

## CHILDHOOD BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT TEMPLE HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH

### **Introduction**

If you've spent much time with us at Temple Hills, then you've probably noticed how richly God has blessed us with children! We believe that children are a gift from God, primarily to parents but also to the church as a whole. Because of that, we are passionate about caring both for you as a parent, and for your children. We want to see all our kids grow into a mature, rich, solid, saving faith in Jesus Christ, and we want to help them grow in their faith and discipleship as they grow up.

We're convinced that God works wonderfully in the lives of children. Many parents at Temple Hills have seen their children—sometimes very young ones—display a wonderful sensitivity to spiritual realities, a heartfelt love for Jesus, and even a desire to tell others about Jesus. In fact, we believe that God sometimes brings even very young children to a saving faith in Jesus. You may be seeing some signs of conversion in your own child's life. If so, then praise God!

Any time parents see signs of conversion in a young child's life, the question will naturally and rightly arise: When should my child be baptized and added as a member of the church? That's a good question, and it's right for that question to press on a parent's heart. But even so, it's not an easy one to answer, and different Christians have come to thoughtful, principled, careful—and yet very different—conclusions on it. Among Baptists, there have been two very broad approaches:

Baptize quickly  
or  
Wait awhile

In other words, is it best for the church to act more-or-less immediately upon a child's profession of faith in Jesus, baptizing them and making them a member of the church even at a very young age? Or is it best to wait awhile, encouraging the child to continue growing in his or her understanding of the gospel and love for Jesus, until it's clearer that his or her profession of faith is considered, deep, and genuinely personal—that is, until his or her profession of faith becomes discernibly *credible* to the church?

### **Biblical Considerations**

Sometimes people approach this difficult question as if there is a clear, open-and-shut biblical command regarding it, and that to take one position or another is to disobey the Bible. Our conclusion as elders, however, is that the issue of when to baptize children who profess Christ is not a matter of simple obedience to an issue clearly settled by Scripture, but instead is a matter of Christian wisdom and prudence on an issue not directly addressed by Scripture. In fact, both sides can actually make some pretty good indirect, prudential arguments for their position. Let's take a look:

### ***A Case for “Baptize Quickly”***

Here are a number of arguments that someone might make in favor of baptizing even very young children quickly upon a profession of faith:

1. Children, just like adults, are sinful, and they are in need of Jesus’ saving work (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-21).
2. Children can be saved. Christ invites children to come to him (1 Samuel 1-3; Psalm 22:9-10; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34-35; Jeremiah 1:5-8; Luke 1:15; Luke 18:16), and he uses children as examples of the humility necessary for those who wish to enter Jesus’ kingdom (Matthew 11:25; 18:2-4; 19:13-14; Mark 10:15-16; Luke 10:21; 18:14-16).
3. Believing children should be welcomed into the church through baptism. The New Testament authors addressed these children as members within the church (Ephesians 6:1 “in the Lord;” Colossians 3:20), and we should as well.
4. The New Testament knows nothing of un-baptized followers of Christ. If a child is a believer, he or she is a disciple. If a child is a disciple, then Christ commands that this child participate in baptism and communion (Matthew 28:18-10).
5. Baptism and communion are intended for every member of Christ’s church. They are ways of experiencing and remembering God’s goodness and the gracious gifts that he has lavished on his people. None of Jesus’ gracious gifts—worship, teaching, preaching, community, pastoral care, communion, or even church discipline—should be withheld from young followers of Christ.
6. In his pastoral epistles, Paul limits the position of elder to men (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 3:2). Moreover, the term “elder” itself suggests that the attainment of age and experience is required for one to exercise this role in the church (though Timothy should not be considered to be too young—1 Timothy 4:12). Paul also sets an age limit (age 60) for widows who can receive support from the church (1 Timothy 5:9). In the spirit of these limitations, it is suggested that church leadership roles and responsibilities that call for a certain level of maturity should be withheld from children until they reach that level. In other words, believing children are full-fledged members of the church that have limited responsibilities until they reach a level of independence from their parents. Until that time, their primary responsibility in the Lord is to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1).

