



What Is Baptism?

R.C. Sproul

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Baptism is taught in the Bible and has been practiced for centuries, but understanding of its meaning and respect for its importance is at a low ebb today. Confusion reigns over questions about its mode and its place in the life of the Christian, and as a result, even many evangelical congregations are downplaying its significance.

This is not the way it should be, Dr. R. C. Sproul declares in this Crucial Questions booklet. Baptism, he affirms, is one of the two sacraments of the Christian church, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Therefore, it is a necessary and meaningful practice that is packed with rich symbolism. In this booklet, Dr. Sproul provides help in understanding and appreciating this practice of the church.

What Is Baptism? Details

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From Reader Review What Is Baptism? for online ebook

Kevin says

This is quite a quick read. This little pamphlet was well-written and packs a lot into few pages. I found it to be a good introduction to covenant infant baptism. I especially appreciated the first chapter in baptism and salvation.

Jimmy says

This is the second booklet in the Crucial Questions Series that I am reviewing. The topic of this work is on Christian baptism. I appreciated that Sproul wrote this and also made it available for free on Kindle and cheap in paperback format. In addition I appreciated the fact that Sproul wrote this booklet in an easy to understand format for the general audience.

The book itself is divided into six chapters. The first chapter covered the relationship between baptism and salvation with Sproul making the nuanced point that baptism is important but that does not mean baptism is contrary to the Bible's teaching that justification is by faith alone. Chapter two looks at John the Baptist's ministry and baptism. Here I appreciated Sproul's point that baptism was shocking in the period of second temple Judaism since it would have been a scandal that John the Baptist implied even the Jews also needed purification and not just Gentiles who converted. Chapter three looks at signs of Abraham's covenant which Sproul ending the chapter with the question of what is the New Covenant sign which of course is Baptism. Chapter four then goes over the meaning of baptism which I felt was the meat of the book. Both chapters five and six are a bit more controversial among Christians and here we see Sproul's Presbyterianism comes out. Concerning the discussion of modes of baptism in chapter five Sproul tries to argue for sprinkling as oppose to baptism by immersion. I didn't think he presented necessarily the strongest case and I remained unconvinced. The most controversial chapter to me as a Christian with Baptist leaning is chapter six in which Sproul tried to argue his case for infant baptism. I know Sproul said that "it's a very dangerous thing to try to discern what is the good and proper way to please God simply by counting noses..." but he goes ahead to make this type of argumentation in the paragraph right before the quote in which Sproul argued that contemporary Evangelicals who reject infant baptism are in the minority and outnumbered compared to the number of denominations that hold to infant baptisms (to be fair he did mention these denominations tend to be smaller in actual size). Moreover even after he made the statement that it is dangerous to argue by appealing to the majority he later goes on to make the same kind of appeal. I found Sproul to be at his weakest in the book here; for instance he acknowledges that "the New Testament nowhere explicitly commands Christian to baptize their infant children" but in the same paragraph he says "But by the same token, there is no explicit prohibition in the New Testament against the baptism of infants." Not only am I not convinced because this is an argument from silent, but I also wonder how the Regulative Principle of Worship that Presbyterian subscribes to applies here as a undercutting defeater to infant baptism within conservative Presbyterian's own theological method. There's more I can say about this chapter but in terms of some positive input I think this is worth reading to at least get the argument for infant baptism from Presbyterians themselves.

Overall a worthwhile work. I used this as a book one of our church's small group was going through.

Zach McDonald says

Sproul is one of my favorite authors because of his conciseness and clarity. This is a great book on baptism that anyone can sit and read within an hour. R.C. makes a point of touching on all the major aspects of baptism that are popularly debated and gives answer that are both short and helpful. Among these topics are meaning, baptism as a covenant sign, mode, and the issue of infant baptism. I only rated the book as four stars because the book wasn't anything mind blowing for me. However, as an introductory book this is by far one of the most helpful.

C.H.E. Sadaphal says

The bottom line: A quick and solid summary of the principles behind baptism with some deviation on methods.

What is Baptism? succeeds by conveying the paramount importance of baptism in the lives of believers as well as carefully explaining the meaning behind the sacrament. What the reader is left with is a solid appreciation of baptism, its cardinal significance, and an awareness of many of the controversies surrounding the practice.

