

## On The Proper Usage Of “Early Church” Writings

**Php 3:17** Brethren, be followers together of me, and **mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.** 18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Even in St. Paul’s day there were **many walking** as false teachers who caused confusion concerning the terms of reconciliation with God; which literally made them **enemies** of the cross of Christ. The purpose of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was to reconcile man with God; and all who hinder this sacred work are enemies of His cause. Paul warned of grievous wolves and false apostles who will masquerade as ministers of righteousness; but are actually ministers of Satan. All the Apostles warned numerous times about false prophets and false teachers, so is it any wonder that many of the prominent voices of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and onward were teaching and practicing contrary to the Apostles of Christ? We must judge every writer and teacher by the **teaching** and **example** of the Apostles of Christ or we are **sure** to err. We can **never** use some “early church” writer as our basis to “understand” the Apostles.

I hope you understand that the **only** “early church” writings from the first century are the Scriptures themselves. The other “early church” writings are from men who were usually removed from Christ and the Apostles by over 100 years, and were not endorsed by any of the Apostles. Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement of Rome, are the ones who probably knew the Apostles, and they didn’t write much.

When I was a young pastor frustrated with the inconsistent and erroneous Baptist doctrine that I had been taught growing up and in college, I was excited to read the “Apostolic Fathers”. Why? Because they are pretty consistent in one area – repentance and obedient faith as necessary for salvation. They did not believe in Calvinistic or Antinomian “Eternal Security”; and so they helped undergird my conclusions against those errors. However, over many years of study leading to greater familiarity with the Scriptures, history, and all the Patristic writings; I have come to realize these men are not safe guides, especially the later ones. Not because they don’t agree with my conclusions; but because they are inconsistent with themselves, the Apostles, history, and the Hebrew roots of the gospel.

A prime indicator of pagan corruption and superstition in these early times can be seen in their baptism practices. This is one way we can know the Didache is not as early as some would like to imagine, as it requires fasting before baptism – something the apostles didn’t practice or teach. Just as you can look at the “Youth Group” in churches today as a prime indicator of how worldly the congregation is, you can look at baptism practices in these early churches to know how corrupt they had become. Even as early as Tertullian (160-220AD) you have much superstitious ceremonialism and shocking error added to the simple rite of baptism.

*When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel. Then when we are taken up (as new-born children), we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey, and from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week. We take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike. As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honours. We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord’s day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday. We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground. At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign. (De Corona Militis Chap 3)*

W.A. Mackay, in his book, *Water Baptism - The Doctrine Of The Mode*, reveals the following sad decay in mainline churches under the leadership of these "Ante-Nicene Fathers." What is said below applied to Tertullian's baptisms as well.

*"Even in the Apostle's days there was a disposition on the part of many to depart from the simplicity of the Gospel. And this was particularly the case with regard to the sacraments of the Church (See I Cor. ch. 11:19-34, and Ch. 1:14). But in the second and third centuries we find the state of things deplorable indeed. The disposition to ascribe peculiar virtue to external forms had gone on constantly increasing, until by-and-by, nude immersions, accompanied with exorcism (magical powers), anointing, and every species of superstitions, fairly ran riot in unseemingly and scandalous practice. It was thought that there was a saving virtue in the very water of baptism. Just as it was believed that the bread and wine, after consecration, became the real body and blood of Christ, so it was believed that the water of baptism, after the invocation, possessed the real presence of the Spirit. The natural conclusion from this was that the more water the better, and that the water should be applied to the whole body so that the regeneration might be complete. We, therefore, now find trine or three-fold immersions in a nude state, accompanied with exorcism, unction, the giving of salt and milk to the candidate, clothing him in snow-white robes, and crowning him with evergreens"*

The Ante-Nicene writers at this period were Gentiles who came from paganism and viewed the Scriptures from their world view rather than from the Jewish viewpoint of Christ and the Apostles. Their erroneous presuppositions led to Roman Catholicism steeped in pagan overtones. This is an undeniable historic fact; and those who quote the Patristic writers to defend their positions, rather than building solely on the Scripture, are strangely quiet about this or are ignorant of it. My use of the Patristic writers keeps these facts in view; but many who use them do not. All heresy comes from ripping the Scriptures from their proper historical Jewish context and original intent; and the Ante-nicene writers are notorious for this.