### ***A Case for “Wait Awhile”***

Similarly, here are a number of arguments someone might make in favor of waiting until a child’s profession of faith becomes more discernibly credible to other believers.

1. Children, just like adults, are sinful, and they are in need of Jesus’ saving work (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-21).
2. Children can be saved. Christ invites children to come to him (1 Samuel 1-3; Psalm 22:9-10; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34-35; Jeremiah 1:5-8; Luke 1:15; Luke 18:16), and he uses children as examples of the humility necessary for those who wish to enter Jesus’ kingdom (Matthew 11:25; 18:2-4; 19:13-14; Mark 10:15-16; Luke 10:21; 18:14-16).
3. Baptism and communion should be given immediately when one’s confession of faith is publicly credible. For adults, this means living in the community of faith for a time and being examined by the elders and larger community who watch for an authentic trust in Christ that is independent of others.

4. It is not clear in the New Testament that children were ever baptized or that we should expect they should be (e.g., Acts 4:4, 32; 5:6, 12-14; 6:1; 8:1-3, 12; 9:2; 10:24, 33, 44-48; 12:13). All followers of Christ described in the New Testament are baptized as adults who have come from a non-Christian context and are actively participating in church life.

5. A child's faith is ordinarily nurtured by his or her parents (Ephesians 6:4). The New Testament teaching that children must obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20) implies that children relate to God and the church primarily through their parents (see also 1 Corinthians 7:14).

6. Moreover, children are easily deceived. They require the constant supervision and care of parental authority (Proverbs 22:15; Ephesians 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 13:11).

7. Due to immaturity, children have had little chance to express their trust in Christ independently from their parents (Ephesians 6:1). For example, they have had few opportunities to choose between Christ and their peers in a deep way. They cannot make a publicly credible confession. Therefore, baptism and communion should be withheld from children until they reach a level of maturity that is independent of their parents.

8. God's saving grace is not given through baptism and communion (1 Peter 3:21; Luke 23:43; Romans 10:9-10). So, there is no danger to the child in waiting. In fact, waiting can increase the honor associated with this event as well as allow time for the child's discipline and faith to grow (Proverbs 1:5; 9:9).

Christians can have good and edifying conversations about both those cases, but the bottom line seems to be that the Bible doesn't give us any definite, unambiguous command or example about whether to baptize young children who profess faith. What the Bible does seem clear about, however, is that we as a church have the responsibility to discern that professions of faith are *credible*.

This idea that not every profession of faith can be deemed *credible*—and that it's our job as a church to determine which ones can—seems to be implied throughout the New Testament. Consider James who argued that faith, if it is unaccompanied by works, is dead (James 2:17), or the author of Hebrews who was confident that the salvation of his audience was accompanied by "better things," namely, their love for God and God's people (Hebrews 6:9-10). Jesus himself in Matthew 13 described a person who hears the word of the gospel and seems to receive it, but then under the pressure of the world shows himself never to have been a Christian in the first place. In Matthew 18, he also insisted that the church could treat a professing believer "as you would a pagan or a tax collector" if that person refused to repent (Matthew 18:17). Paul, too, insisted that the church should judge its own in order to determine if their professions of faith in Jesus are credible (1 Corinthians 5:12). And John spoke of professing believers who "went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19).

All this is to say that our responsibility as a church is not simply to determine when someone has made a profession of faith. Our responsibility is rather to determine when someone has made a *credible* profession of faith—one which has been tested by the world, the flesh and the devil and, in the face of such testing, seems to be genuine, personal, real, deep, and accompanied by good evidence of repentance from sin and love for Jesus.

Especially when it comes to children, determining whether a profession of faith is *credible* in that sense is not easy, and until very recently, most Baptists have recognized that reality.

### **Historical Considerations**

We should note right from the beginning that the question of when a child should be baptized is not a question at all for many Christians. That's because they are what is called "paedobaptists," which means they baptize infants soon after their birth. Baptists have always rejected the various theological cases that lie behind that practice, believing that baptism is for those who (as our Statement of Faith puts it) "do actually profess repentance toward God and faith in and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ."

