

Engaging Contemporary Scholarship

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The Reformers built the systems this book engages—Zwingli’s symbolic baptism, Calvin’s sign-and-seal. But the arguments did not stop there. These same positions have been restated in the last fifty years by serious scholars whose work shapes how today’s Protestant readers think about faith, baptism, and the gospel response. A reader trained on those scholars deserves to see where this book’s framework engages them.

Thomas Schreiner and the Credobaptist Case

The most thorough contemporary defense of believer’s baptism from the Reformed Baptist tradition is the multi-author volume *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*.¹ The volume represents the position that baptism is the public sign of an already-received salvation, distinct from the saving moment itself. This book engages that position throughout Part III. Chapter 14 takes up the primary texts the volume addresses—Romans 6, Colossians 2, 1 Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:27, Titus 3:5—and shows that the saving language Scripture attaches to baptism in these passages cannot be reduced to a backward-looking sign of something already received without doing violence to the Greek constructions. Robert Stein’s contribution to the volume is engaged in Chapter 9 in connection with the synecdoche pattern; Stein’s treatment of repentance, belief, confession, the Spirit, and baptism as closely linked in conversion confronts the linguistic ground Chapter 9 develops, even though Stein reaches different conclusions from the same evidence.

John MacArthur, John Piper, and Lordship Salvation

The Lordship Salvation movement, anchored in MacArthur’s *The Gospel According to Jesus* and developed across decades of Piper’s writing, holds that genuine belief necessarily produces submission to Christ’s lordship and obedient living.² On that point this book agrees—Chapter 3’s Trusting Belief and Chapter 4’s treatment of repentance overlap substantially with what Lordship Salvation says about the nature of saving belief. The disagreement is narrower and concerns where the saving moment is located. Lordship Salvation locates it at the inward moment of submission, with baptism following as a commanded post-conversion act. This book locates the saving moment where Scripture locates it—at baptism, where the heart’s entrustment completes itself in the response God appointed. The Four Levels

framework in Chapter 3 names the gap: Lordship Salvation describes what this book calls Level 3 trusting belief and treats it as Level 4 saving belief, without the completing acts Scripture attaches to the saving moment.

Matthew Bates and the Allegiance Turn

Bates' *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* is the contemporary standard-bearer for reading *pistis* in the New Testament as allegiance to Jesus as King rather than as bare intellectual assent.³ This book agrees with the linguistic and conceptual move and engages Bates accordingly in Chapter 11. Where Bates and this book disagree is on what the allegiance reading entails. If *pistis* is allegiance to the King, then the response that King commanded—including baptism into His name—is the response allegiance must give. Bates retains the Protestant location of the saving moment before baptism. This book argues that the allegiance framework, followed consistently, requires moving it. The Trusting Belief category in Chapter 3 develops what Bates calls allegiance, and Chapter 7's analytic connection shows why genuine allegiance does not stop short of the commanded response.

N. T. Wright on Faithfulness

Wright's body of work on *pistis Christou* and on the gospel as the announcement of Jesus' kingship has reshaped how many evangelical readers approach Romans and Galatians.⁴ This book's treatment of the obedience of faith in Chapter 10 stands on common ground with Wright's emphasis on the gospel as a summons to allegiance under the risen King. The disagreement with Wright runs along the same line as the disagreement with Bates. When the kingship framework is followed consistently to its conclusion, it lands on the response Scripture commands—and that response includes baptism. Wright's own work does not take that step.

Where This Leaves the Conversation

The contemporary versions of the Protestant positions are sharper and better defended than their sixteenth-century forms. They are not different positions. Each contemporary scholar restates the older case with new linguistic, historical, and exegetical tools. And in each case, the agreement this book has acknowledged runs deep but breaks at one place, and the break is not small.

These positions read the saving response as backward-looking: faith lays hold of a salvation already secured, and baptism testifies to a rescue already accomplished. This book reads it as forward-looking. The crowd at Pentecost was cut to the heart and cried out, "What shall we do?"—not because they had been saved, but because they had not. They were pleading for a rescue they did not yet possess.

The gospel response is that plea. Belief, repentance, confession, and baptism are how a guilty person calls upon the name of the Lord to be saved, not how a saved

person announces that he already is. That is why the location of the saving moment is not a quibble over timing. A salvation already received asks only to be confessed; a salvation still sought must be appealed for in the way God appointed.

Each of these scholars' tools—linguistic, historical, and exegetical—is engaged in this book on its own ground. The reader who has been trained on Schreiner, Piper, Bates, or Wright will find the substance of their positions addressed in the chapters above. The reader who wants to press any of these questions further can continue the conversation through the AI study companion at eternalstakes.com.

Notes

- Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006); Robert H. Stein, "Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006).
- John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, rev. and updated anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again* (Geanies House, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009).
- Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).
- N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013); N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

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For the full argument, including Chapter 17, see the book.

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