

SHALL WE BAPTIZE CHILDREN?

**A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS & CHURCH
LEADERS**

by Aaron Battey

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Acknowledgements

This is the fifth book I have written. In many ways, this was the most difficult of all to write. I remember finishing the first draft of this book and the feeling of accomplishment that came with it. Since that feeling, the book has been ripped apart and put back together again—twice. That’s exaggerating only a little bit. I even overhauled the book title! But it was for the best. I owe a debt of gratitude to these faithful friends and men of God: Adam Warren, George Battey, Jamie Thomson, Michael Hernandez, Stéphane Dédéyan, Danny Burns, and Ed Daniel. They each read through the book and gave keen insights and critiques from varying perspectives. The book that is in front of you would not be here without their help.

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Leaving the best for last, God gave me the physical strength and the mental sensibilities to do any and all work that went into this. I was baptized when I was fourteen years old, and by His grace I am saved and being saved every day. My prayer is that this book brings more glory and disciples to Him. I am confident He has listened to many prayers regarding the writing of this book, and I am thankful for any answers He gives.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I was eight years old, and my sister Dorothy was nine years old when we were both initially baptized. One Sunday morning after church services, very innocently, and out of pure curiosity, I asked my pushy uncle C. W. Battey, "How old do you have to be in order to be baptized?"

Uncle C. W. immediately entered panic mode in his efforts to save a hell-bound soul. He said, "I'll come over after lunch, and we'll talk about it."

He came over and sat me down at the kitchen table. He opened a KJV Bible to Acts 2:38 and asked me to read it. I read it aloud. "Do you understand what you just read?"

"Yes," I said, too embarrassed to say otherwise.

He loaded me and daddy into his car and took us to see the elders of the congregation. My uncle did all the talking. He said to the elders, "Little George wants to be baptized."

"Well, if he wants to be baptized, we can't stop him," the elders said.

That evening Uncle C. W. gave the lesson. During the invitation song, Daddy pushed me out into the aisle. Uncle C. W. waved me forward and sat me on the front bench. Everyone sat down after the song ended. Uncle C. W. stood me up and said, "Do you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God?"

"Yes," I said.

"Upon that confession, I will baptize you for the remission of your sins."

He then took me into the water and baptized me. This happened that Sunday evening at the second service. My sister Dorothy got baptized the following Wednesday night. By the time I was fifteen I realized I was not accountable at the age of eight, but I had never heard of anyone being "re-baptized." Brother John Modgling came through Albuquerque and held a meeting at our congregation. I decided I didn't care what anyone thought. I went forward and told Brother John I needed to be baptized. He baptized me, and that's when I consider myself becoming a Christian. Dorothy was baptized later too. She was probably about twenty.

Looking back, I remember one funny thing about this experience. Even at the age of eight, I knew from Acts 2:38 that, when a person gets baptized, he "receives the gift of the Holy Spirit." The church in Hobbs always gave a new Bible to everyone who was baptized. I was baptized on Sunday and the following Wednesday (when Dorothy was baptized), the church gave to me a new copy of a KJV Bible.

I thought to myself, "This must be the gift of the Holy Spirit which the Bible promised I would receive." I was happy with my "gift."¹

Personal Testimonies

Interestingly, I performed somewhat of a poll on social media before my father ever told me about his baptism story. What follows are personal testimonies from adults in the Church of Christ who were baptized as a child and re-baptized as an adult. These are true accounts used with permission. The only details changed are slight grammatical tweaks and names or information that might be used to identify the person writing.

¹This story was written by George Battey, my father and published with permission. There are many details found in this story that will resonate with the reader after having completed this book.

“I was baptized when I was younger due to the pressure of my grandmother. I didn’t do it for the right reasons. It was basically just to make my grandmother happy. I was baptized again as an adult, because I realized I didn’t do it the first time for the remission of sins.”

“I was dunked when I was nine or ten years old. I basically had no clue what I was doing; I was acting on a fear of going to hell if I wasn’t baptized. I had no understanding of repentance; I’m not sure I was even old enough to understand what repentance was, or if I even had anything to repent from. I was in my thirties when that began to bother me. I was baptized again at that time with a full knowledge of what I was doing.”

“I was baptized at thirteen years old, but I was converted at thirty-one. When I was thirteen there were about five other teenagers in my congregation. A preacher gave a very graphic and convicting sermon on the crucifixion of Jesus. All five of us were baptized that day. When I look back, I remember my dad talking to me about the seriousness of baptism on a couple of occasions. In balance with the rest of my life up to that point, I had been told so many times how bad I was and how much we all deserved hell. I believed I was headed straight for hell. Now I realize that ‘we all’ really meant ‘humanity.’ I believed it meant ‘me.’ I remember thinking about how cool it would be to partake of the Lord’s supper with my peers. I remember going to public school and not understanding why my school acquaintances didn’t care that I got baptized, as if it was some status thing. I became rebellious in my late teen years and into my adult years. Time passed, and I had not gone to church faithfully for close to a decade. I had lived the lifestyle of a sinner and indeed deserved hell. I hit rock bottom when I was about thirty. My baptism had always had me questioning myself. After a couple of years living faithfully, studying everything I could get my hands on, and discussing my first baptism extensively with a couple of preachers and my dad, I was baptized again.”

“I was baptized at ten years old. I believed it was important to be baptized, and I believed Jesus was the Son of God, but I truly

believe I got baptized because several of my cousins did as well. I was baptized again at sixteen, because I didn't feel like I truly understood what I was doing at ten, or that I had sins that needed forgiven." "After I was married, a preacher came and held a gospel meeting where I went to church. It was then that I was baptized a second time. I had been thinking about being baptized again for some time, and I finally decided that as a kid being baptized for the first time, I was thinking, "If I want to go to heaven, I have to be baptized." I think I realized what the plan of salvation was, because I had sat at the feet of gospel preaching my whole life, but I wasn't truly ready or mature enough to be baptized the first time at age fourteen. I think my parents and the leaders at church felt like if I wanted to be baptized at fourteen, they weren't going to hold me back. I think another contributor was other young people in the congregation also making the decision to get baptized around that same time. I feel like my first baptism was likely because of peer pressure."

"I was baptized a second time as an adult. The more I studied, the more I realized I never had a moment where I was convicted of my sin, I needed to repent, and I needed to be saved. As a ten year old, I was baptized because I knew it was right, and I was raised in the church. All in all, it sat much better with my conscience when I was baptized again as an adult. To summarize, I knew baptism was a good thing to do when I was younger, but the gospel convicted me as a young man. I don't think my readiness was really examined at all when I was baptized the first time as a child."

"I'm one of those who got wet at twelve years old and was truly immersed later at thirty-one. Originally, I wasn't studied with, and baptism was just almost like a fad or a trend among the

“I was baptized at thirteen years old, but I was converted at thirty-one.”

younger kids at church during that time. I didn't understand it was to forgive my sins, nor did I know I was being added to the church because of my confessional belief in Jesus Christ as Lord. My younger sister and I both got wet the same day. I later left the church at seventeen years old. After coming back to the church, I sat down and read the entire New Testament in two weeks. I was then immersed for the remission of my sins, which were more than many could bear.”

These personal testimonies of being baptized at a young age and being re-baptized at a later age are but a drop in the bucket of actual occurrences. I received these testimonies from Christians within just a few hours after initially posting the social media poll. The very fact that so many Christians have this shared experience is enough reason to write a book. *Perhaps* through diligent Bible study, prayer, brainstorming, and collaboration, we might be able to unveil *some* scriptural light on a very confused subject matter, if at all possible.

What the Church of Christ Teaches

Maybe you picked this book up, and you're not a member of the Church of Christ. It's very possible that you are already confused by what I described or that you will be confused at some point along the way unless I set a few points of doctrine straight.

First, the Church of Christ does not teach that children are born in sin.² We believe that all humans inherit the consequence of physical death from Adam but not spiritual death. Thus, we do not believe that children are born with a sin nature that must be regenerated by sprinkling or immersion shortly after birth. Catholicism and some sects of Christianity believe and practice

²The Church of Christ is undenominational. Unlike many denominations, the Church of Christ does not have a church council, board of directors, or other such decision-making body that determines what each congregation should believe and teach. Thus, when I say, “the Church of Christ does not teach...” this is speaking in general terms. It would be rare to find a leader of a local congregation of the Church of Christ that differs in teaching and practice from what is expressed in this chapter (not in this book, but in this chapter).

this. Neither do we believe in baptizing infants to make them a member of the New Covenant. This is called covenant baptism and will be explored in its own chapter later in this book.

Second, the Church of Christ teaches from the New Testament scriptures that baptism is for “remission of sins.” This is maintained by scriptures such as Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21, and others. This belief that baptism is the actual point in time at which a sinner has his sins washed away and experiences a change of state from that of an unregenerate sinner to a new creation in Christ stands in stark contrast to what most denominations profess about baptism. Many denominations, Baptists being one example, practice what is called “believer’s baptism.” This is the idea that a sinner becomes a Christian on the basis of faith (mental agreement with facts about Jesus) alone, and then at some point afterward professes this faith to the world in the act of baptism.

Church of Christ preachers have traditionally taught that children are born free from any guilt of sin, and then mature so their conscience begins to operate, at which point they become “accountable.” There is no widespread, agreed-upon age at which all children become accountable of sin and require water baptism to have those sins washed away, but there is at least consensus that children will experience this phenomenon at some point. Each young person is deemed ready for baptism on a case-by-case basis, and the parents are usually instrumental in determining this.

Why This Book?

I have several purposes in writing this book. My foremost purpose is *prevention*. It has always proved difficult to find common agreement among Christians in answering the question, “How old does a child have to be for baptism?” While this book will very likely prove unable to accomplish more unity on the answer to that question than the hundreds of much wiser men and women before me, perhaps we can at least come to agreement on those cases of baptism where the subject is *very* young. “Very”

young is vague, but what is meant by “very” will be made clearer as the book progresses. Everyone reading this book can very likely think of at least one instance where they were witness to a very young child being baptized. Many times, the certainty of a young person’s innocence and readiness for baptism is difficult to determine, but there are other times when everyone in the room is thinking about how cute the baptism is as opposed to how salvific it is. If this book can help bring about awareness and good reasons to prevent against these obvious cases where a child is being baptized, then its primary purpose will have been accomplished.

My second purpose for this book, in terms of priority, is to *inform*. I want to give Christian parents *some* type of scriptural and sound guidance for when their child comes asking to be baptized. Whether talking about an innocent child or a sin-stricken adolescent, the goal is to give parents some type of scriptural direction, and some level of guidance that will help them navigate this difficult and stressful occasion in the life of Christian parenting. Most parents have not had adequate, if any, preparation for that moment when their child comes asking to be baptized. Remaining silent on difficult and controversial subject matters doesn’t always help. The people that actually suffer from the “let’s not talk about it” approach, are the parents in the heat of the moment. Telling them, “God will understand whatever you decide,” or “Just do what you think is best” is not reassuring to a parent. I believe the reason is that most parents likely agree that God would not leave us without *some* revelatory guidance on one of the most important moments in a person’s life. It seems bizarre to think that God would take the time to inform Christians they should abstain from eating a strangled animal (Acts 15:20), but then go completely silent on the subject of accountability and baptism. Did God go completely silent, or are there biblical principles to learn and apply? This book makes a case for the latter. When this subject is taught on, it has been my experience that parents with young children are very appreciative. A friend of mine recently taught a sermon that was ninety-nine percent in line with the things found in this book. Afterward, he had several Christian parents come to him and express their heart-felt

appreciation for his teaching on a subject they had never heard anyone teach on, good or bad. If you read this book and disagree with part or all of it, then please consider parents who are seeking direction in this matter. What would you tell them? Where would you point them to look for guidance? And what are we to make of the countless cases of re-baptism of adults who were initially baptized as young children? These are important questions that objectors are asked to consider.