The problem, of course, is determining when that profession can be discerned to be credible, and until recently, most Baptists seem to have believed that it required a significant degree of maturity. One historian described the situation among Baptists in America like this:

We noted earlier the very strong statements in Baptist confessions of faith concerning the necessity of visible evidence of regeneration prior to baptism and church membership. This indicates something of the seriousness with which they took baptism. It was regarded as an adult decision, not to be made lightly. It was said of Richard Furman's ministry at First Baptist Church of Charleston (1787-1825) that in dealing with children the "greatest care was exercised in guarding against premature professions of piety." . . . Anyone who works with children knows that five-year-olds will readily ask Jesus into their hearts, but until very recently Baptists would never have considered baptizing them. Believer's baptism was seen as virtually synonymous with adult baptism. To request baptism was regarded as a decision requiring a fair degree of maturity.<sup>i</sup>

Of course, that's not to say that no Baptists ever baptized young children. Charles Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle seems to have brought many "boys and girls" into membership, though Spurgeon waited to baptize his own sons—who may have been believers for years—until they were 18 years old.<sup>ii</sup> In general, this was true of most Baptists throughout history. They were not baptized until their late teens or early twenties, and most of them even held jobs before they were baptized and given the rights and responsibilities of church membership. Simply put, among Baptists, the baptism of young children and even early adolescents was rare.

Only in the last century has that general practice changed:

Over the years the average age for baptisms among Baptists in North America has steadily declined. Prior to 1966, Southern Baptists did not even keep statistics on the number of preschoolers baptized, but denominational statisticians apparently became aware by then that it was a growing trend. Over the next twenty-three years, they saw the number

of preschool baptisms triple. It is hard to see how these preschool children could have convinced earlier Baptists that they were in fact regenerate or competent to take on the duties and responsibilities of membership.<sup>iii</sup>

More recently, between 1977 and 1997, there was a 250% increase in the number of baptisms of children under age six in Southern Baptist churches. To make matters worse, an enormous number of these early-age baptisms are later recognized to have been illegitimate.

The validity of many contemporary baptisms was further challenged by a 1993 study done by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. In their study of adult baptisms (those over eighteen years of age) in Southern Baptist churches in 1993, they found that the majority of adult baptisms (60 percent) could be called rebaptisms. Some were baptisms of those who had previously been baptized as infants, but 36 percent of these adult baptisms were of those who had been previously baptized in Southern Baptist churches. When asked why they were seeking rebaptism, many said that it was because they had not been regenerate believers when they were first baptized.<sup>iv</sup>

Moreover, it seems that this trend is not only recent, but also distinctly American. English Baptists have noted that Baptists in America, particularly Southern Baptists, tend to approve of baptizing people at a much younger age than do Baptists in England. Similarly, in other parts of the world, reports have shown that while there is generally no written rule, no one would think of asking for baptism prior to the age of 14.<sup>v</sup>

The takeaway from all this seems to be that in general, Baptists throughout history and around the world have tended to believe that discerning a child's profession of faith to be *credible* requires time and a certain degree of maturity. Thus they have generally not baptized young children, but rather have waited awhile until those children have matured at least into mid-adolescence.

But why?

### **Considerations from Childhood Development Patterns**

Over the years, careful observation of children as they mature through childhood and adolescence has helped clarify what parents have known for millennia: Children increase in self-awareness, abstract thinking, recognition of implications, ability to trace consequences, and independent decision-making as they age. Indeed it seems that, generally speaking, a child's intellectual capacity to make a self-aware, independent decision about his or her relationship with Christ increases significantly through the early adolescent years and into mid-adolescence.

Even more importantly, though, our ability to *see and identify* that kind of decision increases as the child ages. The fact is, the younger a child is, the more their values,

identity, and beliefs are—and are *supposed to be*—tightly woven together with their parents’ values, identity, and beliefs. Therefore, a younger child will likely have a hard time distinguishing their love for and obedience to Jesus from their love for and obedience to their parents. That reality is actually very good and very right.

Think of a young child’s heart as a flower bud, tightly closed. The child loves Jesus, and he loves his parents, too. In fact, it’s probably true at that young age that the child loves Jesus *because* he loves his parents; and it’s probably also true at some level that he loves and obeys his parents *because* he loves and wants to obey Jesus. Those two loves are as inseparable as the petals of a budded flower, and at this stage, it is good and right that they should be so.

