

YOUR GUIDE TO...

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT BAPTISM

TREASURING JESUS THROUGH THE ORDINANCES
PART 1



FIVE POINTS BAPTIST
TREASURING JESUS TOGETHER

Table of Contents

The Bible From 40,000 Feet

Baptism's Theological Significance

When Someone Is Ready For Baptism

Am I Ready For Baptism?

Is My Child Ready For Baptism?

Next Steps

The Bible From 40,000 Feet

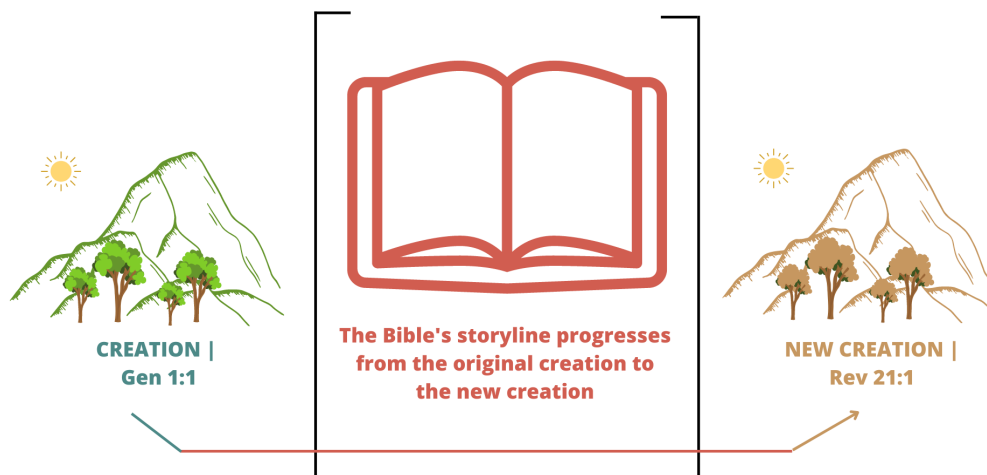
The Bible's Bookends

To really understand what baptism is all about, we first have to understand what the Bible is all about. Now you might be thinking, "But the Bible is such a big book! You're telling me I've got to know all of it before I can understand baptism?" Thankfully, that's *not* what we're telling you. Instead, what we mean is that we need to understand the big storyline of Scripture. It's all too easy to see the Bible as a random collection of stories that exist to give us moral examples to follow. But in reality, the Bible is telling one big story about God and His glory!

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible presents us with a unified storyline about God and what He has done in and through His Son, Jesus Christ. We can see Scripture's unity by considering how it begins and ends:

- "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1)
- "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away..." (Revelation 21:1)

The Bible is bookended with God creating an original heavens and earth, followed by a renewed heavens and earth. This alone tells us a good bit about the Bible's storyline. **First**, the Bible begins with creation and ends with a new creation. **Second**, since God will one day usher in a *new* creation, that means something must have gone wrong in the *original* creation. **Third**, since the coming new creation is certain, God must have done something to fix what went wrong. **Fourth**, what comes in the middle of the Bible (Genesis 2-Revelation 20) must give us the answer to the second and third points.



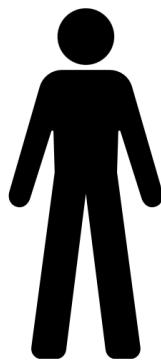
What Went Wrong

In Genesis 1:26-28, we are told that God made men and women in His image to glorify Him. When we turn to chapter 2 of Genesis, we get sort of a zoomed in shot of the first human pair: Adam and Eve. God placed them in the garden of Eden where they could enjoy a close relationship with Him and one another. What an amazing reality! The couple was given only one prohibition: Not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). And God told them what would happen if they did— they would die.

Tragically, in chapter 3 our first parents chose to listen to the voice of the serpent (who was actually Satan himself; see Revelation 12:9) and they ate the forbidden fruit. It was at this exact same moment that they became sinful beings. They also became subject to spiritual and physical death and were cut off from God's presence. And there's even more bad news! As our first parents, the sin that was lodged into their hearts has been passed on to every human being ever since. We are all sinful beings who are spiritually dead and who will one day experience physical death because of our sin. And in our natural condition, we are cut off from God's loving presence. That's why Paul told the Ephesian church that before they came to faith in Christ they were "dead in their sins and trespasses..." (Ephesians 2:1).