In the process of preventing and informing, I would like to address common concerns I have heard voiced when it comes to determining a young person's readiness for baptism. I have grown more and more skeptical about the procedures that grow out of these concerns as I talk to Christian parents about the subject. I have commonly heard parents say things such as, "If we don't baptize them (children), then they will grow discouraged, and eventually they will stop asking." When this or similar reasons for baptism are given, it becomes very clear that baptism is not always being administered "for the remission of sins." As a result, children are frequently baptized, and years later they are re-baptized. The consequences are numerous. If this book can help parents think through the consequences of some common concerns, then the book will also prove successful.

Finally, my goal is to be biblical about the subject matter. It might sound like I am relegating this final purpose to last place, but that is not so. In preventing against very young baptisms, we must be biblical. In informing parents with some type of resource, we must be biblical. In addressing common concerns and procedures, we must be biblical. So, this final purpose is truly the greatest priority. I will try my best to be clear when I am giving my opinion and when I am simply relaying the word of God. While I do not claim to have come up with something that no man has thought up before, I do believe there is much scripture which will make Christians press the pause button on many potential baptisms. I believe there are important biblical concepts, that when brought to the front of this spiritual discussion, should shape our thinking and have a positive effect

on how we answer the question, “Is this young person ready to be baptized?”

If my hopes are realized, then parents will at least have *some* preparation for when their child pops the question. Maybe this book proves inadequate, but if it at least gets parents and leaders thinking and gives them *something* that is even remotely helpful, then it will have accomplished its mission. At the time of this writing, the only books I am aware of that are written by Church of Christ authors on this subject are *Am I Ready? A Study of the Gospel for Young People* by Mark Roberts³ and *Am I Ready to Be Baptized?* by Kyle Butt and John Farber.⁴ Both of these books are written primarily to children instead of parents, and I believe there are shortcomings with both; otherwise I wouldn’t find the need to write another book. Even if other books are out there, this subject needs discussed more than it has been.

Disclaimer: if you are reading this book because you are looking for an exact “age of accountability” at which every single child becomes a sinner and needs baptized, and anyone under that age limit does not need baptized, you can stop reading now; you won’t find that in this book. Some people may read the book and accuse me of this, but I’m making it clear up front that I do not believe this, and you have misunderstood me if you draw such a conclusion from the book. However, if you are looking for some scripturally informed guidelines that you can use to gauge a young person’s readiness for baptism, you will find that and hopefully more.

Summary

This book doesn’t claim to be an answer to all your questions about baptizing children. But at least we’re talking about it now. You will likely learn one or two things that you didn’t know before. You will have plenty of scripture to now consider on this

³Roberts, Mark. *Am I Ready? A Study of the Gospel for Young People*. Lower Light Publications

⁴Butt, Kyle & Farber, John. *Am I Ready to Be Baptized?* Florence, Peaceful House Publishing, 2006

very important subject. And if you are a parent or leader of a congregation reading this, you will now have *some* resource to appeal to, whereas you likely had little to nothing before.

Chapter 2

The Blessings & Curses of Emotion

Before kicking things into high gear, let's take a moment to prepare by talking about human emotions. The subject of emotions may seem unrelated to our subject at first read, but it's actually very relevant. You see, one of the things that makes this subject so difficult to talk about constructively is emotion. Excepting sociopaths, everyone experiences this God-given gift.

The Blessings

Happiness, sadness, excitement, disappointment, laughing, crying, anxiety, peace, confusion, craving, entrancement, awe, amusement, anger, awkwardness, nostalgia, and satisfaction are all different kinds of emotion. Life would be dull without these. Perhaps you've seen someone whose capability to experience emotion was sapped from them by the effect of drugs. Their face says it all: dull. They *feel* nothing. In contrast to that, when a person is baptized, the person's face expresses the God-given blessing of gladness. They *feel* free and overcome with joy! This ability to experience gladness is God-given. The psalmist says as much, "For you, Lord, have made me glad ..." (Psalms 92:4). While a case might be made that God does not make us sad, the Devil does, the very ability to feel the emotion of sadness is God-given. And so, we should not talk about emotions in such a way to leave the impression that they have no place and that we should endlessly suppress them. I think I have made this mistake in the past. That's not what I'm trying to say in this chapter.

The Curses

The problem with emotions is that they are ever-changing. If emotion were a person, it would be like the friend you invite to a party, but it doesn't surprise you at all when he doesn't show up. Unpredictable. Emotions come and go. And this is why they can be dangerous to depend on when determining truth.

Truth is constant. It doesn't change. If you are alive, you have blood running through your veins. I don't even have to see the blood running through your veins to know that. If there is grass, there must be a water source, because grass can't live without water. Every child has a mother and father. At any given moment, there is somewhere on earth not receiving sunlight. Coffee is good. All these things are undeniably true. Okay, not everyone likes coffee, but everything else just listed is constant, unchanging, and dependable.

One more thing is constant, because it is truth—the word of God. Jesus told the Father in prayer, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). The word of God can be depended on. When it says something, you can take it to the bank. The word of God is the final judge because of this unchanging and constant nature: “The word that I have spoken will judge ... in the last day” (John 12:48).

When we put it all together then, emotions are a good thing ... unless we are relying on emotions for the determination of truth. Emotions are a good thing, until we give them charge in the debate of reason. Emotions are a good thing, unless they are at odds with reality. The problem is, emotions have such a strong draw, and it's much easier to be drawn to something you can *feel* than a cold fact of reality. I believe this explains how people in Jeremiah's day, “did not obey or incline their ear [to God's voice], but everyone followed the dictates of his evil *heart* ...” (Jeremiah 11:8). Their hearts had grown accustomed to the *feeling* that accompanied doing evil, so that doing evil actually felt natural. Doing evil felt good and right. And so, Jeremiah would go on to say, “The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (17:9). Jeremiah was exaggerating slightly, but the human mind, steered by the seat of human emotions and feelings, is predictably going to find itself at odds with the reality of God's word. This is how and why emotions can be dangerous.

More Scripture

Consider a few more evidences from scripture that speak to the uncertainty of emotions and why they should not be given the driver's seat.

Example 1—Jacob

Recall the Bible story of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. His brothers realized they were going to need to sell a story to their father, so they took Joseph's coat of many colors and dipped it in the blood of a young goat. When they took the bloodied garment to Jacob, he exclaimed, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. *Without doubt* Joseph is torn to pieces" (Genesis 37:33). "Without doubt." Jacob was certain, and without any doubt, that Joseph was dead. But, as we say, his emotions got the best of him. Jacob had a wrong perception of reality, because his great emotional attachment to his son was ignited and misguided by lies.

Example 2—King Saul

One time King Saul was surrounded by the Philistines in Gilgal. His troops were trembling, and Saul was trying to decide what to do. The prophet Samuel had told him to wait seven days in Gilgal and do nothing until he could arrive and relay word from the Lord. When Samuel didn't show face, Saul got antsy and decided to do his own little burnt offering, presumably seeking the Lord's favor and inquiring from God what to do. The Bible says that when the offering had just finished, Samuel arrived. The prophet was shocked and said, "What have you done?" (1 Samuel 13:11). What do you think Saul said? "I *felt compelled*, and offered a burnt offering" (verse 12). Saul trusted his feelings. He trusted his feelings more than the "commandment of the Lord" (verse 13). And because of this, his kingdom would be taken away (verse 14).

Example 3—Ahithophel

Ahithophel is a Bible character that fewer people are familiar with. At one time Ahithophel was a chief advisor to King David, but during the time that David's son Absalom was trying to kill and seize the kingdom from his father, Ahithophel betrayed the king and went to work for Absalom. Ahithophel was really a bad man, but the Bible says this about his working for Absalom: "Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God" (2 Samuel 16:23). But it wasn't the oracle of God. It was against the will of God. So, why would Absalom follow ungodly advice? Because it sounded good. It *felt* good to Absalom.

Example 4—Samson

Samson is one of my all-time favorite stories, but he also teaches us a lesson in why it's not good to trust your emotions in determining right from wrong. You might remember that Samson had long hair, and the secret to his strength lay in the fact that he did not cut his hair. God had promised Samson miraculous strength if he would let the locks of his hair grow. Well, his girlfriend Delilah got after him about his secret. After three nights of wearing him down, Delilah finally got Samson to let loose the answer to the mystery of his strength. That night, while Samson was sleeping, Delilah took a razor and cut off Samson's hair. After this, the Bible says Samson's strength left him (Judges 16:19). Delilah had been bribed by the Philistines to let them capture Samson once the secret to his strength was found out. So, once she cut his hair off, the Philistines came charging in the room, and Delilah started screaming at Samson: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" (verse 20). "So he awoke from his sleep, and said, 'I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!' But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him." (verse 20). When Samson woke up, he *felt* as strong as he ever did. But he wasn't. His feelings misguided him. They weren't in alignment with reality.

Example 5—Proverbs

This isn't a Bible story teaching about the unreliability of feelings; nonetheless, Proverbs teaches us the same principle.

Open *rebuke* is better
Than *love* carefully concealed.
Faithful are the *wounds* of a friend,
But the *kisses* of an enemy are deceitful.
(Proverbs 27:5-6)

The truths in this passage run against the grain of what modern culture teaches about love. Today, we are taught that love is *always* accepting and *always* makes you feel good. In fact, if someone doesn't make you feel good, culture would have you believe they don't love you at all. But remember, the word of God is truth, and the word of God says that someone who loves you will sometimes say things that don't necessarily make you feel good. Rebuke doesn't feel good, but someone letting you believe whatever makes you feel good ... feels good. A wound doesn't feel good short term, but a kiss does. But the proverb is teaching that having your feelings hurt momentarily by a true friend is better than being surrounded by a bunch of yes-men who only tell you what you want to hear. The moral of the proverb is—what feels good isn't necessarily good.

What's the Point?

So why all this talk about emotions and feelings? Perhaps you made the connection already. What follows in this book is a very emotionally laden conversation. It is very difficult for two people to have a conversation about the baptism of children when both people hold opposing positions. Why? Because we are talking about whether or not someone is saved or lost. The conclusions we draw and the points we disagree on may have salvific consequences. If I change the position I have always held, that might mean I need to get re-baptized. It might mean I shouldn't have baptized my child. It might mean I shouldn't have baptized a bunch of other people's children. There are some pretty serious implications being discussed in this book. All these items

inevitably will spark an emotional response. Again, unless someone is a sociopath, they are going to feel something about this subject, one way or another. The question is, how are we going to handle that emotional response?

What we each must do is properly interpret our emotions. By that I mean, we must recognize emotions for what they are—emotions. Emotions are a blessing, but they are unreliable in determining truth. Therefore, when we are overcome with emotion during this discussion, we must ask these questions, “Why am I feeling this way?” Is it because Aaron is wrong, and he is denying the word of God? Is it because Aaron is binding a man-made tradition? Or am I feeling excited and possibly angry because Aaron is simply teaching something that, if true, has major consequences for my life and belief system?

Someone might read what follows in this book and ask, “Are you saying that I’m not saved, because I was baptized at (*fill in the blank*) years old?” This is usually an emotional response asked in anger and excitement, though not always. If it is emotionally motivated by anger, it is guided by how we feel as opposed to what aligns with reality. If reality is at odds with what *feels* right, we are morally obligated to reach for the truth, even though it may feel uncomfortable. This is so difficult to do. On the other hand, if the question is being asked out of sincerity and honestly seeking confidence in one’s salvation, I would encourage you to put this question in your back pocket until chapter 10 when we discuss the issue of re-baptism.

I will say one last thing here. I am not writing this book to become the self-appointed arbiter of all the personal experiences out there. I simply want Christians to begin discussing a difficult, emotionally laden subject, and if the truth takes us places that initially feels like hurtful wounds, remember that this is not always a bad thing (Proverbs 27:6). I have tried to take a writing approach that is non-confrontational and as easily digestible as

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Summary

I want parents to feel empowered because of this book, not confused. I want children to be reassured, not unsure. I want children to grow up, become accountable and responsible first, and then become Christians. I want all of us to have confidence in our salvation. I want the glory of God to spread. I want all these things. I hope you want all these things, too. Remember this goal and this attitude, as we now march into uncertain territory.