But here’s the problem: In order to discern whether a profession of faith is *credible*, a church needs to be able to see whether a person’s love for Jesus is really *for Jesus*, or if it is because of something else. We have to ask, when push comes to shove, if a person will follow Jesus or family, Jesus or friends, Jesus or acceptability, Jesus or self, if and when those things diverge. To do that kind of questioning and prodding in the heart of a young child, though—to pry in and try to distinguish between the two in order to determine if one exists independently of the other—would seem too much like trying to force some distance between that child’s love for his parents and his love for Jesus, a distinction that isn’t *supposed* to be there at that age. It would seem like trying to force the bud to open before its time.

By the latter years of early adolescence, however, and into mid-adolescence, it seems that the bud has in most cases begun to open on its own. Children of that age have begun naturally to question their childhood beliefs and adopt their own values. They are becoming self-aware, capable of critically evaluating Christianity, of making a personal decision about whether they really do believe in Jesus, and also of deciding whether they believe themselves to be a sinner in need of a savior. In short, the flower has opened, the petals have separated a bit, and therefore we can see much more clearly—without prying—whether that person believes in Jesus of their own volition, or whether their early belief in him has fallen away as they’ve become more independent from their parents.

### **Temple Hills’ Policy on Childhood Baptism and Membership**

We consider it a great joy to meet and talk with the parents of children who are seeking to know Jesus Christ! We love to see children asking questions about God, learning to love Jesus, deepening in their understanding of the Bible, and growing in their discernment of spiritual things. Having read this far, you understand some of the tensions that weigh on our hearts when we approach the question of when a child should be baptized and become a member of the church. With you, we long to see our children saved by Jesus and then encouraged in their faith, and we want to do everything possible not to discourage them in their love for Jesus in any way.

To that end,

1. The Elders of Temple Hills Baptist Church strongly recommend that parents wait until their child is at least at the age of entering their high school years before encouraging them to request baptism or church membership. Please note that this is a recommendation and not a mandate. We are willing to interview your younger child for baptism, if both you and they desire that, but please know that we simply don't expect those conversations to be very fruitful in determining the credibility of a child's profession until they begin to push into mid-adolescence.
2. We also encourage parents to recognize that conversion is God's work in a person's heart and life, not simply a decision the person makes. Therefore, parents should be vigilant in looking for some or all of the following signs of God's converting work in their child before presenting him or her for baptism:

- Conviction of sin. Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit, who uses God's laws and commands to bring sin and the necessity of trusting Christ home to the child's conscience (2 Kings 22; Romans 7:7-9). Does your child demonstrate sorrow and remorse about his or her sin? Does your child recognize that he has sinned against God and not just against others? Does your child confess her sins to God and ask for his mercy without your prompting? Does your child demonstrate commitment to Christ in the midst of strong temptation to disobey?

- Understanding and Faith. Revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit by which he reveals the thoughts of God to people so that a person may obtain a true understanding of Christ and his word (John 10:26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Does your child understand that she is a sinner and cannot save herself? Does your child understand that his sins deserve death and punishment in hell? Does your child understand that Jesus died as a substitute for his sins? Does your child understand that she is saved only by God's grace and not because of any good within herself? Does your child demonstrate an understanding of the Scriptures when they are taught or is your child confused by the Scriptures?

- New Life in Christ. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives life to a dead soul, and produces a credible profession of repentance and faith (John 3; Romans 6; 10:9-10) as well as a new valuing of the Scriptures (John 6:45). Does your child demonstrate a genuine interest in spiritual things? Does your child pray or read the Scriptures on their own initiative? What sins have your children repented of? Does your child desire to talk with you about the Scriptures? How does your child demonstrate that he trusts Jesus?

Does your child demonstrate a genuine desire to tell others about Jesus?

- Neither sorrow over sin nor interest in spiritual things alone is sufficient evidence of a regenerate heart or the work of the Spirit (Acts 8:9-25; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Hebrews 12:17).

