

Believers Baptism: Parents Guide

Believers Baptism And Our Children

I. The Ordinance Of Baptism is generally recognized as having three aspects...

- A. **Obedience on the part of the Christian:** Matthew 3:15 *But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.*
- B. **Obedience on the part of the minister:** Matthew 28:19 *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*
- C. **A public witness to the church:** 1John 5:8 *For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.*
1. It is this third aspect of baptism which so often concerns the younger children.
 2. A child needs to be able to do more than be presented by the pastor to evidence a witness.
 3. While some denominations feel this public witness can be mediated
 - a. by a priest,
 - b. by a covenant relationship with the parents
 - c. or by the pastor emersing the child publicly before the church,
 - d. we hold to the strict biblical view of believers baptism being a testimony by the believer, before the church.
 4. Still others feel that baptism is a good way to break the believer into being a "public" Christian.
 - a. As a result, reluctant candidates are encouraged to be baptized to nail down their salvation
 - b. And to increase their visibility.
 - c. We however hold to baptism as a public testimony by the believer, not a step towards a public testimony by the believer.
 - d. Thus the term, Believers Baptism
 5. By believers baptism we mean...
 - a. That the child has made a personal profession of faith
 - b. That the child can articulate that profession
 - c. That the child understands that baptism is a witness of obedience of this profession
 - d. That the child can articulate this conviction
 - e. That the child has made the decision to be baptized
 - f. That the child can articulate this decision
 - g. As a result the pastor is able with confidence to represent these decisions to the church at the time of the child's baptism
 6. While this public testimony may be represented by the pastor during the baptismal service, the child must be able to confidently articulate to the pastor this testimony.
 - a. No matter how earnestly a second party may desire to articulate the feelings of the baptismal candidate
 - b. The child must be at a spiritual stage where he can do this on his own without help.
 - c. The witness of baptism is more than emersion of the candidate by the pastor.
 - d. It is the emersion of the confessing candidate by the pastor.

- e. It is therefore necessary, in order for this to be a biblical believer's baptism, for the child to be able to give a clear confession of faith to the pastor and to be able to answer, unaided by the parents, any questions presented to the child by the pastor.
- f. This clearly separates the act of salvation and profession of faith from the act of believer's baptism.

II. The Baptism of the child is in no way linked to the child's salvation.

Ephesians 2:8 & 9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

- A. As a result we do not feel the fear nor the urgency of parents who link salvation with baptism.**
- B. If the child is not able to express himself unaided to the pastor then he may need maturity.**
 - 1. The fear that he may change his mind is misplaced.
 - 2. Should the child be truly saved his desire to be baptized will only increase as will his desire to fully articulate his decision.
 - 3. Should the child's desire to be baptized decline, then this is best, as his parents will know that it was not a lasting decision and that further growth is necessary
- C. It is important for the parents to prepare themselves spiritually when bringing the child for the pastoral interview.**
 - 1. The parent will want to help the child in preparing for the interview.
 - 2. The objective though is not for the child to "pass" the interview, but rather for the child, the parent and the pastor to all leave the interview assured of both a genuine salvation decision and a genuine testimony by the child to the church.
 - 3. The outcome of the interview, whether it results in the baptism of the child, or the recognition of needed growth is equally successful.
 - 4. The parents should ask themselves, would they rather their child be baptized, though not ready, or would they rather their child wait? Prayerful and honest soul searching in this area is very healthy for parents of young children.
 - 5. Parents should reflect as well on the impressionable nature of younger children.
 - a. Think for a minute concerning your pre-school child, or your child during the early pre-school years.
 - 1.) Was your child willing to believe in Santa Clause?
 - 2.) Was your child willing to believe in the Easter Bunny?
 - 3.) Was your child willing to believe in the Tooth Fairy?
 - 4.) If you sat down with your pre-schooler and told them, in all seriousness that cheese came from the moon and showed them some cheese you said came from the moon, your preschooler would believe you.
 - b. This is not necessarily bad. Children should trust and obey their parents. It was for this very reason that we raised our children knowing that there was no Santa Clause, no Tooth Fairy, no Easter Bunny, no cheese on the moon. They were fun pretend games to play, but they always knew they were pretend.
 - c. The point is, that the belief system of children in Santa Clause, in the Easter Bunny, in the Tooth Fairy, is based on faith and trust in their parents, not truly in their own convictions and belief.

