



Session IV

What SRPC Believes

THREE KEY TERMS DESCRIBE THE BELIEF SYSTEM OF SRPC

I. *At SRPC, our beliefs are _____.*

We hold to those basic teachings which have been believed by all those churches throughout history that have proclaimed historic Christianity. These teachings have been confessed in the creeds of the church particularly the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.
Apostles Creed*

Three basic teachings of the Christian church:

1. **The _____: there is one God, who eternally exists in a communion of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**
2. **The _____: the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity—God the Son— became man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human.**
3. **The _____: Jesus Christ died on the cross and was raised from the dead for the salvation of sinners.**

We are a part of the holy "catholic" church. "Catholic" is a terms that recognizes our fundamental unity with all true Christians, and of expressing our longing to see greater unity within the body of Christ.

II. At SRPC, our beliefs are _____.

- **WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS WITHOUT ERROR AND COMPLETELY _____.**

We believe in the historicity of the biblical miracles, of the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection, and in the reality of Christ's second coming. We believe the Bible is our ultimate authority for our beliefs and lifestyle. We believe what the Bible says God said—through human agency and without error.

2 Peter 1:20-21 "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." *2 Timothy 3:16* "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

- **WE BELIEVE GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE OUT OF NOTHING AND MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE.**

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." *Genesis 1:26* "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

(Believing that mankind bears the image of God leads us to believe in the sanctity of human life.

Therefore, we oppose the practice of abortion and believe that there are no biblical grounds for abortion. Unborn children, as well as the newborn, the aged and the infirm, have a God-given right to life. We also believe that for those who have had an abortion in the past and are repentant, there is grace and forgiveness from God.)

III. At SRPC, our beliefs are _____.

Our church is part of the Presbyterian Church in America, a denomination which traces its roots to the Protestant Reformation, the ecclesial renewal that took place within the churches of Western Christendom in the Sixteenth Century. The Reformation emphasized the importance of preaching in worship, the sovereignty of God in creation and redemption, salvation by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the centrality of the gospel in the life of the church. As a Reformed Church, we believe that the sacraments of baptism and communion represent God's grace and apply that grace to our lives. As a Reformed Church, we are committed to a Presbyterian (representative) system of church government. As Reformed Christians, we are committed to living out the implications of God's radical grace in every area of our lives, and believe that ALL of life, at home, at work, at play, is to be lived to the glory of God.

A. SALVATION—BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE

1. **The Human Condition: Total Inability**

Because of the fall, we are more sinful than we could ever imagine (Jeremiah 17:9). In our sinful condition, and without God's saving help, we are spiritually unable to choose to love and obey God (Romans 3:9-20, 8:5-8). *Ephesians 2:1* "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." *Romans 3:23* "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

2. **The Initiative of the Father**

Because of our spiritual deadness and sin, we need our God to pursue us, which he certainly does. Why does he do this? Because, while we are more sinful than we could ever imagine, we are also more loved than we had ever dreamed! By his grace, God takes the initiative in establishing relationship with us, reaches down, captures our heart, and invites us into a love relationship with himself (John 6:37-39, II Thessalonians 2:13-14). *1 John 4:19* "We love, because He first loved us."

3. The Work of the Son

The saving work of Jesus didn't serve to make salvation possible; it actually accomplished the salvation of those who belong to God. **John 15:16** "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."

4. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

God sends his Holy Spirit to convince us of our sin and misery, open our eyes to the beauty of Jesus and to capture our hearts with the love and mercy of God. (Ezekiel 36:25-27). (John 6:44-45, Philippians 2:13).

5. The Assurance of the Gospel

He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it (Phil. 1:6). In other words, the One who has captured your heart will never leave you or forsake you. He will never let you go. **John 10:28-29** "And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

B. SACRAMENTS—ARE SIGNS OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

There are two sacraments in which God's people participate. In the Old Testament, they were circumcision and Passover—in the New Testament they are _____ and the _____.