Patristic writers prove they are unworthy of trust and leadership in doctrine by the gross errors they endorsed and practiced in their day in their own congregations and lives. This fact sadly doesn't faze modern Mennonites who use the Patristic writings as long as they can find a quote or statement to defend their own Marcionite errors. I've shown numerous times, and in many instances, that the quote does, in fact, **not** defend their point or that the one quoted was grossly in error and not worthy of joining hands with. This doesn't stop them from assuming that, just because a Patristic writer says something, it is therefore the "official church position" and worthy of trust. This assuming is a glaring revelation of stubborn ignorance as to the true nature of these men they quote.

I use Tertullian and Irenaeus to show that these men knew better than to interpret Jesus as correcting Moses and understood that Moses' Words were Jesus' Words. I also declare that even though they knew this, they still contradicted themselves and spoke things contrary to not only Moses, but the Apostles of Christ. They interpreted Scripture from their Gentile perspective and missed the context and Hebrew roots of the teachings of Jesus. NO modern Mennonite who uses these men to try and support their error would follow these men on most of their other interpretations, beliefs, and practices! They would not attend their churches! But why not? If these men indeed represent the "official church position", and thus reveal to us the *proper understanding* of Jesus' teachings and the Apostles' instructions, as Mennonites conveniently claim in the realms they agree with; then why not follow them on every aspect? Why? Because they don't agree with each other and they have blatant and obvious pagan overtones and errors -- That's why. So why put so much weight on their interpretations of Scripture in **any** area? The Mennonites use them when it is convenient; and at the same time conveniently overlook the gross errors and bad practices of the same men they hold up as authorities. My use of them is different and I will explain how.

I use Tertullian to prove that the Corinthians practiced women's head veil and understood Paul that way, as opposed to "long hair" being the veil; and also that they didn't cover their faces. This is **historic**

**fact** gleaned from Tertullian arguing a completely different issue and referring to the Corinthian's own practice. That Tertullian lived during the time when Corinth was still a practicing Christian Congregation; and knew what their long standing practice and belief was on this topic is valuable historic information. I also use Tertullian's words to prove that the exception clause in Matt 19:9 was not "invented" by Erasmus as foolish people have asserted; because it was in Tertullian's Bible. Using these men to establish **historic data** of this sort **is appropriate**. What is **not appropriate** is when men twist the Scriptures so as to fit the beliefs found in some of the Patristic writers. What is **not appropriate** is to imply that the beliefs of the Ante-Nicene writers are the "official church position" from the Apostles on a subject; when in reality that is far from the truth in many areas. What is **not appropriate** is to build doctrine on what the Patristic writers said while ignoring the Hebrew context of the Scriptures.

When Tertullian writes his apology to the authorities he declares publicly to them that Christians filled their ranks including government and military – even reminding them of some historic facts **before their time** to demonstrate his point; but later gives his opinion that Christians really should not be in the military. Now, which is the "official church position"? Which one shows what Christians in general had believed and practiced even before Tertullian's time? Obviously whether or not Tertullian believed it was right, there were enough Christians in the government and military as to clear him from lying to the authorities. He couldn't have written such a thing to the public leaders if the majority of Christians were pacifists and it was the "official church position" to be so. We can use his statement to the authorities because it was a *historic fact* reported in *public view* and not just a *personal opinion*; whereas his personal interpretation only shows what he personally believed on that subject on that day. The Patristic writers are full of opinions; but these are certainly not "official church positions" as any study of history and Scripture will reveal. Isolated cases of pacifism prove nothing more than cases of Marcionism, Gnosticism, false gospels, pagan influences or mistakes on historic facts like Irenaeus' error on the age of Jesus. What if the "popular" Christian writers of today all wrote their beliefs? Would people 1000 years later know what the true faithful Christians believed? Consider the state of the first century churches of Asia in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 if you think things were just rosy in the late second, third, and fourth centuries when these Ante-Nicene writers lived.

