

Youth Baptism and Lord's Table – Questions and Answer for Parents

1. What is baptism?

Believer's baptism is a public testimony that one has become a disciple or "learner" of Jesus Christ. In one of His last appearances to the eleven apostles after His resurrection, Jesus said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*" (Matthew 28:18-20). The apostles understood what Jesus was saying and believer's baptism immediately became the public sign of every believer's entry into the Christian community (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12).

This outward step of obedience uniquely depicts an inward, spiritual reality (Romans 6:3-5). Through baptism, a new Christian publicly identifies with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. When should a child be baptized?

Children can be baptized only when he or she can provide a believable profession of faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41; Galatians 3:27).

3. What is a believable profession of faith?

Anyone professing Jesus Christ as Lord should be able to:

- Communicate the content of the gospel and express personal trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.
- Express a godly sorrow over sin that leads to evidence of genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10-11).
- Examine himself or herself regarding the condition of his or her soul (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).
- Convey his or her personal submission to the authority of Jesus (Romans 10:9).
- Exhibit spiritual fruit, which proceeds from new life in Christ (Galatians 5:22-23).

4. Does God save young children?

Yes! God can and does convert children (Romans 10:9-13, Acts 2:21). However, a parent should recognize the nature of children: their intellectual immaturity, the frequency with which they change their options, the ease with which they can be influenced, and for many, and their limited exposure to the attractiveness of worldly things. All of these factors make it exceedingly difficult to discern with certainty the legitimacy of their conversion. The younger the child, the more difficult this determination becomes. Baptizing children prematurely can contribute to a false sense of spiritual security.

5. What is the role of the parent in evaluating a child's readiness to be baptized?

Parents have the greatest opportunity to guide the spiritual training of their children. To be most effective, parents should:

- Teach their children God's commands (Deut. 6:7).
- Train their children in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6).

- Bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

At the same time, pastors bear primary responsibility for administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table within the local church and caring for the souls of those who receive them. Parents (and especially fathers) should, therefore, evaluate the readiness of their child for baptism and seek to involve pastors in this process. Parents know their child best and are ideally suited to discern the genuineness of their child's repentance. (Note: the observations of others – Home Bible Study leaders, teachers, trusted friends, and others in the church – can provide objective help in this process.) A parent who believes his child is ready to be baptized should meet with a pastor so that the pastor can verify the parent's evaluation. Pastor, parent, and child should all be confident in the readiness of the child to move forward with baptism.

6. If my child said a prayer and invited Jesus into his heart, isn't that enough to be baptized?

No. The language of "inviting Jesus into your heart" is not biblical. It ignores necessary features of the Gospel, such as justification by faith, and fails to call the individual to repentance. Experience reveals that it is relatively easy to persuade young children to "invite Jesus into their hearts." Unfortunately, many who make such a commitment, or pray such a prayer, later show no evidence of genuine spiritual life.

7. What is the Lord's Table?

Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Table by His example with His disciples in the upper room after the Passover meal (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20). After Jesus' ascension, the early church practiced partaking of the Lord's Table (Acts 2:42). The apostle Paul, later, passed along to the church at Corinth Jesus' instructions to continue the practice (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

All the accounts of the Lord's Table basically agree that the overall message is, "*Do this in remembrance of Me!*" This intentional recall of Jesus' death in the past makes it a sobering present reality. The Lord's Table looks back to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for sinners and looks ahead in anticipation to His future return! Robert Saucy notes, "Jesus wants His people to 'remember' Him continually during His absence by partaking of the bread and cup, which symbolize their sharing in the fruits of His sacrificial death on the cross."¹ The church is commanded to participate in the Lord's Table so that they might remember Jesus' death on their behalf, thereby receiving encouragement and blessing, as they seek to live in humble dependence on Him.

8. How do baptism and the Lord's Table differ?

Wayne Grudem explains, "Baptism [is] an ordinance that is only observed once by each person, as a sign of the beginning of his or her Christian life. . . . The Lord's Supper [is] an ordinance that is to be observed repeatedly throughout our Christian lives, as a sign of continuing fellowship with Christ."

Mark Dever gives further clarification, "Baptism is our initial symbolic act of obedience that identifies us as disciples, protecting the regency of church membership as we enter the front door of the church. Participation in the Lord's Supper is continuing symbolic act of unity and fellowship in Christ that identifies us as those who are continuing members of the church in good standing."

9. When should a child participate in the Lord's Table?

A child should participate in the Lord's Table only after he or she has made a believable profession of faith in Christ (see the answer to **Question 3**), has been biblically baptized, and can properly evaluate the condition of his or her heart for the Lord's Table.

¹ Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 215.