Chapter 3

What Is the Problem and Who Is to Blame?

If everything in chapter one is true, then there are some problems. Let's start with arguably the biggest one of all.

Major Problems

Problem #1

The biggest problem I find in this whole dilemma is—people are being baptized for reasons the Bible never indicated was the purpose of water baptism. In the first chapter I rehashed a common response given by Christians which suggests something fishy is often going on when we baptize children. The responses suggest a two-fold concern: 1) if we don't go ahead and baptize an inquiring child, they will be discouraged, and 2) if we don't baptize the child, they will eventually stop asking to be baptized. Dissuading these type of motivations for baptizing a child is a primary concern in this book. Do not misunderstand me; these are valid concerns! And these concerns undoubtedly weigh heavier on a Christian's mind who has children than it does on a Christian's mind who doesn't have children like me. Nonetheless, what's the real problem in these responses? After validating the fact that these are real concerns, we must also validate the fact that these two responses do not justify baptizing a child who is not mature and responsible. If the child is in danger of growing discouraged by the parent informing him that he is not ready to be baptized yet, the answer to this discouragement is not baptizing him anyway. Peter did *not* say, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *so you won't be discouraged*" (Acts 2:38). Jesus did *not* say, "He who believes and is baptized will be *encouraged*" (Mark 16:16). Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be *saved*." We are talking about sin and salvation from that sin. If we have reason

to doubt that a child is an accountable sinner, then we have good reason to doubt that the child is being baptized *for remission of sins*. The answer is not, “Well, they’re gonna need to be baptized at some point anyway,” which I have also heard said before! The answer is: what can we do to encourage this child while he or she matures and further develops? How do we spiritually nourish this child so that he still has a strong desire to be baptized when he actually is able to bear the responsibility of being a Christian? Asking these questions is a lot easier than answering them. Later on, we will address answers that I believe are thoughtful and will prove helpful to any Christian parent or leader who is asking.

Problem #2

Another major problem with baptizing children is—there is no example of any child ever being baptized in scripture. None. Zilch. This ought to be shocking considering that we baptize children all the time. Read through the book of Acts to be confident.⁵ People might produce good theories as to why they believe there are no written examples of children being baptized in Acts or the epistles, but the fact is, these are nothing more than unsubstantiated theories. I believe the absence of such examples is the one of the most important discussion points in this study. When it was first brought to my attention, I blew it off. But it worked on my mind for months, and I couldn’t explain this fact away. No matter what you believe on this subject, you will have to deal with this fact of scripture.

Problem #3

There is the problem of inconsistency. Now, here is something interesting. When the debate over infant baptism comes up in the

⁵To quote Alexander Campbell, “Both [in] the [great] commission, and the apostles’ practice, in all cases preclude the idea of an infant ever having been baptized.” Campbell was debating about infant baptism, but he might as well have been talking about child baptism.

The Campbell—McCalla Debate, Kansas City, Old Paths Book Club, 1948

There is no example of any *child* ever being baptized in scripture. None.

book of Acts, the account of the Philippian Jailer’s household is commonly referenced (16:31-34). There Paul and Silas tell the Jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your *household*” (verse 31).⁶ This is but one of four “household baptisms” in the New Testament.⁷ The argument from the paedobaptist⁸ position is that the Jailer’s *household* included children and infants; thus, here is scriptural authority for baptizing infants. As long as I can remember, brethren in the churches of Christ have unwaveringly denied that there is any evidence of children being baptized in Acts 16:31-34. There is no mention of infants or children in the text. In response to Presbyterian preacher W. L. McCalla’s appeal to the example of Lydia “and her household” being baptized in Acts 16:15, Alexander Campbell said, “Indeed there is not probable evidence, much less positive evidence of infant baptism in this family.”⁹ It must be assumed that the household of Lydia and that of the Philippian Jailer included children, but assuming is not proving. Campbell got this right as early as 1842. We get this right in 2022. When it comes to the subject of baptizing infants, we have stood united on the ground that there is no example of such a thing in the New Testament scriptures whatsoever ... until a child comes up during the invitation song at a gospel meeting. Suddenly, we seem to forget how we have so confidently argued with our denominational friends. Sure, no one suddenly claims the household baptism of Lydia included children, but when we proceed to baptize a child that is clearly pure and innocent, it is logically inconsistent with our claim that there is no example of such a thing in the New Testament.

⁶Schreiner, Thomas R. & Wright, Shawn D. *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*. E-book, Nashville, B & H Publishing Group, 2006, 117

⁷Stephen Wellum draws attention to these “household baptism” texts: Acts 16:15,32-33; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16 (Ibid.).

⁸“A person who baptizes infants.”

“Paedobaptist.” *Collins Dictionary*, Online, 2022,

[https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/paedobaptist#:~:text=\(%CB%8Cpi%CB%90d%C9%99%CA%8A%CB%88b%C3%A6pt%C9%AAst%20\),a%20person%20who%20baptizes%20infants](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/paedobaptist#:~:text=(%CB%8Cpi%CB%90d%C9%99%CA%8A%CB%88b%C3%A6pt%C9%AAst%20),a%20person%20who%20baptizes%20infants)

⁹*The Campbell—McCalla Debate*, Kansas City, Old Paths Book Club, 1948

Problem #4

This leads into yet another problem; that is, answering the question, “What is a child?” You may not have noticed in chapter one, but I was very purposeful when using the word “child” and the phrase “young person.” In this chapter I have argued that there are no biblical examples of baptizing *children*. But at what point does a child stop being a child and become a *young person*, or as the New Testament says, a *man*? This is a very difficult question to answer. In fact, this is the most difficult question to answer in this entire discussion. I will attempt to give direction in answering this question in the next chapter, but let’s at least agree on one thing before moving on. Let’s agree that there are clearly, without a doubt, some *children* getting baptized in our churches. There are undoubtedly children who have been baptized “for remission of sins” when everyone in the room knew that the child had no sins to remove and/or the child was too immature and irresponsible. Everyone in the room knew that the child would have gone directly into the Lord’s presence had he or she died before or after getting in the waters of baptism. We know and recognize that this does at least happen *sometimes*. Let’s at least agree that this is without biblical example and authority, and we should stop this from ever happening again if we can help it.

Who Is to Blame?

How did we get in this predicament of baptizing children anyway? Did the first century church also struggle with knowing when a child had grown up and needed to be baptized and become a Christian? Or did something happen along the way? If we are going to restore New Testament Christianity, we need to do our best troubleshooting and figure out what we are doing to contribute to the problem.

Culprit #1

I believe I am partly to blame. When I say *I am partly to blame*, I am including myself with *preachers* in general. I believe if we as preachers and teachers of the gospel will be objective about the situation and look at our common habits, we will find that we have contributed and still contribute to this perpetual problem by how we preach.

Think about the classic hellfire, and brimstone sermons that you have heard preachers give. This type of preaching may not have been the common experience of all readers growing up, but I can remember hearing this type of preaching for as long as I can remember. I, myself, gave that kind of a sermon not too long ago at my own home congregation. The sermon was called “Heads Will Roll,” and on the YouTube thumbnail I put the disclaimer “Rated R.”¹⁰ If you’ve ever read or heard the story of Jehu, you know why. Jehu gorily killed off the house of Ahab, and in that account of judgment, we get a small taste of what final judgment and hell will be like. I ended my sermon with four takeaway points about the final judgment: 1) God’s promises of judgment are sure, 2) God sees the blood of the innocent, 3) there is no peace for the wicked, and 4) hell will be graphic. I don’t regret preaching the sermon. I plan on preaching the sermon again someday, somewhere. What I do regret is what I *didn’t* say before ending the sermon. I *didn’t* reassure the children in the audience. I failed to talk directly to the children and affirm that they were safe. They did not have to worry about God sending them to hell or experiencing anything like Jehu did to King Ahab’s family.

Now, no parents came to me the following week to tell me that their children had been terrified ever since they heard that sermon on Jehu. But children often do get frightened by this kind of preaching, and that frightening can and has prematurely set the baptism wheels in motion for children who are not ready to be baptized. Some of the personal testimonies in chapter one

¹⁰Battey, Aaron. “Heads Will Roll.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Chapel Grove Church of Christ, 19 May 2022, <https://youtu.be/7Y6VEGsSGsE>

confirms this is true. Children need reassurance from the same preacher that broadly applied the threat of hell to every living soul in the building. To be sure, they need reassurance from their parents as well. I confidently believe that many children have quaked under hellfire preaching, walked up front during the invitation song, and have been baptized for the remission of discouragement. This doesn't have to continue.

Here is something else I learned recently that is pertinent. I was visiting with an older preacher of the gospel recently, and he was recounting to me the preaching methods of old-time gospel preachers in his day. He said that, back in the day, preachers would hold a Wednesday through Sunday gospel meeting, and they would save their sermon on judgment for Sunday afternoon, the last sermon of the meeting. From Wednesday evening all the way through Sunday morning, the preacher would talk about the gospel, salvation, baptism, etc. Then, on the last service, he would lower the boom on the congregation and give them a fiery sermon on judgment and hell. As a result, the front pews of the church house would fill up during the last invitation song. Repentant Christians made confessions of sin and unregenerate sinners came forward to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Many of the *unregenerate sinners* wanting to get baptized were children. And so, just like with the Philippian Jailer's household, all the children were baptized for the remission of discouragement (sarcasm added). No reassurance was given to the children in the sermon. No disclaimer was made to instill in them confidence that God loved them, and they were safe.

This kind of strategy may have proved effective in the numbers column, and it may have looked good in a monthly newsletter when the preacher wrote up his field report to announce how many confessions and baptisms resulted from the preaching of the gospel that weekend, but how many children were baptized prematurely as a result of this?

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not accusing old-time gospel preachers of being underhanded, conniving, manipulative salesmen. I'm sure there were a few bad apples in the bushel, but

generally, I am certain that most of those old-time preachers strategized and executed their gospel meeting sermons with the sincerest intent, and no doubt, many souls were actually saved. Nonetheless, I do wonder if such strategies that encourage people to get baptized while under the influence of a fearful and emotional high does not place priority on the method of persuasion more than it does the truth of the message. I do not find this *method of persuasion* in the preaching of the apostles and prophets in the book of Acts.¹¹ I strongly believe that hearers should be as level-headed as possible when they decide to get baptized, because they are making a life-long commitment that demands utmost clarity of mind. But this is not at all what you are getting when you combine methods of persuasion with a ten year old brain that is just starting to reason abstractly.

The point is this, when we are preaching, we need to be aware of who all is in our audience. I can speak from experience when I say that historically, I have not considered the children in the audience when preaching and warning about judgment and hell. I encourage teachers and preachers to keep on preaching about the judgment and eternal punishment, but I encourage you to season those presentations with reassurance for the young and impressionable in the audience who have no need to be afraid and leaving their parents with their hands up in the air.

Culprit #2

Preachers aren't the only ones to blame. I believe leaders of the church in general share some level of responsibility on this issue. If my own conscience is any reflection of other leader's consciences, then we haven't openly (or privately for that matter) discussed this issue. That's not to say that the issue of baptizing children has *never* been discussed publicly, but generally speaking, this issue is rarely discussed. Why? I believe it's because it is a very, very, very emotional topic. When you start debating about the "safe-ness," "lost-ness," or readiness of

¹¹I borrowed the phrase "Method of Persuasion" from Scot McKnight. McKnight, Scot. *The King Jesus Gospel*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011, 149.

someone’s children, you might as well be approaching a momma bear with a stick. People get emotional and irrational on the topic. Generally, people don’t reason from scripture, they reason from the gut. Our gut (i.e., intuition) does have a serviceable role in this discussion – don’t get me wrong – but scripture should take priority as in all spiritual discussions. Leaders realize the emotional nature of this topic, and as a result, I believe they either grow weary or afraid of disturbing any bears in their midst. Then again, I’m sure that many people never think about the dilemma of baptizing children. They never lose sleep over it for whatever reason. The result—it doesn’t get talked about.

What Is to Blame?