3. When a child begins to profess faith in Christ and inquire about baptism and church membership, we will joyfully join with that child's parents in considering God's work in their child's life. An elder will meet with the parents initially to discuss the matters outlined above, and we will also seek to stay in close contact in order to mentor, counsel, and advise parents as they seek to lead their children in spiritual things.
4. Over a period of time, the child will be led by his or her parents through a study that clarifies the gospel—i.e., *What is the Gospel* by Greg Gilbert, *Who Will Be King* by Matthias Media, and/or *A Catechism for Boys and Girls* by Reformation Trust.
5. At the conclusion of this study, the child will meet for an interview (or even a series of interviews) with his or her parents and one or more elders of the church. The purpose of these meetings is to discern, as well as we can, if the child understands and has personally and genuinely embraced the gospel.
6. If the elders are convinced that a child has given evidence of a genuine conversion, the child will be baptized and accepted into the fellowship and discipline of the church, and into all the rights and privileges of church membership.

### **Questions and Answers**

1. What if my child is expressing faith in Christ? How can I encourage this faith?

*There are many ways, and we would encourage you to rejoice in what you see God doing in your child's life and be diligent in encouraging it! Continue to teach your children God's law and commands, which the Holy Spirit uses to bring conviction of sin (Deuteronomy 6). Teach them God's promises and speak plainly about their need to repent from sin and trust Christ (Acts 2:38-39). At the same time, model and teach honesty and openness with the Lord in prayer in the midst of all situations (Lamentations 2:19ff), and encourage your children to exercise disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, and Bible memorization (Psalm 119:9-11; 144:12). Also, be sure to include your children in both family and corporate worship gatherings (Exodus 12:26; 13:9, 14-16). A person's presence and participation in church services can be a catalyst*



*for helping them grow to understand the gospel (Psalm 8:2; 102:18; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25).*

2. By not bringing my child into membership in the church, are you saying that my child is not a Christian?

*Certainly not. We believe that God converts people sometimes even at very early ages. Your child may very well be a Christian. God knows. Our policy of not recommending young children for baptism and membership does not at all imply a judgment that they are not saved; it is simply a judgment that at this point in their lives we want to wait for more discernible, credible evidence of their regeneration before giving them the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of church membership.*

3. If my child really is a Christian, doesn't this policy mean that he/she is being denied the Lord's Supper, which is a right for every Christian?

*No, actually the Lord's Supper is not a right for every Christian. It is rather a right and privilege for every Christian who is a baptized member of a church. Moreover, God's saving grace is not given through the Lord's Supper, so there's no spiritual danger in having a child wait. In fact, waiting until a more mature age can increase the honor and solemnity the child associates with the ordinance.*

4. Isn't church membership a right for every Christian?

*No, church membership is a right for every Christian who gives a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ. That doesn't necessarily mean, however, that a person's inability to provide a credible profession means that a person is not a true Christian (or, for that matter, that membership in a local church guarantees that one is in fact a true Christian). In other words, your child may be a true Christian even if he or she is not yet a member of the church (see question 2 above).*

*Here's the thing, theologically speaking: Christians have always recognized that the membership of the invisible church (all those who are saved by Jesus) and the membership of the visible church (local churches) will not be precisely the same. As Baptists, though, we want to be as sure as we can that those who are members of the church are actually and truly Christians. In other words, we want to aim to have a "regenerate membership." In fact, that's precisely what leads us to look for credible professions of faith among those who apply for membership in the church.*

5. Isn't my believing child being denied the crucial benefit of being disciplined by the church?

*Not at all. Temple Hills Baptist Church is deeply committed to disciplining children of all ages, teaching them the Bible, and seeking to point them to Jesus Christ. There is a wealth of help available to you as a parent in*

*teaching your child, however young, to be a follower and lover of Jesus. We will be more than happy to help you do that in any way we can, whether your child is a member of the church or not. In fact, we promise in our very church covenant that “we will seek to bring up such as are or may be under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”*

6. There’s no way you can know my child as well as I do, and I see all kinds of evidence that his/her faith is real. Why isn’t my testimony enough?