So, there is a correct usage of historic **uninspired** writings and there is an incorrect usage. The same usage is proper today with men's writings. If you look at the overall fruit and beliefs of an individual, you can tell whether to even read their interpretations or not; and some of those whom Mennonites seem to prefer are not worthy of following – like Hermas. We should only build doctrine on clear statements of Scripture in their historical Jewish usage and context; but we can gain historical insights through other writings including those of Jewish Rabbis and even pagan Gentiles. No Christian writings outside the Scriptures are inspired and worthy as foundations for doctrine. Christian writings ancient or modern are merely heretical doctrines of ignorant men unless they are properly representing the teachings of Scripture. How ironic and sad that the Apostles said, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*"; but Marcion sympathizers prefer uninspired writers OVER the Old Testament!

Those who I have debated on these issues are continuously revealing an ignorance or bias concerning the true nature of the "early church" and the proper use of "early church writings". I hope this short article will help the sincere seeker of truth to understand the difference in their usage and my usage – as they are not the same.

Let me give you an example of how the Ante-Nicene writings are not even understood properly many times. In the Caneyville Letters and in Ste. Marie's attempted refutation you will hear them quoting from the Ante-Nicene writings thinking they are refuting my position. First, when I have annihilated their error from the Scriptures, I need not worry about some writer later on. Second, those

who attempt to refute my stand don't even understand much of the "early church writings" which they quote. When they read the word "law", they obviously can't tell whether we are speaking of Moses' Law as "the Old Covenant", the "Ceremonial Law" or the "Moral Law". In the Scriptures the word "law" is used in all three of these ways; and you must understand the context to know what is being said – NOT ASSUME. Irenaeus used the term *Law* to refer to the *Old Covenant* as Paul does in Galatians, which was indeed replaced with something better; and wasn't referring to the Moral Law of God, which was not replaced, because there is nothing better.

If we can believe Irenaeus' own words, and if he is free from contradicting himself; then he can **never** support their case. If he actually does later on, then he is obviously confused, because the statement below leaves no room for the other side of the controversy. If Irenaeus believes the quote below, then he is on my side. He is probably the earliest writer to address these issues (130-202AD).

### **Irenaeus against Marcionism**

*"CHAP.XII.--IT CLEARLY APPEARS THAT THERE WAS BUT ONE AUTHOR OF BOTH THE OLD AND THE NEW LAW, FROM THE FACT THAT CHRIST CONDEMNED TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS REPUGNANT TO THE FORMER, WHILE HE CONFIRMED ITS MOST IMPORTANT PRECEPTS, AND TAUGHT THAT HE WAS HIMSELF THE END (fulfillment) OF THE MOSAIC LAW.*

"1. For the tradition of the elders themselves, which they pretended to observe from the law, was contrary to the law given by Moses. Wherefore also Esaias declares: "Thy dealers mix the wine with water,"(6) showing that the elders were in the habit of mingling a watered tradition with the simple command of God; that is, they set up a spurious law, and one contrary to the [true] law; as also the Lord made plain, when He said to them, "Why do ye transgress the commandment of God, for the sake of your tradition?"(7) For not only by actual transgression did they set the law of God at nought, mingling the wine with water; but they also set up their own law in opposition to it, which is termed, even to the present day, the pharisaical. In this [law] they suppress certain things, add others, and interpret others, again, as they think proper, which their teachers use, each one in particular; and desiring to uphold these traditions, they were unwilling to be subject to the law of God, which prepares them for the coming of Christ. But they did even blame the Lord for healing on the Sabbath-days, which, as I have already observed, the law did not prohibit. For they did themselves, in one sense, perform acts of healing upon the Sabbath-day, when they circumcised a man [on that day]; but they did not blame themselves for transgressing the command of God through tradition and the aforesaid pharisaical law, and for not keeping **the commandment of the law, which is the love of God.**"

"2. But that this is the first and greatest commandment, and that the next [has respect to love] towards our neighbour, **the Lord has taught, when He says that the entire law and the prophets hang upon these two commandments.** Moreover, **He did not Himself bring down [from heaven] any other commandment greater than this one,** but renewed this very same one to His disciples, when He enjoined them to love God with all their heart, and others as themselves. **But if He had descended from another Father, He never would have made use of the first and greatest commandment of the law; but He would undoubtedly have endeavoured by all means to bring down a greater one than this from the perfect Father, so as not to make use of that which had been given by the God of the law. And Paul in like manner declares, "Love is the fulfilling of the law:"**(1) and [he declares] that when all other things have been destroyed, there shall remain "faith, hope, and love; **but the greatest of all is love;**"(2) and that apart from the love of God, neither knowledge avails anything,(3) nor the understanding of mysteries, nor faith, nor prophecy, but that without love all are hollow and vain; **moreover, that love makes man perfect; and that he who loves God is perfect, both in this world and in that which is to come.** For we do never cease from loving God; but in proportion as we continue to contemplate Him, so much the more do we love Him."