Pride

It’s not just people that we can point a finger at; it’s something inside people. Something that commonly takes up residence inside the human heart is pride. Many children that were baptized prematurely are now adults. They were baptized at a very young age, and if what I am proposing is true, then these adults now have a serious conflict. If these adults were actually baptized as children for remission of discouragement or other illegitimate reasons, then are they even saved? This inner conflict of the mind assaults our ego. Someone might ask the question, “Are you saying that a preacher of the gospel who has been preaching for twenty years needs to be baptized ‘for remission of sins’ because he was baptized at eight years old?!”¹² As long as the eight year old knew what he was doing, that’s all that matters right? It’s hard for adults to admit that they might possibly have been baptized under the wrong pretense when they were a child, and they need to be baptized for the remission of sins.¹³ That is very

¹²This type of argument is no different than when someone brings up their grandma as a response to the doctrine of the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins. People ask hysterically, “Are you suggesting that my grandma is in hell?!”

¹³Here people might use the phrase “re-baptized,” but this is somewhat of a misnomer. When we say “re-baptized,” we are essentially saying that the person needs baptized “for the remission of sins” again, but you can only be

difficult to swallow and admit. I am confident that this does indeed occur. Again, the personal testimonies in chapter one are witnesses to this. Nonetheless, I'm not God, so I'm not going to attempt reading each person's heart and accusing individuals of pride and hard-headedness. But we do need to realize that herein lies a possible contributor to the problem, and we need to fairly examine ourselves, each one. Do you object to the premise of this book simply because you were baptized at a very young age, and you don't want to think about the possible implications? Are you embarrassed by the possibility of having to admit to someone that you were baptized as a child who was not actually accountable to the law of God, and your baptism was actually for the remission of discouragement?

Matthew Bates retells the story of a youth pastor named Doug who started rethinking his six year old sinner's prayer experience. He was strongly considering that he needed to get "resaved," but something was holding him back.

If I just got "saved" then I am not the spiritually mature Christian everyone thought that I was. I was a youth pastor part-time, I was preaching occasionally ... I was worried that I would lose all these things.

So then I would say to myself, "This is just crazy, I don't need to get resaved—What is going on here?"¹⁴

If this kind of thinking is the culprit of your reservations, please consider the words of Jesus: "It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:30). It's not a perfect word parallel, but it is more profitable that your pride perish than for the possibility

baptized for the remission of sins one time. If you are getting baptized a second time, it's because the first time was not for the remission of sins and this time it is.

¹⁴Bates, Matthew. *Gospel Allegiance*. Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2019, 177-178.

that souls should be led astray and the cycle continue generation after generation.

Physical Maturity

Another factor I will mention here that may possibly be contributing to the problem of baptizing children is hormones. More specifically, established research suggests that the average onset of puberty in children is much earlier today than it was fifty years ago (Weil).¹⁵ As a result, children may look older physically, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are older mentally. Looks can be deceiving, and it's at least a real possibility that Christian parents and leaders are subconsciously influenced by the eye test. The child wanting to get baptized appears more mature than they really are.

Insecurities

There are many things inside children that may be contributing to their premature desires to be baptized. Children often model the behavior of those that they look up to. Children crave praise and validation. Peer pressure may be the most powerful influence on children's behavior. This is very likely why you see groups of children often get baptized together or in close proximity to one another. The child is not going to say that peer pressure is the main motivation for their desire to be baptized even if it truly is. However, the personal testimonies in chapter one validate this conclusion. All these factors are compounded by the insecurities that abound in children. Children want to feel important and older than they really are. They desire to take part in the worship of the church and partake of the Lord's supper. I'm sure there are many other possible influencing factors, but we will call that good enough for now.

¹⁵Weil, Elizabeth. "Puberty Before Age 10: A New 'Normal'?" *New York Times*, 1 April 2012,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/magazine/puberty-before-age-10-a-new-normal.html>. Accessed 10 November 2022.

An Exception & a Plea to the Reader

I will make one qualification before wrapping up this chapter. There are young people who come forward asking to be baptized whose motivation is *not* fear of hell, peer-pressure, or insecurities. These young people separate themselves from their peers. They understand what it means to become a Christian, they recognize what sin is, the consequences of it, and how Jesus' blood atones for that sin. They are already bearing the fruit of Christian responsibilities that we will talk more about in chapter seven. I want to acknowledge these individuals, because I believe they do exist. These young people may be at a transitional age that it is difficult to determine if they are properly a *child* or *man* (*adolescent/young adult*). If it is judged that the individual is ready to be baptized, then by nature of the examples in scripture, and what we will learn about the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, it must be determined that the individual is indeed a responsible man or woman and no longer a child.

Perhaps you are reading this book, and the scenario I just described fits your state of affairs when you were baptized at a young age. As I said before, I'm not writing this book to become the self-appointed arbiter of all the personal experiences out there. That's *not* the point of this book. You will have to take the information in this book and judge your situation for yourself. So, please do this. Please don't take this book as a personal assault on your salvation. Please read it with the spirit of grace in which it was written. If something in this book makes you doubt your baptism or your long-held practice of how young people should be evaluated, then sincerely search out what it is that is making you question these things. But know that I am not writing this on a high horse to set everyone straight, and while there are some things I believe are cut and dry on this issue, there are other things that will require human judgment, your human judgment.

Summary

When you consider all the factors that we discussed in this chapter and add a tablespoon of “let’s not talk about this subject,” then it’s understandable why children might ask to be baptized when they’re not ready and why adults in the room might have their hands up in the air.

Remember what the problem is. First, Christian parents and leaders are baptizing children for the remission of discouragement more often than they are truly baptizing for the remission of sins. Second, we are baptizing children when there is absolutely no example in the New Testament of such a practice.

Finally, we reviewed many different and legitimate contributing factors to the problem of baptizing children. Here is a list of all the factors we discussed:

- Preaching on hellfire, and brimstone that is not paired with words of reassurance for the children in the audience.
- Preaching that places too much emphasis on methods of persuasion, capitalizing on people’s fear and emotional vulnerability to “obey the gospel.”
- Failure to discuss the conundrum of child baptism on a public level which is made worse by people arguing from emotion rather than from scripture and reason.
- Pride among adults who were baptized as children but who are too embarrassed to even consider that they were actually not baptized for the remission of sins.
- Premature activation of hormones within children that are leading to earlier onset of puberty and resulting in children looking more mature than they really are.
- Children’s desire to model behavior.
- Children’s desire for praise and validation.
- Peer pressure.
- Childhood insecurities.

All this troubleshooting is good and well, but now it begs the question: “What is a child?” Remember the motivation for this book as we will attempt to get to the bottom of this question in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4

Childhood Brain & Psychological Development

I don't remember how old I was precisely, but I can still visualize the first time I was embarrassed to change in front of my mom. She had bought me a new pair of blue jeans and told me to try them on. We were both in my bedroom and there was no sign that she was going to step out while I dressed down. There was an awkward pause as I thought to myself for the first time, "I don't want Mom to see me in my underwear!" Every child, if their development is not permanently retarded, will eventually experience this mental transition.

Another example from my childhood that objectively marked a change in my development was when I stopped playing with Barbie dolls. Today with all the gender confusion, society would have you believe there is nothing wrong with a grown man playing with Barbie dolls. I disagree, and so did Adolescent Aaron. I remember when my family lived in Tula, Russia, my Aunt Sharon sent me my very own Ken Barbie doll with real hair for my birthday! I had asked for one, because my sister Elizabeth was the only friend I had in the world at that time, and she had me playing with Barbies every day, but I always had to borrow her dolls to play. Well, I was a happy boy that birthday. But a time came along, when like Paul, "I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11). I stopped playing with Barbies. And no! I didn't *just* stop playing with them last year!

A child's brain is constantly growing and developing. In concurrence with that development, the child will start to "mature" mentally. He/she will stop thinking and understanding as a child (1 Corinthians 13:11). But when precisely that mental maturation reaches a point at which the child is finally morally responsible and spiritually independent; that's not quite as easy

as pinpointing when I stopped playing with Barbies and started collecting baseball cards.

In this chapter, we will examine some basic explanations of how a child's brain develops from a biological and psychological perspective. Afterward, we will compare these explanations with legal age limits found in society and see what we can learn from all this.

Brain Development

You may not believe that a study of brain and cognitive development is all that helpful in a Bible study about when we should baptize children. Nonetheless, I would encourage you to stick with me through the next few paragraphs, and I believe you will find what follows to be very interesting at the least, and quite helpful at the most.

First, let's examine the actual biological development of the human brain from the ages of seven to fourteen. I chose not to include the entire lifespan, because while that might be the most comprehensive approach, I believe the development that occurs in this age range is most helpful and pertinent to our discussion about when to baptize children. After all, it is usually within that age range of seven to fourteen that most young people are baptized in the churches of Christ.

The following information was taken directly from a website called "Cover Three" which was co-founded and directed by a naturopathic medical doctor named Garrett Wdowin.¹⁶ The stages of brain development on this website at least give an idea of what is going on in your child's brain on average from the ages of seven to fourteen.

¹⁶"Kids Brain Development: the Factors & Stages That Shape Kids' Brain." *Cover Three*, <https://coverthree.com/blogs/research/kids-brain-development>. Accessed 30 November 2022.

7-9 Years: Concrete Operational Stage

The frontal and temporal lobes of the brain grow significantly. In conjunction, gross and fine motor skills are more developed. The child's world view becomes more realistic and less fantasy oriented. The child begins formal schooling. Cognitive functions are more efficient. Arithmetic, word recall and reading become easier. The child develops inductive reasoning.

9-11 Years: Concrete Operational Stage

The frontal lobe reaches adult size and neuronal density.¹⁷ Sex hormones increase in response to pituitary and hypothalamic stimulation. The child's growth spurt starts. Secondary sexual characteristics start to form. The child becomes aware of body changes. He/she understands from other people's perspective finally.

11-14 Years: Formal Operational Stage

Significant synaptic pruning and rewiring take place due to marked hormonal changes. The limbic system develops faster than the prefrontal cortex. Components of the limbic system include: amygdala—emotions, hippocampus—memory, hypothalamus—regulates bodily functions and is influenced by the emotions. As a result, the child becomes more conscious of body image and looks. He/she starts to be influenced by peers and experiences wide mood swings. The child has a much longer attention span, can solve more complex problems, and develops abstract thinking and deductive reasoning.

¹⁷Though the frontal cortex is not fully developed until appx. age 25. Kralendijk, Bonaireht. "Maturation of the Adolescent Brain." *National Library of Medicine*, 2013, [ps://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3621648/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3621648/). Accessed 30 November 2022.

Keep in mind, these are general progressions of brain and behavior development. Development may vary from child to child, and some children may progress from one stage to the next slightly more quickly than what is “normal,” but this is what you can expect from your child generally.

Psychological Development

In college I studied nursing, and psychology was a required course within the nursing program. Both in our nursing and psychology curriculums, Erik Erikson’s stages of psychological development was a standard. His research is considered well-respected. Erikson breaks down psychological development into eight stages. Stages four and five capture the ages of five to eighteen. Here is Erikson’s explanation of child development during these stages.¹⁸

Stage 4—Industry vs. Inferiority (5-12 years)

It is at this stage that the child’s peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child’s self-esteem. The child now feels the need to win approval by demonstrating specific competencies that are valued by society and begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments. If children are encouraged and reinforced for their initiative, they begin to feel industrious (competent) and feel confident in their ability to achieve goals. If this initiative is not encouraged, if it is restricted by parents or teacher, then the child begins to feel inferior, doubting his own abilities and therefore may not reach his or her potential. If the child cannot develop the specific skill they feel society is

¹⁸The following information about Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychological Development was quoted from an article by Dr. Saul McLeod. McLeod, Saul. “Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development.” *Simply Psychology*, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

From ages 11-14 years, a child gains a much longer attention span, can solve more complex problems, and develops abstract thinking and deductive reasoning.

demanding (e.g., being athletic) then they may develop a sense of inferiority. Some failure may be necessary so that the child can develop some modesty. Again, a balance between competence and modesty is necessary. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of competence.

