore, Luther viewed rebaptism as unnecessary for those who

³¹ Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975), vol. 3, chap 6, accessed 13 April 2025, <https://ilib.sk/book/18155349/16c0ee/a-history-of-christian-thought-volume-3-from-the-protestant-reformation-to-the-20th-century-003.html>.

³² Martin Luther, "Sermon at the Baptism of Bernhard von Anhalt," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1959), 327.

³³ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 147.

possessed genuine faith. For those without it, he believed they would have to wait for faith to come, though he acknowledged this was uncertain.

Church History and Tradition

Luther also considered the historical practices and traditions of the church in his arguments against rebaptism. He examined the teachings of early Christian theologians and the practices of the early church to support his position. His writing against rebaptism was to give his historical and traditional evidence against it, basing his arguments on the teachings and practices of Anabaptists, whom he said had dragged his name in their beliefs and practices.³⁴ He gave his stand that, though there was the practice of rebaptism in the history of the church, he still could not advocate for it.³⁵ Hubmaier was one of the leaders in the group of re-baptizers, where to him, it seems that Luther was supporting believers' baptism, especially when he was talking about immersion as the biblical mode of baptism and that faith matters more than water, contrary to infant baptism, which was sprinkling and seemingly without faith.³⁶

Luther did not answer him but saw that argument as ridiculous and did not need to be answered.³⁷ In his publication of 1539, on the church council, Luther historically allowed Anabaptists to quote church fathers like Cyprian and the councils like that of Nicaea, who taught rebaptism. He supported the fact that those who were baptized by heretics, though with the correct order, were required to receive

³⁴ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 239-258.

³⁵ Alexis-Baker, "Lest I Make You a Tertullian," 12.

³⁶ Klager, "'Truth Is Immortal'," 201-202.

³⁷ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, The Reformation*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, trans. Henry Wace (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 7:455-456, accessed 13 April 2025, https://www.bible.ca/history/philip-schaff/7_ch07.htm.

rebaptism, though there were bishops of that time who could not agree with Cyprian.³⁸

Luther contends that although some bishops did not support Cyprian, he would be forgiven because he died as a martyr. This shows that Luther knew about rebaptism and its existence in the history of the church fathers. His statements of accepting immersion,³⁹ which could only be possible for believers or adults, to rebaptism, which happens only to the heretics and those who did not follow the correct guidelines as far as baptism is concerned, and should be adults. Luther gives a picture that he clearly understood. He decided to run away from following the well-stipulated history and start his teachings. This is clear, for he knew that the church councils of Nicaea and Iconium taught rebaptism of those who became heretics and had offered sacrifices to idols, leaving the one true God.

Apart from the church fathers and church councils, he talked negatively of the Apostles who are read in the Apostolic Canons, including ancient circulated church manuals that allowed rebaptism.⁴⁰ It should be from this background that the reformer should have built his teaching on rebaptism of heretics, especially those whose baptism was of an un-biblical mode, that is, sprinkling and pouring, maintaining immersion as the only form.

Concerning the church councils, especially that of Nicene, Luther said that their work was to clarify Christ's divinity and not to discuss issues related to do with

³⁸ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 100.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther (1517-1520)*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1967), 1:420.

⁴⁰ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 45.

rebaptism, which he said was unrelated to faith.⁴¹ He therefore refutes their statement on rebaptism, arguing that they should not have spoken on the matter but rather focused on their proper role in the field of divinity. However, this is not a valid reason to reject the idea of rebaptism or decisions made by church leadership, as the leadership has the liberty to discuss what is beneficial for the growth of the church. It is impossible to have a meaningful discussion without addressing the issues affecting the church. Thus, this argument is not a sufficient reason to reject the council's decisions.

On the canons, Luther dropped his teaching on rebaptism, arguing that they were not to deal with faith and that not scripturally grounded. He continues to say that these canons were dealing with what was the temporal and external rule of the church, which to him was “sheer clerical squabbling.”⁴² He added that the reason he could not support the canons’ teaching on rebaptism was that the canons were not meant to address matters of faith, and therefore their position should not be accepted. It is clear from this that Luther spoke of the canons in the same way he spoke of the Council—that they were engaging in matters they ought to have left alone. Referring to the Canons of the Apostles as “sheer clerical squabbling” shows a lack of respect for the work of the apostles. This is especially unfortunate coming from someone who later in life prioritized certain writings and upheld the work of the apostles.

Whatever the apostles taught was intended for the benefit of the entire church, not just for select individuals. Luther might have considered honoring their teachings

⁴¹ Andre A. Gazal, *Reform according to Right Law: The Use of Legal Tradition in Reformation Theology* (Berlin, Germany: Emanuel University, 2022), 104.

⁴² Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 41, *Church and Ministry III*, ed. and trans. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 59.

with the same respect he accorded to the Bible, particularly since some biblical manuscripts were written during the apostolic era.

Therefore, it was not sufficient to use such dismissive statements to refute the practice of rebaptism, especially in the context of addressing heretical teachings within the church. The more appropriate guide should have been the Canons of the Apostles, whose existence Luther acknowledged. There is no concrete evidence that their teachings were ungrounded in Scripture or that they focused solely on temporal and external matters of the church while lacking faith, as Luther claimed. Consequently, dismissing them entirely on such grounds is unjustified.⁴³ The Apostolic canons guided the church in some ways till this time.

Luther diverged from the theological positions of the Church fathers, particularly concerning infant baptism, thereby rejecting their doctrines on rebaptism and various other theological tenets as lacking scriptural basis. He contended that adherence solely to biblical precepts was paramount, dismissing the relevance of consulting ecclesiastical canons and writings of the Church fathers, exemplified in his criticism of Hubmiers. Luther's stance underscored a rejection of extrabiblical authority, advocating for a rigorous adherence to the Bible as the ultimate doctrinal authority. Consequently, in the absence of doctrinal consensus between the Church fathers and ecclesiastical councils, Luther posited that there was no imperative to uphold or accept their teachings, particularly regarding the issue of rebaptism.⁴⁴

Luther vehemently opposed the practice of rebaptism, particularly concerning those who had received baptism outside of the Catholic Church. He argued persuasively against the notion that infant baptism lacked biblical justification,

⁴³ Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

contending that such skepticism extended equally to adult baptism. In responding to Hubmier's inquiries regarding baptism and rebaptism, Luther underscored the historical continuity of infant baptism since the apostolic era, maintaining that it remained unaltered except by the Anabaptists' introduction of rebaptism. Luther firmly asserted that among the sacraments, infant baptism held primacy over adult baptism. He contended that proponents of adult baptism, by rejecting infant baptism, betrayed a lack of faith consistent with their teachings. Luther further posited that divine sanction exists for the baptism of infants, and thus, should not be disregarded.⁴⁵

Martin Luther's View on Rebaptism Significance More Than Form

The theology of rebaptism to Luther came after a long period of his studies on faith and grace, on the sacrament of baptism. He valued baptism and understood the correct and biblical form to be immersion, both in Latin and Greek.⁴⁶ He focused more on what it signifies than the form, so that the old man and sinful nature that is inherited from birth are to be drowned by God's grace. Luther's opposition to rebaptism was firmly rooted in his comprehension of baptism's importance and theological fundamentals.

Martin Luther rejected any affiliation with advocates of rebaptism and contested their doctrines, stressing the necessity of safeguarding the sanctity of baptism within Christianity. His opposition to rebaptism stemmed from his belief that the manner of baptism held lesser significance compared to the spiritual transformation it symbolized. He emphasized the idea of death and rebirth, aligning

⁴⁵ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 239-258.

⁴⁶ William M. Landeen, *Martin Luther's Religious Thought* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1971), 130-135.

with Jesus' death and resurrection. Luther contended that the focus should be on the profound spiritual implications of baptism rather than the specific method employed. This perspective led to disagreements with the Anabaptists, who prioritized the mode of baptism over its symbolic meaning, asserting that the latter held greater biblical authenticity.⁴⁷

The Act of God and Christ

In his "Babylonian Captivity of the Church" dated 1520, he gave his understanding of baptism to be an act of God and Christ and not of man, so that it is God sitting in heaven that pushes a sinner into water in His own hands. The one doing is just a vicarious but by speaking during baptism, that power is from God that changes.⁴⁸ It was from this understanding that if it is God who does it and the same God who cannot lie can bind Himself in a covenant with the baptized, not counting the sins but saying it and blotting it out, then no one else can repeat it, for to him it is not repeatable.

He reasoned that no amount of sin can make it void as far as one has faith, which is received once during baptism and is determined by God and not man.⁴⁹ It was his thought because though the bible does not give the sin that makes void baptism, it still does not talk of baptism that cannot be sinned against. He seems to be making baptism a proof against any sin, or if sin is done, it will not be counted as one.

⁴⁷ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 239-258.

⁴⁸ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 414.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

Faith and Baptism

Drawing from Mark 16:16, Luther expounded upon his interpretation of the relationship between faith and baptism. His elucidation of this verse formed the basis for his steadfast rejection of rebaptism. Luther asserted that faith, according to his understanding, remains elusive for both the individual being baptized and the baptizer. He argued that faith is a divine attribute, beyond human certainty; therefore, baptizing based on faith is essentially a gamble, lacking assurance of its presence. Luther likened this uncertainty to mere washing or moistening, devoid of genuine faith. He contended that the absence or uncertainty of faith contradicts scriptural teachings on baptism. Luther further distinguished between belief and confession, noting that scripture emphasizes belief as a prerequisite for baptism, equating it with faith. Given the inherent uncertainty surrounding faith, Luther cautioned against repetitive baptisms driven by a perpetual quest for certainty, which he viewed as contrary to the essence of baptism outlined in scripture.⁵⁰

Crucial Sacrament

According to Luther, baptism remained unchanged and unaltered, as he considered it a crucial sacrament. While he endorsed infant baptism, he also supported immersion, attributing its significance to God's action of symbolically burying and resurrecting individuals from sin.⁵¹ Unlike other sacraments, such as the Eucharist, which were subject to alteration by the Papacy, baptism remained unaffected. Consequently, Luther viewed the Anabaptists as a threat to baptism due to their rejection of infant baptism and advocacy for its repetition.

⁵⁰ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Doubleday, Canada: Anchor Books, 1962), 292-293.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 409.

