

“Is My Child Mature Enough to be Baptized?”

(Please understand and accept that this article is meant solely as “help” to parents rather than any sort of judgment on parents or young people who have been baptized, PCS.)

Carefully reread the title. The question is not, “Is my child ‘old’ enough to be baptized?” but **‘mature’ enough** to be baptized. Let that distinction sink in for a moment or three. Even an “adult” of 20 or 30 years may not be sufficiently ‘mature’ in their spiritual thinking/beliefs to be baptized.

The prerequisite for being baptized into Christ is **“believing,”** Mark 16:16; Acts 8:37. **But what that “belief” actually is and how it is achieved is important.** Do they still “believe” in fictitious characters, concepts, and stories with “childlike faith”? How have they formulated their “belief” that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Ask them **why** they “believe” Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Then listen closely and perceptively to their answer(s). Is it because they have merely accepted what Mom and Dad, Grandparents, or the Preacher or Bible Class teacher said? Or, is it that they have considered the biblical evidence for such in a sufficiently mature way to reach their own conclusions, and take on the responsibilities for them?

Biblical “faith” is *“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,”* Heb.11:1. Are they **“mature” enough** in their comprehension and thinking to grasp this concept? Heb.11:6 further includes three elements within the concept of “faith”: 1) **Knowledge in the mind-** *“believe that He is;”* 2) **Trust in the heart-** the concept of *eternal “reward”* requires emotional trust based on knowledge and experience; and, 3) **Obedience in the life-** *“seeking Him”* in conduct and as life’s goal. This is the “faith” that not only pleases God, but is also prerequisite to baptism. Is your child “mature” enough to have this kind of belief/faith? If so, great; if not, tell them to wait. (By the way, if you tell them to wait and they accept that, they’re *probably* not ready.)

In addition to the important consideration of biblical “belief” and how it is achieved, **motivation** is also important. Why do they **want** to be baptized? Ask them, and again listen very closely and perceptively to their answer(s). If the answer given is along the lines of “You can’t go heaven when you die without being baptized,” or “It’s the right thing to do,” or “Johnny/Suzy is about my age and he/she was baptized,” then they are probably not ready, and you can appropriately and effectively deal with those concerns. If the answer is something like “For the remission of sins,” you might want to inquire further to verify that they know what “remission” actually means. Children “raised” in godly homes and churches have heard this phrase many times, and thus may know it’s the “right” answer, and can parrot it without really understanding what it means. Additionally, you can ask what “sins” they mean. Is it childish “misbehavior,” not doing as Mom or Dad said, breaking “family rules,” or violating God’s law? Do they really understand the biblical concepts of “sin” and “guilt,” or do they just feel bad for their misbehavior and want to please (or get out of trouble with) Mom and Dad? These questions point to a simple but important factor: **Are they mature enough to begin seeing and shifting to God’s authority over yours as parents?** In their understanding, *who* is the ultimate authority in and over their lives? Is it God, or is it still you as parents? If it’s God, great; if not, tell them to wait.

Baptism is a **spiritually mature** decision. Are they manifesting “spiritual maturity” in other decisions and activities of their lives? Are they interested in and worshiping “*in spirit and truth*” in a way that demonstrates at least the beginnings of maturity? I’m not trying to get “the cart before the horse” here. I realize that baptism is being “*born again*” into spiritual infancy from which we must grow into spiritual maturity. But we do need to understand that **baptism is predicated on “grown-up” concepts and prerequisites, and being a Christian includes “grown-up” responsibilities.** Is your child ready to begin taking on the adult responsibilities of being a “*disciple*” and *learning and following “all that I (Jesus) commanded,”* Matt.28:20? Are they ready to begin “*seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness*” in their lives, Matt.6:33? Or, are they just going to return to being “kids” after they’re baptized?

When Philip preached “*the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ,*” the Samaritans “*believed*” and were “*baptized, men and women alike,*” Acts 8:37. I’m not suggesting that someone must be “21 and legal” to be immersed into Christ. But I am saying that **baptism is an “adult” decision with “adult” consequences and responsibilities attached.** Do you trust your child(ren) with *other* “adult” decisions yet? If not, then my advice (for whatever you consider such to be worth) is not to trust them with the decision to be baptized until you do. I understand, because I’ve been there too, that you fear that they may not be “as interested” later as adults as they are now as children. That’s a legitimate concern and real possibility, but such doesn’t warrant allowing those not mature enough in their understanding or abilities to do something for which they are just not ready.... or at least not ready yet.

The desire to be baptized, even in those not yet ready for it, is a good thing. But it is a “spark” that needs to be nurtured and fed until it matures into full flame, rather than doused with the water of baptism too early. To switch metaphors, those physically born *prematurely* often do not survive, or at least have a much more difficult time doing so than those who have properly gestated to full term. As is frequently the case, *physical* things illustrate *spiritual* things- those spiritually “*born again*” prematurely have similar **challenges.** (Phillip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)