To put it another way, all humanity is born in Adam. And from him we inherit a sinful heart that leads us to commit sinful deeds, think sinful thoughts, and harbor sinful attitudes. The result is condemnation before God.

Condemnation



In Adam =
Heart: Sinful
Verdict: Guilty

What God Has Done To Rescue Us

Even though Genesis 3 is one of the most tragic chapters in all the Bible, it is also shot through with hope. God promises in verse 15 that there will be one born of woman who will crush the head of the serpent and restore all that was lost. We know now that this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Through His death on the cross, Jesus absorbed God's wrath for our sin so that we wouldn't have to. In love, the Father sent His Son to do this for us. And in love, His Son willingly came. He died as our Substitute to pay the penalty our sin deserved. Listen to this passage from Isaiah 53:5-6:

*But He was **pierced for our transgressions**; he was **crushed for our iniquities**; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***
(Emphasis ours)

This is the Gospel. Before our conversion, we were underneath God's wrath (John 3:36). As our Substitute, however, Jesus stepped into our place and the wrath we deserved fell on Him instead. We receive the benefits of His death by trusting in Him and His finished work on the cross.\

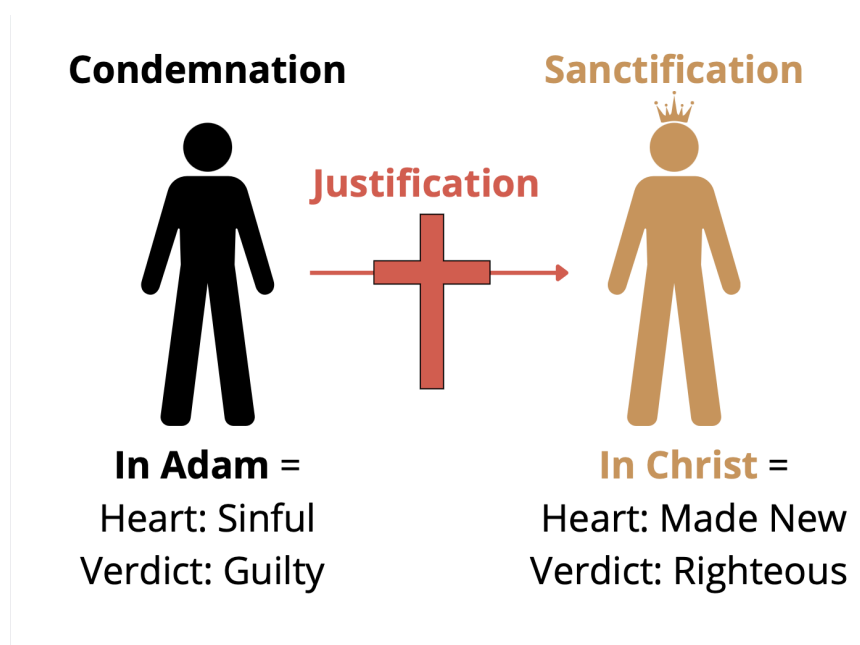


Theologians also refer to this as **Justification**. That is, Christ removes our guilty verdict and gives us a righteous verdict instead.

But again, how do we receive the blessings of justification? By turning away from our sin and toward Christ in faith. **We trust that Christ and His work alone are able to satisfy God's wrath toward our sin.** That is, we come to the end of ourselves and realize that in our sin there is nothing we can do to commend ourselves to God. And when we trust in Christ in this way, the New Testament says that we are now **in Christ** (Romans 8:1). And we become a part of a new humanity who will one day enjoy God's presence together again in the new creation! Check out this beautiful passage from Revelation 7:9-10 that captures this truth:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (Emphasis ours)