However, the author takes a stand to clarify some of the confusion surrounding baptism with some debatable results.

What is Baptism? begins by first ... <http://www.chesadaphal.com/what-is-ba...>

Eric Skwarczynski says

Now, I absolutely have to preface this review with the statement that, while I was raised and currently adhere to the belief of baptism by the mode of immersion, I must admit that I have not thoroughly studied it out to the point of being definitive on the issue. This book is one of the first books I have read on the topic of baptism, specifically paedobaptism—the baptism of infants—and this review is primarily going to reflect on both the quality of the book and arguments set forth in the book itself, and I have not let any pre-existing bias or weigh in on the review. I read this with an open mind, hoping to better understand a position on the doctrine that I have yet to grasp.

Now, with that massive disclaimer out of the way, here is my review of this fascinating little book.

Written by Dr. R.C. Sproul of Ligonier Ministries, this tiny booklet (69 pages) is an introduction to the historical position of baptism in the reformed faith. The reformers do not believe that baptism has a place in regeneration, as this would deny the established reformed tradition of *sola fide*—“by faith alone.” The first portion of the book discusses the significance of baptism from a Biblical perspective.

“...I asserted that baptism is not necessary for salvation. However, if you were to ask me, “Is baptism necessary for the Christian?” I would say, “Absolutely.” It is not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary for obedience, because Christ, with no ambiguity, commanded that all of those who belong to Him, who are part of the new covenant family, and who receive the benefits of His salvation are to be baptized in the

Trinitarian formula."

The latter portion of the book elaborates on paedobaptism, which is defined by Dr. Sproul as a "symbol of faith preceding an act of faith." For those who would state that the symbol must follow the act of faith, Sproul makes this statement:

"If we reject infant baptism on the basis of the principle that a sign that involves faith must never be given until after faith is present, we also negate the legitimacy of circumcision in the Old Testament."

Sproul gives many interesting arguments historically for the baptism of covenant children, gives fascinating insights on the particular mode of Baptism—his analysis of the Greek and Hebrew words regarding the topic and what they actually imply was particularly interesting, and actually has somewhat pressed me to at least re-consider paedobaptism as a Biblical model. I have certainly not been "converted" to the idea, but his arguments hold weight, and deserve to be further reviewed.

This was a fascinating introductory book for the topic, and I would recommend it to those interested in looking into the doctrine. This book is available free for kindle.

Chris says

This is a very interesting book which seeks to explain the religious process of Baptism: The symbolic cleansing of a person with water either by pouring over the head or bodily immersion.

Baptism with water first appeared in the New Testament practiced by the Prophet John the Baptist who baptised many people and Jesus Christ Himself. After the death of John, Jesus made a new covenant with mankind to baptise them with the Holy Spirit rather than water.

The book explains the basic principals of baptism, why it is still important today and presents arguments on controversial topics such as: Is water Baptism still relevant today? Is it necessary for salvation? and should babies be baptised (otherwise known as Christened)

I don't agree with everything the book said as, although it tried to remain neutral to the points it was discussing, the author did state they believe there is a case for baptising babies whereas, as a Baptist, I don't believe it should be done.

It is a good book and worth picking up, particularly if you are considering being baptised yourself

Elizabeth Johnson says

Good overview of the main controversies surrounding baptism - including mode (sprinkling vs immersion), age (infant vs adult), relation to conversion, and contextual meaning. Comprehensive yet concise, and fast reading.

Stuart Elliott says

This was a quick read introducing the doctrine of Christian baptism from a reformed, covenantal and Presbyterian perspective. Being all of those things I am more inclined to agree with Sproul's position and explanation on Baptism. I particularly enjoyed the connection and clarification between the significance of the covenant God made with his people and the sign of the covenant both Old and New. Baptism can't be separated from its covenant significance and covenant can't be separated from its community significance. Overall great intro that is accessible yet delves deep.

Marguerite Harrell says

8-16-2013 I am about to start reading this. Just letting you know that I believe in Believer's baptism and not the infant's baptism. I know that R.C. Sproul does believe in infant's baptism since he is a Presbyterian, and I am a Baptist. We both do have different view. It will be very interesting to see how they (Presbyterian) believe in infant's baptism (pedo baptism) and why!

It is very interesting to read how pedo baptism believe and very educational too. I don't agree with them since I am a credo baptist.