This departure from established tradition and biblical practice posed a significant concern to Luther, who argued that infant baptism had been practiced since the Apostles. He maintained that if infant baptism were heretical, it would not have persisted for such a prolonged period. Thus, Luther adamantly opposed rebaptism, asserting that it was unnecessary, as infant baptism had been performed correctly according to biblical and traditional principles.⁵²

Validity of Baptism

Martin Luther gave his stand against the sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church in his “Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” where he believed that only two of the seven were valid as far as the bible was concerned by the year 1520. These two were baptism and the Lord’s Supper.⁵³ He preached more than twenty-five sermons in almost ten years on baptism between 1528 and 1539,⁵⁴ considering baptism as relatively more important than any other sacrament, as it is the one that stands at the top and gives importance to all other sacraments. It shows that his arguments on baptism being pure from the beginning and not altered by the Papacy should not be altered or questioned, but should be accepted the way it was. There was no need to repeat it at all, as it is God who has kept it thus far.

He contended that various elements within the Papacy, including scripture, genuine baptism, the Ten Commandments, and other shared doctrines, should not be dismissed outright, despite the Papacy’s flaws. While acknowledging the Papacy’s antichristian aspects, Luther advocated for engaging with it rather than completely

⁵² John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists* (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2001).

⁵³ Landeen, *Martin Luther’s Religious Thought*, 130-135.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

rejecting it. He argued that the Papacy should adhere more closely to the teachings of the apostles instead of incorporating human inventions and evil practices. Luther's criticism was primarily directed towards the Anabaptists, who sought to entirely dismantle Papal influence, potentially causing greater harm to Christianity by inadvertently weakening its foundations in the process.⁵⁵

Regarding baptism, Luther posits that it has remained unchanged by Roman Catholics, preserved instead by divine intervention. He contends that had this sacrament been extended to adults, its efficacy might have diminished, rendering it ineffective. However, Luther asserts that its restriction to infants ensures its potency. Consequently, salvation hinges on the principle that those who believe in Christ and undergo baptism will attain salvation. Luther emphasizes that the act of baptism, which he regards as a ritual, holds no significance without concurrent faith. Thus, possessing faith during baptism is imperative for the salvation of every baptized individual.⁵⁶

His stand on baptism and the Lord's Supper might be true, but how it is conducted and its significance had been tampered with, and there was a need to change and be re-examined so that it serves the purpose. Defending it by one's means and misinterpreting the scripture in a way you see it right would not be possible. Luther's initial rationale for opposing Anabaptists and advocates of rebaptism, who rejected infant baptism alongside other sacraments and doctrines associated with the papacy, was their comprehensive rejection of papal authority. Given Luther's steadfast support for infant baptism, which he regarded as an unaltered and historically grounded practice, he perceived re-baptizers as deviating from both

⁵⁵ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 239-258.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

biblical precedent and longstanding tradition. He argued that adherents of rebaptism would effectively need to renounce the entirety of scripture to fully embrace their beliefs, an endeavor Luther deemed unfeasible and contrary to established theological principles.⁵⁷

Luther viewed Baptism as a holy sacrament that comes fully from God. In Luther's Small Catechism, he defines baptism as "not simply water, but it is the water comprehended in God's command, and connected with God's Word" where to him, the word as he defined was, "that which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke as it is recorded in the last chapter of Matthew, verse 19: "Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost" and comes with the benefits which "worked forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and confers everlasting salvation on all who believe as the Word and promise of God declarations."⁵⁸ These words and the promises of God, according to Luther, are what were also recorded in Mark 16:16, that whosoever believes and is baptized will be saved, and the one who does not believe will be judged, so that baptism will not be complete without this word and water of baptism. Faith comes in as a third after water and word, in that faith depends on the word of God, as is mentioned and done by the priest in place of God himself.⁵⁹

Luther endeavors to reconcile faith and baptism. He asserts that individuals should embrace their infant baptism without seeking additional baptisms. Trusting in the testimony of others should only occur when it pertains to matters of divine

⁵⁷ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 239-258.

⁵⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism: With Additions, Including the Augsburg Confession. Tr. from the Original German*, trans. H. A. Urseth (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1860).

⁵⁹ E. G. Schwiebert, review of *A Compend of Luther's Theology*, by Martin Luther, ed. Hugh Thompson Kerr, 6th ed., *Theology* 48, no. 305 (1945): 255-257.

revelation, without any contradiction. Luther emphasizes that baptism originates from God and is validated by the gospel, entitling believers to its associated privileges. Therefore, one should wholeheartedly embrace their baptism without any doubts.⁶⁰

In his treatise ‘Concerning Rebaptism’ published in 1528, Luther was frustrated with Hubmaier, who dragged his name as if in support of believers’ baptism. In his argument, Luther said that rejecting the baptism of infants by Anabaptists was acting against accepted tradition. Luther cited Augustine’s support for the apostolic origins of infant baptism while dismissing Hubmaier’s treatise, terming it absurd and stating that it does not need to be responded to.⁶¹

Luther argued that faith serves as the conduit during baptism, supporting his belief that even children possess faith, validating their baptism as sufficient and irrevocable. He contended that regardless of subsequent actions or developments, such as growing up, rebaptism is unwarranted.⁶² Luther countered the Anabaptist claim that children lack visible faith, asserting that even if faith becomes evident years after baptism, a second baptism remains unnecessary.⁶³ He emphasized the principle that “faith doesn’t exist for the sake of baptism but baptism for the sake of faith,” underscoring the primacy of faith over the act of baptism. Luther maintained that once faith manifests, baptism achieves its purpose, rendering a second baptism redundant. He stressed the correctness of the initial baptism, deeming repetition unnecessary as certainty regarding the presence of faith cannot be guaranteed.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 346-347.

⁶¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:456.

⁶² Schwiebert, review of *A Compend of Luther’s Theology*, by Martin Luther, 255.

⁶³ Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 346-347.

⁶⁴ Wright, “One Baptism or Two?” 15.

Nevertheless, Luther in his work 'On the Councils and the Church' in the year 1539 accepted that Anabaptists correctly mention church fathers like Cyprian and church councils like Nicaea, that they taught rebaptism. He agreed that Cyprian taught that people baptized by heretics must be re-baptized, even if it was not accepted and welcomed by all church bishops at the time. Though Augustine condemned this act by Cyprian accepting rebaptism, Luther said that Cyprian could be forgiven, for he became a martyr at last.⁶⁵ Luther also did not deny that the Council of Nicaea and other earlier church councils agreed with Cyprian when it came to re-baptizing those who received baptism by heretics, hence supporting the position of Hubmaier. Luther also stated that even the Apostolic Canons and the earliest church manual accepted rebaptism.

Nevertheless, Luther, in his work 'On the Councils and the Church' in the year 1539, accepted that Anabaptists correctly mention church fathers like Cyprian and church councils like Nicaea, which taught rebaptism. He agreed that Cyprian taught that people baptized by heretics must be rebaptized, even if it was not accepted and welcomed by all church bishops at the time. Although Augustine condemned this act by Cyprian accepting rebaptism, Luther said that Cyprian could be forgiven, for he ultimately became a martyr. Luther also did not deny that the Council of Nicaea and other earlier church councils agreed with Cyprian regarding the rebaptism of those who received baptism from heretics, thus supporting the position of Hubmaier. Furthermore, Luther stated that even the Apostolic Canons and the earliest church manual accepted rebaptism.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, 44-45.

⁶⁶ Gazal, *Reform according to Right Law*, 101.

Martin Luther's stance on rebaptism was unequivocal: while he acknowledged its existence, he vehemently opposed it. In his work "Concerning Rebaptism," Luther systematically laid out his reasons for rejecting the practice. He delved into the essence of baptism, arguing that its fundamental nature precludes any need for repetition, especially concerning infant baptism.⁶⁷ This became his stand, though he believed in the existence of its practice, especially to those baptized by heretics. His teaching and support of it was not because it is biblical to accept it, but it was a teaching of the church fathers and church doctrines, and apostolic canons.

Luther made it clear that, despite being associated with proponents of rebaptism like Hubmaier, he adamantly disagreed with their views. He denounced such assertions as "perverted" and "transparent lies," distancing himself from any endorsement of rebaptism.⁶⁸

Furthermore, Luther addressed the consequences of embracing rebaptism, particularly in terms of martyrdom. He maintained that those advocating for rebaptism should not be persecuted as martyrs since their beliefs could be based on genuine faith or falsehoods, thus absolving them of guilt.⁶⁹ If their teaching were true and biblical, then it would come to light at the end, but if lies, it would not prevail. He therefore didn't want the Anabaptists to be persecuted for holding on re-baptizing converts especially those who received baptism at infancy or those who received it from the heretics. He did not favour the notion that individuals baptized in German should be re-baptized in Latin, as it implied that the German baptism was erroneous while the

⁶⁷ Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 346-347.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gazal, *Reform according to Right Law*, 103.

Latin one was correct.⁷⁰ He believed that those baptized in Germany received a true baptism even if they were infants and should not be repeated when they joined the church in Latin. There was no invalid baptism as long as an ordained minister did it, water was used, and the Trinity was mentioned. If it missed one of these, it was not baptism and should be done and not repeated.

On those who received baptism and went back to sin and want to join the church, whether they received baptism as an infant or as an adult, Luther argues that “baptism can be correct and sufficient even if the Christian falls from faith or sins a thousand times a year. It is enough that he rights himself and becomes faithful, without having to be re-baptized each time.”⁷¹ This should be a reason, therefore, for making the first baptism sufficient and proper for one who has come back to be a believer. To Luther, it seems that lack of faith does not mean anything since there is no difference so long as it was done correctly, meaning that it can come later or during baptism.

During Luther’s contemplation of the re-baptizers, who opposed infant baptism and conducted rebaptism, he recognized their distinctiveness from mainstream Protestants. These individuals also performed rebaptism on converts from the Roman Catholic Church joining the Protestant movement. Unlike Lutherans, they sought to establish themselves as the true Protestants, emphasizing their denomination’s superiority. The term “Anabaptists” emerged coincided with Ulrich Zwingli’s divergence from Luther’s teachings, particularly regarding the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli’s interpretation equated the sacramental elements of bread

⁷⁰ Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 342.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 360.

and wine with the real body and blood of Christ, leading to discord and subsequent persecution of his followers.⁷²

During the medieval era, Catholic doctrine asserted that sacraments possessed the power to effect metaphysical change, imbuing elements with desired outcomes. Luther concurred with this belief, maintaining that baptism serves to cleanse individuals from original sin and impart an unchangeable character upon them. He regarded baptism as the preeminent sacrament, emphasizing its spiritual significance received through faith rather than its outward form.⁷³ Luther argued that since baptism removes original sin, there is no need for its repetition. Following baptism, ongoing sanctification occurs, even if one returns to sinful behavior. However, the efficacy of baptism persists unless the individual renounces their faith in the promises made during the sacrament, which are solely found in Christ Jesus.

