

Baptism of Children

Introduction:

1. A conscientious pastor will have conflicting thoughts about the baptisms of most children due to their age, for their level of understanding and knowledge of the commitment are much harder to measure.
2. By definition of human nature, there will always be parents on both sides of the pastor's choice in baptism!
3. We know from the word of God that ordained teachers are the baptizers in Christ's churches (Matt 28:18-20; John 1:6,33); therefore, parents should be very careful in judging a pastor's duty and choice in the matter.
4. We totally reject the Catholics and their Protestant daughters that sprinkle or pour water on infant children.
5. We know from the word of God that the proper subject of baptism is a believing and repenting person with an active conscience that is able and willing to commit to discipleship (Acts 2:38; 8:12,36-37; 18:8; I Pet 3:21).
6. This past Sunday, hearing about Jesus as King of kings, we saw baptism as swearing allegiance to our King!

The DANGER

- A. Baptizing children not properly qualified for the ordinance is a perversion of the gospel of Christ.
 1. All things must be done decently and in order: baptizing foolish children is wrong (I Cor 14:40).
 2. Baptism is important, for it is the first act of Christian obedience (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:48).
 3. Baptism requires repentance, which in turn requires consciousness of sins (Matt 3:6; Mark 1:4).
 4. Baptism is the answer of a good conscience, so we must have a conscience, sufficient knowledge of the gospel to make it good, and the ability and willingness to act conscientiously (I Pet 3:21).
 5. John required fruits, or actions, to prove a true spirit of repentance before baptism (Matt 3:7-9).
 6. We must avoid and reject Roman influence that would value sacramentalism without knowledge.
 7. Baptism is not needed for eternal life, so there is no obligation or need to baptize children early.
 8. It is the blasphemous presumption of baptismal regeneration that has spawned so many heresies.
- B. Not baptizing children that properly repent and believe is to offend Christ's little ones (Mat 18:1-14).
 1. This warning by Jesus teaches principles, not baptismal rules (Matt 19:13-15; Mark 9:33-43).
 2. There is no advantage in trying to be more conservative than Scripture (Acts 26:5; Col 2:16-23).
 3. We must avoid Roman influence that exalts manmade rules and tradition over the word of God.
 4. The knowledge required for baptism is not great, and we should not seek to make it greater.
 5. Yet we must remember that baptism is the act of obedient faith bringing the Holy Spirit to seal us as God's children (John 7:39; Acts 2:38-39; 19:1-7; II Cor 1:22; Gal 3:26-29; Eph 1:13; 4:30).
- C. Parental emotions often run very high in their sentimental prejudice in favor of their own children.
 1. Parental love for a child is absolutely irrelevant to the issue. Does the child truly love God?
 2. Women especially have difficulty thinking rationally from Scripture about their own children.
- D. The easiest decision is to make black and white rules; but godly wisdom is exercised in gray areas.

The GUIDELINES

- A. Many issues require God's minister to judge: baptism is surely such an issue (Heb 13:7; I Tim 5:17).
- B. There is no example at all in the Bible of any child of any age ever being baptized. Consider it!
 1. The children Jesus defended were not baptized (Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-15; Mark 9:33-43).
 2. All the specific cases of baptism described in the New Testament are of adults, not children.
 3. Jesus fulfilled righteousness by baptism at 30 (Luke 3:21-23); Timothy was a youth, but we are not told enough to know what Paul meant by that vague term (I Tim 4:12; II Tim 2:22).
 4. Household baptisms prove Catholics and Presbyterians wrong, but not Baptists; for the word of God was taught and believed before baptism in all cases (Acts 10:44-48; 16:32-33).
- C. The Bible is quite meager on the level of responsibility expected or required at any specific age.
 1. God judged Israel from entering Canaan from the age of 20 (Numbers 14:28-35; 32:11).
 - a. A simple rule like 20 is very appealing to pastors that would like a black and white rule!

