



Theresa Baptist Church
Our Responsibilities in Baptizing our Children

In Matthew 19:13-14, we read these words, *“Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”*

It is a glorious thing for a child to come to the Savior! And we want to see our children and young people come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus! We want to see them safely in His arms. We never want to hinder them from coming to Christ; instead we want to lead them there. Shepherding our children into the saving arms of our Chief Shepherd is the desire of every Christian parent and Pastor. Every Christian parent longs to see their child trust in Christ as Savior and walk with Him as a fruitful disciple.

Before there were churches, Sunday Schools, children’s ministries, youth groups or Christian schools, there was ***the family***. God first entrusts parents with the privilege of teaching their children and leading them to Jesus. Partnering with parents and equipping them for this task is the responsibility of the church.

It is the role and function of the Pastor(s) to lead our church in this responsibility. Having prayerfully searched the Scriptures and discussed this among spiritual leadership, this position statement is given to address the issue of the baptism of children and young people at Theresa Baptist Church. Baptizing a child is not so much a matter of waiting until the right age as it is discerning a credible profession of faith. The issue itself is not clearly addressed in scripture, so it is a matter for Churches and Elders to prayerfully and carefully consider in light of Christian wisdom and general scriptural principles.

In discussing a child’s conversion, faith, and baptism, several key truths must be kept central in our focus.

1 - We must *Shepherd* our Children to Jesus.

When a child begins considering a faith commitment, we must be very intentional in all we do in order that a solid foundation is laid that leads to mature discipleship. In the book “*Shift*,” author

Brian Haynes raises some key points and questions that all parents, Pastors, and children & family leaders need to consider.

- He writes, “For a child to understand enough to make an authentic [faith] commitment, he or she must learn and understand several key truths...these core competencies include Jesus, faith, the Bible, sin, repentance, salvation and baptism.”¹

It is impossible to have saving faith in the biblical sense without certain minimal beliefs and awareness of the basic truths of the gospel. Topics such as: Who is God; who is man, what is sin; Who is Jesus; What has Jesus accomplished; and what is man’s response to Jesus called for by God?

- To be a Christian means that we have repented of our sin and turned to Jesus for forgiveness, trusting in Him as our Savior and Lord. For Jesus to be our Savior He must be our Lord, which means that God rules over every area in one’s life.

Parents are to model, teach, and reinforce these truths for their kids. Children’s ministry workers partner with parents to teach and model these same truths. Pastors are to shepherd these families through this chapter of their lives. And the Church participates in the entire process as we worship, grow, and serve together in the community of faith.

Parents, along with Pastors, teachers and others in the Church must diligently pray for our children and carefully observe the lives of our kids. When our kids ask questions, and when our kids are demonstrating interest in spiritual matters, adults must encourage them but we must also ***weigh*** their motives.

- “Is this child trying to please mom and dad or friends? Or, is this child making a genuine faith commitment based on an age-appropriate understanding of Jesus, sin, repentance and salvation?” How the child and family are shepherded through this crucial time is very important.

On this point Dr. Mark Dever writes: “Of course children can be converted! The question raised by baptism is the ***ability of others*** to be fairly confident in that conversion. The changeable nature of children (which God especially intends for the time when they are living as dependents at home, being trained in the basics of life and faith) is a gift from God and is to be used to bring them to maturity. It should also give us ***caution*** in assuming the permanence of desires, dreams, affections and decisions of children.”²

In recognizing all of this, it is important that we rightly shepherd our children to God.

¹ Brian Haynes, *SHIFT*, (Loveland, CO: Group), 60.

² The Baptism of Children at CHBC, 2004, pg 2.

2 - What to Look for when a Child says, “I want to be Baptized.”

As we respond to our childrens’ interest in matters of faith, it is important to be positive, encouraging, and sincere. We want to express our delight that God is at work in their lives and that they are listening to Him. We should be diligent to communicate the characteristics of their lives that we find encouraging but also the things that we are concerned about. For example, “I am glad that you want to follow Jesus, but let's talk about this ongoing pattern of disobedience and lying...”

- It is important that children (and adults) understand that faith is a journey, and that we need to start well and finish well. Children expressing interest in Christ and/or baptism have not arrived at the goal, they are only just getting started.

A young child can certainly become a Christian! But a Pastor and a Church cannot necessarily discern whether or not a child has truly become a Christian. Parents see the child and know him/her better than others. So a parent’s **honest assessment** is necessary. Emotions must not direct this assessment. Scripture and the Holy Spirit, along with the spiritual guidance of Pastors, Sunday School teachers, etc. must be the basis of the assessment.

- Pastor John Stark summarizes this well saying, “If parents spend time discipling their children in the knowledge of God’s Word and the gospel, evidences of faith will [become clear], such as remorse over sin, a love for Jesus Christ, and a hunger to learn more about God. Intentional discussions and questions can reveal motivations and desires that can either affirm or call into question the child’s faith. Bringing pastors and church leaders into these discussions will help parents recognize these evidences.”³

3 - Why We Move Slowly when Baptizing Children.

Some may ask, “Why not immediately baptize a child when they say they want to be baptized, or that they have “invited Jesus into their heart”?”

