



BAPTISM

BOOKLET

SPANISH  
*River*  
CHURCH

# A BIBLICAL VIEW OF BAPTISM

by Dr. David Nicholas

- *What is baptism?*
- *Why do we practice it here at SRC?*
- *What does it mean to be baptized?*
- *Why is it important?*
- *Why do we baptize infants?*

All of these are questions we often have about baptism. The purpose of this booklet is to answer these questions and more. Dr. David Nicholas takes us through the scriptures for a comprehensive view on the sacraments as they apply to our world today.

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

## Why Baptize?

What is the purpose of baptism? And why do we at SRC baptize children as well as adults? We baptize because Jesus commanded us to baptize. He said,

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).*

We baptize children whose parents know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and are members of this church, as well as adult believers who were never baptized as children.



## The Sacraments

We believe that there is a continuity between the Old and New Testaments and that the two are not separate. There is a unity between them. What was started in the old is continued in the new but in a different form. There were what you might call the two sacraments of the Old Testament, circumcision and Passover. For 2,000 years prior to the birth of Christ the Jews practiced circumcision, and for 1,500 years before Christ they celebrated the Passover once a year.

These have been replaced in the New Testament church by baptism and the Lord's supper.

## ***Circumcision: a sign of the promise***

God instituted circumcision after He chose Abram to be the father of all who believe. God told Abram that He was going to do something spectacular through him.

*The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3).*

God made certain promises to Abram, whose name God changed to Abraham. God told Abraham that one of his descendants would bring blessing to the whole earth. The Apostle Paul tells us that God was telling Abraham that the Messiah would eventually be born into his family. Thus God had preached the Gospel to Abraham when He made this promise to him.



*The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you” (Galatians 3:8).*

So that Abraham and his descendants would not forget that God had made this promise, God instituted the “sacrament”

or rite of circumcision. Abraham was circumcised as an adult and after he believed. God told Abraham that from then on, all males born into his family were to be circumcised on the eighth day of their lives as a sign that God had made the promise of the coming Messiah to Abraham.

*Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you” (Genesis 17:9-11).*



*“As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you...”*

Thus the Jews circumcised all their male babies as a sign that God had promised to bring the Messiah into the world through Abraham’s family. All male Gentile proselytes who joined with Israel were circumcised as well (Exodus 12:48).

## ***Baptism: a sign of the new covenant***

After the Messiah came into the world, He told His followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them. We learn from the New Testament that baptism has replaced circumcision as one of the sacraments of the church, just as the Lord's Supper has replaced the Passover celebration. Paul said,



*Baptism has replaced circumcision as one of the sacraments of the church, just as the Lord's Supper has replaced the Passover celebration.*

*In him [Christ] you [Christians] were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12).*

Paul equated circumcision with baptism. And since circumcision in the Old Testament was applied to children as well as adults, we believe that children of believing parents should be baptized. We also baptize adults who have come to know Christ and were not baptized as infants, as was done to Abraham or to any convert to Judaism in the Old Testament.

## What does it mean?

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What then does baptism mean? For one thing, it does not confer the gift of eternal life on the child or the adult. No ritual can ever make a person right with God. One of the tragedies of Judaism was that they thought that circumcision made them acceptable to God.

There are some churches that teach that baptism of a child confers on the child forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. This is called baptismal regeneration. But no rite can take away our sins.

Baptism is a sign which points to the work that Jesus did for His people. God must punish our sins and if He punishes us it means eternal separation from Him. In His love for us, God the Father sent God the Son to earth to become a man.

Jesus was born of the family of Abraham as had been promised. Jesus lived a perfect life and then allowed Himself to be crucified. While Jesus hung on the cross, God the Father placed our sins on Him and punished Him in our place. Jesus died, but on the third day He came back from the dead.

Sin results in death, but after Jesus paid for all of our sins, death could no longer hold Him. Jesus therefore has overcome sin and death, and those who trust in Him as Savior and Lord are forgiven their sins and given the gift of eternal life with God. This is the only way that God has provided for people to be accepted by Him.

In the Presbyterian tradition we baptize adults after they believe, but only those who were not baptized into the covenant family as children. We also encourage believing parents to present their children for baptism. When a child is baptized with water he receives the sign of the covenant that God has made with His people. The child is a child of grace since he or she has been born into a home where Jesus Christ is honored as Savior and Lord.