Luther's View on Baptism and Church Membership

Martin Luther firmly regarded baptism as how individuals are received into the fellowship of believers and the broader Christian Church. His teaching emphasizes baptism's role in initiating new believers into the spiritual and communal body of Christ while upholding its divine institution and theological significance.

Luther described baptism as the sacrament that welcomes individuals into the Christian Church, making it foundational to Christian identity and membership. He stressed the importance of understanding baptism correctly, focusing only on what is essential for faith and practice. He noted that, "We take up baptism, by which we are

⁷² Roland Herbert Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 153-155.

⁷³ Landeen, *Martin Luther's Religious Thought*, 130-135.

first received into the Christian Church. That it may be readily understood, we will carefully treat of it, and keep only to that which it is necessary now.”⁷⁴ Luther also emphasized the symbolic act of baptism, where water immersion represents death to sin, and being drawn out signifies new life in Christ. He said it should be known that, “baptism signifies, and why God has ordained just such an external sign and form for the sacrament by which we are first received into the Christian Church. But the act or form is this, that we are sunk under the water, which passes over us, and afterwards are drawn out again.”⁷⁵ This represents death and resurrection of a sinner. It should therefore be known that it comes from God and not an invention of a man so that can repeat it as it pleases.

Rejecting baptism, according to Luther, is like rejecting the Word of God, faith, and Christ himself. He viewed the sacrament as a commandment of Christ that binds believers to their faith and the Church. He said that, “whoever rejects Baptism rejects the Word of God, faith, and Christ, who directs us thither and binds us to Baptism.”⁷⁶ No one should think that what he or she receives before was not baptism, but should know that it came from God and should be received without any questioning.

Baptism, therefore, to Luther is both a sign of the grace given by God and also a commitment to belonging to a church, showing it publicly by one being baptized. This shows that when one accepts to be baptized, they are not only marked by the covenant but also integrated into the communal life of faith. There is therefore un-

⁷⁴ Luther, *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 96.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁶ Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 101.

unbroken strong connection between baptism, faith, and church membership, where he put his strong understanding of the church as Christ's body.

Luther's Stand on the Apostate

According to Martin Luther, though the scripture has explained well the fate of the apostates, as Paul said that they need to be removed out of the believers and Christ in Matthew saying such to be treated as gentiles, he firmly rejected the idea of rebaptism, if such a person would like to be part of the church again. He believed baptism is a one-time act, grounded in God's promise, which remains effective even if the baptized person falls away. He put his emphasis on the fact that instead of undergoing the sacrament as one who was a gentile, the person should only repent and continue in the grace. He kept that baptism endures throughout a Christian's life, even if one falls into sin. His emphasis is thus;

Therefore, our baptism abides forever; and even though some one should fall from it and sin, we nevertheless always have access thereto, that we may again subdue the old man. But we must not again be sprinkled with water [his understanding of baptism, though sometimes he accepted immersion as form of baptism] for though we were a hundred times put under the water, it would nevertheless be only one baptism, although the act and significance continue and remain. Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to baptism, that we return to and practice what had been begun and had been abandoned.⁷⁷

Luther likened the Church having believers who are baptized to a ship navigating the sea, acknowledging that believers may slip out of the ship but should strive to return but to him not through rebaptism. This is not Biblical especially when one had gone against the teachings of the church. One according to Luther should just

⁷⁷ Luther, *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 101.

continue as he begun⁷⁸ without showing how he began for everyone comes to church through baptism and continued in it.

For Luther, baptism brings individuals into the Church and establishes their identity as members of the body of Christ. If someone falls away, they should return to Christ and the Church through repentance, not rebaptism as he noted that, “If, therefore, we have once in baptism received forgiveness of sin, it will remain every day, as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old man about with us.”⁷⁹ He wrote that rebaptism should be avoided for it “blasphemes God and His work, which is done and accomplished in baptism”⁸⁰ and should not be repeated for to him it is not dependent on the individual’s continued faithfulness but is instead anchored in Christ’s unchanging mercy and the church’s communal support.⁸¹

How Luther’s Theology of Grace, Faith, and Sacraments Shaped His Opposition to Rebaptism

Martin Luther’s conception of grace, faith, and sacraments was closely related to his beliefs about rebaptism. His stance is brought to light by his answer to the Anabaptists who, in his day, promoted rebaptism for newborns who were baptized without faith. Luther, an Augustinian monk who studied the Bible after reading Romans and Galatians, defended the idea that redemption is obtained only by God’s grace and not through human merit. Its reception does not require human faith or

⁷⁸ Luther, *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 101.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁰ Martin Luther, “Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 40, *Church and Ministry II*, trans. Conrad Bergendoff (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1975), 230-240.

⁸¹ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2000), 44-45.

comprehension because it is God's work. Therefore, rebaptism was not required because God's grace is effective and does not require repeating once it is given.⁸² Luther believed that since baptism is "not something we do but what God does for us and gives to us,"⁸³ it does not need to be repeated. He consequently saw this as God's grace, something that Anabaptists did not comprehend and interpreted as a human profession of faith rather than a manifestation of divine grace.⁸⁴

Luther placed greater stress on justification by faith alone, independent of human labor, in his theology of faith. In light of this, baptism was never required to be based on faith. This was not the case for Anabaptists, who held that baptism necessitated a deliberate act of faith and that failure to do so would necessitate rebaptism. Luther maintained at the time that baptism would eventually introduce or strengthen faith.⁸⁵

God's promise made during baptism is still enforceable despite human failure, character, and reaction, hence rebaptism was not required.⁸⁶

Luther insisted that baptism is God's promise that cannot be repeated because, from a practical standpoint, he saw it as a sacrament that is a practical and effective way to give grace rather than a ceremonial ordinance.⁸⁷ Rebaptism would undermine the permanence of baptism, which is a way to start a believer on the path to Christianity,

⁸² Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Word and Sacrament II*, 57-59.

⁸³ Luther, *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 81.

⁸⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, *Luther on Baptism: Sacramental Presence and Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 92-94.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets," in *Church and Ministry II*, 29.

⁸⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 174, accessed 13 April 2025, <https://dokumen.pub/reformation-thought-an-introduction-0470672838-9780470672839.html>.

raising doubts about the efficacy of God’s promise.⁸⁸ Because it “works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this,”⁸⁹ he believes that the promises made in baptism are just as visible as those made in any other sacrament. Therefore, it is a once-and-for-all natural event that God performed, and repeating it shows that God’s grace is insufficient.⁹⁰

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, baptism in the early centuries was primarily by immersion until the second century, when pouring water on the head was allowed in special cases. This practice evolved, and by the fourth century, theological discussions on baptism—particularly paedobaptism, became prominent, with figures like Tertullian and Clement shaping its development. Augustine of Hippo later emphasized baptism as essential for the remission of sin, formalizing its theological significance in the Western Church.

During the medieval period, Emperor Justinian mandated infant baptism, and the Council of Florence defined baptism’s effects as spiritual cleansing and initiation into the church. The Reformation reshaped baptism’s meaning, with Martin Luther rejecting rebaptism and emphasizing that baptism, once performed correctly, remains valid for life. He held that faith, alongside water and the Word, completes baptism, making rebaptism unnecessary.

⁸⁸ Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-centred Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 312.

⁸⁹ Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 27.

⁹⁰ Scott Hendrix, *Re-cultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 118.

The rebaptism debate originated in early church disputes, particularly between Pope Stephen and St. Cyprian, and later resurfaced with the Anabaptists, whom Luther opposed. He insisted that baptism was a divine act, not dependent on the baptizer's faith, and that salvation rested on faith in God's promise. He rejected church traditions that lacked biblical support, emphasizing Scripture alone as the final authority.

Luther's critique of the Roman Catholic Church focused on its sacramental system, arguing that baptism should not be altered by human traditions. He preached extensively on baptism, affirming its divine origin and permanence. In his writings, he upheld infant baptism, citing Augustine to assert its apostolic roots and denouncing Anabaptist calls for rebaptism.

In his writings, particularly in *On the Councils and the Church* (1539) and *Concerning Rebaptism*, Luther rejected the Anabaptist practice of rebaptizing individuals, even if they had been baptized by heretics. While recognizing the historical support for rebaptism in early church doctrines, Luther maintained that the belief in the necessity of rebaptism was flawed and contradicted the biblical understanding of baptism as a once-for-all sacrament.

Luther also distanced himself from those advocating for rebaptism, including Hubmaier and the Anabaptists, whom he saw as distorting the true meaning of baptism. He opposed the idea that baptism could be invalid based on the language or denomination of the person performing it, asserting that baptism was valid as long as the essential elements—water, the Word, and the Trinity—were present.

Martin Luther viewed baptism as the foundational sacrament for entering the Christian Church, marking an individual's initiation into the body of Christ. He emphasized baptism's divine institution, stressing that it symbolizes death to sin and

new life in Christ. Rejecting baptism, according to Luther, is akin to rejecting God's Word and Christ. He saw baptism not only as a sign of God's grace but also as a public commitment to church membership. For Luther, baptism, faith, and church membership were inseparable, binding believers to their faith and the community of believers in Christ.

Finally, Luther argued that baptism remained valid even if a baptized person later fell into sin, asserting that repentance and return to faith were sufficient, negating the need for rebaptism. He believed that baptism's effects were permanent unless one renounced faith entirely. Luther's view on baptism centered on its spiritual significance and the faith it symbolized, rejecting the emphasis on external rituals or the mode of baptism.

Ultimately, Luther viewed baptism as an unrepeatable sacrament, divinely instituted and valid regardless of the recipient's initial faith, as faith could develop later. His teachings reinforced the permanence of baptism and the sufficiency of faith and God's Word over ritual repetition.

CHAPTER 4

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF MARTIN LUTHER'S VIEW ON REBAPTISM

In this fourth chapter, Martin Luther's theological standpoint on rebaptism is explored through a thorough and compelling analysis. To establish a robust argument, the chapter begins with an exposition of selected biblical texts that present baptism as the doorway to church membership, followed by an examination of Luther's interpretation of the same. It then proceeds to consider passages that address the removal from church membership of those who fall into apostasy, alongside an analysis of Luther's understanding of this issue. The chapter also briefly engages with debated biblical texts on rebaptism, contrasting them with Luther's perspective.

Finally, Luther's theology is critiqued in light of the scriptural and theological findings presented. This comprehensive critical examination seeks to arrive at a theologically sound stance on rebaptism within the broader Christian tradition.