Stage 5—Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-18 years)

During adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood is most important. Children are becoming more independent, and begin to look at the future in terms of career, relationships, families, housing, etc. The individual wants to belong to a society and fit in. This is a *major stage of development (emphasis mine)* where the child has to learn the roles he will occupy as an adult. It is during this stage that the adolescent will re-examine his identity and try to find out exactly who he or she is. Erikson suggests that two identities are involved: the sexual and the occupational. According to Bee (1992), what should happen at the end of this stage is “a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one’s appropriate sex role”. During this stage the body image of the adolescent changes. Erikson claims that the adolescent may feel uncomfortable about their body for a while until they can adapt and “grow into” the changes ... During this period, they explore possibilities and begin to form their own identity based upon the outcome of their explorations. Failure to establish a sense of identity within society (“I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up”) can lead to role confusion. Role confusion involves the individual not being sure about themselves or their place in society. In response to role confusion or identity crisis, an adolescent may begin to experiment with different lifestyles (e.g., work, education, or political activities).

Okay, that’s enough psychology for one book on baptism. What do we take away from comparing both Wdowin and Erikson’s explanation of childhood brain and psychological development?

We learn that there is still significant brain development that occurs from roughly the ages of twelve to eighteen years, but it is during these years that a child begins to think abstractly, gains the ability to reason deductively,¹⁹ becomes more independent, make life-changing decisions, and loses the formal title “child.”

Legal Age Requirements

Society recognizes that there is a significant cognitive change that occurs during adolescence (12-18 years), and with that change comes more responsibility and freedom. So, let’s look at the age limits society has placed on young people in our society and see how this stacks up with what we learned about child brain and psychological development. The following facts all pertain to the state of Tennessee, where I live. Certain age limits may vary slightly from state to state, but generally, these are a good representation of legal age limits across the United States.

- **14 Years Old**—Working Age²⁰
**with significant restrictions*
- **14 Years Old**—Medical Treatment Age²¹
- **15 Years Old**—Driving Age
- **16 Years Old**—Medical Consent Age²²

¹⁹Deductive reasoning is a logical approach where you progress from general ideas to specific conclusions. It’s often contrasted with inductive reasoning, where you start with specific observations and form general conclusions. Bhandari, Pritha. “What Is Deductive Reasoning?” *Scribbr*, <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/deductive-reasoning/>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²⁰“Child Labor Act.” <https://www.tn.gov/workforce/employees/labor-laws/labor-laws-redirect/child-labor.html>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²¹Patients may be treated by a provider as young as fourteen years old if the provider deems the patient mentally mature enough to make own medical decisions.

“Obtaining Informed Consent for Children and Adolescents.”

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/Mature_Minor_Doctrine.pdf. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²²“Obtaining Informed Consent for Children and Adolescents.”

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/mentalhealth/documents/Pages_from_CY_BPGs_363-366.pdf. Accessed 20 October 2022.

- **17 Years Old**—Marriage License Age²³
- **18 Years Old**—Military Enlistment Age²⁴
- **18 Years Old**—Tattoo Age in Tennessee²⁵
- **18 Years Old**—Age of Consent for Sex²⁶
- **21 Years Old**—Drinking Age²⁷
- **21 Years Old**—Tobacco Age²⁸
- **21 Years Old**—Vape Sales and Possession Age²⁹

This is not an exhaustive list of age limits. You could also look up the legal voting age, the age for prosecution as an adult, gambling age, age advisories for movies, and the list goes on. This is all very interesting at the least and helpful at the most.

²³“Minimum Age of Applicants.” *The University of Tennessee*, <https://www.ctas.tennessee.edu/eli/minimum-age-applicants>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²⁴“State Guard.” <https://www.tn.gov/military/who-we-are/state-guard.html#:~:text=Must%20be%20between%20age%2018%20and%2067>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²⁵*A minor can get a tattoo “to cover up an existing tattoo” at sixteen years of age with parental consent.*

“Tennessee Code Annotated.”

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/Tattoo_law.pdf. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²⁶Age varies per state. In many states, the age of consent is sixteen (see Alabama, Alaska, etc.). “In Ohio, sexual intercourse with someone under 13 years of age is illegal regardless of the age of the defendant.”

“Statutory Rape: A Guide to State Laws and Reporting Requirements.” *ASPE*, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/statutory-rape-guide-state-laws-reporting-requirements-1>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²⁷“Tennessee.” file:///C:/Users/tncgc/Downloads/Tennessee_June-2019.pdf. Accessed 20 October 2022.

²⁸“Tobacco Enforcement: Halting Tobacco Sales to Minors.”

[https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/businesses/halting-tobacco-sales-to-minors.html#:~:text=Tobacco%20Enforcement%20FAQ&text=What%20is%20the%20legal%20age,\(21\)%20years%20of%20age](https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/businesses/halting-tobacco-sales-to-minors.html#:~:text=Tobacco%20Enforcement%20FAQ&text=What%20is%20the%20legal%20age,(21)%20years%20of%20age). Accessed by 20 October 2022.

²⁹“E-cigarette Regulations – Tennessee.” *Public Health Law Center*, <https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/resources/us-e-cigarette-regulations-50-state-review/tn>. Accessed 20 October 2022.

While I'm on this particular point, there is one more piece of information I want to share from the *Legal Information Institute*. It had this to say about the “legal age.”

The legal age is also known as the age of legal majority. This is the age at which a person gains the legal status of an adult. The legal age is set by state law and can differ from state to state. However, almost all states set the base legal age as 18 years old. This is the age at which a person gains control over their own actions and affairs and becomes responsible for the decisions they make. Those past the age of legal majority are usually tried as adults when charged with crimes.

Once a person reaches the legal age of their state, they may enter into legally enforceable agreements. *Minors do not have the legal capacity to enter into a binding contract.*³⁰

Remember this tidbit about not having the capacity to enter into binding contracts. I will appeal back to this later on in the book. But for now, let's review what we have learned here.

Summary

If the legal system has any room at the table of discussion here, it indicates that around the age of fourteen years old, a child is an adolescent who is transitioning into adulthood slowly. They will eventually be able to do everything that a fully mature adult can do, but the initiation of that freedom and transition does not start until at least fourteen years of age. This is in the same ballpark as the twelve to eighteen year old age range that we learned in regard to brain and psychological development. No doubt, these legal limits are set, to some degree, based on what we know about the cognitive development that takes place in adolescence.

³⁰“Legal Age.” *Legal Information Institute*, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/legal_age#:~:text=However%2C%20almost%20all%20states%20set,adults%20when%20charged%20with%20crimes. Accessed 20 October 2022.

In the next chapter, we will look at scripture and see if we can identify at what age a child goes from being a child to being a spiritually responsible, young adult. Will scripture add up with what we have learned from biology, psychology, and society?

Chapter 5

What Is a Child?

What is a child? That's the million-dollar question. The fact that it is taking two whole chapters to answer this question is either a testament to my own ignorance or how truly complex the question is (or both). To this point, my premise has been that there are no examples of children being baptized in the New Testament scriptures; therefore, the scriptures seem to indicate that such a practice is without biblical precedent. While it may be difficult to answer the question briefly, precisely, and cleanly, I full heartedly believe that the Holy Spirit's word would not abandon us on an island when it comes to such a life-changing issue. In this chapter, our goal is to search the scriptures and see what we find.

The Greek

Unfortunately, doing a Greek word study will not settle the issue. There are three main Greek words that are translated as "child" in scripture,³¹ but none of these words reveal an actual age at which a child transitions to adulthood. The same thing could be said for the word "adult." The Greek word indicating an adult would be the word translated as "man,"³² but again, an exhaustive search of this and related words will not reveal an exact age at which a child becomes a man or adult³³. Though, that's not to say that looking up these words is altogether unhelpful to the study.

³¹The words are *teknon*, *huios*, and *pais* and the various forms that they take. Vine, W. E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Lynchburg, The Old-Time Gospel Hour

³²The words are *anthropos*, *aner*, *tis*, and *teleios*, with the first two words being the most common. (Ibid.)

³³Interestingly, a friend of mine named Stéphane Dédéyan did an exhaustive search of the word "*aner*." For each occurrence of the word in the New Testament, he lists the verse and then interprets whether or not a man or child is indicated by the context.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:20, Paul says, “Brethren, do not be *children* in *understanding*; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.” This verse at least corroborates what we learned in the previous chapter: children develop cognitively as they transition into adulthood. The child is eventually deemed “mature” as their ability to “understand” and reason responsibly grows.

I will say one last thing about the Greek word for *man*, which is a reiteration of something I said at the end of chapter three. If a young person is deemed to be responsible enough to become a Christian, it would seemingly have to be concluded that the young person is no longer a child but falls somewhere in the broad category of whatever “man” or “woman” is. When reading the book of Acts, the only persons baptized are men and women respectively. Consider Acts 8:12 which says, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both *men* (*aner*) and *women* were baptized.” The baptism of men and women to the exclusion of children is what we see consistently in the book of Acts. “Men” includes young men, old men, and possibly adolescents, but we can be certain it does not include children,³⁴ whatever a child is.

Dédéyan, Stéphane. “Greek Word aner (man).” <https://biblediscoveries.net/age-of-baptism/childhood-and-adulthood-in-the-new-testament/greek-word-aner-man/>. Accessed 22 October 2022.

³⁴“anēr.” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g435/kjv/tr/0-1/>. Accessed 30 November 2022.

Figure 5.1³⁵

COMPARISON OF GREEK TERMS	
Child <i>teknon, huios, and pais</i>	Man <i>anthropos, aner, tis, and teleios</i>
Includes infants, toddlers, and children.	Includes old men, young men, and possibly adolescents.
<i>In Bible times, a person was either a child or a man. There were only two categories of classification in the vocabulary of the New Testament Greek.</i>	

Specific “Age” Passages

With the study of biblical Greek proving mostly unhelpful, we will move on to passages that talk about children. There are at least four passages I find to be particularly helpful in this pursuit.

Passage #1—Mark 5:41-42

Then He took the *child* by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to

³⁵It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine how *adolescents* were grouped in New Testament Greek. “Adolescent” is a more modern term and category for which there is no Greek parallel. It is my belief that the adolescent transition phase is a period in which maturation, accountability, and responsibility increases at a rapid and significant rate, so much so that, a young person in this age range could have been included in classifications of “men and women” in the New Testament Greek.

you, arise.” Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was *twelve* years of age. (Mark 5:41-42)

This passage is very helpful. Here, the text brings to our attention two key facts: 1) Jairus’ daughter is a child, 2) the child is twelve years old. If you continue to read Mark’s gospel, you will eventually come to Jesus blessing the little children. Jesus tells His audience, “Let the *little children* come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). The phrase translated “little children” in this verse is the same Greek word (*paidion*) translated “child” in Mark 5:41. Putting these two verses together, we learn that a twelve year old can be classified as a little child in New Testament times, and “of such is the kingdom of God,” meaning that children are innocent and in a saved condition. In Matthew’s parallel, Jesus puts it this way, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these *little ones*, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). The best I can tell from these passages, a twelve year old *can* be considered a child, at least in some cases, and “of the kingdom of God.”

To be fair, this verse alone does not reveal to us whether or not Jairus’ twelve year old daughter was immature, average, or mature for her age. We don’t know much about the cognitive development of this child. All we learn is that a twelve year old can be considered a child according to scripture, and I believe it is safe to conclude that this is true of *most*, though not necessarily *all* twelve year olds.

Passage #2—Luke 2:41-52

His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was *twelve years old*, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the *Boy* Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day’s journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So

when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.” And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that *I must be about My Father’s business?*” But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was *subject* to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus *increased in wisdom and stature*, and in favor with God and men. (Luke 2:41-52)

Key Phrases:

- “twelve years old” (verse 41)
- “child” (verse 43)³⁶
- “I must be about My Father’s business.” (verse 49)
- “[Jesus] was subject to them.” (verse 51)
- “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature.” (verse 52)

Here, you will notice again a twelve year old who is called a “child.” To be sure, this is no ordinary child. It would be entirely appropriate to conclude about the Son of God in a twelve year old body that He was precocious.³⁷ In fact, verses 46-48 draw attention to Jesus’ precociousness by mentioning how the teachers in the temple and Mary and Joseph were all “astonished” and “amazed” at Jesus’ understanding and answers. Now, there are at least two ways to interpret this story about Jesus at twelve

³⁶The NKJV translation of verse 43 “boy” comes from the word “pais” and is properly translated “child” just as well. Compare with the KJV translation.