- b. Those under 20 are described as not knowing good from evil, but we must interpret this in light of their inability to make the decision to take Canaan themselves (Deuteronomy 1:39).
 - c. Those over 20 had to pay an atonement tax for their souls (Exodus 30:11-16; 38:26).
 - d. Moses numbered all those 20 and over as able to go forth to war (Numbers 1:3,45; 26:2).
- 2. Levites worked at 20 (I Chronicles 23:24), at 25 (Num 8:24), and at 30 years of age (Num 4:3).
- 3. God described the innocent of Nineveh as not knowing their right hand from left (Jonah 4:11).
 - a. This vague description is not conclusive again, but it may be assumed near 5 years of age.
 - b. Our own education-obsessed society does not attempt much instruction before the age of 5.
- 4. The shame of nakedness is an indicator from nature of active consciences (Gen 2:25; 3:7,11,22).
 - a. Young children show no shame about nakedness in front of the other sex, but this changes.
 - b. You must consider a child's shame apart from habit, peer pressure, or parental restrictions.
- 5. God and men assume infancy, childhood, youth, majority, and old age (Lev 27:1-7; Eccl 11:10).
 - a. Here is a valuable passage that indicates the relative value of ages and sexes for redemption.
 - b. Observe that God considers all children between one month and five years as infants (27:6).
 - c. The category from 5 to 20 would include children and youth, though youth might in some contexts include those under 30, when leadership began (Num 4:3,35,39,43,47; Luke 3:23).
- D. The knowledge level for baptism is not high, but it does require a conscience and some knowledge.
 - 1. Most instruction and growth takes place after baptism (Matt 28:18-20; I Pet 2:1-3; II Pet 3:18).
 - 2. John the Baptist required confession and repentance to be proven before baptism (Matt 3:1-8).
 - a. Peter required the same at Pentecost (Acts 2:38); and Paul taught it to all (Acts 26:20).
 - b. The Jews at Pentecost, the eunuch, the jailor, and Cornelius gave evidence of faith.
 - 3. It requires faith in the gospel (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:12; 18:8; Hebrews 11:6).
 - 4. It requires the answer of an active and intelligent conscience to answer God (I Peter 3:21).
 - a. The reason for baptism should be appreciation for Jesus Christ saving you from your sins.
 - b. The reason for baptism should be love of God and desire to please Him by obedience.
 - c. The answer and objective of baptism is answering God, not satisfying parents or friends.
 - d. Joining the church or taking the Lord's Supper are not good reasons for water baptism.
- E. Regeneration precedes faith, and faith precedes baptism, so regeneration should be indicated.
 - 1. Children from a Christian home and/or regenerated early may not have a dramatic change.
 - 2. Faith without works is dead and is but a devilish faith, so works should appear (James 2:14-26).
 - 3. Children can show obedience, sobriety, fear of God, speaking the truth, and love for God.
 - 4. Children can show a rule of their spirit brought about by the grace of God not evident in others.
- F. Since baptism is somewhat related to church membership, this duty must be considered as well.
 - 1. Baptism is the commitment to follow Christ, and church membership is part of following Christ.
 - 2. If a child partaking of the Lord's Supper would be disorderly, the child is not ready for baptism.
 - 3. If a child would hinder effective church discipline, then they do not qualify adequately either.
 - 4. Is the child mature enough and committed enough to fulfill the basic duties of love and service?
- G. God's ambassador must judge in child baptism; and he may change that judgment (Hebrews 13:7).
 - 1. He will give an account to God for his actions in this and other matters, not you (I Cor 4:1-5).
 - 2. It is his solemn duty to make a difference between the holy and the profane (Ezek 44:23-24).
 - 3. It is his solemn duty to rightly divide the Bible on this issue (II Chron 19:8-10; II Tim 2:15).
 - 4. There are so many factors that age is a pitiful determinant of when a child should be baptized.
 - 5. Allowances see differences in intelligence, maturity, temperament, training, confidence, etc.
- H. We can derive enough wisdom from Scripture in order to establish a few general guidelines.
 - 1. Any child five years of age or under is considered an infant in the mind of God (Leviticus 27:6).
 - 2. Yet an exceptional child of five or six might be able to worship, like Samuel (I Samuel 1:24-28).
 - 3. Jesus said that children brought to him were believers, so we will also (Matt 18:6; Mark 9:42).
 - a. If the Son of God gave them credit for faith in Him, then we must not deny them foolishly.
 - b. These children were old enough to respond to verbal commands and be offended by others.

- c. The initial aspects of the gospel that must be confessed are actually very simple (Acts 8:37).
- d. The great bulk of instruction and growth in grace is to occur after baptism (Matt 28:19-20).
- 4. A simple, solitary, or casual request does not mean anything to a real servant of Jesus Christ.
 - a. Children can be easily manipulated by a sermon, by peer pressure, or by age considerations.
 - b. Persistent requests, obedience at home, and knowledge of discipleship are important factors.
 - c. Baptism is not just a rote ritual to be done casually or easily; it is a sober act of discipleship!
 - d. If the pastor does not react to your request, then ask him again, and ask your father about it.
- 5. A good conscience must recognize one's own sinfulness and Christ's great salvation (I Pet 3:21).
 - a. This precludes rote memorization of facts or trained verbal responses simply to qualify.
 - b. A conscience has personal interest in the facts of the gospel, not mere intellectual knowledge.
 - c. A conscience aware of sin and salvation will have independent indications of its condition.
 - d. If a child has never initiated spiritual conversation, requests, or tears, where is a conscience?
- 6. Thorough and repeated instruction for emphasis should save them from seeking rebaptism later.

The PREPARATION

- A. While we are to suffer little children to come to Christ, let us not make them suffer if they do not!
- B. Parents should not be deceived by fads: all children will have them often about various things.
- C. Parental duties include living an example, teaching obedience, and answering spiritual questions.
- D. Baptism should be exalted as an important ordinance, but children should not be pressured into it.

The IMPORTANCE

- A. Solomon taught young people to remember their Creator in their youth (Eccl 12:1-7; Prov 8:17).
- B. Rejecting baptism requires a denial of God's word or God Himself; there is no other choice.
- C. Baptism justifies God by repentance; not being baptized rejects the counsel of God (Luke 7:29-30).

The WARNING

- A. Departing from iniquity and walking in a new life is the duty after baptism (II Tim 2:19; Rom 6:4-6).
- B. A child should not view baptism as the end of a process, but rather the beginning of discipleship.
- C. Children can be excluded as easily as adults, if they persist in foolishness or sinfulness (I Tim 5:21).

Conclusion:

- 1. Though there is much latitude and gray area in this important subject, the man of God has the inspired word.
- 2. If a man chooses to err on the severe side, then he must put forth more effort to keep from offending children.
- 3. If a man chooses to err on the liberal side, then he must put forth more effort to instruct and to follow up.

For Further Study:

- 1. [Baptism catechism](#), for parental use in teaching children about sin, salvation, baptism, and church membership.
- 2. [Requirements of a Scriptural Baptism](#), which outlines and proves the five conditions for baptism to please God.
- 3. [The Importance of Baptism](#) shows the godly emphasis on this ordinance found in the New Testament Scriptures.