Debated Bible Verses on Rebaptism

Rebaptism of the Ephesians in Acts by Paul (Acts 19:1-7)

Some biblical verses only imply the practice of rebaptism, but the one that is known to discuss it is from Acts 19:1-7, where Paul in Ephesus was conversing with 12 individuals who had received the baptism of John the Baptist and were unaware of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 19:5, these 12 individuals are believed to have been disciples of John the Baptist, among many others whose rebaptism is not recorded, though it is assumed that it did not take place. One example is the baptism of Apollos, which was not repeated by Priscilla and Aquila after he had received John's baptism. This suggests that Christian baptism after Pentecost was for repentance and the forgiveness of sins, with the introduction of two additional elements: administering baptism in the name of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These became the presupposition of discipleship in Jesus and the establishment of the eschatological community of salvation.¹ However, these two additional elements did not change the moral character or the eschatological orientation of baptism. The only addition was to bring a closer personal commitment of the baptized individual to Jesus, which was not present in the baptism of John. This indicates a change of lordship that would determine the entire life of the believer.²

This shows that Paul's baptism of the 12 individuals could be considered a rebaptism when similarities are considered, but if differences are emphasized, it should be regarded as a new baptism that had only received preparatory instruction from John's baptism. This baptismal assessment may have been made by Paul after learning that they had not heard of the giving or the presence of the Holy Spirit. It can be understood that since they had limited knowledge of their baptism, the baptism of John persuaded them to accept another baptism.

It is important to note that the Holy Spirit came primarily after Paul laid hands on them, and not at the time of baptism. This should not be confused or wrongly

¹ Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 752-754.

² Eduard Lohse, *The First Christians: Their Beginnings, Writings, and Beliefs* (London, UK: Lutterworth Press, 1983), 90.

concluded as Paul separating baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit, as he in his letters demonstrates that they are not only fundamentally connected but also simultaneous. For Paul, it is only possible to be united with Christ through the Holy Spirit.³

Some scholars like Roy believe that Paul's highly developed theological perspective on baptism as a rite of initiation into Christianity is what prompted him to advise the Ephesian believers to be baptized again, as this was believed to be central to his understanding of conversion.⁴ Paroschi, in his article on the book of Acts concerning Paul and the Ephesian believers who received rebaptism, suggests that after they had "lost contact with the Jesus movement in Palestine and missed out on Pentecost, they needed now to be reincorporated into the fellowship of the church. Paul, himself a post-Pentecost apostle, found it appropriate to re-baptize them, probably on account of his understanding of baptism as something that symbolizes the whole experience of conversion, all the more so because he connects baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus."⁵ These Ephesians were therefore to receive this second baptism because of the new experience in the teachings of Paul and understanding of the resurrection of Christ. They therefore restored their understanding and close contact with Him.

The New American Commentary holds that to be a true disciple of John demands that one believes in Jesus John was preparing them to. The big problem of

³ Terence Paige, "Holy Spirit," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 407.

⁴ Kevin Roy, *Baptism, Reconciliation, and Unity* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), 11-12.

⁵ Wilson Paroschi, "Acts 19:1-7 Reconsidered in Light of Paul's Theology of Baptism," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 47, no. 1 (2009): 100, accessed 18 April 2025, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3053&context=auss>.

the 12 was that “they failed to recognize Jesus as the one whom John had proclaimed as the promised Messiah.”⁶ When they heard from Paul about the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they immediately accepted rebaptism.

This seems to suggest that the rebaptism received was not for the forgiveness of sin but for the new light of the gospel, which they knew nothing about. Though Matthew Henry did not agree with Polhill that they did not recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah, he argued that they had not received the seal of Christ to control their mind and being, which was to be seen through its fruit. They were not under the governance of the Holy Spirit.⁷ This seems to suggest that Christ in the form of the Holy Spirit was absent in their lives of being disciples and hence needed to be publicly accepted through baptism.

Maddox saw that the twelve, though they had the baptism of repentance, lacked the baptism of faith and fulfilment that of Jesus, which shows the hope of resurrection. After an explanation to them by Paul, Maddox said that they requested rebaptism, which was granted to them.⁸ Longenecker does not see this as rebaptism, but was baptized into Christ once and for all.⁹ He does not understand that the baptism of John was the acceptable baptism by then, pointing beyond John to the baptism of the coming Messiah, who was Jesus. After the twelve were accepted, they received rebaptism into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not John as before.

⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary 26 (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1992), 389.

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 197.

⁸ Timothy Donald Fletcher Maddox, “Revisioning Baptist Principles: A Ricoeurian Postmodern Investigation” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 150-152.

⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 9:494.

Exell termed the 12 to have been separated from other Christians though they were believers by their ignorance of common doctrine and the common body. Paul questioning them opened their minds and was to follow the instructions from Paul that was to be baptized into Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit rested upon them after receiving rebaptism and being laid hands on by Paul.¹⁰

The 12 believers accepted to receive baptism for the second time because they had received a new light, where Paul believed that they were lacking something in their former baptism. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* notes that upon receiving the new teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gift that comes with it, they received a conviction and were re-baptized.¹¹

It seemed that these disciples were untrained students, searching for a teacher for more. Paul questioned them and realized that they had received baptism before understanding the basic truth of the gospel, which was the gift of the Holy Spirit, and had not received it. After clarifying this to them, they were re-baptized.¹² This indicates that rebaptism is biblical and acceptable when one has gained a new spiritual understanding. However, it is not recorded in the scripture whether all those baptized by John received a second baptism when they received the Holy Spirit. The scripture here does not indicate that John was the one baptizing them, but rather that they were baptized “into John’s baptism,” which was a baptism of repentance. This might have been done by someone else.

¹⁰ Joseph Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 16, *The Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 57.

¹¹ “When They Heard This” [Acts 19:5], *SDABC*, 6:373.

¹² Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 10:263.

Though between the time of Jesus and the apostles, there is no record of any individual baptized more than once, it does not necessarily mean that rebaptism was never practiced in the early church. In cases of apostasy, where an individual had formally renounced their Christian faith and membership in a particular church community, a second baptism may have been seen as necessary for their reintegration and recommitment to the faith.¹³

It is possible to say that the Christian who has “slipped away from the faith and reverted to his or her former life of sin” should undergo a public renewal of the baptismal experience as a testimony to their repentance and rededication to the Christian life. The personal witness of a transformed lifestyle is considered an important aspect of this rebaptism, signifying the individual’s genuine return to the faith.

While the biblical evidence on the practice of rebaptism is not definitive, the scholarly discourse suggests that the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5 may be understood in a more nuanced way, allowing for the possibility of rebaptism in certain contexts, such as cases of apostasy and the need for public reaffirmation of one’s Christian commitment.¹⁴

One possible reason a person may seek or feel the need for rebaptism is connected to the experience of the 12 Ephesian believers. They believed that the greater light of truth shared with them by Paul was of such a life-changing nature that they felt it necessary to be baptized again. Many may feel the same today as they learn new biblical teachings that revolutionize their way of believing and worshiping God. Some indeed discover that their previous Christian walk, though sincere, was

¹³ “In the Name” [Acts 19:5], *SDABC*, 6:373.

¹⁴ Joe Crews, *Baptism: Is It Really Necessary?* (Granite Bay, CA: Amazing Facts, 2013), 27.

violating some very important principles of Scripture. None should feel that they are denying their earlier experience by choosing to wash the past clean through a renewal of the baptismal experience.¹⁵

One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism in Ephesians 4:5

The rejection of “rebaptism” using the book of Ephesians 4:5 warrants careful study to glean insights into the biblical and theological stance on this matter. The interconnectedness of “one Lord, one Faith, and one baptism” underscores the significance of each element complementing the others. The singular Lord, Jesus Christ, is depicted as the embodiment of complete salvation, attainable solely through faith and not by human works. This faith, originating from God, serves as the link connecting believers to the Lord Jesus, a connection solidified and marked by the Holy Spirit through baptism.¹⁶

Scriptural references elucidate the concept of one baptism for the remission of sins, emphasizing the unity achieved through being baptized into Christ, as highlighted in Galatians 3:28. The focus on one baptism, as articulated by Paul, centres on the notion that those baptized according to Christ’s institution receive the same spiritual cleansing and renewal signified by baptism,¹⁷ a sentiment echoed in Titus 3:5. This common baptism unifies individuals in their profession of faith,

¹⁵ Crews, *Baptism*, 28.

¹⁶ James R. Janke, “An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 4:1-16,” paper presented at the Nebraska District Pastors’ Conference, Trinity Lutheran Church, Winner, South Dakota, 1993, accessed 10 April 2025, <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/2338/JankeEphesians.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

acceptance of the covenant, and consecration to the Lord and Redeemer, symbolizing their incorporation into one body adorned with Christ.¹⁸

Pratte advocates for immersion as the preferred form of baptism, likening alternative practices to idol worship. However, his stance does not prescribe a one-time practice of baptism for believers but underscores the mode of immersion. The engagement with baptism based on the three divine names highlights the communal nature of the sacramental covenant, where believers collectively profess their faith as a unified body, aligning themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ in faith.¹⁹

It seems that the significance of one baptism is the universal rite employed to admit believers into the Church of Christ, signifying their incorporation into His body or divine trinity. Ray Stedman draws parallels between one baptism and the baptism of the spirit, suggesting a spiritual connection symbolized by water baptism, emphasizing unity with Christ and participation in His death and resurrection.²⁰ This perspective promotes the unifying role of baptism, bringing together believers in Christ, devoid of prescription for a singular instance of baptism.

Lincoln's interpretation posits that the single baptism in Ephesians 4:5 is characterized by the confession of one faith in one Lord, emphasizing initiation into the collective body of believers united in Christ.²¹ Baptism serves as an initiatory rite

¹⁸ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1856), 208-209.

¹⁹ David E. Pratte, *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans: Bible Study Notes and Comments* (Scotts Valley, CA: Create Space Independent, 2017), 153-154, accessed 10 April 2025, <https://biblestudylessons.com/commentary/epistles/romans.pdf>.

²⁰ Ray C. Stedman, "The Cry for Unity," Ray Stedman Ministries, accessed 10 April 2025, <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/ephesians/the-cry-for-unity>.

²¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 240.

facilitating growth and conformity to the likeness of Christ's death and resurrection,²² underscoring its role as a unifying force within the Christian community.