- **We believe in the baptism of _____ and _____.**

Because in all of God's dealings with humanity the children of His followers have always been included in the people of God, Christians believe that their infant children are to be baptized. We do not believe that baptism saves anyone. **Acts 2:38-39** Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

- **We believe in baptism by _____.**

Baptism in the Bible was done by sprinkling or pouring.

- **We believe in the _____ of Christ in the Lord's Supper.**

We believe that in the Lord's Supper, while no physical changes take place in the bread and wine, Christ is really present through the Spirit, and that those who come in faith are truly blessed and that they spiritually receive Christ's Body and Blood.

C. CHURCH GOVERNMENT

- **TYPES OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT:**

1. HIERARCHICAL—CATHOLIC and Methodist
2. CONGREGATIONAL—Baptist and Bible Churches
3. REPRESENTATIVE—Reformed and Presbyterian

- **CHURCH OFFICERS**

1. Presbyterian churches are governed by elders, whose primary job is the spiritual oversight of the church
2. PCA churches also ordain _____, whose primary job is to oversee the ministry to the poor and needy, and who also assist the elders in various ways.

- **PCA HISTORY**

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was founded in 1973 by a group of evangelical churches leaving the existing Presbyterian denominations, out of concern that they were abandoning biblical orthodoxy.

D. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

One of the marks of a “true” church is discipline which has as its end the restoration of a sinner. In other words, if a member is involved in some habitual, grievous sin (for example: adultery) and *refuses to repent*, it is the responsibility of the church to intervene with “discipline.” This can take many forms ranging from a simple rebuke to dismissal. However, at any point, if the person repents and desires to be restored, they will be.

The primary process for confronting sin and conducting church discipline is laid out by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17: *“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (NASB)*

ASSIGNMENT

1. Read the article that follows on Baptism and Infant Baptism.
2. Read chapters 10-11 (pp97-115) in *The Apostles’ Creed: Rooted*.
3. Read Part 3 of the New City Catechism
4. Watch the baptism DVD if you haven’t already.
5. FILL OUT THE MEMBERSHIP PROFILE and bring it to Class 5 if you plan to sign up for a membership interview.
6. Worship this weekend is going to be great; after all, God will be there. Be sure you’re there too!

Baptism and Infant Baptism

Case 1: Biblical Theology

STEP 1: Circumcision was a sign of faith and the blessings of salvation

Romans 4:11 - “Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness he had by faith”. Just as we are sinners saved by grace through believing, Abraham was as well. Does circumcision *save* the individual? NO! It is a sign of faith and salvation. *What did the circumcision accomplish then?* It brought the recipient into a “covenant community”. Abraham believed savingly in Genesis 15, but in Genesis 17 God makes with him a “covenant” (v. 7). Salvation cannot be lost, but a covenant is something Abraham must “keep” (Gen. 19:9: “You must keep my covenant...every male in your house must be circumcised”). A covenant is a *legal accountability relationship*. To be in a covenant is to have God’s name placed on you. (“You shall be my people”). It binds you to a) obey the word of God and b) worship and work with the people of God, those also in covenant with God.

And it was a sign put not only on believers, but also on the children in their household. (Genesis 17:12; Gen. 19:11 - “every male in your house who is eight days old must be circumcised”). Why would the sign of faith and salvation be applied to an infant who had not yet believed? Because circumcision does not save, but it does accomplish this—it brings the children into the covenant. When Abraham placed it on his children, he was binding himself and them to have them brought up obeying God’s law and worshipping and working with God’s people. They had to someday be “circumcised in heart” as he was—they had to get saving faith as well. But the sign of faith and salvation upon them, bringing them into the covenant, was their continual prod and witness to them of their responsibility to grasp God by faith.

