

WHO SHOULD WEAR THE CHURCH ‘TEAM JERSEY’?

Should the children of believers wear the team jersey? (Be baptized?)
Or is it only for the adult members of the church?

The church has been divided on this issue for a very long time.

The biblical case for ‘believer’s baptism only’ is often strongly presented. The biblical case for ‘the baptism of the children of believers as well’ is sometimes not known.

Before we get ‘hot under the collar’ about this, we need to remember that baptism is a secondary issue. In 1 Cor. 1:17 Paul says, “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (NIV2011). Though we may disagree about water “baptism”, we can still agree and hold together on the “gospel”, the main issue.

What follows is a simple explanation of what this baptism question involves.

Baptism is one of the six ingredients of Salvation (They are all found in Acts 2).

These six ingredients can be arranged as follows:

- What the *church* does: Teach the *message* about Jesus and *baptize* (Acts 2:14-40; Acts 2:41)
- What the *individual* does: *Repent* and *believe* in Jesus (Acts 2:28, 41. See also Acts 16:30-31)
- What *God* does: *Forgive* sins and give the *Holy Spirit* to produce new life (Acts 2:38)

There they are: the six ingredients of Salvation: *Message, Baptism, Repent, Believe, Forgiveness, Spirit.*

The big dividing question is this: is it about getting them in the right order or just making sure one has all six?

- Some would feel that it is very important that these six ingredients occur in the right order and that baptism must always follow personal repentance and faith. Such people don’t baptize very young children but rather wait for them to express repentance and faith later in life and then get baptized.

For those who hold this view, the children of believers do not yet wear the church team jersey (of baptism) Are they members of the church? Yes, but in a becoming sense.

- Others feel that the order in which these six ingredients occur is not the important thing. What is important is that we have all six. And we are to just

add any that may be missing. If we hear the Good News about Jesus, and we respond in repentance and faith, receive God's forgiveness and Holy Spirit; we then need to add baptism if we find we are not baptized. If our parents took us for baptism as young children, we need to make sure that we add repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, so that we also receive God's forgiveness and Holy Spirit.

In the Acts of the Apostles we don't seem to see a strong commitment to getting these ingredients in order, but we do see the apostles adding ingredients that are missing (eg. Acts 8:14-17). On the day of Pentecost "about three thousand people" were baptized immediately after Peter's sermon (Acts 2:41). The entire Jerusalem church of 120 believers (Acts 1:15) could not have had time to check that each individual had come to a genuine expression of repentance and faith in Jesus. This may have been because the apostles felt that if faith was lacking, it could be improved or added after the baptism.

For those who hold this view, the children of believers do wear the team jersey (of baptism) because they are already members of the church, included with their parents.

This is the view expressed in Acts 2:39, which says, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off —for all whom the Lord our God will call." (NIV2011).

It also agrees with Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God being for young children as well. Mark 10:13-16 says that "People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." (NIV2011)

Because St Martin's has a big view of baptism that includes the young children of believers being baptised (and wearing the team jersey), we do not 're-baptise' people who were baptised as infants as this implies that the infant baptism was not valid.

As I have said, not everyone will agree with our position on baptism, but hopefully we can all still agree and hold together on the main issue of the gospel of the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:17).

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