Paxson, about a singular baptism, articulated that once an individual fully embraces the comprehensive truth of divinity through faith, with its focal point being the one Lord, Christ Jesus, they become all connected through the action of the Holy Spirit in the baptism ceremony. He posited that this single baptism symbolizes an internal spiritual process guided solely by God and externally exhibited through water baptism, serving as a public declaration to both believers and non-believers.²³

This act of baptism, according to Paxson, signifies an inward transformation by the Holy Spirit and an outward demonstration through water baptism. McGee corroborates this view by underscoring that genuine baptism is that of the Holy Spirit, symbolically represented by water baptism, wherein believers are unified.²⁴ Boice concurs, interpreting it as a public declaration of identification with Christ.²⁵ The emphasis here lies on the act of associating oneself openly with Christ through baptism rather than on the belief that once baptized, always baptized.

From the perspectives of these authors, it becomes evident that baptism primarily serves to signify the forgiveness of sins and the incorporation of a believer into the community of fellow believers. The notion implied is that upon recognizing one's sinful nature, baptism becomes a necessary step. The recurrent public affirmation of aligning oneself with Christ through water baptism is emphasized,

²² "One Baptism" [Eph 4:5], *SDABC*, 6:1022.

²³ Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 16, *The Acts*, 52.

²⁴ Vernon J. McGee, *Thru the Bible*, vol. 5, *Matthew through Revelation*, 5th ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 72-73.

²⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians, An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 126-127.

highlighting the need for this act to be performed openly, especially in instances of public sins. This perspective does not preclude the possibility of repeated baptisms but rather stresses the central significance of a single baptism, which embodies the essence of a genuine spiritual baptism.

This singular baptism is depicted as the emblem that establishes a connection with Christ, alluding more to water baptism as a symbol and spiritual baptism as endorsed by Wood.²⁶ He posits that this single baptism represents a sacrament of unity, signifying alignment with Christ in His death and resurrection, sealed by the Spirit and integration into the body of Christ, thereby unifying all Christians into one entity in Christ Jesus.²⁷ The term ‘one baptism’ signifies unity without discrimination, advocating not for the restriction of multiple Christian baptisms but for the unification of all believers through a common baptism, fostering unity of body and spirit. This singular baptism holds significant power, uniting believers when invoked in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit during the sacrament.²⁸ It stands as the singular mode of professing one’s faith and the same sacrament that binds individuals to Christ, our Savior.²⁹ This issue of rebaptism in early Christianity has been a subject of scholarly debate, with differing interpretations of the biblical evidence. While Ephesians 4:5 refers to “one baptism,” this passage does not necessarily preclude the possibility of rebaptism in certain circumstances.

²⁶ A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 11: 56.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 269.

²⁹ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation*, 566.

One perspective suggests that the “one baptism” mentioned in Ephesians may be understood as referring to the acceptable mode or expression of baptism, rather than the number of times an individual is baptized.³⁰ The New Testament does not provide detailed discussions of different modes of baptism, primarily describing immersion as the common practice. Therefore, the “one baptism” could be interpreted as denoting the normative mode of baptism, without necessarily ruling out the possibility of rebaptism.

The Theology of Grace, Faith, and Sacraments Influence on Luther’s Stance Against Rebaptism

Martin Luther’s conception of grace, faith, and sacraments was closely related to his beliefs about rebaptism. His stance is brought to light by his answer to the Anabaptists who, in his day, promoted rebaptism for newborns who were baptized without faith. Luther, an Augustinian monk who studied the Bible after reading Romans and Galatians, defended the idea that redemption is obtained only by God’s grace and not through human merit. Its reception does not require human faith or comprehension because it is God’s work.

Therefore, rebaptism was not required because God’s grace is effective and does not require repeating once it is given.³¹ Luther believed that since baptism is “not something we do but what God does for us and gives to us,”³² it does not need to be repeated. He consequently saw this as God’s grace, something that Anabaptists did

³⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 243-245.

³¹ Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *Word and Sacrament II*, 57-59.

³² Luther, *Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, 81.

not comprehend and interpreted as a human profession of faith rather than a manifestation of divine grace.³³

Luther placed greater stress on justification by faith alone, independent of human labor, in his theology of faith. In light of this, baptism was never required to be based on faith. This was not the case for Anabaptists, who held that baptism necessitated a deliberate act of faith and that failure to do so would necessitate rebaptism. Luther maintained at the time that baptism would eventually introduce or strengthen faith.³⁴ God's promise made during baptism is still enforceable despite human failure, character, and reaction, hence, rebaptism was not required.³⁵

Luther insisted that baptism is God's promise that cannot be repeated because, from a practical standpoint, he saw it as a sacrament that is a practical and effective way to give grace rather than a ceremonial ordinance. Rebaptism would undermine the permanence of baptism, which serves as a starting point for a believer's journey into Christianity, casting doubt on the efficacy of God's promise.

Because it "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe this," he holds that the promises made in baptism are as tangible as those made in any other sacrament. Therefore, it represents a once-and-for-all natural event executed by God, and repeating it suggests that God's grace is lacking.

³³ Hubmaier, "On Infant Baptism against Oecolampad," 125-129.

³⁴ Wengert, *Luther on Baptism*, 92-94.

³⁵ Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets," in *Church and Ministry II*, 129.

A Biblical-Theological Critique of Luther's View on Rebaptism

Biblical Critique

The use of the words one lord, one faith, and one baptism in Ephesians 4:5 as explained above, was not correctly interpreted by Luther, for to him, it emphasizes the singularity of the act of baptism and not the meaning and what baptism stands for.

Here, Paul does not assert that there is only one unique non-repeatable event, for if it were so, those who were baptized could not have freedom to choose but to be like robots, and there could not be sin in them at all. It is therefore biblically correct to state that the correct interpretation of this verse is closer to one acceptable mode of baptism than the number.³⁶ Though Luther discusses the one-time baptism, which can be seen in the verse, he does not understand that the form and unity are seen in the whole chapter.

The meaning of Mark 16:16 as understood by Luther is not what the original author intended. He asserted that faith is elusive both in the baptizer and the one being baptized, so that neither of them understands whether there is faith or not. He therefore seems to say that baptizing one should not be because they have believed, but trusting that if it is not there it will come, and if it is there it is ok. This is contrary to the scripture, which plainly says that whosoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Baptism, therefore, comes after one hears the gospel and believes, which is having faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ's saving work through his death and assurance of salvation through his resurrection, then such is baptized to seal it. The outward baptism by water is a sign of an inward faith or belief, and the denial of being

³⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 243-245.

baptized shows inward disbelief.³⁷ This fact, which is biblical by Luther, needed to be corrected to allow those who were wrongly baptized to receive baptism again in a correct mind after believing, which comes after hearing the gospel.

The truth of 2nd Timothy 2:13, as discussed by Luther, is that Christ cannot deny Himself but remains faithful to His word and promise even in the face of human frailty.³⁸ This does not mean that when one departs from Him or denies Him, it will not be denied by Christ. In verse 12, Paul states that those who will leave will deny faith, are denying Christ. The phrase “if we believe not” goes with “he cannot deny himself,” denoting that “He is faithful to his threatening and promises” so that they will be fulfilled accordingly. He “cannot recede from any word he spoke, for he is yes, and amen, the faithful witness”. It cannot mean he will not require an answer and repentance from our sins, as Luther suggests. His being faithful to the promise is to demand repentance and coming back to righteousness, which, if it were public apostasy, needed a public confession, which is rebaptism. “Our being dead with Christ precedes our living with Him and is connected with it; the one is to the other.”³⁹ One cannot die without being buried. The apostate will die to sin and apostasy and should be buried in the grave of water then resurrect into new life in Christ Jesus.

We therefore need to die to sin, and what follows is burial in a watery grave, waiting faithfully for Christ’s glorification. In other words, if we fall or desert Christ’s way, he will not change even if we perish.⁴⁰ This brings a clear understanding that the

³⁷ “Shall Be Saved” [Mark 16:16], *SDABC*, 5:659.

³⁸ Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 2.

³⁹ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation*, 676.

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 219.

change that is being talked of by Paul is His character that is not changed by our sinful nature, and not the fact that since he had promised to save will do so even if we go back to sin. Luther seemingly did not understand the use of such words in this verse. This cannot be used to have a stand that, so long as we are baptized, we will be saved automatically. There is justification for those who will realize their sin and go back to God. when one dies, there is a need for burial.

Washing of regeneration in Titus 3:5 is viewed as ‘producing an instant change that ends old life and begins the new life’,⁴¹ which is not only once then stopped but has a continuous activity by the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer as long as they are alive. It is a work not of men. It is true, as Luther puts it, that when one sins, he or she cannot go through the whole process of rebirth, but he made it too general, forgetting that those who did grievous sins were publicly called to repent, as the Israelites were in the wilderness on their way to Canaan.

They did not need to go back to Egypt again, but the grace of God was enough for them. At the same time, those who committed grievous sins were called to repent publicly, but if they did not do so, they were killed publicly like Achan and Korah. Luther's talking of the sin of unbelief as that cannot be forgiven might be different from what the scripture called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This sin of unbelief could be forgiven if one comes back in need of repentance. Such would therefore need to be re-baptized to be able to feel acceptable as part of the circle of believers.

Matthew 18:15-18

This verse suggests Disciplinary measures through the removal of membership that warrants rebaptism for one who had been disciplined to return to church

⁴¹ Wood, “Ephesians,” 11:56.

membership. In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus outlines a procedure for dealing with unrepentant sinners within the Christian community, emphasizing the gravity of apostasy and persistent unrepentance. This passage highlights the church's duty to take firm action when someone refuses to repent, even if it leads to their removal from the fellowship of believers.

The passage begins with an instruction to address a brother who sins: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." Here, the Greek verb *ἁμαρτάνω* (*hamartano*), meaning "to sin" or "to miss the mark," implies a significant moral failure requiring action rather than being overlooked. This confrontation is intended to preserve the sinner's dignity by handling the offense privately, thus emphasizing love and reconciliation.⁴²

Jesus' instruction to "go" (*ὑπάγε*, *hypage*) places the responsibility on the offended party to initiate reconciliation. This initial approach reflects a pastoral concern aimed at restoring the individual without public exposure, thus preserving the offender's dignity while addressing sin seriously.⁴³

If the sinner refuses to listen, the next step is to involve one or two witnesses. "Take one or two others along with you, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." This is likely to have been borrowed from the Old Testament in Deuteronomy, where there is a need for more than one witnesses for judgment to be valid and to promote fairness.⁴⁴

⁴² Ralph Earle, "Matthew through Luke," *Beacon Bible Commentary*, ed. W. T. Purkiser and Albert T. Harper (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), 6:151-152.

⁴³ Frederick L. Moriarty, review of *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, by W. D. Davies, *Gregorianum* 45, no. 4 (1964): 826-828.