³⁷Precocious means to exhibit mature qualities at an unusually early age. “Precocious.” *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*, Online, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/precocious>. Accessed 28 October 2022.

years old in regards to what it reveals about children and accountability.

Interpretation #1

A brother told me very stately: “There ain’t a child out there more precocious than Jesus.” He was saying this in response to parents who claim that their child is extremely precocious and ready to become a Christian at the age of nine or ten or eleven years old. I have heard multiple Christians tell me that they believe this account of Jesus at twelve years old was not placed in the Bible by coincidence. “It means *something*,” they say. They believe this story was specifically placed in the Bible as an indicator to when a child is mentally mature enough to “be about his/her Father’s business.”

Interpretation #2

Others read Luke 2:41-52 and do not find it to be placed in scripture as an indicator of when a child becomes accountable. This interpretation would say that the specification of Jesus’ age here is just a detail given to color in the picture of an event that happened in Jesus’ life, an event that bridges the gap between His birth and preaching ministry. Verse 49 does not say that Jesus *started* being about His Father’s business at age twelve, it simply says that He *was* about it at that age. Verse 51 does not say that Jesus *started* to be subject to His parents at this age, it simply says that He *was* subject to them. According to this view, there is nothing in Luke 2:41-52 that proves age twelve is the age of transition to adulthood. It is interesting but inconclusive.

You will have to decide which of these interpretations harmonizes the most with scripture and is fair in its conclusions. I’m not going to do that for you here. I will simply say this: Combining what we learn about what a child is from Mark 5:41-42, 10:14, and Luke 2:41-52, it would seem that age twelve is a good ballpark to be assessing the transition from childhood to adulthood. Take note, I am *not* saying that an individual less than twelve years old cannot prove accountable, responsible, understanding, and ready to become a Christian. I am simply

saying this age appears to be a general window when that transition takes place. This also harmonizes with what we learned about this age range from the previous chapter.

Passage #3—2 Chronicles 34:1-3

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the *eighth year of his reign*, while he was still young, *he began to seek the God* of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. (2 Chronicles 34:1-3)

If you do the math on King Josiah, he officially became king when he was eight years old, but he began seeking the Lord when he was sixteen years old. He likely had some counselors actually ruling the kingdom for him when he was eight, but clearly he started taking an active part in the responsibilities of the kingdom when he was an adolescent.³⁸ The description of King Josiah beginning to seek after the Lord sounds a lot like the description of Jesus increasing in wisdom and stature. Josiah's age upon seeking the Lord also falls in line with what we learned about brain and psychological development and even our domestic laws for legal age limits. Bottom line: King Josiah starts taking on spiritual responsibilities around the age that one would expect, given what we have learned to this point. Does that mean sixteen years old is the age that children need to get baptized? No. This simply adds scriptural reinforcement to the idea that children

³⁸The reign of King Joash is evidence of a young king who had someone else helping him rule the kingdom at a very young age. In 2 Chon. 24:1-3 that Joash was seven years old when he became king, but he was only faithful to God as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive, and Jehoiada chose wives for King Joash. A similar arrangement was likely the case when King Josiah began his reign at eight years old.

begin to cognitively transition in a significant way around the years of twelve to eighteen. This is a general time period in childhood development where a child starts putting away childish things and starts bearing adult responsibilities and actively seeking after God.

Passage #4—Numbers 14:29

The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from *twenty years old and above*. (Numbers 14:29)

It is hard to have a conversation about the age of accountability without someone spitting out Numbers 14:29. This verse clearly indicates that a young adult of twenty years old was, without question, accountable for the sin of complaining that was committed in the wilderness. I believe it would be proper to draw the conclusion that this scripture at least gives an *upper age limit* for when a young person is undoubtedly accountable to the law of God.³⁹ In other words, if a young person is twenty years old, they need to be “obeying the gospel.”

None of these four passages would indicate an *exact* age at which a young person is suddenly accountable and ready to become a Christian, but they do provide a fair reference for Christian parents and leaders to have in evaluating between a child and an adolescent/young adult.

³⁹Disclaimer: there are some persons who are mentally handicapped and never become accountable to the law of God. This statement about an “upper age limit” is not meant to include such individuals.

The Age of Accountability

A quick Google search of “the age of accountability” will reveal a host of online articles debating this concept. I have intentionally used the phrase sparingly to this point, as I think the phrase does more harm than good. The very idea of an age of accountability suggests there is some magical age at which, when the clock strikes 12:00 AM, the child is suddenly accountable in a way they were not at 11:59 PM. In this case, what I sarcastically told my high school graduating class in 2011 had some relevance: “In two weeks we are going to be mature just like that (*snaps fingers*).” Of course, this is nonsense. And while this may not be what most people suggest by the phrase “age of accountability,” it is still all that most people will hear and envision.

The Level of Accountability

An arguably better phrase to incorporate on this topic of discussion is “level of accountability.”⁴⁰ This phrase suggests that there is no magical age, but there is a point in time that a child becomes accountable to the law of God and bears responsibility in taking up his cross and following Jesus. How one determines when a young person has actually reached a proper level of accountability is case specific, not age specific. Parents and church leaders are tasked with taking the information God has given us, and making a responsible judgment as to whether or not the young person under consideration has reached a responsible level of accountability.

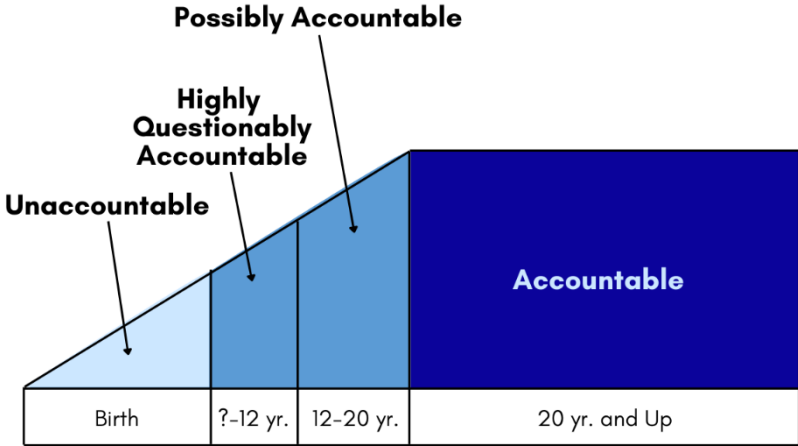
Figure 5.2 provides a visual chart that combines all the evidence from the last two chapters and plots the progression of accountability in a young person from pre-adolescence through adolescence.

⁴⁰Friel, Todd. “Great News: Babies Who Die Go to Heaven.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Wretched, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-1dyNGr4KA>.

How one determines when a young person has actually reached a proper level of accountability is case specific, not age specific.

Figure 5.2⁴¹

ACCOUNTABILITY GROWTH CHART



Notice, the triangular half of the diagram expresses a steady increase in cognitive and moral development. The chart shows that as one approaches the upper limit (twenty and up), the odds of accountability increase until *absolute* accountability is reached. This chart assumes all other criteria are met including what would legally be termed *competency*. Absolute accountability arguably occurs around age twenty based on the evidence of Numbers 14:29. The small window of time marked “highly questionably accountable” is in reference to children below the age of twelve. This is not to say that any child below the age of twelve is not accountable, but based on all the evidence in scripture foremost, and psychology and science secondarily, children in this highly questionable window should be examined closely. This highly questionable window is where the guidelines from chapter seven will become especially helpful.

⁴¹This chart is courtesy of Adam Warren. Adam is a good friend, medical doctor, and pharmacist. He kindly read this material on accountability and suggested the visual diagram.

Summary

When we take all the findings from the last two chapters and put them together, we can now answer the question a little more precisely: “What is a child?” According to scripture, the answer is as follows:

- Study of New Testament Greek is helpful, but inconclusive in answering this question.
- A twelve year old is sometimes called a child according to scripture (Mark 5:41-42).
- Jesus (twelve years) and King Josiah (sixteen years) give us good examples of young people who started seeking after the Lord and increasing in spiritual wisdom and understanding.
- The age range of twelve to twenty years is a good reference point for when we should be evaluating whether or not a young person has reached a level of accountability.⁴² Age twelve is not a hard lower limit but a general window.
- Everything we learn from Mark 5:41-42, Luke 2:41-52, 2 Chronicles 34:1-3, and Numbers 14:29 is right in line with what we have learned about childhood brain and psychological development and legal age limits in society.

If what we have learned to this point is logical and true, then we should pause when an individual well below the age of twelve comes to us wanting baptized. The things we will learn in the following chapters should add to this caution. Chapters seven and

⁴²For the purposes of this book and for the sake of simplicity, if the word “child” is used, it is referring to someone under the age of twelve years old; however, as this chapter recognized, this is not a hard and fast magical age. Each child is determined to be a man (adolescent or young adult) on a case-by-case basis. I am allowing for the possibility that there are individuals below the age of twelve who may prove accountable and responsible enough to be classified as a man or woman, using the two-category classification language of the New Testament Greek.

eight will prove especially helpful in knowing what to say to these children when they do come asking.

Chapter 6

The New Covenant & Infant Membership

In this chapter we will examine what a covenant is, what God promised would be *new* about the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, and why understanding all this is so pertinent to the subject of baptizing children. I believe if people truly understand what the New Covenant is that young people are entering into when they are baptized, then they will understand why people such as myself have concern when *children* are baptized into this covenant. This chapter may not have the sobering effect that I intend, but if it fails, the failure lies in the writer and not in the truths under discussion.

What Is a Covenant?

Put simply, a covenant is an agreement between two parties. There is a problem with this definition though. It's *too* simple. Unfortunately, I believe most Christians and Bible readers think of a covenant as nothing more than an agreement. If that is all a covenant is, then I made many covenants when I was a child. I made covenants with my friends Austin and Jesse all the time when we agreed to trade Hot Wheels during our make-believe games as car owners and salesmen. But those weren't covenants in reality. A covenant is an agreement, but it's so much more than *just* an agreement.

To be more precise, *a covenant is a bond in blood between two parties that is sealed with an oath of faithfulness to the terms of the covenant and is predicated on blessings for remaining faithful to those terms and curses if unfaithful.*

This definition is the result of much tweaking here and there as I have studied the covenants of scripture in my brief lifetime.⁴³

⁴³I originally used this definition by O. Palmer Robertson: "The phrase bond-in-blood expresses the ultimacy of the commitment between God and man in

You will not find such a nice and neat definition of *covenant* in the pages of scripture, but everything within this definition is somewhere in scripture to be sure.

Notice a few things about covenants from the Bible in general, and then I will bring attention to those common elements we find in covenants sealed between God and man. Ultimately, we will discover those same common elements present in the New Covenant. The following is an incomplete list of covenants in scripture made between man and man.

- Jacob & Laban (Genesis 31:44-54)
- Abimelech & Abraham (Genesis 26:25-34)
- Gibeon & Israel (Joshua 9:14-15; 2 Samuel 21:1-14)
- David & Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-4)
- David & Abner (2 Samuel 3:7-21)

For brevity's sake, we will only examine one covenant from this list: the Jacob-Laban covenant. The terms of the covenant were: 1) Jacob would not hurt Laban's daughters (verse 50), 2) Jacob would not marry any other women (verse 50), and 3) neither Jacob nor Laban would do harm to the other (verse 52). Laban then said, "The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us.' And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac (God)" (verse 53). Along with the oath they swore before God, they sealed the covenant agreement with the blood of a sacrificed animal, and all the men ate a meal to show fellowship or participation in this new covenant arrangement (verse 54). The blessings of the covenant were implied to be that God as the witness of all this would providentially bless both Jacob and Laban if they remained faithful on their end of the agreement (see verse 48-50). The curse of the covenant was

the covenantal context. By initiating covenants, God never enters into a casual or informal relationship with man. Instead, the implications of His bonds extend to the ultimate issues of life and death."

Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Christ of the Covenants*. Philipsburg, P & R Publishing, 1980, 8-9.

implied to be providential curses from God if either party was unfaithful. They joined hands to create a heap of rocks so that whenever they saw this monument (sign) they would be reminded of the covenant they had entered into with an oath (verse 45-48).

The covenant between Jacob and Laban plainly lays out all the trappings of a covenant that you expect to see after reading through the Bible, and for this reason it serves as an excellent segue into covenants formed between God and man. There are four major covenants between God and man found in scripture:

- Noahic Covenant (Genesis 8-9)
- Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15, 17 & 22)
- Mosaic or Old Covenant (Exodus 19-24, 31)
- New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8-9)

Five Criterion of a Covenant

A careful reading of these covenants made between God and man will reveal five main criteria of a covenant, all of which were also present in the Jacob-Laban covenant.

Five Criteria of a Covenant⁴⁴

1. Oath
2. Sacrifice
3. Blood
4. Token
5. Meal

⁴⁴Originally, I included Terms & Conditions as a sixth criterion of a covenant. However, the Noahic Covenant is unique by the fact that it was an unconditional covenant. Therefore, this was left off.

1. Oath

One way to think of a covenant is as an oath. This is manifested when we see how the words *oath* and *covenant* are used interchangeably. When Abimelech goes to make a covenant with Isaac in Genesis 26, he says, “Let there now be an *oath* between us, between you and us; and let us make a *covenant* with you ...” (verse 28). When God speaks retrospectively of Israel breaking the covenant he had entered into with God, God says, “As I live, surely My *oath* which he despised, and My *covenant* which he broke ...” (Ezekiel 17:19). A covenant without an oath is basically what me and my friends were doing when we played Hot Wheels. The oath is one of the primary items that makes this agreement between two parties so sober. In Joshua 24:14-25 we see an example of the oath Israel took when the Mosaic Covenant was renewed before entering Canaan. That oath was summed up in the statement, “We will serve the Lord!” (verse 21) after which Joshua declared that the people were witnesses unto themselves that they had sworn this oath before God. The people responded with, “We are witnesses!” (verse 22). Remember this point. Put it to memory. Whenever a person enters into a covenant with God, the person is swearing an oath of fidelity.

2. Sacrifice

All the major covenants between God and man involved some type of a sacrifice. The book of Jeremiah gives insight into the significance of the animal sacrifice. God declares against Israel, “And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they *cut the calf in two* and *passed between the parts of it*—the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—I will give them into the hand of their enemies ...” (Jeremiah 34:18-20). The symbolism in the act of passing between the carcasses of the sacrificial animals seems to be graphically clear: “May what happened to these animals happen to me if I am unfaithful to the

Whenever a person enters into a covenant with God, the person is swearing an oath of fidelity.

covenant.” God carries out this same ritual with Abraham when sealing the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15:9-18. Jesus is the sacrifice in the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15). When a person enters into a covenant with God today, the person is agreeing to endure a death equivalent to what Christ died on the cross (i.e., hell) should he/she be unfaithful to the covenant.

3. Blood

The blood of the covenant is very closely associated with the sacrifice. Blood is significant in scripture because it represents life (Leviticus 17:11). The shedding of blood represented a judgment on life. This made the covenant operative, symbolized the seriousness of the covenant, and signified the penalty for breaking the agreement. When Jesus says at the Last Supper “for this is My blood of the new covenant” (Matthew 26:28), He is echoing the same words that Moses spoke at the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus 24:8. The blood of the covenant makes plain that this “bond in blood” is a life and death matter. This elucidates what Paul meant when he said, “Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and *blood* of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27).

4. Token

The token or sign of the covenant was created so that neither party would forget the oath they had taken; it is established as a memorial. This is no clearer than in the Noahic Covenant. “It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh ...” (Genesis 9:14-15). The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision (Genesis 17:10-11). The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-18). The sign of the New Covenant is the cup of blessing shared in the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:20). When a Christian partakes of the cup each first day of the week, he/she is reminded of the covenant he entered at baptism.

5. Meal

While a fellowship meal is not specifically mentioned in the creation of each of the four major covenants between God and man, it is a common element of covenants throughout scripture. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel “ate and drank” when they met God on top of Mt. Sinai to seal the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 24:11). The Lord’s Supper is a covenant meal (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:27-29). When a Christian eats this meal with the church, he is showing covenant fellowship with the other covenant members including God. When Jesus said to His disciples, “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom,” (Matthew 26:29) He is indicating that He has spiritual fellowship with Christians when they observe this covenant meal in the church today.

The New Covenant Oath

If all covenants involve an oath of faithfulness, what is the oath of the New Covenant? Perhaps all the interspersed talk about oaths and swearing up to this point has given you pause. For approximately six years or more, I have preached these five criterion of a covenant from pulpits of churches. Never has anyone ever come up to me after preaching these things and objected to the statement that all covenants between God and man involve an oath. However, I have only just recently made the connection that Christians are actually swearing an oath when they confess Christ as the Son of God. “Now, I don’t know about that,” people object. “Why all this talk about swearing?” I have been asked in response. Many Christians have been taught their whole life that swearing is always wrong, whatsoever, without exception. However, I believe people’s strong conviction on this point about swearing is, most often, not the result of careful biblical interpretation; it’s simply what people have been told their entire life.

In recent proximity to writing this book, I gave two sermons entitled “Don’t Swear at All” and “The Good Confession.”⁴⁵ In those sermons I made the case that when Jesus says, “But I say to you, do not swear at all ...” in Matthew 5:34, He is not forbidding all swearing in all circumstances, without exception. There are several reasons for this conclusion:

- 1) First, in Matthew 5:34-37, Jesus goes on to clarify His statement “do not swear at all” by showing how people in that time and culture had created an approved system of false swearing (see Matthew 23:16-22). Jesus was not condemning *all* swearing but *false* swearing.
- 2) Second, God the Father, Jesus Christ, Paul, angels, and Christians all swore righteously during both the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁶
- 3) Third, Isaiah prophesied that Gentiles would swear allegiance to God in 45:23, and Paul quotes this prophecy as fulfilled in the church when people “confess God” (see Romans 14:11).
- 4) Fourth, Christians are part of the New Covenant, and all covenants are established with an oath; thus, all swearing can’t possibly be *off the table*.

If all these four observations are true, then Jesus’ command about swearing must have been a limited command. I believe a careful examination of Matthew 5:33-37 will reveal that Jesus was forbidding swearing regularly, trivially, and/or with evil motives in order to circumvent the force of the oath.

Now, back to the original question: what is the oath of the New Covenant? The oath that Christians swear is essentially the same

⁴⁵Batthey, Aaron. “Don’t Swear at All.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Chapel Grove Church of Christ, 26 September 2022, <https://youtu.be/c7lyhzNBOAY>.
Batthey, Aaron. “The Good Confession.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Chapel Grove Church of Christ, 29 September 2022, <https://youtu.be/pWb1Cqax9bg>.

⁴⁶Matthew 26:63-64; Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:18,23; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5,10; Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Acts 18:18; Revelation 10:5-6; Hebrews 6:13

oath as the one that Israel swore in Joshua 24:14 when they said, “We will serve the Lord!” (verse 21). When Christians make “the good confession,” they are swearing an oath of *allegiance* to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The following five passages, when read successively, make a strong case for this conclusion: Isaiah 65:16; 45:22-23; Romans 14:11; Phil. 2:9-11; Hebrews 4:14. The good confession is a pledge of allegiance to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and is equivalent to saying, “I believe Jesus is the King, and I will serve Him faithfully.”⁴⁷

If you don’t yet understand why all of this is relevant to the discussion about baptizing children, I encourage you to consider one more teaching from Jeremiah 31, and then we will put it all together.

Jeremiah 31 & Infant Membership

In Jeremiah’s day, the nation of Israel was in spiritual shambles. Jeremiah’s sermon portfolio mainly consisted of doom, gloom, and more doom. Jeremiah ate people’s tears and emotions for breakfast. But occasionally, even Jeremiah smiled. Any reader of Jeremiah 31 can imagine that’s what the Weeping Prophet was doing when he wrote verses 31-34. He starts off by announcing, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (verse 31). What follows in the next three verses is a contrast between the Old Covenant and this New covenant. The Lord focuses His list of contrasts on the nature and conditions of this New Covenant. Here are the contrasts:

- I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts.
- I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

⁴⁷The following verses are all helpful in understanding exactly what a person is confessing or should confess at baptism: Hosea 2:2,21-23; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Matthew 26:11; John 19:6-11; 1 John 4:15; Matthew 16:15-16; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9.

- No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

Because of the nature and conditions for entering the Old Mosaic Covenant, the nation of Jeremiah’s day was infected by covenant members who had *no knowledge of God, no heart for God, and therefore, no loyalty to God*. This was primarily due to the fact that *children* who did not know God and had not yet cultivated a heart for God and His law were made members of the Old Mosaic Covenant by means of circumcision on the eighth day after birth. God was saying the New Covenant would do away with these problems that came with infant membership.⁴⁸ According to verse 34, a child in the Old Covenant, who had no knowledge or loyalty to God, would grow up and eventually need to be taught to “know the Lord!” Do you see the problem with this? God says, “No more of that! In the New Covenant, everyone in the covenant will already know Me before they enter into it” (verse 34).⁴⁹

Notice one more item before moving on. According to God in Jeremiah 31:34, the condition for covenant membership is not acknowledging “I’ve sinned, and I’m going to hell if I die tonight without getting baptized.” While that may be important to recognize, God says the main factor is whether or not the person “know(s) the Lord.” I believe this at least incorporates that the person understands Jesus as the Christ (the anointed king); they understand the gospel is the good news that Jesus is the ruling King; they understand what that implies in terms of submission to His kingship; and they understand they are taking a pledge/oath of faithfulness to the King when they become a Christian. This is not asking too much. These are basic, entry-level facts.

⁴⁸This is not to say that there is no problem of New Covenant members who have no knowledge, heart, or loyalty to God. But the nature of the New Covenant and the conditions for entering into it were constructed by God in such a way, that, fundamentally and ideally, this problem would be resolved.

⁴⁹Author’s Translation (AT)

Does your child understand these fundamentals of what they are doing when they enter the New Covenant that Jeremiah prophesied about? Even if they can think abstractly enough to comprehend these things to some faint degree, are they mature enough to be entering into a covenant? Does God deem a child spiritually responsible enough to swear an oath of allegiance? According to society, “Minors do not have the legal capacity to enter into a binding contract.”⁵⁰ Is it logically consistent to argue that *children* who aren’t responsible enough to go to the grocery store by themselves are somehow spiritually responsible enough to enter a covenant that is sealed by blood? Being a little more generous, what about children who aren’t responsible enough to stay at home alone while their parents go to the grocery store? There seems to be a disconnect between scripture and logic on one hand and what we commonly see practiced on the other hand.

Summary

Hopefully, now you can understand what all this covenant discussion has to do with baptizing children. Did you learn anything about covenants in this chapter? Did anything you just learned test long-held beliefs you have held about what it means to become a Christian? If the answer in your head is anything short of “No,” then please keep reading.

In this chapter we learned the following:

- A covenant is a bond in blood between two parties that is sealed with an oath of faithfulness to the terms of the covenant and is predicated on blessings for remaining faithful to those terms and curses if unfaithful.
- Covenants are a life and death matter.
- Every covenant involves an oath of faithfulness to the covenant.

⁵⁰“Legal Age.” *Legal Information Institute*, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/legal_age#:~:text=However%2C%20almost%20all%20states%20set,adults%20when%20charged%20with%20crimes. Accessed 20 October 2022.