*Membership in the church is never a matter of just one or two people (even family members) vouching for a person. It is a matter of the entire church, through its elders, determining that a person has made a credible profession of faith.*

7. You talked a little earlier about the flower bud of love for Jesus and love for parents. I understand that, but why do you need to see evidence of a child’s love for Jesus being independent of his/her love for his parents? Shouldn’t we look rather for evidence that is credible *for the person’s stage of life*? In other words, isn’t the presence of the bud itself credible evidence of God’s regenerating work in a young child’s life?

*That’s a really good question. But consider this: As we saw earlier, statistics show that a large percentage of baptisms performed on children of Christian parents actually turn out not to have been legitimate in the very estimation of those individuals themselves; that is, those people look back and decide that they weren’t actually Christians when they were baptized. Keep in mind too, that those statistics cover only those who stay in the faith and ultimately apply for “rebaptism” – they don’t even include those individuals baptized as children who leave the faith and never return. When you think about it, that tells us that the presence of even a well-formed “bud” of love for parents and love for Jesus turns out to be a rather poor predictor of whether a person really is a Christian, and therefore whether he/she should be baptized. In that sense, the presence of the bud is—by definition—just not very credible in and of itself. That’s why we look for evidence of a love for Jesus that is personal, considered, and independent. That kind of profession of faith is a much better predictor of a strong, life-long commitment to Jesus.*

8. Aren’t we losing valuable time to help my child understand his/her place in the church?

*Probably not. If your child hasn’t reached late-early or mid-adolescence, then he or she is probably not equipped yet to understand very deeply the importance and texture of what it means to be a member of the church, with all its rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Even secular society recognizes that it’s best to withhold some rights and privileges (think of voting or holding office) until people are mature enough to understand them and exercise them responsibly.*

*The best way you can teach your child, at this stage, the importance of the church and what it means to be a member of it is by attending regularly, teaching, and explaining to your child what is happening and why. When your child has begun to mature a little more, there will be plenty of time for him/her to learn at an experiential level what it means and looks like to be a church member.*

9. Even so, what's the trouble with going ahead and baptizing young children?

*There are at least a couple of potential dangers in baptizing children before they have reached a significant degree of maturity. First, early baptism has the potential of offering a child false assurance, leading them to rely on the concrete experience of their baptism and the concrete reality of their church membership for a sense of well-being with God, instead of relying on Christ, who is not seen. Of course that's a danger for anyone of any age, but it would seem to be a particular danger for children whose thinking tends toward the concrete, and whose sense of well-being is naturally so tightly woven together with a sense of others'—especially their parents'—approval. As they age, however, children are better able to know for themselves (and we are better able to see) that their faith is truly and solely in Jesus.*

*Also, as we saw earlier in this booklet, an enormous number of people who are baptized early are troubled by confusion later in life about whether their baptism was genuine. Memories of the first decade of our lives are often fuzzy at best. Even if we do remember a decision or an event like baptism, we usually cannot recall any reasoning behind the decision or event. Once a young person has the capacity for reasoning and for more independent thinking, they are far more likely to embrace the decisions and commitments they make as their own. Our hope is that as a child waits, there will be a growing sense of anticipation as they look forward to following the Lord in obedience.*

*By encouraging parents to wait awhile before presenting their children for membership, we hope to help people lessen the dangers of both false assurance and confusion.*

10. Isn't it dangerously discouraging to prolong a period of "testing" in a child's life?

*Yes, it probably is. That's why we would encourage you not to begin that "testing" period prematurely by encouraging your child to inquire about baptism before mid-adolescence. If you do, we are willing to talk with them, but you should be aware that we likely will not recommend them for baptism or membership at that time. By late-early or mid-adolescence, however, we think it will usually be possible to move relatively quickly toward baptism and membership. Let the flower bloom a bit before you encourage your child to ask to be baptized.*

11. With this policy, are the elders implying that my baptism at an early age was illegitimate?

*Certainly not! Many of our members here at Temple Hills were baptized very early in life, much earlier than mid-adolescence, in fact. We don't mean at all to call those early baptisms into question. In fact, in those cases, the intervening years of growth and faithfulness have shown those early baptisms to be legitimate.*