⁴⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York, NY: Scribner, 1971), 240-241.

The witnesses' role is essential for maintaining objectivity, ensuring that the process of discipline is just and without bias.⁴⁵ Their presence both substantiates the offense and underscores the gravity of unrepentance.

If the offender remains unrepentant, the issue is brought “to the church.” The word *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklesia*), which can best be translated to mean the local congregation, serves as the final earthly authority on such matters. William Hendriksen observes that the church, as the body of believers, has the responsibility to uphold its standards of holiness and integrity.⁴⁶ This public stage emphasizes the communal aspect of church discipline, where the congregation, representing Christ's body, holds the authority to call the individual to accountability. This is supported by Keener putting it that the church acts corporately as a reflection of God's authority on earth, with the goal of both preserving community purity and encouraging repentance in the unrepentant member.⁴⁷

If the individual remains unrepentant even before the church, Jesus instructs, “Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Here, the imperative *ἔστω* (*estō*), which means “let him be,” suggests a continuous action of treating the unrepentant as an outsider. The terms *ἔθνικος* (*ethnikos*), meaning “Gentile,” and *τελώνης* (*telōnēs*), “tax collector,” symbolically imply social and religious exclusion.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 198-199.

⁴⁶ Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, review of *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, by William Hendriksen, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28, no. 5 (October 1975):486-488. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600035420>.

⁴⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 454-456.

⁴⁸ William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume 2: Matthew 8-18*, International Critical Commentary (London: T and T Clerk 2004), 785.

By treating the unrepentant as a “Gentile or tax collector,” the church enacts separation, signifying that the individual is no longer part of the covenant community. This exclusion upholds the community’s holiness and signifies the rupture caused by the unrepented sin. Robert Gundry explains that this exclusion underscores the church’s commitment to purity, with the hope of prompting the offender to reflect on their sin and repent.⁴⁹

Jesus underscores the church’s authority with the statement, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The terms *δέω* (*deō*), meaning “to bind”) and *λύω* (*lyō*), meaning “to loose”, reflects rabbinic language of forbidding or permitting actions, indicating that the church’s decisions have heavenly backing.⁵⁰

This authority underscores the significance of church discipline, with the church’s decisions carrying weight before God. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison interpret this as meaning that the church’s actions, when aligned with God’s will, reflect God’s judgments on the matter.⁵¹ The church, therefore, looks at the mistake and decides whether it needs excommunication or not. It is not only from a human perspective but also has divine acceptance.

These bible verses from the book of Matthew point out that apostasy and persistent unrepentance are valid grounds for removing someone from church membership or disciplining a member. Sunderland Lewis puts it that when a member sins or has a scandal and refuses to listen to the church, they are excommunicated,

⁴⁹ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 365-366.

⁵⁰ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume 2*, 787-88.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

which is to declare such a person not fit for any honor of a Christian until he or she repents. To him, the reason for such is for one to repent. This means that this separation is designed to uphold the church's holiness and encourage the sinner's return in humility.⁵²

For those who return to the church in genuine repentance, reentry may involve baptism or rebaptism, symbolizing renewed commitment. Baptism, in this context, functions as a public affirmation of repentance and reconciliation, marking the restoration of the individual to the fellowship of believers. According to Sunderland Lewis, baptism or rebaptism serves to welcome the penitent back into the body of Christ, affirming the cleansing from sin and renewed faith.⁵³

2 Peter 2:20-22

In 2 Peter 2:20-22, there is a warning of severe penalties for anyone who goes back to a sinful lifestyle after the full knowledge of Christ. Here, he uses strong metaphorical terms to show how spiritually affected those who go back to sin. It gives guidelines on church discipline, proposing that those who fall back into sin should be removed from church membership and that, if they repent, rebaptism is the appropriate means of restoration if they had received baptism at first when they came to the church.

The Greek term *ἐπίγνωσις* (*epignosis*) used in this passage suggests a “full knowledge” or deep understanding of Christ, implying that the apostate's knowledge was not superficial but profound. The use of the Greek term *ἐπεγνωκέναι* (*epegnokenai*) to mean “to have known” in verse 21 likewise denotes a thorough,

⁵² W. Sunderland Lewis and Henry M. Booth, *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1892), 354.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

intimate acquaintance with Jesus, underscoring the deliberate nature of the apostate's rejection. The *Wesleyan Bible Commentary* notes that individuals warned by Peter had such a complete understanding of Christ, and their choice to abandon the faith was a deliberate renunciation that warranted removal from the church. Peter's message thus cautions against apostasy by presenting it as a severe rejection of divine truth, with consequences that necessitate church discipline.⁵⁴

Lenski interprets this passage by comparing the state of apostasy to that of paganism. He writes, "It is better to be a pagan, never to get out of pagan ignorance, than to become an apostate by sinking back into paganism."⁵⁵ This view highlights the severity of returning to sin after coming to the knowledge of God. According to Lenski, those who backslide in this manner should be removed from church membership and treated as pagans once more. The church is to respond with discipline toward these individuals, reflecting their departure from the faith and the defilement of sin that now entangles them. Lenski emphasizes that, having been baptized and received salvation, such individuals are expected to continue in that state of grace and avoid returning to worldly defilements and sins. By turning away from the commandment of salvation, they effectively "turn away from salvation and from Him, the Lord and Savior,"⁵⁶ thus necessitating a strong disciplinary response from the church community.

⁵⁴ Charles S. Ball, "1 and 2 Peter," *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles W. Carter and Ralph Earle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 6:167.

⁵⁵ Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 298.

⁵⁶ Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the Three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude*, Publications of the Academy of American Franciscan History/Monograph Series (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1966), 298-299.

Peter's use of the word *ἐπιστρέψας* (*epistrepsas*) "having returned" to depict a fool's relapse into folly is now applied to the apostate's return to sin. This suggests a total repudiation of the Christian life, as it implies turning away from both the teachings of Jesus and the way of righteousness.⁵⁷ In this passage, the metaphor of a dog returning to its vomit and a pig returning to wallow in the mud illustrates the vile nature of a Christian who, after cleansing through baptism, willfully returns to sin. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* interprets Peter's message as a call for the removal of such individuals from fellowship with believers.

Eldon Fuhrman elaborates on the responsibility of those who have "known the way of righteousness." Once someone has encountered the joy of salvation, any return to sin becomes "a sin against more light" and thus incurs greater punishment than if they had never known salvation.⁵⁸ He draws a parallel between apostates and the imagery Peter uses of "a dog going back to his vomit, or a pig going back to wallow in the mud after being washed." This metaphor of a "washed" animal may imply baptism: after receiving the purification symbolized by baptism, an individual who turns back to sin must be cleansed again, potentially through re-baptism or a similar renewal process.⁵⁹ This view implies that apostasy is not only a personal failure but a breach of covenant with God that requires formal church discipline.

Peter uses the metaphors of a dog returning to its vomit and a sow wallowing in the mud to illustrate the moral and spiritual depravity of apostates who revert to sin.

⁵⁷ Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 4 *Hebrews to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 399.

⁵⁸ Eldon R. Fuhrman, "Hebrews through Revelation," *Beacon Bible Commentary*, ed. A. F. Harper and Ralph Earle (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), 10:418-419.

⁵⁹ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, Anchor Bible 37 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 172.

These metaphors, as explained by the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, represent the vile and foolish conduct of those who, having once been cleansed from sin, return to moral filth. Dogs and pigs, culturally viewed as impure animals, signify the depth of uncleanness associated with backsliding into sin. For those who have received righteousness through Christ and later backslide, the message is clear: they are no longer suitable to remain in communion with those who are “clean.” Church discipline may thus involve temporarily separating such individuals until they demonstrate repentance and readiness for restoration.⁶⁰

The *Pulpit* by emphasizes that those who abandon their faith after having known Christ enter a state worse than their former ignorance, becoming “dirtier than before.” Their condition post-apostasy is thus deemed even more severe than if they had never known the truth.⁶¹ This view implies that the church should treat apostates with a discipline suited to their grievous return to sin. This approach ensures that the purity of the community is upheld while also recognizing the consequences of knowingly rejecting the path of righteousness. Consequently, apostates may be considered worse than pagans due to their deliberate rejection of the gospel, justifying their removal from the community until a sincere repentance occurs.⁶²

1 Corinthians 5:11-13

The issue of sin and the unrepentant sinner is dealt with in these verses among the Christians, where Paul advises such a member to be removed if he or she persists

⁶⁰ Earle and Thompson, *Hebrews-Revelation*, 6:100.

⁶¹ B. C. Caffina, “Exposition and Homiletics of 2 Peter,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. Rev. H. D. M. Spence and Rev. Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950) 22:63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 22:64.

in sinful behavior. It shows the difference between the responsibility of the church to maintain the internal holiness and God's part in judging the world.

Paul admonishes believers not to associate with anyone who identifies as a "brother" but engages in persistent sinful behaviors. The term *ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος* (*adelphos onomazomenos*), which can be translated as "brother named," stresses the difference between a professed faith and unrepentant actions. This seems to mean that any close fellowship, including eating together, especially during the Lord's Supper, should be avoided at all costs so that the church avoids any compromise spiritually and morally.

The church is therefore called to care for those in the church by exercising carefulness in addressing any sin amongst themselves, as those outside the church are left for God to deal with them. Metz emphasizes the need to expel wicked individuals from the fellowship to uphold the church's sanctity, making it clear that apostates should not remain in the church membership. This is a practical application of Paul's directive to maintain the integrity of the Christian community.⁶³

Using the phrase *τί γάρ μοι τὸς ἐξω κρίνειν* (*ti gar moi tous exō krinein*) to mean "What have I to do with judging outsiders?" shows clearly that there is a difference between what the church can do and what God does. Paul reinforces that the church's responsibility is internal discipline, which involves the removal of those who practice lawlessness, such as fornication and other sinful acts.