The Bible prescribes that believers who participate in the Lord's Table must be in proper fellowship with God and other believers, or there can be serious consequences. In 1 Corinthians 11:27-28, the apostle Paul writes, *"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup."*

The Corinthians experienced judgment for their abuse of the Lord's Table. In 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, Paul writes, *"For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."* The "sleep" to which Paul referred was death.

In light of such sobering consequences of judgment for a wrong participation in the Lord's Table, parents should be exceedingly cautious in allowing their child to partake without the ability to discern the spiritual condition of their own heart.

10. What do I say to the child who thinks he is converted, if I don't think he or she is ready for baptism or Lord's Table?

Any child professing faith in Christ should be the object of enthusiastic encouragement. Expressions of faith and evidences of repentance are gracious moments, which parents should encourage with positive words. At the same time, parents should understand that many children have, at some time, expressed faith in Jesus, but now show no evidence of saving faith. Thus, we recommend responding to your child with something like the following:

"I'm thrilled that you are repenting and trusting in Jesus. More than anything I want you to know that God has really changed your life. You will know God has saved you if you continue repenting and trusting in Jesus. If God has changed your heart, you will want to obey Him more than anyone else.

At times, it is difficult to tell if you are a true Christian without having your faith tested. Sometimes God tests your faith by having you choose between something you want and something He wants for you. Give it some time and see what God does. We will and pray about it and watch how you respond to God leadership in your life. As questions come up, we will talk."

11. Are there any problems with waiting too long to baptize a truly converted child or allow him or her to partake of the Lord's Table?

Baptism and the Lord's Table symbolize and remind believers of the gift of salvation. Through them, the Holy Spirit instructs and assures the believer of his or her union with Christ. For this reason, it is unwise to withhold the ordinances from a true disciple of Jesus.

This concern, however, will have to be balanced with the danger of premature participation in the Lord's Table and the potential false assurance baptism can give to a child who is not regenerate. These challenges require parental leadership. Discussing these issues provides opportunities to study Scripture, trust God, and pray together. When considering these questions, the following counsel is helpful, "Your child will not be any less saved by your judicious waiting for more substantial evidences, if God has indeed performed a work of grace in the first place."² In the process of making these decisions, your pastors stand ready to provide counsel in discussing these issues and support in caring for your children.

12. If I have a child who is unbaptized, but receiving the Lord's Table, how do I go about removing this privilege?

This situation provides wonderful opportunities for humble, parental leadership. A parent who has allowed his unbaptized child to receive the Lord's Table should study the subject in order to develop

² Gundersen, Dennis, *Your Child's Profession of Faith* (Kansas City, MO: Calvary Press), 23.

biblical convictions. Then, he must humble himself before his child; taking responsibility for any confusion or difficulties this may have caused the child. He should then seek to teach his child about the nature of salvation and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table. A proper understanding of the ordinances can then lead to appropriate observances of them. Situations like this are ideal opportunities for parents to draw support, encouragement, and counsel, not just from pastors, but also from others in the church community.

13. Why not baptize infants?

Scripture nowhere instructs us to baptize infants, nor does it describe infants being baptized. The consistent pattern of participants in baptism in the New Testament is those who have heard and believed the Gospel, and were then baptized. Acts 2:41 records, “*So then, those who had received his word (Peter’s) were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.*” A similar pattern is recorded in Acts 8:12, “*But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.*”

Even when the Bible speaks of whole households being saved and baptized, it does not include infants—because infants cannot believe the message of the Gospel prior to their baptism. Note carefully the pattern recorded in Acts 16:31-34,

They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

Time, after time, after time, the Bible repeatedly emphasizes faith in the Gospel message as the prerequisite for baptism; the church today should do the same. (For more helpful information regarding this issue, please consult *A Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism* by Matt Waymeyer).

14. What do I do if my child was baptized as an infant?

The Bible reserves baptism for those who have repented of their sin and trusted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Thus, we urge all who have turned to Christ to be baptized by immersion, regardless of whether they were baptized as infants.

15. What if my child was baptized at an early age, and now I don’t think he or she was really converted until later. Should he or she be baptized again?

If the child was baptized as an unbeliever, his or her baptism was not biblical. He or she should now be baptized as a believer, providing they can meet the guidelines found in **Questions 3 and 4**.

16. What is the role of the church in evaluating a child’s readiness to be baptized and receive the Lord’s Table?

We believe the administration of the ordinances belongs to local churches and that God places pastors within churches to lead and care for people, as a shepherd would a flock (Hebrews 13:17 and Acts 20:28). Pastors have a unique charge from God to preserve the purity of the church and maintain the integrity of membership. On the last day, they will give account to God for those given into their charge, whether children or adults. For this reason, pastors must actively and carefully oversee the administration of the ordinances. They should also be involved in evaluating a child’s readiness to be baptized and subsequently receive the Lord’s Table.

*This paper has been compiled using material from Covenant Life Church: *The Sacraments – Questions and Answers for Parents*.