- As a Church, we want to do everything in our power to encourage our children and to nurture the seed of the gospel that is planted by God in their hearts, while at the same time avoiding those things that can later lead to doubts; or worse, false conversions and/or false assurance.

And to be clear, we follow this same intentional and slow process with most everyone, children and adults.

The reasons we don’t immediately baptize children can be summarized in the following three points:

³ John Stark, thegospelcoalition.org/blogs, February 23, 2011

1 - Many who were baptized as children have later realized that their baptism wasn't genuine for one reason or another.

We must acknowledge that many of the children that were supposedly converted in our churches are showing no signs of conversion later in life. The fallout is massive and the statistics are sobering. Many of those who “made decisions” at Vacation Bible Schools, in childrens’ programs, Children’s Church, Sunday School classes, etc., and who are on church rolls have no true spiritual life in them. We must take great care knowing that simply by getting a child to make a decision about Christ in their early years does not guarantee that they are truly followers of Jesus. Some who thought they were child converts, thankfully, have come to Christ later in their teen or adult years, sometimes without using the terminology or fully understanding the change that has taken place.

- A relatively large number of baptisms in Southern Baptist churches are “re-baptisms”—often representing people who thought they were saved because they prayed a certain prayer, but, because they lacked a biblical understanding of salvation, were in reality not saved. As a church we have the responsibility to do all we can to prevent this in the lives of our kids. As Pastor/Elders we take the lead in this responsibility.

2 - We Must Carefully Steward Children’s Vulnerability.

It is rather easy to convince children to pray “the sinner’s prayer” or to raise their hand, or sign a card in response to a persuasive presentation of the gospel. Children are easily swayed and convinced. Almost anyone with basic persuasive abilities and a position of authority could get a fairly good response of supposed “new converts” in almost any classroom of children, especially if other kids are responding and peer pressure is at play.

3 - We want to Be Clear with Our Children about True, Biblical Faith.

Often, when discussing salvation with children, we do not focus on issues like repentance and faith, choosing rather to use the unclear terminology of “inviting Jesus into the heart,” which is a phrase not found in the Bible. This is not to say that the Spirit of Christ is not “in” the Christian, but that our evangelistic invitations to come to Christ too often is different than the Bible’s. We affirm what Sally Michael, Jill Nelson and Bud Burk write in *Helping Children Understand the Gospel*:

“When presenting the Gospel to children, it is important to emphasize that salvation is not based on anything they do, but on what Jesus accomplished on the cross... ‘The Gospel is not man accepting Jesus as his Savior, but that God accepted the Lord Jesus as the perfect and only savior two thousand years ago. The Gospel is not man giving his heart to Jesus, but that Christ gave His life, and His whole being in the place of sinners. The sinner is only to trust in what has already been done on his behalf.’ The gospel proclamation begins with a proclamation of objective facts, but it also calls for a personal

experience of trust in Jesus. There needs to be a personal embracing of Jesus as Savior; a receiving of Him as Redeemer and Lord and trusting in His finished work on the cross. This is saving faith.”⁴

One of the central goals of Theresa’s discipleship ministry is to ground our parents in the Gospel so they are equipped to share it with their families. If parents are clear and confident in their understanding of the gospel, then they can have a biblically-grounded confidence concerning their children and their role in shepherding their child to Christ. As Parents, and as a church, we want to be prayerful, careful and confident in how we share the gospel with our kids and what we ask them to do in response.

As a Church, we will do all we can to encourage our children toward Christ, to nurture the seed of the gospel that God plants in their hearts, while at the same time, avoiding those things that can lead to later doubts, or worse, false conversions and/or false assurance.

⁴ Sally Michael, Jill Nelson, Bud Burk, Helping Children Understand the Gospel, (Minneapolis: Children Desiring God), p. 8

Theresa Baptist Church
Child Baptism Process

1 - A child displays interest in baptism.

- They're asking questions about baptism.
- They express a desire to be baptized.
- Etc.

2 - Parents/Grandparents talk with their child(ren) about baptism.

- Look for an age-appropriate understanding of the Gospel and salvation.
- Look for age-appropriate evidences of true faith.
- Consider these resources:
 - *The Disciple-Making Parent*, Chap Bettis
 - *Parenting*, Paul Tripp

3 - Reach out to Spiritual Leadership: Pastor Garrett.

- Set up a meeting for your child with the Pastors.
- You are welcome to sit in on the meeting or not; whatever you and your child most prefer.
- We will talk with your child about the gospel, looking for a basic understanding of the Christian faith: God, sins, Jesus, salvation, forgiveness, repentance, etc.
- After meeting with your child, Garrett will talk with you about their initial impressions and what next steps will look like.

4 - Intentional Discipleship.

- For those ready to move forward, we recommend a time of focused and preparatory discipleship.
 - For those in Elementary school, this has taken place during the Sunday Morning Sunday School hour. Mrs. Jan Bowes has led this group for the last several years, and walks children through a more in-depth, age appropriate study of the Christian faith. At the end of this time, this group meets with Pastor Garrett for a Q&A.
- For young adults in our Student Ministry, Garrett will set up a time to meet with your student and work through preparation for baptism.

5 - Celebrate Baptism!

- Having worked through the above process, we will schedule a Sunday to baptize your child!