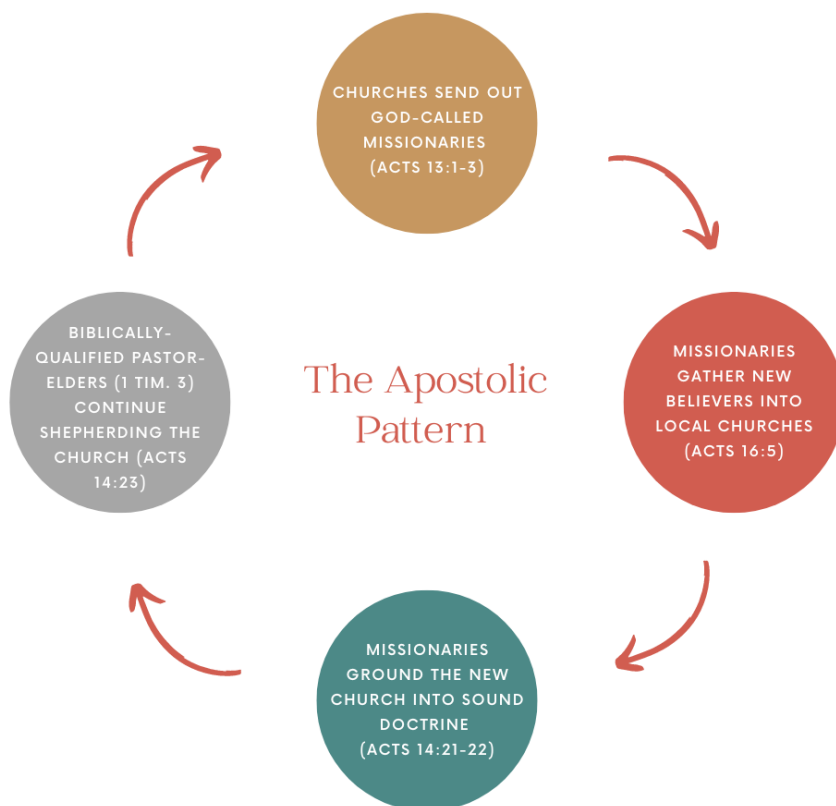
So, conversion is when a person shifts from belonging to the old humanity **in Adam** to the new humanity **in Christ** through **justification** (which was only made possible because of Christ; cf. Romans 5:12-21). And once we are justified, we spend the rest of our lives growing in **sanctification**. That is, we seek to increasingly cultivate the fruits of the Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-24). You can summarize the Gospel then in three words: Condemnation — Justification — Sanctification.



And that's what the Bible is all about! God created the heavens and the earth so that we could enjoy a relationship with Him. Our sin ruined this. But God sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin. Now, all who trust in Jesus become a part of a new humanity who will one day be with God again in the new heavens and new earth. But what do we do until then? **That's where the church enters the picture.**

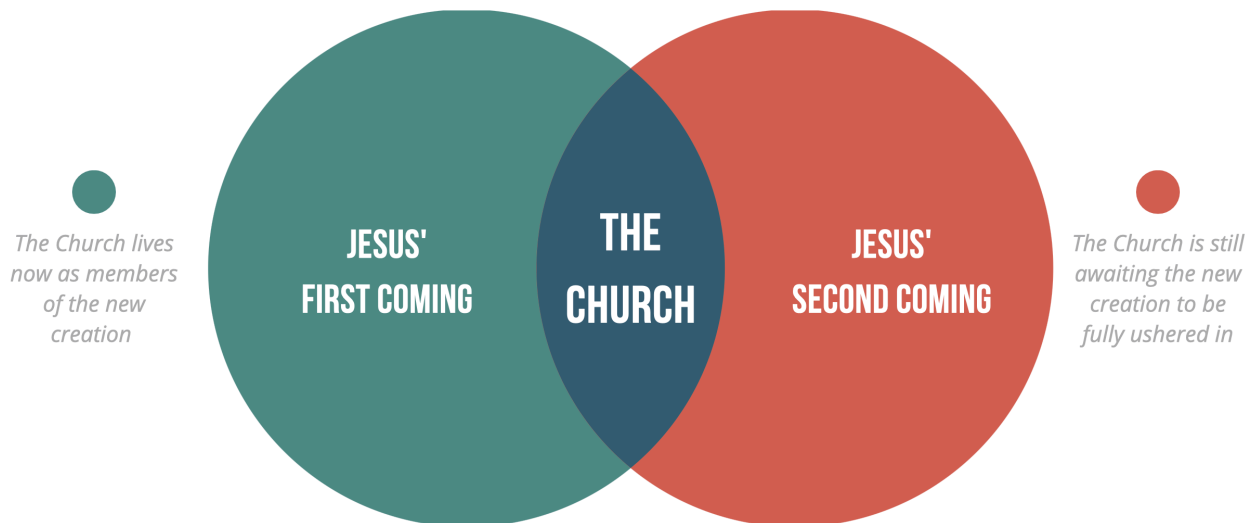
In Acts 1, Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection one more time before ascending back to His Father. And He told them that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Witnesses to what? The good news that we talked about above! That in Christ, people can now be forgiven of their sins and receive justification!

