

CHILDREN and BAPTISM

Affirmations by our elders regarding baptism of children:

- Baptism is an act of obedience and a symbol of one's new life in Christ.
- Neither Scripture nor our church constitution give a minimum age for baptism, but both affirm baptism as for being for all Christian believers.
- Baptism is to be given by the church to new believers who have given credible testimony of faith in Christ for salvation by grace.
- Baptism is also consistently presented in the NT as an introduction into the body of Christ, the church, which is necessarily expected to be manifested locally, meaning one is then expected to walk as a Christian with a particular local church.
- A believer's baptism should be seen as a one-time event marking the end of the old person and beginning of the new and should not be repeated.
- It is difficult for young children to demonstrate the change that comes with new life in Christ in such a way that the church can affirm.¹
- While churches should be careful to avoid discouraging young new believers from progressing in their faith, the church has the responsibility not to give false assurances of salvation. The church also must uphold and promote regenerate church membership for the health of the church and its testimony.²

We *recommend* that parents of children who are professing faith in Christ should pursue baptism for such children only when

1. The Christian parents of this child and the child are ready for the child to take responsibility for his or her relationship with God,
 - a. meaning that the parents would transition from being the responsible leaders of this child in his or her relationship with God to supporters of that child's walk with God,
 - i. similar to how one takes responsibility to instruct a less mature brother or sister in Christ in the church but not override that fellow believer's responsibility before the Lord;
2. The parents have shepherded the child through both an elders-approved study on Christian baptism and the church's statement of faith so that the child understands what he or she is embracing;

¹ A 1993 study on baptism found that 36% of adult baptisms in SBC churches were re-baptisms for people who were baptized in SBC churches as children, stating that they did not believe they were regenerate believers at their previous attempt at baptism. See Philip B. Jones, *A Study of Adults Baptized in Southern Baptist Churches, 1993* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, 1995) 5.

² Regenerate refers to "new life" or "born again."

3. The child and parent have met with one of the elders to confess personally that he or she has faith in Christ and therefore wants to identify with Christ in obedience through baptism
 - a. this means the child says it in one's own way without assistance from the parents;
 - i. this is not a stringent test in any way; their profession just needs to be truly theirs and credible;
4. And the child needs to then confess this new faith before the church in any gathering made available to the whole church and state their desire to follow Christ in baptism.

If a child has placed their faith in Christ but is not ready to assume responsibility for their faith with the rest of the church, then this should still be celebrated! He or she may announce to the church during a sharing time that he or she has placed faith in Jesus for salvation and how happy that he or she is to have a relationship with God. The church should rejoice in this, and the parents and the elders should share how excited they are with the child and how they look forward to this child one day demonstrating this relationship through baptism when they are ready in the ways outlined above.