

BAPTISM CLASS

WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD BE BAPTIZED?

THE RELATIONSHIP OF BAPTISM TO BELIEF

Peter at Pentecost

Act 2:37-38, 41 - Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

- They heard the preaching of the good news and were called to believe something.
- There was a heart transformation prior to baptism (cut to the heart; received his word).

Philip in Samaria

Act 8:12 - But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

- They heard Philip preach the good news.
- They believed and then were baptized.

The principle: Belief comes before baptism.

THE QUESTION OF CONVERSION

Scriptures encourage us to examine ourselves.

- 2 Corinthians 13:5a: Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.
- Faith is more than believing Jesus is true or real. Faith is personally believing & placing our complete trust in him.

What is a "believable profession of faith?":

- meaningfully tested
- affirmed by other believers
- demonstrated in obedience

The principle: True conversion leads to evidence of new life.

THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF BAPTISM

Romans 6:3-5: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

- Baptism symbolizes our spiritual death and resurrection. Baptism represents dying to our old way of life apart from the Lord in sin and being raised to a new life united to Christ.

Colossians 2:11-12: In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

- In the OT, circumcision was used to show those who belonged to the covenant community. This represented a mixture of those who proved to have faith along with those who proved not to have faith.
- In the New Covenant, the circumcision of flesh is replaced with the circumcision of Christ. Those who believe in Christ are united with Christ by faith - they are not circumcised in flesh, but circumcised in heart.
- Baptism expresses this spiritual reality.

Principle: Baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality of being united by faith to Christ and his people.

A CONTRAST IN CONTEXT: CHILDREN & BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE

- **NEW TESTAMENT CONTEXT:** All baptisms in the NT were adults in pioneering contexts with high costs.
- **OUR CONTEXT:** We are considering children in an established church in a Christian culture.

THE NEED FOR HUMILITY & DISCERNMENT

Though the context of the NT does not outline specific instructions for navigating the baptism of children in the established church, there are a few more clear principles that can help us.

- Parents are entrusted with the task of discipling their children by bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).
- The church is entrusted with the sacrament of baptism which is the entrypoint into the life and membership of the church. In particular, pastors are entrusted with overseeing, protecting, and caring for Christ's church.
- Both parents and church leadership must walk together in humility - depending on the Lord - as we navigate our responsibilities in discerning a child's profession of faith.

We are attempting to look upstream to discern the more fundamental question - "Is this child a Christian?" Have they been converted by the saving grace of God?

CHILDREN & CONVERSION¹

The likelihood of childhood conversions

- We believe children can and do come to genuine saving faith in Christ.
- We rejoice in the phenomenon of the Lord often saving children of believers while still living at home.

The challenges of discerning genuine conversion in children

Intellectual immaturity: The judgment and discernment of children is less developed and less mature than in most adults.

- 1 Corinthians 14:20: Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.
- 1 Corinthians 13:11: When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

Instability: Instability and changeableness is an assumed characteristic during this season of life.

- Ephesians 4:14: So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Persuadability: It's assumed that children are generally naïve and are in need of instruction, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, and discretion.

¹ This section has been adapted from Dennis Gunerson's "Your Child's Profession of Faith" and Steve Whitacre's paper "Children, Conversion, & Baptism"

- Proverbs 1:1-4: The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.

Parental Yearning: Parents may be eager for their child to confess faith, pray, or show evidence of God's grace, and this yearning can lead them to prematurely view such acts as definitive proof of conversion. We urge parents to guard their own hearts.

The danger of false assurance

Is a profession of faith alone sufficient?

“I have personally seen young children make a profession, receive baptism, later leave the faith, live lives that give no evidence of regeneration and yet maintain confidence that they are in right standing with God because they are baptized church members...I have seen others who have come back to God after a period of wandering and have wrestled with the need to receive believer's baptism. They had professed faith sincerely as children, but looking back, they conclude that they were sincerely repeating the answers they had been taught, and sincerely seeking to please the authority figures in their lives, but had no genuine faith.” - **John Hammett**²

If the candidate is actually unconverted, then they will be falsely assured of their salvation and unprepared for judgment and, in the meantime, they could harm the church's mission of proclaiming Christ.

