

IS MY CHILD READY FOR BAPTISM?

As most believers would be aware, baptism is defined in this way:

“Baptism is the sacrament which uniquely depicts initiation into the Christian life. In baptism we find that as a genuine believer is fully immersed in water, he is identifying with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism points to the beginning of the Christian life, and displays one’s commitment to Christ. While baptism does not save, it is an important act of obedience to our Lord, and follows His example.”

Clearly, the importance of baptism can’t be minimized. It’s our desire as pastors to serve the parents of our church as they determine the readiness of their children to be baptized.

Please understand, the Bible is quite direct in stating that parents bear the primary responsibility for the spiritual condition and progress of a child. Parents are the God-given means of grace to their children to: teach them God’s commands, train them in the way they should go, and to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

However, as pastors called to shepherd the flock of God, we’re to administer the sacraments within the context of the local church. So it’s our privilege and responsibility to equip you, as parents, in the process of determining if your child is ready to be baptized. The decision ultimately rests with you, but our desire is that God would be glorified in our midst as we together evaluate the readiness of children to be baptized.

The Bible provides no age limitations for those who are to follow the Lord in baptism. The main biblical criterion for baptism is a person being genuinely converted. With that in mind, parents must do the hard work of ensuring that their child is indeed a Christian before participating in baptism.

While we certainly believe God does save children, even young children, we should all be aware that just because a child follows a parent in repeating a “prayer of salvation,” there is no assurance that the child is truly converted.

Children often change their opinions, can be immature, and can be easily influenced. They haven’t really been exposed to much of the world, making it difficult to discern if genuine conversion has occurred. The younger the child, the more difficult it is to determine.

We believe that a child should only be baptized if he can provide a believable profession of faith in Christ. It’s true that there is no minimum age for baptism, but waiting until the child is of age to understand and appreciate the experience can have significant benefit.

Baptizing prematurely can provide a child with false assurance. This, of course, is quite dangerous for a child, and can cause significant confusion throughout the child’s life. Since the Bible never teaches salvation through baptism, waiting until there is a believable profession of faith in Christ will prove beneficial later on in a child’s life.

As you care for and lead your children, discussing with them spiritual truths, we recommend that you look for evidences of genuine conversion. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but it can help parents begin the dialogue process to determine readiness for baptism.

1. Can your child communicate the content of the gospel (not perfectly of course), and can they communicate an expression of faith in Christ for salvation?
2. Does your child evidence godly sorrow over sin, followed by repentance?
3. Can your child examine himself, and evaluate the condition of his soul?
4. Has your child demonstrated a willingness to turn away from the world (at least as much of the world as a child experiences), and instead obey God's commands?
5. Does your child exhibit the "fruit of the Spirit" that proceeds from genuine regeneration?

Discussing these and similar questions with your child can open up a world of wonderful and heartfelt communication, and no doubt you'll experience God's help in determining if your child is ready to be baptized or not.

If, in the overall process, your child professes faith in Christ, but you don't think the child is ready, consider following this approach.

Share with your child that you're thrilled that they are repenting and trusting in Christ. Let them know that more than anything, you want both them and you to be assured that God has really changed their life. Say something like this:

"The way we know is when you continue to repent and trust the Lord, and live life as a true Christian, having a new heart that loves to obey God. Sometimes it's not really clear that a person is truly a Christian until that person is in a place where it really costs the person to live for and obey Jesus.

You might not know for yourself until you have to decide whether to obey Christ or follow your friends. So, let's see what God continues to do in your life. Together, we'll watch and pray, and along the way I want you to feel free to ask any and every question that comes up."

In conclusion remember, this is an exciting and meaningful season in family life! When our children begin to show interest in spiritual things, we should rejoice in the Lord for the privilege of sharing the gospel with them. To see Him at work in their hearts is thrilling indeed. As we walk them through all God is doing in their lives, may He give us the insight and discernment to evaluate accurately what's taking place.

As your pastors, we rejoice with you as your children come to Christ, and experience genuine conversion. Please be assured that we're here to help you along the way. We look forward to the day when, with assurance of their salvation, we join together with our church family in seeing them follow our Lord in the sacrament of baptism.