

# BAPTISM

AND CHILDREN



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Olney, Texas

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# Why do we withhold baptism from children?



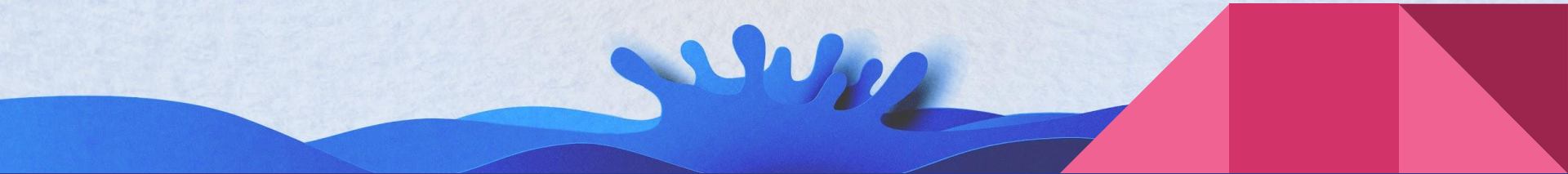
- The Baptist tradition has always practiced believer's baptism.
- We reject the infant baptism teachings of the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed traditions.
- The church during the New Testament times only baptized believers— baptizing only after evidence of a changed heart.



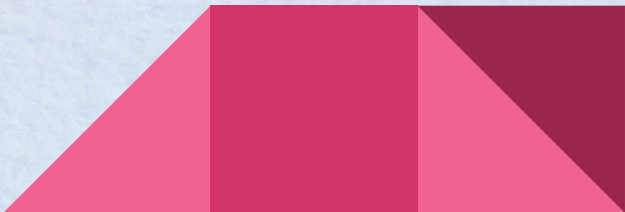
# Historical Considerations



- Most Baptists in history were not baptized until their late teens or early twenties. Most held jobs before they were baptized. As far as Baptists were concerned, baptizing young children was rare.
- Southern Baptists Today: Between 1977 and 1997 there was a 250% increase in the number of baptisms of children under age six in Southern Baptist churches.

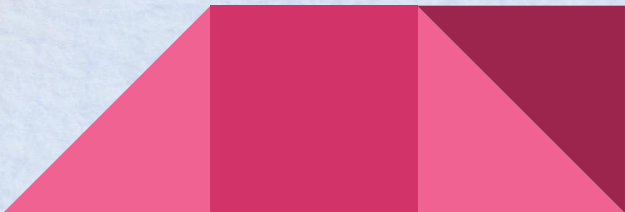


# Parental and Pastoral Considerations

- We want to see our children embrace Christ and experience authentic salvation. This is a good desire.
  - But we need to be equally concerned about our children having a false assurance of their salvation.
  - In our day, there is a tremendous amount of social pressure on the church's pastoral leadership to confirm the conversion of a young child.
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# Consideration for the Child

- In our evangelism we do not want to pressure children for a quick decision without waiting for them to show true understanding about what it means to turn away from sin and truly trust in Jesus.
  - On the other hand, we don't want to deny the work of God in a child's life by denying them baptism. Nobody has to "earn" the right to be baptized. We baptize based on a **credible confession of faith**.
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# Consideration for the Witness of the Church

- The church is concerned that we do not baptize or receive anyone into membership who is a Christian in name only (nominal Christian). Our church membership is a witness for Christ to a lost world. We strive to protect the **gospel message** and the **witness of the church**. Unregenerate members are a threat to both.
- It is more difficult to assess the conversion of a child because they are **immature** and still **developing**, their faith is closely tied to their **parent's faith**, they are **not independent**, and very small children **do not think abstractly**.

## Some Positive Reasons to Wait:

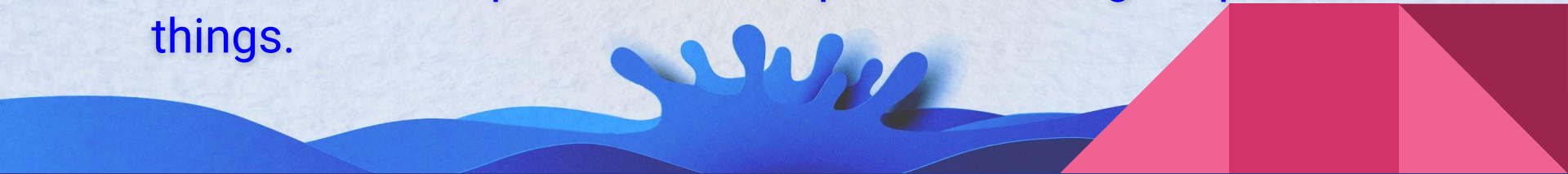
- The church welcomes converts into its membership with the confidence that they have **demonstrated evidence of change and new life** throughout their adolescent years.
- Older children and teenagers are able demonstrate a deep understanding of the Christian faith without confusion.
- Once joining the church, these adult believers have fond memories of their baptism as a significant event and rite of passage.
- Saving grace is not dependent upon baptism or the Lord's supper.



