

“Is My Child Ready To Be Baptized?”

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When children are brought up hearing the gospel and knowing the Lord’s plan of salvation (Acts 2:38), it is natural for them to ask about baptism and salvation. Often, this question comes up earlier in the lives of these children than others because they have been exposed to the gospel much earlier than other children their age. Sometimes, this question comes as early as 5 or 6 years old. Often, children 7 or 8 years old ask their parents about being baptized for the remission of sins.

As Christians and parents, we do not wish to discourage children from obeying the Lord, but we also wonder if a child is ready for such a commitment. As adults, we recognize that what is involved in being a Christian includes much more than just the act of being baptized (I Cor. 15:58). There are many responsibilities associated with the decision to change one’s life and become a Christian.

Should Young Children Be Baptized For The Remission Of Sins?

Some may wonder if it is even right for young children to be baptized at all. Is there an actual “age of accountability” defined in the New Testament? First, the term “age of accountability” is not found in the Scriptures. At the same time, I believe most parents (and most adults) have the ability to listen to a child speak, and watch a child’s actions and know the maturity level being shown by that child. A parent knows when a child is showing signs of a conscience that is “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) by what he is being taught.

Let us keep in mind that in order to be saved, one does more than submit to baptism. It is necessary to hear God’s word, believe on Christ, repent of sins, and confess one’s faith before being baptized (Rom. 10:17; II Pet. 3:9; Rom. 10:10). In the case of our young children, do they truly believe? Are they merely repeating what they have heard? Faith is a strong conviction. Does my child have this? Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of life (Matt. 21:28-31). Repentance demands godly sorrow over sins (II Cor. 7:10). Has my child exhibited this? Was he just sorry he was caught? Confession of our faith is necessary (Matt. 10:32-33). Has my child shown a true conviction to boldly acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Is he embarrassed in front of others at the mention of Jesus or the discussion of spiritual thoughts? I do not write this to discourage, but to encourage objective and rational thought as we

encourage our children to follow the Lord and be saved one day (Mk. 16:16).

In the New Testament, we read where people were baptized “and their house” (Acts 16:14-15, 30-34). This means that not only were those mentioned in the text saved, but also folks in their household or family. While we could not prove the ages of anyone in their houses, it is logical to say that this could include folks younger than Lydia, or the Jailer. Could there have been children baptized? There might have been children baptized if those children were old enough to hear the gospel and believe on Christ as the Son of God (Acts 2:22; Jn. 8:24; Heb. 11:6). If these children truly repented of their sins, and confessed their faith in Christ (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37), they would have been baptized (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16; I Pet. 3:21).

At the same time, these children in the first century (and children today) needed to know what would be expected of them when they became a Christian. As Jesus taught us, we need to count the cost if we are going to be His disciples (Lk. 14:25-33). Can a child aged 5-8 truly count the cost of what it means to be a disciple? Only the parents and the child can know for sure.

Asking Questions Is Important

When a child talks about obeying the gospel, let parents be ready to ask pertinent questions. Remember, if a child is making an “adult” decision, then he needs to be able to answer some pointed questions.

We could start by saying: “I am glad you want to talk about this. But, I was wondering something. If you died tonight, would you be saved or lost?” If your child says he will be saved or something similar, we can know that he is not yet ready to be baptized. He does not have an understanding of sin and its consequences (Jas. 1:14-15). There is nothing wrong with this; he is just too young to seriously consider baptism. We need to commend our child for thinking seriously and for wanting to please God. Then, we need to nicely say, “Let’s wait and talk about this again when you get a little older.”

We might ask: “Why are you wanting to be baptized?” Listen closely to your child’s answer. Is he merely repeating what he hears every week in Bible classes and sermons, or is he speaking from the heart? If he is simply repeating what he has heard, it shows he is listening. However, if he cannot voice this in his own words, perhaps he needs to wait. How a child answers can also shed light on whether he truly believes, has repented and is willing to confess Christ.

Another good question to ask is: “Do you understand what baptism does?” If she says she understands that it is to forgive sins, we might then

ask if she has sinned and needs to be forgiven. If the answer is “no” or she cannot think of a sin she has committed, then do not overreact to this answer. Listen closely and encourage her to wait and to keep on talking about this important decision. If, on the other hand, she says she knows she has sinned, then ask what kind of sins she has committed. Did she say she didn’t clean her room when told? Or, that she fought with brother or did not share a toy? Or, did she say she has been lying or stealing things and knows she is wrong (Eph. 4:25-28)? Can she name specific instances when she has sinned?

Sometimes, I have asked young children wanting to be baptized if they’d mind if we waited and talked about it some more. I do not demand we wait, but ask sensitively about this possibility. If a child says, “Yes” this is another clue that tells me it is not time yet. In every case of conversion in the Bible, folks were baptized immediately (Acts 2:41, 8:12-13, 8:36-39, 16:30-34). These folks didn’t wait! They knew the urgency of the situation. If a child does not appreciate the urgency of baptism, perhaps he is not ready. If a child says he cannot put off being baptized, I still ask some of the other questions mentioned above.

Please note that these questions need to be asked gently and with understanding. This is not an inquisition! We are not demanding our children answer certain questions in order to be saved. Rather, these questions ascertain what our children are thinking and helps them consider what it means to be a Christian. This leads to our last point.

Marks Of Maturity

Some children mature faster than others, and we need to take this into account as we talk to them about being baptized. Perhaps this is why certain children ask about being baptized at an early age. However, what signs of maturity are our children showing? Perhaps by considering the maturity of our children, it can help us in directing them toward being baptized or encouraging them to wait a while.

Maturity Mark

Yes No

Maturity Mark	Yes	No
Does my child run and play in the church building though being told not to?		
Does my child take naps in worship?		
Does my child pay attention to all acts of worship?		
Has my child been talking about baptism repeatedly?		
Is my child concerned about his/her sin and being lost?		

Does my child show an understanding of faith, true repentance, and confessing Christ?		
Does my child tend to be a “follower”? If so, has this discussion of baptism come up because he has seen others his age be baptized lately?		
Does my child tend to be a “pleaser,” and look for ways to please parents? Could this be more important to my child than pleasing God?		
Does my child show an interest in Bible reading, prayer, and other spiritual matters at home?		

Conclusion

It is my hope that this will help us give a ready answer when our children come to us asking about baptism. We do not wish to discourage, but we also do not wish to baptize a child who is not ready for the responsibility that comes with being a Christian. Christ called baptism being “*born again*” (Jn. 3:3, 5) because this is a radical change in our lives spiritually and physically, and affects us for the rest of our lives! Are our children ready for such a commitment? We would not encourage a young child to get married just because he/she has started noticing the opposite sex. In like manner, a child hearing the plan of salvation and beginning to appreciate its importance may not be ready to be baptized yet. Let us rejoice that we have a child thinking in spiritual terms at such a young age. Let us also react properly and pray for God’s help as we help our children to become Christians (Eph. 6:4).

Please visit with the Caneyville church of Christ...

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<http://caneyvillechurchofchrist.com>

Times of services...

Sunday: 10:00 am (Bible classes), 10:45 am & 5:00 pm (Worship)

Wednesday: 7:00 pm (Bible classes)

Other opportunities for Bible study:

- Correspondence Courses (free upon request)
- “*The Ancient Landmark*” Radio Program (99.9 FM – WXMZ & 101.5 FM WLWQ broadcasting Monday-Friday)

“*The Ancient Landmark*” (www.youtube.com/theoldpaths1994)