"3. **As in the law, therefore, and in the Gospel [likewise], the first and greatest commandment is, to love the Lord God with the whole heart, and then there follows a commandment like to it, to love one's neighbour as one's self; the author of the law and the Gospel is shown to be one and the same. For the precepts of an absolutely perfect life, since they are the same in each Testament, have pointed out [to us] the same God,** who certainly has promulgated particular laws adapted for each; but the more prominent and the greatest

[commandments], without which salvation cannot [be attained], **He has exhorted [us to observe] the same in both.**"

He says in Chapter II of this same document:

"3. But since the **writings (litera) of Moses are the words of Christ**, He does Himself declare to the Jews, as John has recorded in the Gospel: "If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, neither will ye believe My words."(3) **He thus indicates in the clearest manner that the writings of Moses are His words.** If, then, [this be the case with regard] to Moses, so also, beyond a doubt, the **words of the other prophets are His [words], as I have pointed out.** And again, the Lord Himself exhibits Abraham as having said to the rich man, with reference to all those who were still alive: "If they do not obey Moses and the prophets, neither, if any one were to rise from the dead and go to them, will they believe him."(4)"

Irenaeus could not believe that **love** fulfilled both covenants and then believe what modern Mennonites believe! If you can't understand this, then I cannot help you. It is principally impossible. **If** love allowed divorce and remarriage among Israelites when immorality marred that marriage; **but** Jesus said that to obey Moses' Law **now** is committing adultery; **then LOVE CANNOT FULFILL BOTH**; and Irenaeus' statement, "**...the precepts of an absolutely perfect life, since they are the same in each Testament**", simply cannot be true. **If** love taught men to defend the damsel in distress, the weak, and the innocent blood in the OT; **but** Jesus taught that we must be pacifists and allow the damsel to be raped while we pray; **then** how does LOVE fulfill both Jesus and the Law? **If** love taught men to swear by God in calling upon God to be witness of earthly transactions; **but** Jesus taught that this very precept "cometh of evil"; **then** how does love fulfill both the Law and Jesus?

Jesus did **not** teach a higher moral ethic; but taught the **same** ethic that JESUS also taught in the OT through Moses - As Irenaeus just stated: "**...the Lord has taught, when He says that the entire law and the prophets hang upon these two commandments.** Moreover, **He did not Himself bring down [from heaven] any other commandment greater than this one**, but renewed this very same one to His disciples, when He enjoined them to love God with all their heart, and others as themselves. **But if He had descended from another Father, He never would have made use of the first and greatest commandment of the law; but He would undoubtedly have endeavoured by all means to bring down a greater one than this from the perfect Father, so as not to make use of that which had been given by the God of the law.**"

If there were deceivers propagating false doctrine within the very apostolic churches themselves even while the Apostles were alive; can you build doctrine on some uninspired opinion 100 plus years removed from the Apostles? Where did the early church end up? Which direction did these men lead those mainline churches? It ended up in Catholicism – eastern and western. If a doctrine is not clearly and consistently taught in the Scriptures, then quoting some uninspired man 100+ years removed from the Apostles certainly doesn't validate it! There is a proper and improper way to use historic writings. Look and see all that these men practiced and believed before building your doctrine on a singular opinion that you liked.

**Acts 20:25** *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that **after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.***

If you wish to see a demonstration of the misuse and false assumptions when using the Ante-Nicene writers, then read the debates that I've had with these people where I expose the false conclusions they

jump to with the Ante-Nicene writers. Paste this address into your browser and read their letter with my response:

[http://www.thefaithoncedelivered.info/web-living\\_faith\\_00087.htm](http://www.thefaithoncedelivered.info/web-living_faith_00087.htm)