

A Guide for Parents: Children and Baptism

As you study “Children and Baptism” on this page, look for the key word: identify.

What is baptism?

The Bible teaches about baptism.

In Bible times if a Gentile wanted to be a Jew, one of the rituals performed on him was baptism. The word baptism literally means “to dip” someone. Baptism outwardly symbolized a change of status for that person. No longer were they identifying themselves with false gods or with a sinful life, but they were now identifying themselves as followers of the Lord and His redeeming way.

When John the Baptist began to minister, he preached that people should turn and repent of their sin (Matthew 3:2). As people were convicted and started confessing their sin, John began to baptize them (Mark 1:5). The amazing part was that these were Jews being baptized. They were repenting of their sin, and then outwardly proclaiming through baptism that they were turning from their former life to follow and identify with the coming Messiah.

John’s baptism was different than the baptism Jesus would bring to all who trusted in Him. John baptized people in water, but Jesus would bring a baptism where the Holy Spirit would take away a believer’s sins and give him new life (Matthew 3:12). When a person trusts in Christ’s work, the Holy Spirit baptizes that person into Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). That simply means the Holy Spirit applies to that person the death of Christ, which takes away sin, and the resurrection of Christ, which gives new spiritual life (Romans 6:3-10). That person is no longer identified with the sinful, selfish life, but he is now identified as Christ’s.

When a believer decides to be baptized in water in front of the church, he is identifying with Christ.

- He is identifying that spiritual baptism has happened to him. His action of baptism shows he has trusted in Jesus’ death and in His resurrection to take away sin and to give him new spiritual life.
- He is identifying his change of status from living the old life for self to living a new life for Christ.
- He is identifying himself with the body of believers. This means he is telling the church that he wants to grow in the faith and to be accountable to other believers.

Can a child really be baptized?

Salvation and baptism are for all groups of people.

Peter preached to thousands of people in Acts 2. At the end of the message, the people felt the guilt of their sin and asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said,

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

The invitation was to turn from trusting self, to trusting Jesus’ work, and then outwardly identify their decision with water baptism. But whom did Peter say could do this? He said: you, your children, and anyone else. It is significant that Peter specifically mentions the demographic group of children.

The Bible seems to record some children being baptized.

The Bible tells of families being baptized. All of these examples below use the Greek word “oikos” which means family. The Bible uses this word to talk about a pastor’s family in 1 Timothy 3:5. The verse prior, verse 4, identifies his family as having children. Therefore, as you read through these passages, think about what makes up most households—a dad, a mom, and children!

- Acts 16:30-31,33 – Peter tells the Philippian jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:30-31) Peter was not saying if dad believes in Christ everyone else in the house—mom, son, daughter—are automatically saved. No, Peter was saying, “If you believe on Christ, you will be saved, and then your family can be saved if they believe on Christ too.” After the whole family believed on Jesus, Acts 2:33 says, “He and all his family were baptized.”
- Acts 16:15 – Lydia and her family were saved and “she and her household were baptized...”
- Act 18:8 – “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”

- 1 Corinthians 1:16 Paul says, “Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas.”

How do I know if my child is ready to be baptized?

Ask yourself: Does my child feel confident about his salvation?

Since baptism is for believers, only a child who is certain he is saved should be baptized. If your child is still struggling with his salvation, baptism will not give him assurance of his salvation. Assurance of salvation is not gained by a person looking back at what they have done but looking back in dependence at what Christ did on the cross. In fact, baptizing a child who is still struggling with his salvation could hinder him in the future from being open about his need of Jesus. His baptism could be a stumbling block to truly trusting Christ because of the embarrassment of already being baptized.

Ask yourself: What is my child trusting to take away his sin?

If you have not already, read the flyer on “Children and Salvation.” This will help you better grasp the answer to this question. As parents, we must seek to discern what our children are trusting for eternal life. If you look in the tract, *Three Questions about Baptism*, there are wonderful questions you can ask your child to help you discern if your child understands the gospel, wants the gospel, and has accepted the gospel.

Ask yourself: Why does my child want to be baptized?

Children have different reasons they want to be baptized. Some because of pressure from an adult (please do not let this be you), some because another person was baptized, some because they think it help take away sins, and some because they think it will be fun. Those are not right reasons to be baptized. A child should want to be baptized because he wants to, in obedience to Jesus, show the church that he has trusted in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. He wants to proclaim to others he has identified with Christ.

Ask yourself: Does my child understand the seriousness of baptism.

Baptism is serious. Yes, it can be a great time to take pictures, invite grandparents, and celebrate after church. But a child should understand baptism is more than all that. He is committing his life to Christ. He is telling the church, “I have trusted in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. My life is now His. I am joining you in living for Christ!”

How can I prepare my child for baptism?

Pray for your child.

- Pray God will give you and your child discernment about when the time is right for him to be baptized.
- Pray God will give your child understanding of the significance of baptism.

Ask your child heart-penetrating questions.

- Ask questions to your child about his salvation.
- Ask your child about his desire to follow Christ.

Talk with your child about the meaning of the baptism.

- Go to a place where you can talk privately with your child like McDonald’s or the park. Open your Bible, read through the *Three Questions about Baptism*, and talk about the meaning of baptism.
- Once your child expresses a strong sincere desire to be baptized, your child is confident in his faith, you feel your child has accepted Christ, and you know your child understands the seriousness of baptism, have them attend the baptism class. (Look on the church website for those classes.)

If you have any more questions or would like to talk with someone about this topic, do not hesitate to call or meet with me (864-967-7803). I would love to talk with you about your child and baptism. ~ Pastor Ben Ice