

Water Baptism – Are Children Ready?

by Randy Christensen

Numerous questions arise for a pastor, parent, or children's leader when a child states his desire to be baptized in water. Since we are in a place of guiding these young sheep, we want to know that each child is ready for this step in obedience. So, what should we say? When is it appropriate for a person to be baptized in water?

We are committed to living by, and perpetrating, biblical views, not simply our personal opinions. Church tradition should not be our "rule of faith and conduct." We must understand what the Bible says about water baptism and how this relates to children.

Here are five key concepts concerning baptism:

1. Baptism shows we are followers of Christ (Matthew 3:15 and 28:19,20).
2. Water baptism is a visual testimony of our spiritual birth (Romans 6:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17 and John 3:4-6).
3. It shows that one has chosen to serve God, not self (Acts 2:38).
4. It is a symbol that a person's sins have been washed away (Psalm 55:17).
5. Water baptism shows one is now dead to sin and alive to Christ (Romans 6:3-11).

The criteria for water baptism should be based on a person's understanding and commitment to these five scriptural concepts, not upon his physical age. No where does scripture say there is an age requirement for baptism.

Honestly, in my years of pastoring, I have found there are times when some of the youngest saints were the ones most reverent and spiritually in tune when water baptism occurred. And there have been times I've baptized forty-year-olds and I'm not sure that they understood the significance of the act in which they were participating. So, age obviously does not ensure understanding.

Here are specific questions to consider prior to baptism:

1. Has the child made a conscious choice to place Christ as Lord of his life? Is he born again, and does it show?

A desire to serve the Lord fully needs to be exhibited by the child. If the child displays no interest in worship, prayer or spiritual growth, I question if he is ready to be baptized in water. If there is no spiritual yearning from his heart for more of God, then I question if the child has truly been born again. Water baptism is a statement that one has given all to Christ and is turning from sinful self-centered ways, instead choosing to be God-

centered. If that's not demonstrated in a person's life, he's not ready to be baptized, no matter what age he is.

2. Are his parents in support of his water baptism?

In scripture we see parents bringing their children to Christ to be blessed, to be healed, and to have their needs met. Parents should have the defining "say so" about the age their child is prepared to be baptized in water. They are the primary spiritual authority in the child's life.

We should strive to involve parents in this process. I mandate that parent's accompany their child to the water baptism class. I will not baptize a child if the parent's are not fully in agreement with our teaching on water baptism.

I have developed a creative training video called, "The Water Baptism Video," which children check out from the church and watch with their parents. Parents are encouraged to discuss the video with their child and pray together about their child's desire and the decision to be baptized in water. I intentionally place this spiritual responsibility back into the hands of parents.

Many parents have expressed their appreciation for our church helping them to be spiritual leaders for their own children. Many have stated that they personally have learned a lot by watching and attending our water baptism training.

3. Is the child prepared to testify about what Christ has done in his life?

Since water baptism is a visual testimony about Christ's redemptive work for us, I believe that each baptismal candidate should also give a verbal testimony about Christ's forgiveness. If the person is not able or willing to state that he has chosen to turn from sin and live for God, then he is not ready to be baptized in water.

At times, I've seen people fully intimidated by the idea of speaking in front of a crowd. I encourage them to write down a brief testimony, then they may read it to the others before they are baptized. A verbal testimony doesn't have to be improvised, but it should be orally given by the candidate.

4. Is this a "life and death" commitment?

Romans 6 speaks about being "dead with Christ." Yes, we need to be like dead people when it comes to sin and temptation. But, I believe there is more to this concept than that.

When Paul wrote this passage, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he fully understood that when a person chose to leave his old way of life and chose to live as a Christian, there would be a strong possibility that he may literally forfeit his life. He may be a martyr in a short amount of time.

Many Christians throughout the world live with the realization that their lives may be taken at any moment because they follow Jesus.

So, this question must be answered. "Would I rather die, than not serve Jesus?" If a person cannot answer that question with a determined "yes," then I question if he is ready to be baptized. Water baptism is a public statement that one has chosen to follow Christ no matter what may come. Does the child understand the potentially serious consequences of that statement? If not, he may not be ready to be baptized. The ordinance of water baptism is not to be taken lightly.

God's plan is for all true followers of Christ to follow him in baptism. May God guide you and direct you as you, "Go and make disciples, baptizing them..." (Matthew 28:19,20)

Note: More information with creative teaching is shared on "The Water Baptism DVD" available in Randy's store.