Baptism is a sign that emphasizes the grace of God given to the child because he has the privilege of being brought up in a Christian family. He has the opportunity to learn about the Savior from his parents as they live the life of Christ before him and as they tell him about Jesus. He has the opportunity to be brought up in the church, in the fellowship of believers where he can also learn of the Savior.

The minister who administers the sacrament of baptism states that the rite does not save the child but points to the grace of God made known at the cross of Christ. The child is now a child of the covenant and the people look forward to the day when this child will enter into the fullness of the covenant by trusting Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

The parents of the child being presented for baptism dedicate their child to God and promise to rely upon God's

grace and strength so that they might set a godly example for their child and teach him the truths of God from the Scriptures.



The parents promise to do all they can to bring their child up in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Thus baptism is a meaningful rite for parents and the congregation because promises are made concerning the way the child will be raised.

Baptism is also meaningful for the child, even though he may be unaware of what is taking place, because he is being set apart as a child of God’s covenant. Parents who understand the significance of the covenant promise that God has made to them will tell their son or daughter that he or she is a special child, being a child of God’s covenant. They will pray with and for their child and communicate the Gospel to him, looking to Jesus to save him and bring him into the fullness of the covenant.

Baptism is therefore a time of celebration, a celebration of God’s grace. We rejoice in those adults who have come to know the Lord, and their baptism points back to the time when they trusted Christ and received the gift of eternal life.

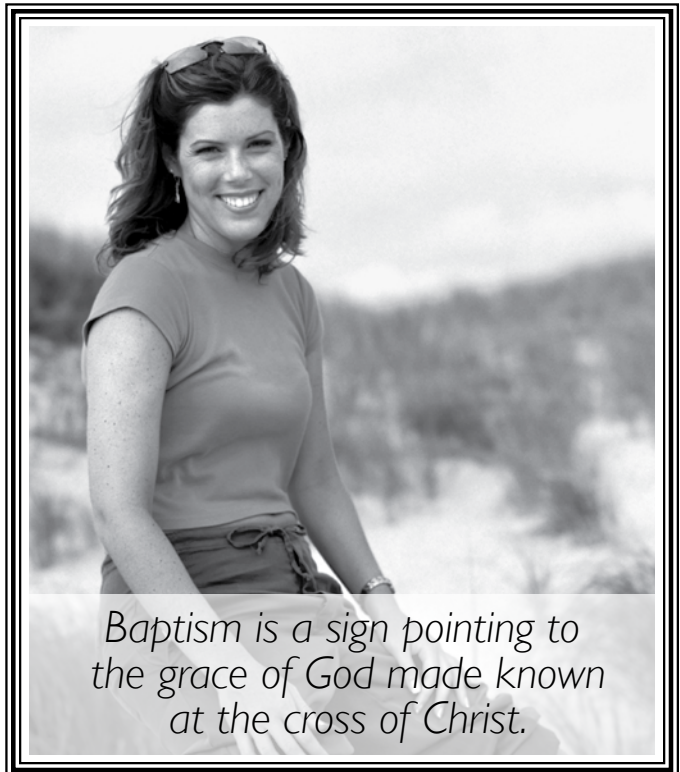
When a child is baptized, the minister is saying, “Lord, I place the sign of the covenant upon this child looking forward to the day when he or she will come to understand the Gospel and enter into the fullness of the covenant. This is a demonstration of Your grace, that we are a people of Your grace, and we rejoice in these children and look forward to Your working in their lives.”

Baptism does not save anyone. It points to God’s grace. It points to the cross of Christ and what He has done.

## SUMMARY

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- Baptism does not save anyone—child or adult.
- It does not bring about forgiveness of sins or confer the gift of eternal life on anyone.
- Baptism is a sign pointing to the grace of God made known at the cross of Christ.
- Adults who were not baptized as covenant children are to be baptized after they believe.
- Christian parents are to present their children for baptism before the congregation so that they might be baptized with water and thus receive the sign of the covenant which points to the cross and the life Christ has made possible for His people.
- Christian parents dedicate their children to God, understanding that they are children of grace, promising to teach their children about the Lord and to set a godly example for them.



*Baptism is a sign pointing to the grace of God made known at the cross of Christ.*

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