Now here's what's interesting: When the good news of the Gospel began to spread all across the Roman Empire, the apostles didn't just take off to another area after a group of folks in once place decided to trust in Jesus. Instead, they next formed these believers into *local* churches, where they could care for one another, hold each other accountable to follow Jesus, and receive shepherding from a group of pastor-elders who would also protect them from false teaching. The graphic illustrates the apostles' missionary methods as seen throughout the Book of Acts.



Each local church is also intended by God to offer its community a picture of the new humanity in Christ. It is through the way we live our lives together as believers that tells the world around us whether we really believe the Gospel or not (John 13:34-35). That's why it's not enough to pursue the fruits of the Spirit in our own individual lives. We must also seek to do this in the context of a local church. As we seek to live faithfully as brothers and sisters, we do so in eager expectation of the coming new creation when we will be with **all** of our brothers and sisters in Christ from all times and all places!

WHERE WE FIT IN GOD'S STORY NOW



Now that we better understand the big story of the Bible, we are in a much better position to understand baptism.

Baptism's Theological Significance

In this section, we're going to talk about what all baptism signifies in a person's life.

1. Identification As A Sinner

First, by coming forward in baptism, we are telling the world that we are sinners in need of a Savior. That's really the place to begin. If a person thinks that baptism is a display of their own righteousness, they do not yet understand the Gospel and should not be baptized.

2. Identification With Christ's Death

In Romans 6:3, the apostle Paul writes, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" When a person is immersed under the water, it symbolizes Christ's death and our identification with it. We have died to our sin, meaning that our attitude toward it is fundamentally changed. The sin we once loved, we now hate and seek to actively put it to death in our lives.

3. Identification With Christ's Resurrection

Likewise, when the person is then raised from the water, it symbolizes Christ's resurrection. The believer is thus telling the world that he/she now shares in resurrection life just like his/her Lord (Romans 6:4).

4. Identification With Christ's People

Baptism is how one enters into the covenant community of the church. Unless one is providentially hindered¹, the consistent New Testament pattern is that baptism should lead to church membership. Why?

¹ **Providentially Hindered:** A person who is unable to follow a biblical command due to a physical inability. Biblical examples would be the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). The thief on the cross was not held accountable to belong to a local church because the moment at which he came to faith in Christ he was literally nailed to a cross and was about to die. The Ethiopian eunuch was likewise excused because he came to faith in a missionary context. That is, there was not yet a church in existence when he became a believer. Having said that, one hopes that he went on to help establish one! So today, if someone is homebound or lives in a place where there are no churches, then God does not hold them accountable to do something that they are literally unable to do. For everyone who is not providentially hindered, however, they are held accountable to obey God in these areas.

Because the Lord knows that we need to be in covenant with other believers for accountability (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 3:12-13) and encouragement (Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11) and that we need pastor-elders who can continue shepherding us (Acts 20:17-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-3). To put it another way, **the normative pattern in Scripture is that when a person becomes a believer, they will belong to and gather regularly with a local church.**² The ordinance of baptism is how we publicly identify with Christ and are then joined to His people through church membership. And though we don't have the space to dive into this topic now, ongoing participation in the Lord's Supper is the means of remembering that we have been joined to Christ and His people.³ In other words, what follows baptism is a life long pursuit of treasuring Jesus with your brothers and sisters in a local church.

Take a moment to read **Acts 2:14-47** and then examine the graph to see this biblical pattern.



² We say it is the *normative* pattern because some believers are providentially hindered (See footnote 1 above for more info). We also say *normative* because of the consistent New Testament evidence that indicates this as the pattern for believers who are not providentially hindered: **Evidence #1:** When the New Testament (NT) uses the word “church” it is almost always referring to a local assembly of believers who gathered regularly in time and space. This is proven through **Evidence #2:** Most of our NT “books” were originally letters addressed to these local assemblies of believers (Romans to the Church in Rome, 1 & 2 Corinthians to the Church in Corinth, etc.). **Evidence #3:** There are clear biblical references to believers being shepherded by specific pastor-elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-3). **Evidence #4:** The biblical practice of church discipline requires church membership (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5). **Evidence #5:** In Hebrews 10:24-25, we are commanded to gather regularly with our brothers and sisters in the local church. For a fuller explanation of all these evidences, please visit this webpage: <https://www.fivepointsbaptist.com/looking-to-sunday/post/the-beauty-of-the-gathered-church--part-1->

³ For more information on this ordinance, see *Your Guide To The Lord's Supper*.

