



When Should My Child Be Baptized?

We are thrilled that you are talking to your child about the gospel! We join in your eager desire for your child to know the Lord. In an effort to help you understand the theological position of Trinity Grace Church and how it comes to bear on this question, we've compiled this short resource we hope will serve you and your child.

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is one of the sacraments or ceremonies Jesus gave to the church. About baptism, our Statement of Faith says:

“Baptism is an initiatory, unrepeated sacrament for those who come to faith in Christ that pictures their remission of sins and union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Through immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the believer publicly proclaims his faith in Christ and signifies his entrance into the body of Christ. Although commanded by Christ and a true means of grace, grace is not so inseparably tied to baptism that no one can be saved without it, or that everyone who is baptized is thereby saved.”

Therefore, baptism is a picture of what Christ has done for every believer, when they come to faith in his death and resurrection. Being baptized is a public testimony of what Christ has done for you and a public commitment to follow him.

- **Romans 6:3-5:** *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*
- **Colossians 2:11-12:** *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Who Can Be Baptized?

Baptism is a public testimony of what Christ has done in the life of a believer, going from once being dead in sin to being made alive in Christ. Like a wedding ring, baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality. Therefore, a candidate for baptism should:

- Understand the gospel
- Respond to the gospel in faith and repentance
- Possess evidence of being born again

Two Ditches

Since the church is given the responsibility of administering baptism, pastors are called to serve in the process of a candidate being baptized. When trying to discern a candidate's profession of faith, pastors, along with parents, can sometimes fall into one of two ditches.

Easy-believism: On the one hand, we may be overly eager to baptize upon a profession of faith. In an attempt to be charitable, a candidate may be quickly baptized without an adequate grasp of the gospel. This has damaging consequences for both the candidate and the church. If the candidate is actually unconverted, then they will be falsely assured of their salvation and unprepared for judgment and, in the meantime, they could impede the church's mission of proclaiming Christ.

Excessive caution: On the other hand, we can err on the side of being excessively cautious. In an effort to guard the candidate from a false assurance, we can be too focused on specific, external fruit and can create arbitrary age-boundaries that don't really focus on the heart.

Needless to say, we want to avoid both of these ditches!

Is There a Different Standard for Children?

No. Biblically, there is not a different standard of faith for a child. Everyone's profession of faith should be credible in order to be baptized. Obviously, a child may not possess the same vocabulary or theological understanding as an adult being baptized, but they should possess a similar understanding of the gospel. Therefore, the primary difficulty is not in securing a profession of faith. The primary difficulty is in attempting to discern if a profession of faith is credible.

What Makes Assessing a Child's Profession of Faith So Difficult?

It is more difficult to assess the profession of a child's faith for a number of reasons. There are at least three categories that characterize the season of childhood that make it more difficult to assess the credibility of their profession of faith.

Intellectual Immaturity: The judgment and discernment of children is less developed and less mature than in most adults. In fact, this characteristic of children is consistently used in Scripture to exemplify immature thinking.

- **1 Corinthians 14:20:** *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*
- **1 Corinthians 13:11:** *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.*

Instability: Another characteristic found in children is instability. In fact, Scripture uses this quality to clarify the idea of what we are to grow out of as believers. Instability and changeableness is an assumed characteristic during this season of life.

- **Ephesians 4:14:** *So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

Persuasability: The season of childhood is generally characterized by persuasability. It's assumed that children are generally naïve and are in need of instruction, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, and discretion. But they can also be more easily swayed and deceived.

- **Proverbs 1:1-4:** *The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.*

So, due to the season of life they are in developmentally, we believe that a child's profession of belief in the basic gospel facts alone should not be considered solid grounds of assurance.

How Does the Bible Address the Season of Childhood?

In regards to children, Scripture contains little emphasis on helping them be saved by faith in Jesus. Instead, it places the emphasis on training and obedience to God's commands.

- **Ephesians 6:1-2:** *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise).*
- **Colossians 3:20:** *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

This does not mean that we should not proclaim the gospel to our children! However, it does mean that the main goal of parenting during the season of childhood is not securing a public confession of faith and thus making sure they are saved. Rather, the main goal of parenting is teaching them how to obey God.

Parents are wise to be patient during this period of their child's life, seeing it primarily as a time of preparation.

What Are Three Ways to Help Build My Child's Faith?

1. **Encourage your child:** Praise your child for any evidence of God's grace you see, for doing anything they would not naturally want to do in order to serve and share with others.
2. **Challenge your child:** Urge your child to value knowing God and walking in a relationship with God above all.
3. **Fix your child's eyes on Christ, not on his own profession:** Keep your child from being distracted with worries about what other Christians think of his profession. Encourage your child instead to keep the focus on knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

What Are Four Evidences of Faith to Look For?

A genuine believer in Christ is always one who has turned from his sin (repentance) and has rested his hopes for eternal life entirely on Christ's accomplished work on the cross (faith). If you've committed as a parent to help your child learn obedience and you are actively encouraging your child in the 3 ways listed above, we would encourage you to look for these 4 evidences of faith in your child.

1. **Sound profession of belief in the gospel:** Does your child understand the story of the gospel? Has your child responded to the gospel in repentance and faith?
2. **Affectionate love for Christ:** Does your child show an evident love for Christ? Does your child delight in the Lord?
3. **Determination to obediently follow Christ:** Does your child show a strong interest in pleasing God, by willing obedience at least to the biblical duties that are known and understood? Does the child have a heart to obey parents and the other authorities God has placed over his or her life? When corrected or instructed according to truth, is it welcomed, and responded to in a humble, receptive way? Does your child genuinely try, out of love for God, to apply what he has taught from God's word to his life? How has your child responded to different "tests" of faith (e.g., when playing sports with people who do not follow Jesus, when family members or friends sin against him, etc)?
4. **Decisive rejection of the reign of sin:** Does your child express conviction about sin and a desire to turn from sin?

What Are Next Steps?

We would encourage you as a parent to allow for your child to grow and mature under your guidance and instruction. As a season of patient cultivation, use the 3 ways that have been suggested to build your child's faith and spend time collecting evidence of your child's profession of faith. We recommend waiting to have a conversation about baptism until your child is closer to 12 years old. This is not a hard set rule. However, by this time developmentally, your child will likely have had more substantial opportunities to be tested in the faith.

If you have heard your child articulate a sound profession of belief in Jesus Christ and have seen many other evidence of faith, invite others into the conversation. Ask other people that know your child well to give some feedback. Have they seen similar evidence?

After this, we would encourage you and your child to connect with a pastor to explore the possibility of being baptized.

Recommended Resources:

Leading Your Child to Christ by Marty Machowski

Your Child's Profession of Faith by Dennis Gundersen

Practice Charity, Pursue Credibility: How to Respond to a Child's Profession of Faith by Caleb Greggson and Sam Emadi