To preserve the righteousness of the church, the church has a duty to separate evildoers from its midst, while judgment is left to God. To uphold the Christian

⁶³ Donald S. Metz, "Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians," *Beacon Bible Commentary*, ed. Ralph Earle (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1968), 8:356. The church is called to judge and discipline its members, ensuring their conduct aligns with biblical standards as this internal accountability is vital to preserving the church's moral and spiritual integrity.

standards of the church, it is therefore necessary that membership of such individuals should be removed, not because of judgment but for disciplinary purposes.⁶⁴

It should be noted that discipline by removing the member's name is only acceptable when that case is beyond doubt in its clarity to all. This disciplinary action reflects Paul's advice to the Corinthians to address fallen members whose actions undermine the community's holiness.⁶⁵

Paul's use of the term *ἐξάρατε τὸν πονηρὸν* (*exarate ton ponēron*), meaning to "Expel the wicked person" in 1 Corinthians 5:13, is an imperative rooted in Old Testament teachings. Drawing from Deuteronomy 24:7, the apostle commands the church to remove unrepentant sinners from their fellowship. This aorist-imperative conveys both urgency and necessity, underscoring the church's obligation to act decisively. Paul invokes the moral framework of the Old Testament to reinforce the call for purity among God's people so that this practice aligns with God's unchanging demand for holiness within His covenant community.⁶⁶

While Paul's directive appears severe, its ultimate purpose is redemptive. By severing fellowship with unrepentant individuals, the church aims to shame them into repentance and eventual restoration. As Matthew Henry notes, such disciplinary actions serve to preserve the church's testimony against sin while offering an opportunity for the offender to be reclaimed.⁶⁷ Henry stresses that the church is obliged to distance itself from wicked practices to honor God and protect its witness.

⁶⁴ John Peter Lange, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5," *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical*, StudyLight.org, accessed 11 April 2025, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/lcc/1-corinthians-5.html>.

⁶⁵ Charles W. Carter, "1 Corinthians and Ephesians," *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles W. Carter and Ralph Earle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 5:157.

⁶⁶ Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament*, 500-505.

⁶⁷ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation*, 197.

Theological Critique

The theological view of Martin Luther, as discussed above, needs to be critically examined to determine if it was correctly thought out or not. His leading theological understanding of rebaptism was that fact since the form of baptism was not important, baptizing again those who did not receive immersion was not acceptable. Theologically, the form of baptism to Luther did not matter more than the significance. Though he accepted that immersion was the biblical form of baptism, he did not focus much on it but on its theological fundamentals, hence rejecting rebaptism.

Looking closely at the idea of death, burial, and resurrection, which baptism symbolizes, or rather rebirth, he wrote that he would like to give to a thing so perfect and complete a sign that is also complete and perfect. Theological stance, as far as the form is concerned, cannot be set aside from its theological meaning. If one doubts it, then Paul in Romans 6:4-5 says,

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

This form of submerging one in water and emerging to Paul is a symbol of death and burial to sin on one hand and resurrection to life on the other. Writing to Colossians, Paul emphasizes it in Colossians 2:12 that, 'For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with Him, you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.' The same imagery is shown here, so that baptism is the grave of the old man and the birth of the new. As he sinks beneath the baptismal waters, the believer buries there all his corrupt affections and past sins as he emerges, then he rises, regenerates, and quickens to new

hopes and new life.⁶⁸ Apart from being commanded by Jesus, baptism in itself both symbolically and theologically shows clearly death to sin, burial in the grave of water, and resurrection to new life only in Christ Jesus.

The act of immersion is a symbol and not an actual activity, as Luther seems to suggest when he said that God himself is doing the baptism as He sits in heaven with his own hands using men as vicarious. This to him brings the notion that it does not matter who does the baptism as long as it is done. This to him would nullify the fact that it can be repeated for whatever God did; no man can repeat it, and God cannot repeat it either. On this, John says that he was baptizing with water, but one who was greater than he was coming who would baptize with the Spirit and fire.

It is evident, therefore, that the promise of Jesus of the Holy Spirit is being fulfilled after the command has been executed by the disciples of baptizing. Baptism is therefore done by men and not God as a symbol of the burial and resurrection of the one who has died to sin. Using this theology to teach that what God has done cannot be rubbed by sin or repeated is not correct theologically. The Holy Spirit of God can also be wronged by men or even blasphemed, hence it can't be a reason for not re-baptizing the one who has wronged or received baptism wrongly, thinking that God did it Himself.

Luther's rejection of rebaptism was also based on the fact that the Anabaptist rejected infant baptism, which to him was biblical and was practiced from the apostolic times. He appreciated the fact that it was never touched by the papacy nor altered with the Eucharist. He argued that if it was not theologically or biblically

⁶⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Baptism: NT References," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Fully rev. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:413.

correct, then God could not have allowed it to be practiced for such a long period of time.

Anabaptists rejected infant baptism, for it was not biblical as claimed by Luther, but it had been tampered with by the papacy by introducing not only other forms apart from immersion but also allowing it to be done to infants and not believers. They then introduced rebaptism to those who had received infant baptism by giving both theological and biblical reasons. Baptism is not for infants but for believers who are in a position to decide, as said by Howard, quoting Barth,

In every case, the indispensable answer to an unavoidable question by a man who has come to faith. It answers the question concerning the divine certainty and the divine authority of the word which the man has already heard, which in faith he has already laid hold of, and to which he has replied in the affirmative.⁶⁹

His view on terming infant baptism as correct and should not be repeated has no basis, and should allow those who receive it either by immersion or sprinkling to receive the true biblical baptism. It might be seen as a second baptism or even the first, but they should not be denied.

The longevity of a practice does not necessarily confer authenticity upon it. The assertion that infant baptism persists solely due to its historical precedent while rejecting adult baptism lacks inherent truth, as the passage of time alone cannot validate a doctrine or a teaching irrespective of its duration. Thus, it remains evident that biblically, the discourse on baptism and its prerequisites pertains more fittingly to individuals of mature years rather than infants. Initially, Luther espoused the belief that infants could be baptized either through the faith of their parents or through spiritual guardianship,⁷⁰ but later, his perspective evolved to encompass the concept

⁶⁹ James Keir Howard, *New Testament Baptism* (London, UK: Pickering & Inglis, 1970).

⁷⁰ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 65.

of infants possessing their own faith.⁷¹ Nonetheless, his conceptualization of faith may deviate from biblical parameters, given that faith devoid of action holds little doctrinal weight. Luther's assertion regarding the delayed emergence of faith after baptism also warrants scrutiny, as it diverges from conventional theological perspectives.

His view that baptism cannot be wronged after being received by any sin is biblically and theologically wrong. Baptism to Luther is a sacrament that, when you receive it, no account of sin will make it void as long as you still have faith, which is only determined by God, not man. Sin is the transgression of the law and also a lack of faith. It is not possible that when one receives baptism, remain sinless or cannot reach a point where he or she resurrects and lives again in sin so that he or she can repent and die to sin again, and that can receive rebaptism. It may not be called rebaptism for the former has been invalidated by sin, but it shows that one is receiving baptism and had received it before.

Lack of faith, which Luther called unbelief, contradicts when he says that one can receive baptism without faith, but faith will find him someday, or when faith comes, he does not need to be re-baptized. His argument, therefore, should be scrutinized more before accepting it, for it seems to have no strong theological basis. Ezekiel says that if one who has been righteous falls or goes back to sin, they need to come back and repent to receive pardon and life, or else they will go into destruction. Luther claims that no amount of sin can invalidate baptism cannot stand the test for the Bible as the scripture says in Isaiah 59:1-2 "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not

⁷¹ Luther, *Church and Ministry II*, 65.

hear” and that the wages of sin are death. This means that when one sins which we all do for all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, we need to die daily by faith and the moment the spirit of God convicts us of sin which is His work would like to die in the grave of water, then it should be allowed without any reason whatsoever.

Implications of Luther’s Stand on Rebaptism in the Church

The Risk of the Church’s Spiritual Discipline Declining

The modern church must maintain doctrinal purity and spiritual discipline while secular influences progressively permeate what is supposed to remain holy. Since Luther got his objection from his theological beliefs, this presents several hindrances to the church in upholding spiritual authority and the seriousness of religious vows. This might lead the church to fail in preserving biblical discipline, recovering those who stray, and maintaining a distinct standard of faith and practice if rebaptism is outright prohibited. Lack of clear rules for repentance and restoration in the church can cause people to come and leave without accountability. This can bring spiritual laxity and may cause chaos in the worship places.⁷²

Church Membership Status in Question

Since baptism implies both a person’s acceptance of Christ and their dedication to the church’s beliefs makes it is a condition for one to be a church member.⁷³ It is therefore important to give a person a chance to confirm their beliefs in public if discovered that their former baptism was either not done right or

⁷² Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man, Between God and the Devil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 150.

⁷³ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 859.

illegitimate. Luther's position, however, on rebaptism prevents such people from atoning for previous transgression, making them feel unsatisfied in their spiritual life and not sure of their baptismal status.⁷⁴

There is a possibility that those who move from one denomination to another might be because of a new set or development of theological beliefs. It is therefore difficult for them to show their dedication to the newfound theological light without rebaptism. This prohibition will then make new converts not in a position to express joyfully their repentance and commitment to new biblical principles, which impedes their full integration.⁷⁵

For baptism to be valid, it should closely follow the guidelines from the scripture, where a person may want to be rebaptized according to biblical mode if they were formerly baptized differently. Stanley Grenz says that if rebaptism is not allowed, then the erroneous baptism will remain, failing to correct previous theological mistakes, and the church will remain in the wrong way of doing this needful sacrament.⁷⁶

Difficulty in Spiritual Renewal and Church Harmony

Since baptism is a sign of obedience, people may choose to reaffirm their commitment in public by getting re-baptized after learning new biblical truths. It is therefore rebaptism that will fully manifest their transformation if they have been living not in accordance with the learned biblical truth.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 312.

⁷⁵ Hendrix, *Re-cultivating the Vineyard*, 118.

⁷⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 530.

⁷⁷ Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 27.

Furthermore, rebaptism promotes harmony amongst believers from various denominations. Instead of fostering division and exclusion, the church should foster an atmosphere of theological clarity, reconciliation of those who are new in faith with those who exist, and common faith by permitting candid conversations and acceptance of various baptismal experiences.⁷⁸

Limitations in Restoring Church Apostates and Reconciliation

For church leaders, apostasy poses a significant theological dilemma. Repentance and a dedication to righteousness must be shown in the rehabilitation of a baptized person who has fallen into sin or rejects the faith. For those who rejected their religion, the early church practiced public confession and outward gestures of restoration. Assuring the congregation and the repentant believer that the past has been forgiven and forgotten, rebaptism serves as a potent public demonstration of restoration.

Furthermore, the church's witness is harmed by serious and visible sins. In addition to demonstrating the church's adherence to biblical holiness, public confession through rebaptism provides a tangible symbol of repentance and renewal. It also extends God's grace to the repentant sinner. The church loses a vital instrument for exhibiting mercy and justice in situations of grave moral failure when it rejects rebaptism.

