

GUIDELINES FOR BAPTIZING CHILDREN/STUDENTS (Revised and Updated January 2010)

One of the difficult questions that churches such as ours face is: "When is a child ready to be baptized and become a member of the church?" For churches that practice believer's baptism this question has resulted in different churches coming to different conclusions.

The Bible does not state a specific age. Therefore the spiritual leadership of each local congregation must take the responsibility of developing some kind of general guidelines that protect the integrity and seriousness of the important biblical steps of baptism and entrance into the fellowship of the church. A child should not be rushed into this time of examining their heart and purposefully choosing to publicly articulate their faith before the body of believers.

In an article dealing with the question of the "age of accountability," Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School (Christianity Today, 3/1/99) offered some helpful thoughts. He said that throughout church history there have been differing opinions on the "accountable age." He writes, "Some Christians have based their teaching about the age of accountability on Jesus' encounter with the teachers of the Law when he was 12 years old. Doubtless, this was an important moment in Jesus' development, perhaps his bar mitzvah when, as a Jewish young man, he would be recognized as fully responsible to participate in the worship of the community." George goes on to state that the Puritans "generally forbade admitting children to Communion before the age of 14."

While George makes it clear in the article that the Bible gives us no specific age of accountability he offers this stern warning to Baptist Churches: "Historically, most churches that practice believers' baptism have emphasized the adult character of this decision, making baptism a post-puberty rite. In some baptistic circles, however, the age of baptism has steadily declined so that many churches are practicing a kind of 'toddler baptism' with little theological or biblical warrant."

With these thoughts in mind, in the year 2000 the pastors and deacons came up with the following guidelines for baptizing children. Some of the guidelines had actually been in place for many years, but we thought it would be helpful to refine them and put them in writing for the benefit of parents of younger children. We recognize that no man-made guidelines are perfect, but hopefully these will offer some help to our parents as they direct their children in these matters.

1. A child will not be considered for baptism and church membership until he/she is at least 10 years of age.
2. Reaching the age of 10 does not mean that a child will automatically be accepted as a candidate for baptism and church membership. The parents of the child and the pastors of the church must be in full agreement in their belief that the child has truly repented and embraced Christ in wholehearted discipleship and is prepared to clearly articulate his/her profession of faith before the church body.

3. Upon the agreement of the parents and pastors that the child is ready for baptism, the child will then meet with the deacons of the church to share his/her testimony of personal faith in Christ.
4. The final step is the actual baptism/membership service in which the child will publicly share his/her testimony with the congregation and then be baptized by immersion and received into the church fellowship.

REVISED GUIDELINES – EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2010

- Children under the age of 18 will continue to be considered as candidates for baptism according to the above guidelines.
- However, children under the age of 18 will no longer be granted full membership in the church upon their baptism. Instead, they will be classified as student members. Student membership will allow them limited participation in church ministries, but they will not have the voting rights and privileges that adult members do.
- When a student member turns 18 years of age, they will be notified that they are eligible for adult membership. However, they will not be granted adult membership until they meet with the deacons and share a brief testimony about their current spiritual walk with Christ. If a student member chooses not to meet with the deacons, their name will automatically be removed from the membership roll of First Baptist Church.
- It is our prayer that, by the grace of God, the “Revised Guidelines” will allow the Biblical Church Body to play an important role in assisting the Biblical Family Unit in the spiritual development of young men and women at a crucial time in their spiritual lives.