- d. It is for this reason that we waited till our children held convictions apart from us before we allowed them to be baptized.
 - 1.) All parents know the shock of being contradicted by your child, through another authority. The first time your child says, “But Mrs. Jones says...” and then quotes their teacher at school or church, we as parents are taken back. We are no longer the absolute authority. These early assaults are easily repulsed, but as the child matures, we begin seeing that our response is weighed against that of others and then a decision is come to by the child.
 - 2.) All parents know the surprise when their child says, “Your not going out like that?” or “Please don’t do that again around my friends”. Suddenly the child has an identity apart from their parents. The child begins to think of themselves separately from their parents lives and lifestyle.
 - 3.) A small child will, on the way to the mall, walk right through a puddle in the parking lot, even stamp their feet in it. This same middle schooler or teenager will be hesitant to even walk in the rain, not to mention be found jumping in a mud puddle. The child has developed a sense of social being apart from the parent and is away of their social surroundings.
 - 4.) Some parents find this threatening, we rejoiced in this. We rejoiced in the development of personal convictions by our children and their expression. Better to know what your child truly believes than to hold on to a fantasy.
 - 5.) We felt strongly, that for our children to truly be baptized in obedience to God’s Word and as a witness to the church, that they had to have grown to the point where their convictions were being evidenced apart from our own and their social awareness, as well, was evidenced apart from our own.
6. Many Protestants snicker and disdain the Baptism of infants by the Catholic Church.
 - a. How many of those same protestants holds that little pink Bible and rose their child was given at the baby dedication as the assurance of their salvation.
 - b. Or hold that baptismal certificate or memory of that small child being walked down the isle by mom as the assurance of that child’s salvation.
 - c. How much better, than to hold to such rituals, to wait and know with certainty that a mature child, made a very difficult decision, on their own, after much struggle, to openly before their peers, follow the Lord in believers baptism.

III. The goal is believers baptism

A. For it to be believers Baptism it must be the child’s decision before the church, not simply before the parents.

B. As a result it is important that the child be able to share, at his level, the decision he has made.

1. Although the child may not be able to communicate the doctrinal nuances, nor use the vocabulary of an adult
2. The confidence of a personal decision should be evident. The child need not speak before the congregation. The child must however express confidence in this decision to the pastor, that the pastor may express this confidence before the congregation.

3. Where there is no confidence in the interview, there can be no corresponding confidence by the pastor in the baptism.
4. Believers baptism is a testimony. Where a confident testimony is not given, a confident testimony cannot be honestly presented to the church.

C. It is unfortunate that this is one of two reasons that people will often leave a church.

1. The first reason is the Marriage Ceremony. If after the interview process the pastor does not feel that both of the engaged couples are truly Christians, expresses this and as a result, declines to perform the ceremony, it is not uncommon for the couple to respond by leaving the church.
2. In the same vein, if after the interview process the pastor does not feel the child can truly articulate his or hers salvation to the pastors satisfaction and declines to present the child for Baptism at that time, it is not uncommon for the parents to respond by leaving the church.
3. In both cases there is the attitude, “Well you are not the only show in town, I will just take my business elsewhere.”
4. In the case of Baptism this arises from three sources...
 - a. First is the feeling that know one can really know a child the way a parent does. Who are you to question whether my child can be admitted to your school, your church or your program.
 - b. Second is the feeling that the parent is being judged as a failure. If my child is not to be baptized then I have either failed to save them or worse, I can't even tell if my child is saved or not.
 - c. Lastly is the feeling that the church has an obligation to perform the ordinances at the demand of the parent. Be it Baptism the Lord' Supper, Worship Attendance, Sunday School Attendance or Youth Camp, a church should respond in compassion to the requests of the parent. It is morally wrong for the church to withhold that which is in its power to perform if the parent requests it in a reasonable way as provided for the other members.

D. When children meet with me I ask them five questions which I look to them to answer in their own words without help from their parents.

1. I understand that I may have a bashful child who does not want to answer.
2. The nature of a testimony though is that it overcomes bashfulness.
3. It is important for a child who comes for baptism to be able to share these five basic answers to insure that their baptism is the child's testimony to the church.
4. I then relay this information to the church, as their testimony during the baptismal service.

IV. If the child is not ready for baptism,

A. I am in no way questioning his salvation.

B. I am simply saying that at this time the child is not able to give a testimony which I can represent before the church.. This is a necessary witness, a necessary function of the ordinance of baptism.