5. Identification With The Triune God

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commands His disciples to go and make more disciples among all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit*. Christians believe that there is only one God in three Persons: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. This is a doctrine of unfathomable depths. And that's why it should drive us to our knees in worship and adoration. In baptism, the believer is identifying with the triune God of the Bible.

Summary

What's important to see from all of this is the nature of baptism. It is an outward, physical sign of an inward, spiritual reality. And the order here is so important. A **person is first converted** and **then they pursue baptism** to publicly testify to their conversion. This also means that baptism has no salvific effect. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone. But for those who have been truly converted, it will be their joy to publicly declare it through baptism. By doing so, they also enter into covenant membership with a local church where they can **receive** and **provide** accountability & encouragement **from** and **to** a specific body of believers, continue to be shepherded by specific pastor-elders who are charged with overseeing and caring for their souls (Hebrews 13:17), and remembering their covenant commitments through regular participation in the Lord's Supper.

BAPTISM & THE LORD'S SUPPER



When Someone Is Ready For Baptism

In this section, we're going to talk about evidences that suggest a person is ready to move forward with baptism.

Am I Ready For Baptism?

You know you are ready for baptism when you have... **An Adequate Understanding of the Gospel**, meaning:

1. You know you're a sinner who stands justly condemned before a holy God and that you can't save yourself (Rom. 3:9-20)
2. You believe Jesus — who is fully God and fully man — endured God's wrath for you on the cross and then rose from the grave 3 days later (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:1-4)
3. You understand that you must turn from your sin and trust in Christ alone in order to receive the benefits of His finished work (Mark 1:14-15)
4. You believe that there is one God in 3 Persons, Father, Son, & Holy Spirit (Mk. 1:9-11).⁴
5. Last but not least, you understand that genuine conversion will result in a new life where one gladly pursues personal holiness (Gal. 5:22-24) and walks in covenant with other believers in a local church (Eph. 2:10-22, 3:10)

Is My Child Ready For Baptism?

We believe that parents hold primary responsibility for their child's ongoing discipleship and the church holds primary responsibility for overseeing the proper observance of the ordinances, including baptism. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that this be a conversation between parents and pastors.

At the outset it is important for parents to understand that while baptism is a very important decision, **it is not life or death**. A person's salvation does not depend on baptism, but on Christ's finished work alone. So Mom and Dad, breathe. And don't put too much pressure on your child or yourself.

Having said that, the Biblical criteria for someone to be baptized is that they have a **credible profession of faith**. Elements of this profession are those listed under **An Adequate Understanding Of The Gospel** above.

⁴ Note that this is an article of faith that must be believed. That does not mean one has to be able to fully understand or explain the Trinity. Indeed, none of us will ever be able to fully understand or explain this mystery. But its truthfulness must be accepted by faith nonetheless. Belief in God's Triune nature has been seen as a key element in a person's profession of faith from even the earliest times of the Church's existence.

- Additional Indicators That Your Child May Be Ready:
 - They confess sin to you even when they know they wouldn't have gotten caught
 - They have a desire to learn more about the Bible apart from yours or another person's prompting
 - You can see some of the fruits of the Spirit budding in their hearts, especially in how they relate to their siblings and other children⁵
 - They see church attendance as a delight rather than mere duty
 - You notice a desire in them to be obedient to you and others in authority over them (even though they won't do so perfectly)
 - They consistently express their desire to be baptized over a period of several weeks to several months

Next Steps

If you are ready to take the next step toward baptism, contact our church office and let us know! We can be reached by phone at **(205) 339-3220** or by email at **susan@fivepointsbaptist.com**. After you contact us, we will officially enroll you in our baptism process and you will be assigned a pastor who will lovingly walk you (or your child) through each step toward baptism. Please feel free to reach out if you have further questions or concerns.

We are praying for you and we love you!

Grace & Peace,
The Pastoral Team

Five Points Baptist Church | Northport, AL

⁵ You are not perfect and neither is your child. So don't look for perfection. But when you see evidences of the Spirit, take note of those! Also, do not threaten to withhold baptism from them for misbehavior. That can totally confuse the nature of the Gospel in your child's life! For example, never say something like the following: "*If you were really a Christian you would...*" This can cause the child to misunderstand the order of good works in the Christian life. *First*, we are saved because of the finished work of Christ. *Then*, in gratitude (not guilt) we joyfully pursue good works (Ephesians 2:10).