# Some Downsides to Waiting



- The church begins to emphasize good works, rather than the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Children and adults may be discouraged by their continuing sinfulness and lack of apparent fruit.
- “Withholding” could become an excuse for parents and children to lower their expectations and put off training in spiritual things.





# Some Downsides to Immediate Baptism

- The social pressure (expectations) on the church's leadership and parents may lead them to confirm the salvation of children at a very young age.
- Children may feel pressured to respond to the gospel and be baptized without truly understanding the gospel.
- These two factors lead to many lost children being baptized (many testify to this as adults). A child may grow up with a skewed understanding of the gospel and false assurance.
- Could create a situation where parents and the church are at odds over discipline.

# Some Positive Reasons to Baptize Immediately:

- Children are sinners and need to be saved like everybody else.
- Children can be saved. Christ invites children to come to him and he uses the faith of children as an example for those who wish to enter the kingdom of God.
- Children are addressed in Ephesians 6:1 (arguably because they are baptized, believing church members).
- The New Testament does not contemplate unbaptized disciples.
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper are intended to be received by every believer
- Scripture indicates that the relative age and maturity of a disciple can limit or determine their participation in church life and responsibilities as members.



# More Positive Reasons to Baptize Immediately:

- Immediate participation reinforces our understanding that salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit, and not merely a decision by the believer.
- Immediate baptism can include a reasonable time of waiting (even years) to make sure there is evidence that the child understands the gospel and gives evidence of conversion (heart change)
- Children are encouraged to obey their parents, read their Bibles, participate in the worship services of the church, to pray to the Father, and grow spiritually even as they are growing physically.



# At What Age Should a Child be Baptized?

- This must be considered on a case-by-case basis because every child is different. But there are some principles that guide our decisions:
- Baptism should follow a confession of faith and discernable signs of conversion.
- Time is usually the best way to tell. Parents should assume a position of “wait-and-see,” even as they encourage their professing child.



# What are we looking for?

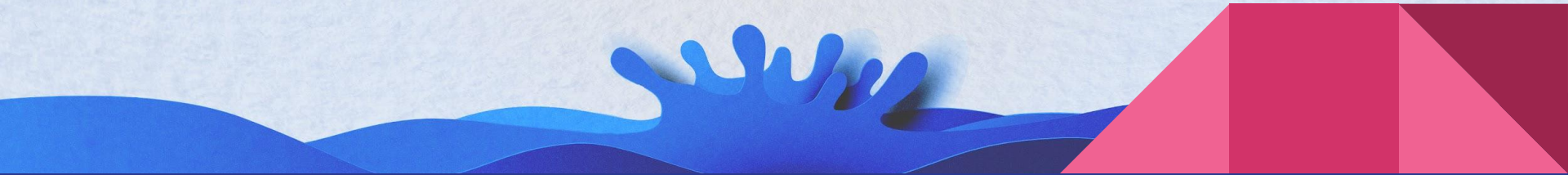
- Conviction: a conscience that is changed by God's Word, sorrow over sin, repentance toward God, demonstrated commitment to Christ in the face of temptations.
- Articulation and understanding of the Gospel and the concepts of the holiness of God, sin, punishment, penal substitution, the imputed righteousness of Christ. Children should understand these things and not be confused by them. This is made harder by the spiritual immaturity of many parents.





# What are we looking for?

- Regeneration: A new life in Christ. When we are saved we become different people. This is sometimes hard to discern in a child, but a saved child will demonstrate (in age appropriate ways) a desire for spiritual things, like prayer, scripture reading, worship, fellowship, repentance, and a desire for others to know Jesus.
- Parents should look for evidence of conversion, evidence of understanding in thinking, and maturity in thinking.





- Many teenagers and adults who were baptized as pre-teens often feel a need to be re-baptized when they are older, usually because they can't clearly remember their decision to follow Christ or the event of their baptism. Memories of the first decade of life are hazy.
- A child who is baptized should be mature enough to understand the significance of the event of baptism & they should be old enough to remember the event well.

# What can we do right now?

- Set a good example for your child of what it means to be a committed Christian. Your witness is the most important. They will learn how to follow Christ or how to not follow Christ by watching how you live. Love Christ, be honest, speak lovingly, don't be a hypocrite, work on your own walk with the Lord.
- Understand that the church is not the primary disciplinemaker of your child—you are. This is your responsibility and you will answer to God one day for your witness to your children.
- Talk to your children all the time about the gospel and spiritual things. Correct them when they disobey, ask them to forgive you when you sin against them.
- Remember that salvation belongs to the Lord. Pray for the salvation of your lost children. Trust God to save them.