Steve Campbell says

The booklet is a good introduction to baptism and what it means. Of course, since it is a booklet, it only scratches the surface of the topic. Considering the space limitations, Sproul does a good job of clarifying the meaning of baptism and what happens at baptism. He also makes a good case for infant baptism, but in a relatively short chapter, he doesn't have much room to go into the arguments for or against it in much depth. The reader will want to use this booklet as a launching point for a more in-depth study.

Wesley Rea says

Sproul does a great job laying out the meaning of baptism as well as the different interpretations on it as a sacrament. It's been awhile since I've dipped (no pun intended) into the subject of baptism and I appreciated a lot of the thoughts and definitions of terms that he had to offer.

I also appreciated that he put in a section specifically for his case for infant baptism. I am not a paedobaptist, but I think it's important to hear the arguments and wrestle through the best that the paedobaptists have to offer. I'm still thoroughly credobaptist, but I enjoyed hearing some new arguments that I somehow hadn't heard before.

Adam says

This is a very concise yet informative booklet on baptism. Having followed R.C. Sproul for a few years now,

I was at least somewhat familiar with the arguments for paedobaptism presented in this book. However, after reading this (and after some other factors and some time spent studying the issue), I found myself actually persuaded, happily and Biblically so, into paedobaptism this time. His argument regarding 1 Corinthians 7 was very good at demonstrating, in my mind anyway, that the children of believers are in the covenant. If they are in the covenant, and baptism is the covenant sign, it only makes sense that they ought to be baptized.

Beyond that, it is very informative regarding the Reformed position and understanding on baptism, like its being a sign and seal of the covenant, how the mode doesn't necessarily have to be immersion, etc. I may need to re-read this just to solidify it in my mind more.

Many thanks to Dr. Sproul!

Crystal Rose says

This book was really helpful in learning more about the history and meaning behind baptisms. I was born and raised a Catholic, so I was baptized very young and only knew what my church taught me. Within the last few years, I've become more of a Christian, and have considered being baptized again. This book answered a lot of questions I've had about the process and the significance, and made me even more excited to get baptized!

Wade says

This book is a helpful, brief, easy-to-read definition of baptism. Sproul looks at the whole of Scripture (showing the continuity between the old covenant and the new covenant) and explains what a sacrament is, and specifically what the sacrament of baptism is. He does a particularly great job of explaining John the Baptist's baptism and how it is most definitely not New Testament baptism, or the baptism that Jesus instituted and commanded; his explanation of John's baptism and how it relates to New Testament baptism is very helpful. Sproul also does a sound job of explaining the connection between circumcision and baptism, therefore explaining the continuity of the covenants and how the new covenant does not destroy the old covenant, but rather fulfills and builds upon the old covenant. Sproul gives a very brief, but nonetheless clear and helpful, explanation of infant baptism. He points to the fact that the new covenant is in every way more inclusive than the old covenant and, therefore, it would be very odd if the sign and seal of the new covenant did not include infants while the sign and seal of the old covenant did include infants, especially since the New Testament never tells the covenant community to withhold the sign and seal of the covenant from infants (as had always been practiced since the days of Abraham). He also briefly addresses the testimony of church history (all the way back to 150 AD) practicing infant baptism. This is a short book; therefore, Sproul does not belabor points or attempt to address every possible objection to a specific doctrine. This book is a very helpful and clear definition of what baptism is, which makes it a beneficial book for any believer to read in order to have a more clear view of one of the two sacraments of the church.

Alex Hannis says

As a Baptist, I did not agree with everything the author argues for in relation to baptism in this book (Sproul is an ordained Presbyterian). However, I don't think it's fair to mark down a book solely because we share

different convictions. The first few chapters were especially good, as he described the differences between Catholic and Protestant views of baptism. Next, Sproul gives a rich biblical theology for the sign of the covenant in a way that many of my fellow Baptists miss. He then goes on to explain the specifics of the Reformed tradition, that there is no preferred mode and that there is no explicit command against infant baptism.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in understanding baptism (for the first few chapters especially), and then even more for my Baptist friends who often create straw man arguments and quickly dismiss infant baptism. As Sproul finishes the book he writes, "Here again, however, I urge that those who believe in infant baptism and those who support believer's baptism will practice the judgment of charity and not let their diverging views become a source of division."
