Believer’s Baptism: Sign Of The New Covenant In Christ - Critical Analysis

Introduction

Believer’s baptism has been subject to analysis from various authors whether it is the clear teaching of the New Testament. In order to respond to this analogy, Schreiner and Wright examine the practical applications for believers’ baptism in the current dispensation. In addition to this, McDonnell and Montague believe that the logical introduction into the New Testament is the very term baptism in the Holy Spirit. The word baptize with the Spirit as a compliment is seen to appear eight times in the New Testament. Of these eight appearances, four are the promise of John the Baptist that the one coming after him will baptize in (the) Holy Spirit (Mark 1;8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). [1] It is from this point of view that Schreiner and Wright build on their analysis of baptism and makes its focus on the covenantal theology of reformed and Presbyterian churches. The New Testament puts an emphasis on believer’s baptism at its very core focus in the Book. The main purpose of this Book by Schreiner and Wright is to illustrate the great significance of baptism while the reader gains appreciation for the significance of baptism. [1: Kilian McDonnell and George Montague. Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries, Second Revised Edition. (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017), 4.]

Brief Summary

This Book presents the need for the believers to have a central focus of Jesus Christ as the initiator of baptism. For instance, Schreiner and Wright state that baptism is reserved for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. [2] It is a complete contrast of the many infant baptism procedures that are witnessed amongst evangelical churches. It is necessary for the authors to respond to the numerous inquiries by people who desire to know more about the main purpose of baptism and where it is the doorstep towards bringing the child into the covenant community. The different scholars that have been quoted by the authors have assisted in approaching this topic from biblical exegesis and theology, history and theology as well as its pastoral application. [2: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 6.]

Biblical Exegesis

The first chapter in this Book looks at the dynamics of the word baptism as presented by various authors. The analysis by Kostenberger and Patterson looks at various readings from the four Gospels and quotes the Book of Matthew where baptism is specifically meant for those believers who have forsaken their old ways and looked at a new life with Christ. [3] In addition to this, the Gospel of Matthew in this Book talks about baptism as an essential component of Christian faith as well as its initiation that is received through immersion. Lastly, it highlights how the one who receives baptism is transformed. However, we are reunited with him each time there is repentance and the forgiveness of sin. [4] Despite the illustrations by Stein regarding baptism in the Acts of the Apostle, Schreiner and Wright further add that there are four key

areas worth noting based on the epistles' version of baptism, how baptism was carried out, the redemptive history of baptism and baptism and the idea of believers. [5] [3: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 66.] [4: Robert H. Stein. Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ. (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 60.] [5: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 67.]

History and Theology

Schreiner and Wright then move from a Biblical analysis of baptism to that which is related to history and theology. Since the beginning, the early church has tried to coil the meaning of baptism to the believers. The authors highlight how people who have advocated for infant baptism have been encouraged by the narrative of how children were presented in the temple in the olden days. [6] This basis is highlighted by Schreiner and Wright through the sacraments, the definition of various authors on their understanding of baptism, the mixed community of believers, the covenant of grace, the use of New Testament texts and lastly, how infant's baptism fits with the conviction of salvation through faith. It further gives various definitions and understanding of baptism. However, it is worth noting that this section of the book does not give a clear response on the six categories as having been illustrated by other authors in the book. [7] [6: Robert H. Stein. Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ. (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 60.] [7: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 97.]

Pastoral Initiative

In various churches, there are various ways that pastors and the ministers administer baptism. Again, local dioceses have specific rules that must be taken into consideration when this is done. This is the other perspective that is introduced in this Book by Schreiner and Wright. The Book presents some rules on what can be done during baptism. The focus includes who is given the powers to baptize, how baptism is to be carried out, and the people that can be baptized. [8] It goes ahead to stipulate when baptism can be done and lastly, whether those who are not baptized can partake in church sacraments such as Holy Communion. To administer baptism or the Lord's Supper is to make an authoritative pronouncement based on your own confession of the gospel, you are with Christ. [9] [8: Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker. Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies. (B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 154.] [9: Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman. Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age. (Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 4.]