The Church's Stamping Authority Compromised

The church loses a crucial tool for upholding doctrinal responsibility and spiritual discipline if rebaptism is no longer an option. Refusing to affirm spiritual

⁷⁸ Hubmaier, "On Infant Baptism against Oecolampad," 125-129.

rebirth through rebaptism puts a church at risk of becoming both spiritually and doctrinally ineffectual, hence, it cannot stamp its authority on those who are heretics. Spiritual seriousness and the church's moral authority are undermined when individuals can join and leave the church with no obvious repercussions. Despite its theological justification, Luther's position restricts the church's capacity to successfully recover lost believers and administer biblical discipline.⁷⁹ Accepting rebaptism would allow the church to meaningfully and Biblically and publicly affirm a restored believer, guaranteeing that faith is a serious, lasting commitment rather than a passing affiliation.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Oberman, *Luther: Man, Between God and the Devil*, 150.

⁸⁰ Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God*, 311.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter will conclude with a summary of key insights, a thoughtful conclusion and implications, and well-considered recommendations regarding the biblical and theological perspectives on re-baptism in the Christian church. This structured approach aims to provide a nuanced understanding that will engage readers and deepen their appreciation of the theological complexities surrounding re-baptism.

Summary

Summarily, it was during the Reformation that rebaptism emerged around the 16th century. It was because of infant baptism that brought this theological disagreement. Anabaptist reformers put more effort into the baptism of those who believe that faith, which is genuine and a decision that is informed, was the first requirement before baptism, which was not seen in infants. They therefore pushed for rebaptism to those who were infant baptized or had no knowledge during baptism.

Acts 19:4-7 is used as the reason for rebaptism by supporters of the same, where Paul the apostle met those who had received baptism by John the Baptist. Inasmuch as John's baptism was to prepare many for the coming Messiah, the explanation from Paul is that the baptism they should receive was in the name of Jesus Christ and will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This incident demonstrates that new spiritual understanding, particularly regarding Christ and the Holy Spirit, is a

valid and necessary reason for rebaptism. The Ephesians' willingness to be rebaptized after receiving this new light highlights the practice's biblical validity.

Mark 16:16 further reinforces the idea that baptism follows personal belief and conviction: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." This order is significant because it underscores that belief must precede baptism.

The Bible does not support baptizing infants because they can't make informed decisions and profess faith. Such who were baptized as infants should therefore receive baptism anew, for they have found a new belief with understanding.

Ezekiel 18:21-23 calls a sinner to repentance and to be renewed, as God promises to bring back the sinner who comes back from the life of sin. This shows that those who had fallen into apostasy after receiving their first baptism should receive the second baptism. Rebaptism is a public declaration that those who were in sin have repented and are coming back to commit their lives to God again, showing their faith in His grace and forgiveness. This is seen in Titus 3:5, where spiritual regeneration is described as the washing of rebirth, showing a new beginning in the life of a sinner who has repented.

Additionally, rebaptism is supported by the principle of receiving new light and understanding. In the case of the Ephesian believers in Acts 19, their rebaptism was prompted by a deeper grasp of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, when believers today encounter significant new truths, such as a deeper understanding of God's law or the gospel, they may feel compelled to renew their baptismal covenant as an outward expression of their spiritual growth.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, drawing on biblical examples, practices rebaptism under specific circumstances, such as apostasy followed by genuine repentance or the acceptance of new biblical truths.

The principle in Matthew 18:15-17 has it that when one has received discipline by the church, the only way to be restored publicly and to acknowledge repentance should be by rebaptism as they return to faith. The church, therefore, identifies that rebaptism is not a repetition of grace but a reaffirmation of faith and a re-commitment to the body of Christ.

Using Ephesians 4:5, which speaks of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” as a reason against rebaptism is out of context, as this text emphasizes the unity of Christ’s body and not against rebaptism. This shows that baptism in its true form shows a faith being shared and identification in Christ. For those who have strayed or come to a new faith, rebaptism serves to re-establish this unity and commitment. Martin Luther rejected rebaptism, emphasizing that baptism is a sacrament of God’s promise, performed once and valid regardless of later sin or loss of faith. He disputed that a second baptism lessens the grace of God and puts more emphasis on the works and not on faith. Luther observed that the baptism of infants is valid, stating that faith approved through the Holy Spirit endows it with the ability.

In cases of apostasy or heresy, rebaptism is important as it symbolizes repentance, restoration, and a new commitment to the faith. Luther and his team still hold that repentance and confession are sufficient for one who has received baptism and fallen into apostasy to come back to the community of believers, saying that baptism is an unrepeatable sacrament.

Synthesis of the Research Findings

Generally, the findings suggest that rebaptism is the reflection of spiritual renewal, repentance, and acceptance of the new theological truths, but not a rejection of the initial baptism. It is heavily supported by the scriptures, especially in Acts 19:1-7, where the Ephesians were rebaptized upon a deeper understanding of Christ.

In cases of apostasy, the realization of the significant theological enlightenment and realization of the invalidity of former baptism, rebaptism should be considered. Baptism in this instance should be understood not only as an initial rite of faith but also as a sacrament used to reaffirm a covenant between a believer and God. While Martin Luther rejected rebaptism with understanding of it as a permanent sacrament, it did not account fully for the spiritual transformation that can make rebaptism necessary. It is therefore valid to note that his perspective is not entirely biblically and theologically valid, especially when seen against scriptural practice. Rebaptism, therefore, should be a voluntary and personal decision signifying repentance and renewed commitment to God. This will foster a balanced approach so that rebaptism cannot be imposed as a requirement or dismissed outright, but offered as an opportunity for spiritual restoration in the life of the believer or repentant sinner.

Conclusion

In conclusion, rebaptism should not be seen or taken as a rejection of the first baptism but as a thoughtful manifestation of spiritual renewal, repentance, and understanding of the new light and truth. This acknowledges the transformative power of God's grace and aligns with biblical teachings on faith, repentance, and the reception of new truths. The examples of rebaptism in the Bible, particularly in Acts 19, provide a clear precedent for this practice, affirming its validity for believers who seek to deepen their relationship with God.

It is, therefore, both biblically and theologically defensible, especially in cases of apostasy or significant theological enlightenment. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's perspective aligns with these principles, emphasizing rebaptism as a personal decision reflecting genuine repentance and recommitment to God.

Implications of the Study

Martin Luther rejected rebaptism, believing that baptism is an event where the promise of God is at the center and not the workings and reactions of a human being. This, therefore, though it is upholding the objective of the sacrament, also raises some questions theologically as far as repentance, church identity, and doctrinal accountability are concerned.

Theological Implications

Genuine repentance. Those who, in one way or another, fall away from the biblical doctrines and teachings and want to renew their faithfulness to them will do so decisively through rebaptism. Ezekiel 18:21-23 supports that God accepts those who come back to him with understanding and faith. The birth of regeneration through rebaptism should follow such genuine repentance.

Faith before baptism. Mark 16:16 is one of the Bible verses in this study that explains well that if baptism was done in infancy, then faith lacked; hence, it was unbiblical. This therefore allows such to come to correct it by personally understanding what baptism is all about and therefore receive rebaptism. This rebaptism, therefore, will be biblically correct because it is driven by faith in Christ.

Spiritual growth. Just as the 12 Ephesians got more understanding from Apostle Paul concerning Jesus and the Holy Spirit, it is therefore possible for one to choose rebaptism when they receive major biblical doctrine or truth after guidance from a spiritual leader. This choice shows one's growth in faith and honor to God as He leads their lives.

Deep commitment. Choosing rebaptism after apostasy or knowledge of major biblical doctrine shows how baptism is a deep commitment and not just a ritual. The practice respects the fact that baptism is holy, showing death to sin and new life in

Christ. Rebaptism is therefore valid when done for the correct purpose and reasons, not to deny God's grace but to respond to it.

Missiological Implications

Public testimony. The church grows inwardly and outwardly so that, when one gets a major new truth during evangelism, they have an opening where they can associate fully with those who got it earlier. This is through rebaptism if they had already received baptism. This, therefore, makes evangelism meaningful and the growth of the church important.

Sense of belonging. When those who realize they knew nothing about the truth do not receive rebaptism or are denied, they may not feel welcomed and may not deeply commit themselves to such teaching, since no one seems to notice even their presence. Upon receiving rebaptism, they may experience comfort and desire to engage more with these teachings and form relationships with other church members. Others in the fellowship will appreciate their full support and responsibility. This rebaptism will unite the old and the new in faith and following Jesus with a clear conscience and in truth.

Restoration of the fallen. The fallen in faith should be restored to start a new life with God. Rebaptism, therefore, should be the best means of satisfying the thirsting soul in need of fellowship in the church and Christ. The act is the sign to the church and the world that they are serious about starting over again with God. Such a restored member will feel accepted back as a lost but found son or daughter of the kingdom rather than if he or she didn't receive any of the kind.

The church's moral standard. When people join the church and leave without any accountability, the church will grow weak and lose its sense of existence. Discipline and rebaptism make sure that members returning to the church after

apostasy are not just physically present but also restored spiritually, committed to the biblical teachings in the church, and publicly recognized. These steps will therefore make the church strong.

The church and its leadership should practically prioritize scripture over historical and personal views or denominational biases. Personal spiritual conviction should be emphasized during discussions around rebaptism, where rebaptism should be allowed to be a personal voluntary act which is only facilitated through prior education and pastoral guidance, and not a requirement or dismissed thought.

In case of apostasy and theological enlightenment, rebaptism should be recognized as a valid step in spiritual renewal. This step should be encouraged, especially to those who would like to recommit their lives to Christ once again after apostasy, and those who realized that they did not Biblically receive baptism, and those who have gained new theological insights and would like to affirm their acceptance of truth publicly.

Church members should be educated on the theological basis for rebaptism, ensuring that they understand it as an affirmation of faith and not the denial of the previous baptism. Church leaders should also avoid rigid interpretation that dismisses rebaptism role in spiritual restoration and transformation as much as baptism is seen to be a holy sacrament.

When rebaptism is approached with humility and discernment, it serves as a powerful public declaration of God's grace and also as the means by which the Holy Spirit of God brings transformation in the life of a believer.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, I therefore recommend the following:

1. That historical theological positions be reevaluated, especially on baptism and rebaptism in light of biblical standards and contemporary theological reflections.
2. Further explanation of the historical, doctrinal, and scriptural foundations of rebaptism in academic discourse, with its effects, to help open up more understanding of it.
3. Comparative studies between different Christian traditions be encouraged to illuminate diverse theological understanding of rebaptism and their practical applications.
4. A church guided theological framework be developed in theological institutions by the church leadership. This clear doctrinal guideline on rebaptism will ensure that the practice is scripturally sound and practically relevant.

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