*We have adopted the policy laid out here, however, because for every member who was baptized early and proved that baptism to be genuine over the years, there is at least one other member who was baptized early but who ultimately decided that baptism wasn't a true one; in other words, that member eventually decided that they weren't really a Christian at the time of their early baptism. And in the meantime, many of those people will testify that they were lulled to sleep for a time by false assurance, plagued by doubts about their faith, or simply sunk in confusion. Through this policy, we want to try to avoid those troubles as much as possible.*

12. What if I have older children or teenagers, but they are not receptive to spiritual things? What do I do?

*• Pray for your children's salvation. Salvation is God's work. Do not be afraid to ask God to give your children saving faith (Matthew 6:7-11). Pray that the Holy Spirit will use your teaching, correction, and love as parents to show your kids God's holiness as well as their own sin and guilt (2 Kings 22; Romans 7:7-9). Pray that he will make your child's conscience tender and ready to hear the gospel (Galatians 4:1-5). Pray these prayers in front of your children.*

*• Talk to your children. Talk to them about the benefits of obeying God and living with wisdom (Proverbs 3:13-18; 8:12-21; Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 1:8-9; 6:20-23; 7:1-3; 24:13-14; Ephesians 6:1-3). Lovingly warn your children that failing to trust and obey God results in death and hell (Proverbs 12:1-2; 13:1; 15:32-33; 19:20, 27-29; 23:12; Luke 12:4-5). Assure your children that Jesus offers forgiveness of sins and joy to those who trust him (Romans 5:8). Correct your children when they disobey. Remember mercy when correcting your children. Repent and ask your children for forgiveness when you fail to be merciful (Psalm 39:10-11; Proverbs 13:24; 29:15; 1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 6:4; Psalm 6:1-2; 38:1; 39:11; Isaiah 53:4-5; Romans 5:8).*

*• Don't rush your children to be baptized if you feel they are not ready. Even some elders at Temple Hills have been convicted that their children should wait to participate in the ordinances until they are older than mid-adolescence. Do not feel you have failed as a parent because you do not*

*see fruit. Trust that God will work according to his own timetable (Philippians 1:6).*

*• Ask for help. God has put us in community together so that we can help one another. The Elders and many others at Temple Hills would be more than happy to talk and pray with you about your parenting struggles. Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask.*

13. What if my child was baptized at another church before our family came to Temple Hills?

*By asking parents to wait until their children are pushing into late-early or mid-adolescence before encouraging them to pursue baptism, we are not at all saying that a genuine baptism cannot occur before that time. If a child was baptized as a believer at another church before coming to Temple Hills, we will not ask the child to be baptized again.*

*However, all that we have said about trying to discern a credible profession of faith with regard to baptism, is also true with regard to church membership. Therefore, we would strongly recommend that parents not present their baptized children for membership at Temple Hills until at least their high school years. Again, please note that this is a recommendation and not a mandate. We are willing to interview your younger child for membership, if you desire that, but please know that we simply don't expect those conversations to be very fruitful in determining the credibility of a child's profession until at least the high school years.*

*That said, we also want to be exceedingly careful not to discourage your child spiritually, especially if he or she has been taking the Lord's Supper at another church. If this describes your situation, please be sure to talk with an elder about how we can move forward in being sure your child is encouraged in his or her faith in Jesus.*

14. If my child has made a profession of faith, but has not been baptized, can he or she participate in the Lord's Supper?

*Our Statement of Faith affirms what Christians throughout history have always affirmed, that baptism precedes participation in the Lord's Supper. For that reason, your child should not participate in the Lord's Supper until he or she is baptized. (See question 12 if your child was baptized in another church.)*

*That said, use the Lord's Supper to encourage active, God-glorifying anticipation in your child's heart. Instead of only focusing on why your child shouldn't partake, focus on your eager anticipation that they will partake. If you can do so truthfully, let your child know how you have seen the Lord's work in their lives, and how you look for them to grow. Encourage them to continue trusting Christ. Children in whom the Spirit is at work will be aware of their sins. Do not encourage children to be introspective and worried about their faults. Point them to Christ and*