Critical Interaction

There are different arguments and conclusions that have been made in the Book on Baptism by the various authors. It is worth noting that the arguments have been produced from a non-Baptist perspective an indication that there is no bias presented in the Book. As can be seen from the various discussions, Schreiner and Wright try to limit oversimplifying the original position that has been presented. In addition to this, the book could have taken a different dimension had it been for the Baptist authors to give their ideas and opinions on the subject. In

most cases, they tend to take a side that may impact on an understanding of baptism from various perspectives. [10] However, leaving the Book open for the perspectives of Baptist author's will present a new dimension since most of their views will be contrary to what has been presented in the Book. While it is true that the Baptist perspective on this Book could have been contrary to the ideas held by Schreiner and Wright, it would have been of great significance if their opinion could have been incorporated. This could have offered the reader the ability to critically look at what Baptist believers and authors hold with regard to baptism. In this regard, there are others who may end up feeling that this Book by Schreiner and Wright is not applicable in their churches hence cannot be used in sacramental instructions. [11] The lack of inclusion, therefore, means that Baptist churches will rarely use the Book in different applications, especially with regard to pastoral applications. [10: Robert H. Stein. Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ. (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 60.] [11: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 97.]

The other critical point worth illustrating stems from the argument by Schreiner and Wright regarding the covenant. While it could have been essential to look at this point in a critical way, the Book fails to determine whether baptism is a sign of the new covenant. [12] The different authors have presented a diverging opinion on what was the meaning of the covenant. In some cases, we see how spiritual circumcision is referred to as the new covenant while others hold that it was baptism. The arguments of Schreiner and Wright would have been clarified with the concept of the new covenant being presented in a clear way. While appreciating the analysis by Schreiner and Wright on baptism, it is perhaps debatable that the Roman Catholics will feel that their view on baptism is not reflected. [13] There is a special emphasis on the sacrament of baptism for infants in the Roman Catholic Church. Green notes that baptism in the Roman Catholic Church is that which is given only once and faults other churches that do not make this sacrament an important initiation into the church. The arguments of the Roman Church in critiquing this Book would have been stated through the fact that those who are not properly baptized in other Churches will be baptized again. However, they agree with few churches that are believed to undertake this initiation sacrament in the right and recommended way. Again, it may not only be applicable to the Roman Catholic Church but the Lutheran or Orthodox Church may also find issues with it. While there is clarification on reformed churches at the beginning, it is worth noting that some section of this book may not only be used by them but by the universal church. [14] [12: Ibid, 97.] [13: Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker. Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies. (B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 154.] [14: Kilian McDonnell and George Montague. Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries, Second Revised Edition. (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017), 4.]

Schreiner and Wright have tried to prove their points by carrying out an effective analysis from various authors. For instance, it notes that the fire received through baptism is also discussed through the narration of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, of how the first disciples were able to receive this call and went out to spread the Good News. There are several elements that are narrated concerning baptism from the perspective that shows baptism signifies repentance, faith and the gift of the Spirit. [15] Many of the problems that are related to Christianity as noted by Stein stems from our moving away from God when we commit sin. Again, the book on a historical perspective on baptism acknowledges that it is untenable to try and judge baptism based on the Biblical text and understanding, as to do this will be missing the entire point and focus of baptism. The example of conversion of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles tries to spell out

how baptism was a door step to another mission. It is a deeper understanding of the covenant that God had with humanity that is clearly stated by Stephen Wellum in the Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants. It is referred to as the covenant of grace that humanity moves from a state of sin to that of being righteous with God. It further states that there is no forceful requirement that one had to be baptized in order to be considered holy but rather, it is a covenant that speculates how a Christian should live. [16] [15: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 67.] [16: Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker. Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies. (B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 154.]

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth reiterating that while the author tried to sell out the argument on baptism, it was lacking in a universal perspective considering that this is a religious book. It does not only entail going to the reformed brothers but might have had an effective purpose when it was directed to the universal church. [17] Despite this weakness, the book has been able to bring on board various authors who have argued their case through Biblical reflections and thoughts in history. The authors have tried to take a reformist perspective while writing the book hence have failed to consider the vies of the Baptist authors as well as the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox, who would have been well versed to give their thoughts. [18] It is however, true that the book has provoked the need to carry out research on whether the sacrament of baptism is a covenant, and if so, what is the position of other sacraments. [17: Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman. Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age. (Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 4.] [18: Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ. (Nashville: B & H Adademic, 2006), 67.]

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