In many cases, there is safety in patience. Wise parents and pastors will wrestle with the recognition that the dangers of providing a child with false assurance through premature baptism is far higher than the risks of discouraging a child's faith through delayed baptism. A truly converted child who isn't baptized right away is in no danger of losing his or her salvation. We have never seen a child's faith harmed by delaying baptism. On the other hand, every pastor has a collection of heart-breaking stories of young people who were baptized too young, young people whose premature confidence bred complacency towards godliness, sadly culminating in turning away from the faith they never really held. - **Steve Whitacre**

The shift from imitation to individuation³

Imitate: In their younger years, children imitate parents. That ability to imitate is great, but as parents, we need to be careful. It's so easy for a child to pick up on the *outside* behavior—things like how we talk, what we do, or even physical actions like putting our hands up during a song—without those things having real meaning on the *inside* for them. Later, this phase

² From John Hammett's chapter "When Should a Child Be Baptized" in the book "40 Questions About Baptism & The Lord's Supper."

³ This idea came from an online article by Michael Lawrence entitled "Give Them Time: How to Protect the Assuring Nature of a Child's Baptism."

transitions into meaningful behavior. However, the motivations that move the behavior may not necessarily be flowing from a regenerated heart.

Individuate: As children grow older, they become more personally independent and socially aware. Their social environment expands, and with it, the temptations to fear man, to people-please, to sinfully pursue power or pleasure. The temptations become clearer, but so do the victories that come through dependence on the Spirit if they have been genuinely converted.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD

The goal for your child is not ultimately baptism, but trusting in Christ - which will give way to clearer evidence in time.

Evidences of faith to look for

- **Sound profession of belief in the gospel:** Does your child understand the story of the gospel? Has your child responded to the gospel in repentance and faith?
- **Affectionate love for Christ:** Does your child show an evident love for Christ? Does your child delight in the Lord? Does your child genuinely try, out of love for God, to apply what he has taught from God's word to his life?
- **Determination to obey Christ:** Does your child show a strong interest in pleasing God, by willing obedience at least to the biblical duties that are known and understood? Does the child have a heart to obey parents and the other authorities God has placed over his or her life? When corrected or instructed according to truth, is it welcomed, and responded to in a humble, receptive way? Do they confess sin, even if they haven't been caught? What are their friends like? What is their relationship like with classmates, siblings, teachers, and parents? Do they honor Christ in these relationships?
- **Trusting Christ in suffering and trials:** How has your child responded to different "tests" of faith (e.g., when playing sports with people who do not follow Jesus, when family members or friends sin against him, etc)? How has your child responded to suffering - like a serious sickness, the loss of a close family member, or some other major difficulty?

3 ways to help build your child's faith

1. **Encourage your child:** Praise your child for any evidence of God's grace you see, for doing anything they would not naturally want to do in order to serve and share with others.
2. **Challenge your child:** Urge your child to value knowing God and walking in a relationship with God above all.

3. **Fix your child's eyes on Christ, not on his own profession:** Keep your child from being distracted with worries about what other Christians think of his profession. Encourage your child instead to keep the focus on knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

NEXT STEPS

1. Use the 3 ways that have been suggested to build your child's faith.
2. We recommend waiting to have a conversation about baptism until your child is closer to 12 years old.
3. Ask your child questions that give opportunity for heart conversations.
 - a. What do you enjoy most in your Bible reading?
 - b. What do you pray for when you pray?
 - c. Which of your friends are Christians? (Seek to find out why the child thinks they are Christians)
 - d. If a kid your age asked you how to become a Christian, what would you say?
 - e. Who encourages you most to follow Christ?
 - f. What temptations do you feel most powerfully right now and what do you do about them when they come?
 - g. Have there been times you have felt especially close to the Lord?
4. Spend time collecting evidence of your child's profession of faith.
5. Invite others into the conversation.
6. Study about baptism together (Bible Doctrine chapter or Romans 6:1-11).
7. Help your child form a clear profession of faith.
8. Fill out the "Baptism Request" form and connect with a pastor.