Summary of Step #1

What did circumcision signify? *It was the sign of faith and salvation.*

What did circumcision actually accomplish? *It brought the recipient into a covenant community.*

Who received circumcision? *Believers (who had faith and thus were brought into the covenant) and their children (who came into the covenant first and were led to the faith circumcision pointed to).*

STEP 2: Baptism is the sign of faith and salvation in the New Testament

Baptism is the outward sign of inward faith and the blessings of salvation (I Peter 3:21; I Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:1-4). Does baptism save us? NO! In Romans 4 Paul refutes the idea that the sign of salvation can save us. It is a sign of faith and salvation. *What does baptism accomplish then?* It brings us into a covenant with God—for we are baptized “into the name” of Christ. Baptism binds us to the church, it is not merely a personal inward testimony, but a commitment to holy living and work with the church. See Acts 2:41 - to be “baptized” was to be “added to their number”. To be baptized is to commit to a holy life (Gal. 3:27). It brought into a legal accountability relationship. It bound you to a) obey the word and b) worship and work with God’s people.

And it was a sign put not only of believers, but also on the children in their household. Acts 16:15; 33-34, I Cor. 1:16, we see that when a head of household believed in Christ, not only was he (or she) baptized, but also the “whole household”.

Now the word “household” in Greek included children. It would have been a bias bordering on prejudice to assume that every one of the households mentioned in the Bible as being baptized were childless households. Such would have been very abnormal. When a householder placed baptism on children, he was binding himself and them to have them brought up obeying God’s law and worshipping and working with God’s people. They had to some day be “baptized in the Spirit” as he was —they had to get saving faith as well. But the sign of faith and salvation upon them, bringing them into the covenant, was their continual prod and witness to them of their responsibility to grasp God by faith.

Summary of Step #2

What does baptism signify? *It is the sign of faith and salvation.*

What does baptism actually accomplish? *It brings the recipient into a covenant community.*

Who receives baptism? *Believers (who have faith and thus are brought into the covenant) and their children (who come into the covenant first and are led to the faith baptism signifies).*

STEP 3: Circumcision is fulfilled by baptism

That circumcision and baptism both represented the same thing is clear from Col. 2:10-12. There we see that just as baptism represents the death of Christ, which brings us our salvation, circumcision also represented the death of Christ, which brings us our salvation. *Circumcision is fulfilled by baptism.*

Case 2: Principles of Interpretation

1. All Christians admit to the “unique position” of the children of believers.

We hold them accountable to pray and obey the Word and worship in ways we would not hold unbelievers, yet we urge them to believe and may know they are not yet born again. Presbyterians have no trouble understanding their position. They are “covenant children”, accountable by being brought into the covenant, with the covenant sign upon them. We have the Old Testament people of God as an example of this approach. Baptists essentially do the same thing, but without any Biblical or theological framework to account for it.

2. Old Testament principles are binding on the New Testament, unless repealed.

Example: the tithe. The NT does not explicitly command the tithe, yet there are places it appears to assume it (Luke 11:42). Many Christians will argue that, since the tithe is not commanded in the NT, we are not bound to it. Others will argue that, since it is not repealed we are still bound to it. Every NT teaching has its roots in the OT. This is a difficult issue of Biblical interpretation, and where you “come down” on it will determine your approach to infant baptism. If God would have us cease applying the sign of salvation to our children, as a way of expressing their unique place in the covenant community, why did he not plainly command us in the NT to stop it? After all, it is no small matter—if the fundamental pattern of 1700 years was to be laid aside we would expect a word from him. However, there is no such word. Indeed, we see in Acts “households” baptized upon the profession of the head of the household, just as we saw in the OT.

Case 3: Historical Argument

We know that in the early church, infants were baptized. Iraneus was a “Spiritual grandchild” of St. John the apostle. That is, Iraneus was discipled by Polycarp, who was discipled by the apostle. Iraneus baptized infants. Now it is unlikely that in such a short time period the church would have changed such an important practice in the apostolic church? And if there was a change from the earliest practice to the latter practice, why would there be no evidence of a dispute? Why no tracts or papers or letters? Clearly the ancient church assumed that baptism of infants was normal. It is virtually impossible to believe that the NT church did not baptize infants when the “grandchildren” of the apostles did!