



MILLINGTON  
baptist church

## GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN ON THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

### Baptism

#### **When Should My Children Be Baptized?**

We, the elders of Millington Baptist Church, after prayerful searching of the Scriptures and discussion conclude that, while Scripture is quite clear that believers only are to be baptized, the age at which a believer is to be baptized is not directly addressed in Scripture. We do not understand the simple imperative command to be baptized to settle the issue, nor do we understand the imperative to be baptized to forbid raising questions about the appropriateness of a baptismal candidate's maturity. We do understand that the consideration of an appropriate age for a believer to be baptized is a matter not of simple obedience on an issue clearly settled by Scripture, but rather is a matter of Christian wisdom and prudence on an issue not directly addressed by Scripture. Though the baptisms in the New Testament seem largely to have occurred soon after the initial conversion, all of the individuals we can read of are both adults and coming from a non-Christian context. Both of these factors would tend to lend credibility to a conversion. The credibility of the conversion is the prime consideration, with the effect upon the individual candidate and the church community being legitimate secondary concerns.

We believe that the normal age of baptism should be when the credibility of one's conversion becomes naturally evident to the church community. This would normally be when the child has matured, and is beginning to live more self-consciously as an individual, making their own choices, having left the God-given, intended child-like dependence on their parents for the God-given, intended mature wisdom which marks one who has felt the tug of the world, the flesh and the devil, but has decided, despite these allurements, to follow Christ. While it is difficult to set a certain number of years which are required for baptism, it is appropriate to consider the candidate's maturity. Of course children can be converted. We pray that none of our children ever know any lengthy period of conscious rebellion against God. The question raised by baptism is the ability of others to be fairly confident of that conversion. The malleable nature of children (which changeableness God especially intends for the time when they are living as dependents in the home, being trained in all the basics of life and faith) is a gift from God and is to be used to bring them to maturity. It should also give us caution in assuming the permanence of desires, dreams, affections and decisions of children. Nevertheless, should the young person

desire to pursue baptism and membership in the normal course set out by the church, we will examine them on a case-by-case basis, with the involvement of the parents.

While we want to celebrate our children when they desire to take important steps of faith, we believe it is wise to wait to baptize a child until he or she has reached a certain level of maturity. Therefore, generally we offer the guidance of encouraging our children to wait until **at least twelve years old** to make this important decision. While we are willing to discuss exceptions to this general rule, we do believe this position esteems baptism as a one-time act to be anticipated as a public, credible, mature profession of faith.

Nothing in this statement should be construed as casting doubt about the legitimacy of the baptism of any among us, regardless of how young they were when they were baptized. Because they have continued in the faith into their adult years we assume the legitimacy of their initial profession made at baptism. The question we are concerned with here is looking forward, not backward. To put it another way, we are raising the question about how many people have been baptized at this church in the past as younger people and children who went on to give no evidence of ever having been savingly converted, and what damage was done to them, and to the witness of the gospel through the church's premature baptism of them. It is our judgment that while there is some danger of discouragement on the part of those children who do give some good evidence of being converted and yet are not baptized, through good teaching in the home, and through the loving inclusion of the families in the church as we currently do, that danger is small. There is, however, we believe, a greater danger of deception on the part of many who could be wrongly baptized at an age in which people are more liable to make decisions which are sincere, but ill-founded and too often short-lived.

Two other notes in conclusion. First, we realize that this issue is an issue of great emotion for some, and we in no way are trying to lead anyone to disobey their conscience on this matter; we simply are trying to inform and educate our consciences from the Scriptural necessity of a credible profession of faith for baptism. Second, while it is not generally known among American evangelicals today, the practice of baptizing pre-teenage children is of recent development (largely early 20th century) and of limited geography (largely limited to the United States, and places where American evangelicals have exercised great influence). Baptists in the past were known for waiting to baptize until the believers were adults. Baptist Christians around the world are still much more cautious than modern American Christians, often waiting in Europe, Africa and Asia to baptize until children are grown and are in their 20's.

#### **Resources:**

Article: "**When should my children be baptized?**"

<https://www.challies.com/articles/when-should-my-children-be-baptized/>

Booklet: "**Why should I be baptized?**" By 9 Marks of a Healthy Church ministries.

<https://9marks.myshopify.com/collections/9marks-publications/products/why-should-i-be-baptized>

*For more information, please reach out to one of our pastors or elders.*

## The Lord's Table

### **When should my children take the Lord's table?**

We, the elders of Millington Baptist church, understand the Lord's Table to be one of the ordinances of the church that is limited to those who are converted to Christ. We allow the parents to decide when their children are ready to participate, but we also strongly encourage them to make sure their children understand the significance of what they are celebrating with clarity. It is a decision we would encourage them to make carefully and prayerfully. With that in mind, here are some key principles to guide parents in this area:

**What key principles determine a child's readiness?** For any person to be ready to participate in the Lord's Supper, they must understand that at the Lord's Table we are doing these things:

- **We Remember** - The mental action of the participants of the Lord's Supper is to focus the mind on Jesus and especially his historical work in dying for our sins. 1 Cor 11:24-25 says "Do this in **remembrance** of me."
- **We Worship** - 1 Cor 10:20 talks about sacrifices given to idols, which Paul says are given to demons because there's worship going on there, and so in the same way, when we celebrate the Lord's table, there is true worship here. This is why the Lord's table is **for believers only**, It's not for unbelievers, because it is part of worship. The Lord's Supper is an act of the gathered family of those who believe in Jesus, the church. It is not an act for unbelievers. Unbelievers may be present—indeed, we welcome them to be present—there is nothing secretive about the Lord's Supper. It is done in public.
- **We Give Thanks** - The word "EUCCHARIST" in 1 Cor 11:24 means to give thanks. Why? Because he paid our sin debt.
- **We Practice Self-Examination** The scripture says a man ought to **examine** himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:28-29) Infants and smaller children, not instructed in the Lord, cannot "examine themselves" or properly "recognize the body of the Lord."

Therefore, as parents, you should look for your child's capability in understanding, seriousness, and their ability to remember, worship, give thanks and practice self-examination.

### **Resources:**

For more information about this topic, here is a short booklet called "**Why is the Lord's supper so important?**" By 9 Marks of a Healthy Church ministries.

<https://9marks.myshopify.com/collections/9marks-publications/products/why-is-the-lords-supper-so-important>

*If you have further questions about these topics, please feel free to speak with one of our pastors or elders.*