



# Water Baptism— Are Children Ready?

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**N**umerous questions arise for a parent, children's pastor, 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.

The criteria for water baptism should be based on a person's understanding of and commitment to five scriptural concepts (see sidebar), not upon his physical age. Nowhere 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 40-year-olds when I was unsure they understood the significance of the act in which they were participating.

So, age obviously does not ensure understanding.

## Five Key Concepts Concerning Water Baptism

1. Baptism shows we are followers of Christ (Matthew 3:15; 28:19,20).
2. Water baptism is a visual testimony of our spiritual birth (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:4-6).
3. It shows that one has chosen to serve God, not self (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3,4,11-14).
4. It is a symbol that a person's sins have been washed away (Psalm 51:7; Romans 6:3,6).
5. Water baptism shows one is now dead to sin and alive to Christ (Romans 6:3-11).

## 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 away from sinful, self-centered ways, choosing instead 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 parents accompany their children to the water baptism class. I will not baptize a child if the parents are not fully in agreement with our teaching on water baptism.

I have developed a 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 children and pray together about a child's desire and 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 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 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 speak-

ing in front of a crowd. I encourage them to write down a brief testimony to read before they are baptized. A verbal testimony doesn't have to be improvised, but it should be orally given by the candidate.

**G**od'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).

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### Questions for Further Study—

1. How do you know if a child is ready to be baptized in water?
2. What statement does water baptism make?
3. Why is it important for a baptism candidate to give a verbal testimony?

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