V. Procedure

- A. The child comes forward during the serviced for counseling**
- B. The parents read the packet presented to adults coming for Baptism and complete the study on baptism - discussing the principles with their child**
1. The Bible study can be done by the parents and explained to the child, but if the child is old enough to write, he should write in his own answers to the questions.
 2. Parents should then read the section entitled, “A Personal Word Of Testimony”
 3. Lastly the parents should read the excerpt on Baptism from Mack and Swavely, “Life In My Father’s House”
- C. The parents should satisfy themselves that their child responds with confidence to the parents the five questions**
- D. Their child meets with the pastor for baptismal counseling before being baptized**
1. Please make an appointment to meet with Brother John on Wednesday, either before or after the service
 2. The pastor will ask the child five questions to which the child can confidently testify
 - a. What is sin?
 - b. What is a Christian?
 - c. How did you become a Christian?
 - d. What is baptism?
 - e. Why do you want to be baptized?
 3. If all parties are confident a date for baptism will be set.
 4. The pastor will explain the baptismal process to the child (this will include a visit to the baptismal pool)
- E. It is understood that for many families, the baptism of a child is an exciting event which the extended family will want to attend.**
1. Believers baptism though is not a forgone conclusion. This is neither a right of passage nor a confirmation service. As a result, it is better to wait till after the interview to begin sharing with family and friends the date of baptism. The baptism interview is not a formality and the baptism itself is not a foregone conclusion.
 2. All believers who can give confident evidence of both their salvation and their desire to make a public profession of faith through baptism will be joyfully and willing accepted.
 3. No individual unable to give confident evidence of both salvation and the desire to make a public profession of faith through baptism will be baptized.

A Personal Word Of Testimony

Rev. John S. Mahon

Education Pastor

As I write this testimony I rejoice in the joy God has given us in our four children. All are grown and all are walking with the Lord. Eleanor and I prayed and labored diligently for our children's salvation and subsequent spiritual growth. Each of our children received Christ at a relatively early age. Although we rejoiced in this, were also all too aware of the spiritual realities of an early conversion.

Many, many children experience a clear call by God to salvation during the pre-school years. For the rest of their lives they refer back to this date with confidence as the time when God's effectual call brought them out of darkness and into light. Unfortunately, there are children who are immersed as unbelievers, or if not unbelievers, certainly not as testifying believers. I say immersed, for the very definition of baptism is that it is a believer's testimony before the church. This second unfortunate experience results from a number of reasons

Children of pre-school and early elementary age have a very narrow world view. Their earnest desire is to please their parents and the narrow world of friends to whom they are exposed. As a result, when they see their parents concern over baptism, they see their friends being baptized and they see the attention and praise this brings, it is all too easy for them to make this decision for these reasons.

Being in the ministry, Eleanor and I were all too aware of the pain and heartache that can result from children making an important decision like this as a result of the desire to please rather than as a result of a true conviction of the Holy Spirit. At worst the child, the parents and the church are lulled into a false belief of conversion. At best, the child begins his spiritual journey pleasing men and not God. Both are damaging to all concerned.

Aware of these dangers we made what for us and our children was an important decision.

First, our children would not be allowed to take the Lord's Supper until they were Baptized.

Second our children would not be Baptized until they were able and willing to walk to the front of the church, on their own and make a public profession of their faith. This would be followed by an appointment with the pastor. Again, made by them, on their own and attended solely by them. We also told them that this decision would have to wait until they were in the fourth grade. The reason for this is at that age the child is very aware of peer evaluation and peer pressure. We wanted our children to make this decision in the harsh crucible of peer disapproval.

Each of our children professed Christ at an early age. Each desired baptism as their young friends were being baptized. None though were willing to initiate this on their own. We explained it once and then left it to the Holy Spirit. There came a time in each of their lives where, upon realizing how their friends would react they no longer were interested in baptism. This of course caused us concern, but it also convinced us that we had made the right decision. If and when our children made their profession of faith, we had the assurance that it would be their profession of faith made before their peers and in the harsh light of peer scrutiny.

There came as well, in each of their lives a new and greater understanding of their salvation. A second decision and a subsequent following of the Lord in believer's baptism. Each decision to

be baptized was made by the child before the Lord. We did not know the decision was being made until after the child went forward.

People would say to us, "Your child wants to be baptized now, you had better take advantage of it, they may not want to be baptized when they get older." We would reply, "If that is the case, our child does not want to be baptized, merely immersed in water. If it is a true decision, it will only grow with time. If it is not, then it is more important that we know this, than that we pretend a decision was made, when this was not truly the case."