*assure them of your confidence that since he has begun a good work in them, he will finish it (Philippians 1:6).*

*While you wait, prepare. If your children are with you during the Lord's Supper service, allow them to hold your hand as you hold the elements. Allow them to quietly observe you as you take each element. Share with them how much the Lord loved us to give His life for us. Pray with them thanking the Lord for His death and life.*

*Finally, set an example of worthy partaking. If bitterness or anger or any sin troubles you, do not partake. This will show your child that you are serious about Paul's admonition that we should not partake of the Table in an unworthy way.*

15. What if I am convinced that my child is not ready for baptism and church membership, but he is feeling peer-pressure because he sees friends being baptized or taking the Lord's Supper?

- *Ask questions. Peer-pressure provides an excellent opportunity for parents to talk with their children about the gospel, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Ask your children, "Why do you want to be baptized?" "Do you only want to be baptized because your friend was baptized?" "What do you understand baptism to signify?" Asking probing questions will help you, as the shepherds of your home, to understand your child's heart.*

- *Be honest. If you are convinced that your child is not embracing the gospel, talk honestly with them about errors in their understanding or sin in their life. Encourage them to repent from sins or submit to the Bible's teaching, and pray with them for God's help.*

16. What do I say to other parents if they call into question our family's decisions on these matters?

- *Be open. Don't be embarrassed about sharing your convictions with others in our church. God intentionally created us to grow in community with others. Maturity increases in a church when we seek to live by faith together—loving one another, supporting one another, and holding one another accountable (Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 7:3). This kind of gospel community is short changed if we are not talking with one another.*

- *Be forgiving. Remember that this is a matter in which the Scriptures are not perfectly clear. Families in our church will come to different conclusions about these things. Do not judge others because your approach is different (Romans 14:1-23).*

17. What if I don't have kids, but I work with the children's ministry at Temple Hills? How can I encourage a child who expresses faith in Christ without overstepping or pressuring the child?

- *Stress the facts of the gospel. Teach children God's laws and commands, which the Holy Spirit uses to bring conviction of sin (Deuteronomy 6). Then, teach them God's promises and plainly speak about their need to repent from sin and trust Christ (Acts 2:38-39).*
- *Encourage un-churched children to come to Temple Hills' regular gatherings. God saves sinners through exposure to His preached word. Pray that the ministry of the church will influence every child that walks through our doors.*
- *Do not offer false assurances or pressure children for commitments. Do not assure children that a prayer for mercy (a "sinner's prayer") guarantees their eternal destiny. It does not. Salvation is a work of God.*
- *Do not be skeptical about a child's sincerity. Although we want to be careful not to give a child a false sense of security, neither do we want to unwittingly discourage children from believing that God can grant them saving faith as a child. When a child says he/she loves Jesus or believes in Jesus, responses such as, "That's wonderful! I hope you love Him and follow Him all your life!" can be greatly encouraging.*
- *Trust God to work in the hearts of his children to bring them to himself through faith, in his time and in his ways. Your responsibility is to faithfully tell the gospel to them and leave the results to the Lord (Philippians 1:6). We can trust that the Holy Spirit will assure those who are truly changed (Rom 8:16).*

18. What if a child—on her own initiative—says she is trusting in Christ?

- *Express joy, but use discernment about validating that expression as one of saving faith. Offer encouragement to her to continue placing her trust in Christ throughout her life.*
- *If a child from a believing family speaks with you about the gospel, let her parents know the questions their child is asking. Parents are called to be the primary shepherds of their children, and they should be closely involved when their children are asking these questions. Encourage parents, with the support of Temple Hills' leadership, to discern their child's heart carefully.*
- *If a child from an un-churched family speaks with you about the gospel, let the leadership know so we can explain the gospel clearly to the child's*

*parents, let them know about the questions their child is asking, encourage them to continue bringing their child to THBC, and build a relationship with them.*

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<sup>i</sup>John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 122.

<sup>ii</sup>Mark E. Dever, "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church" in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the new Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 346. Also see W. Y. Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 43-45.

<sup>iii</sup>Hammett, 111-12.

<sup>iv</sup>Hammett, 112.

<sup>v</sup>Hammett, 112.