- The oath of the New Covenant is a pledge of allegiance to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's equivalent to saying, "I believe Jesus is the King, and I will serve Him faithfully."
- God, through Jeremiah, said the New Covenant would not have infant members.
- In the New Covenant, all covenant members already "know the Lord."

Chapter 7

Thirteen Guidelines for Baptism

It's really easy to say, "You're doing that wrong." It's harder to offer a constructive and encouraging, "Here's how you should do it." While this chapter doesn't have all the answers, and I won't pretend that the guidelines for baptizing a young person are a one-size-fits-all cookie cutter set, this chapter at least attempts to give some type of *how to* answer to the dilemma.

No One Said It Was Easy

After having many conversations with Christian parents on this subject, I feel rather unqualified to be offering advice like "Here's how you should go about baptizing your child." I don't have any kids. I don't have any personal skin in the game you could say, outside of the fact that I am very passionate that God's will be done, and I have great concern for the long-term salvation of all people to include our children in the church. People have told me on countless occasions and in many different contexts, "You'll understand it when you have your own kids one day. Things change. And it's different when it's your kid." Whatever the *it* factor may be that's under consideration, I agree one hundred percent with parents when they say this. I am not at all discounting the fears and anxieties this whole subject brings to actual parents. I can't empathize enough with parents who go to bed worrying every single night about their child's soul. Many times, it's not necessarily that the parent(s) are worried their child is currently in an unsaved condition. The parents may have no doubt that their child would go to heaven if they died in the middle of the night. Rather, they are worried that their child won't have the fervent desire to become a Christian down the road when it does matter and when they aren't innocent and irresponsible any longer. If this describes where you're at while reading this, I wish there was something I could do to help bear this burden and relieve these anxieties. Unfortunately, I'm afraid

that worry comes pre-packaged with parenting, and the best I can tell, no one can do the worrying for you.

While I can't take your worry away and bear it on my own shoulders, there is something that I can do, even as a single man with no kids. I can study the subject and write a book to give Christian parents *some* type of resource where hardly any exists currently. While writing this resource, I can do my utmost best to let God's word steer the ship and take priority in answering any questions and providing any guidelines. That's what I've tried to do. I've tried to be scriptural about everything, and I've tried to prevent emotional arguments from obscuring the truth. For the guidelines that follow, we will need God-given scripture, God-given logic, and God-given intuition.

Thirteen Guidelines for Baptism

Before getting right into the guidelines, we need to be reminded of a few things already taught in this book. First, there is no magical age at which a child turns into an adult overnight and is ready to get baptized. I made the case in chapter five that a young person well below the age of twelve years old is in a window of development that would properly be called *highly questionably accountable*. At the end of that chapter, I stated that young people below and around the age of twelve need to be closely examined for spiritual competency and that the guidelines in this current chapter would prove especially helpful in determining that conclusion. Second, the covenant concept is very important in establishing guidelines. In chapter six we examined what a covenant is and how this life and death "bond in blood" is not child's play. Third, the question is not, "Does my child understand what he/she is doing?" The question is, "Is my child accountable to the law of God and responsible enough to take a covenantal oath?" I am *not* saying the first question is altogether irrelevant and unimportant. I *am* saying the first question doesn't probe far enough. I cannot say it enough, the real question is one of *accountability* and *responsibility*. Though a child can recite how baptism is for the remission of sins all day long, and they can talk about how they have sinned and are bound for hell if they

died right then, if they are neither accountable nor responsible enough to enter into the New Covenant, they are not ready to be baptized. Now the question is, how do you know if they are accountable and responsible enough?

Guideline #1

Ask the question, "Do I believe my child would go to hell if he/she died right now?" This question and its answer are based on God-given intuition.⁵¹ I've heard of six and seven year old children getting baptized in the church of Christ before. I've never met a six or seven year old that I was concerned was unsaved and going to hell. Perhaps I'm too confident in this personal judgment, but I believe if everyone is being honest with themselves, they will agree. I believe I can honestly and unhesitatingly say the same thing about any nine or ten year old that I've met. Others might have more pause at this age. What makes you pause? Answer the question and be honest. Is it because you are even slightly convinced the child is accountable and responsible?

At this point, if the answer to this first question is a solid "No," and you are unflinchingly convinced that your child would not go to hell if they died immediately, then there is no reason to continue down this list of guidelines. If the answer is "Yes" or "Maybe," then keep on reading.

Guideline #2

Is the child younger than Jesus was when the Bible says that He was about His Father's business, was subjecting Himself to His parents, and was increasing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men? Review Luke 2:41-52. If the child is below the

⁵¹There is an appropriate place for using our God-given intuition and good sense in determining truth. Paul appeals to this element of human reasoning several times in his epistles: Romans 3:5-6; 3:31; 6:1-2; 6:15; 7:7; 7:13; 9:14; 11:1; 11:11; 1 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 2:7; 3:21.

The question is not, “Does my child *understand* what he is doing?” The question is, “Is my child *accountable* to the law of God and *responsible* enough to take a covenantal oath?”

age of twelve, it would be wise to give special attention to this child's readiness and the guidelines that follow.

Guideline #3

Do you believe your child is ready to take an oath of allegiance to Jesus Christ and enter into a covenant agreement with God that comes with life and death blessings and curses? See Isaiah 45:23 & Romans 14:11.

Guideline #4

Is your child about his Father's business (Luke 2:49)? In other words, has he/she demonstrated the ability and evidence of bearing Christian responsibilities? We often say about elders and deacons that a prospect for these church offices should already be doing the work of the office before they are ever ordained to the office. How much more is this true of a child who wants to become a Christian? Some practical, Christian responsibilities a young person might demonstrate are things such as voluntarily trying to talk to members of the church that are older than them, asking to have Bible studies, helping serve tables at church get-togethers, voluntarily participating in evangelistic efforts such as door knocking, picking up stray trash laying around the church house, etc. Hopefully, those are enough examples to get the wheels turning in your head. If the child is doing these things, but he/she is always being forced to do them, then the child is not actually demonstrating responsibility.

Guideline #5

Is the child ready to take *independent* responsibility for making spiritual decisions in his/her life? For example, does the child have to be awakened by Mommy and Daddy every Sunday morning to get ready for church? Is the child given the responsible option of going to church or staying home? One brother in Christ told me, if the answer to the last question is "No," then the child is either not ready to become a Christian, or the parent is over-protective. I tend to agree. Jesus told prospective disciples to bear their cross and follow Him

(Matthew 16:24). Cross-bearing denotes adult responsibility, and Mommy and Daddy can't bear the cross for you.

Guideline #6

Does the child read the Bible on his/her own? The problem with this question is that many aged Christians don't even do this, so why should we expect young Christians to demonstrate this before being baptized? There are many reasons why we compare ourselves to the word of God and not other Christians; this is one of them. Jesus said in John 15:7 that to remain in Him, a Christian *must* have Jesus' words remaining in them. This is not just a good idea. If you are going to "prove to be [Jesus'] disciple" you *must* be in God's word (John 15:8 NASB). A Christian cannot continue to be sanctified without the word of God (John 17:17). It doesn't matter how old or young the Christian is, they must be in the word of their own free-will choice.

Guideline #7

Has the child demonstrated an independent conscience separate from their parent's influence? For example, does the child voluntarily admit to sin he/she has committed or is this something that they have to be coached into doing? Is the child only confessing to sin when they get caught red-handed? Paul said to Timothy, "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a *good conscience*, and from *sincere faith*" (1 Tim. 1:5). Paul wasn't saying that Timothy's Momma's conscience had to be operative and good. He wasn't talking about Timothy's Momma's faith being sincere. The individual themselves must have these essential qualities to be a Christian.

Guideline #8

In close connection to the last guideline, can the child actually identify a specific sin he/she has committed? If not, why not? When John was baptizing in the Jordan River, Matthew reports that people "were being baptized by him ... confessing their sins" (3:6). They weren't confessing "I've done and said some things that I shouldn't have." They were actually confessing the sins

themselves if we are to take this description at face value. How has the child sinned exactly?

Guideline #9

Ask the questions, "Does my child *voluntarily* express an interest in spiritual things?" Does the child only seem to be interested in spiritual things when his/her older friends or siblings bring the subjects up? What provokes this interest? It appears one of the reasons Jesus taught in parables was to separate the authentic and sincere among the crowds from the ones who were just following the crowd or had other false motives. This can be observed best in Mark's gospel, specifically chapters three and four. There Jesus teaches in parables, and those who wanted to understand the meaning of the parables came *inside* the house and asked Him questions further, while those who were uninterested stayed *outside* the house and obviously were not sincere. It even says in Mark 4:34— "When they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples." Is your child voluntarily *inside* the house or outside playing tag with the other children?

Guideline #10

Does the child ever ask spiritual questions related to the sermons, family Bible reading, etc.? This assumes that the family makes it a habit to discuss these things to begin with. Is the child asking Philip to explain Isaiah 53 to him as it were (Acts 8:30-31)?

Guideline #11

Does the child pay attention during services? This might seem like a no-brainer, but I have always observed teenage Christians who pay absolutely no attention to the teaching part of a church service and/or who do not sing with the congregation. It's possible that such teenage children did initially pay attention during church services when they became a Christian and later grew cold, but it's also likely that they never really paid attention and were baptized without this even being a consideration. Someone who gets the covenant program realizes that singing is a command for every single Christian (Ephesians 5:19;

Colossians 3:16). Furthermore, it's to be done with a willing and joyful spirit (Psalms 100:2). Does the attitude demonstrated when one does or doesn't sing not give some indication of their spiritual attitude in general?

Guideline #12

Is the child emotionally mature enough to be treated as an adult who has sinned when he/she actually does sin subsequent to baptism? This includes correction, rebuke, and exhortation from the leaders of the church and brothers/sisters in Christ. Paul's command to Timothy for convincing, rebuking, and exhorting Christians was not limited to *older* and *mature* Christians (2 Timothy 4:2). If a person chooses to become a Christian, they are assuming the responsibility that comes with it, and that includes corrective discipline.

Another brother in Christ asked me facetiously, "What are we supposed to do with a 'Christian' child who is being rebellious at school? Are we ready to disfellowship them if it comes down to it? How does that even work?" Although there was a tone of exaggeration in this question, it bears out the point being made in this guideline. Is the child emotionally mature enough to receive discipline from leaders in the church? And are Mommy and Daddy going to *allow* that to happen? Again, this could either indicate that the child is not ready to be baptized or the parents are overprotective.

One time I saw an eleven year old child, who had been baptized, haul off and slap the fire out of another child while they were playing. The victim of this assault and battery was unbaptized. Several adult Christians were present to witness this sin of hate and retaliation. Do you think anyone got out of their chair, took this offending, eleven year old Christian aside like Peter did to Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:18-24 and rebuked her for committing this high-handed sin? Of course not. There was no repentance and prayer for forgiveness. Why? Because no one saw this eleven year old baptized child as an adult Christian who was responsible and emotionally mature enough to be disciplined by

a fellow Christian. If I had done the same thing at 29 years old, I would have had to stand up in front of the church and make a public confession of sin, asking for forgiveness. Is there not a logical gap here?

Guideline #13

Ask the child, “How do you envision your life being changed after you become a Christian?” Read Ephesians 4:20-24 and Galatians 5:16-26. If the child cannot answer this question, it could be because he/she doesn’t yet have the abstract reasoning capacity that comes with adolescence and mental maturation. Young people who are contemplating becoming a Christian need to consider seriously the effect this decision will have on their current relationships and pleasurable habits. We tell adults who are contemplating the same decision, “Your relationships are going to change.” Does this not apply to the young person who may or may not have evil company they keep? (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Evaluating the Guidelines

Granted, these are simply guidelines; however, each guideline is presented with scripture. It would be hard to make a convincing case that a child who is *not* at least an adolescent and is *not* independently reading his Bible, getting himself up to get ready for church, paying attention and participating in worship, taking on active roles and responsibilities in the church, asking spiritual questions out of personal interest and concern, and emotionally mature enough to be corrected and rebuked by fellow Christians and leaders of the church is ready to be baptized and become a member of the New Covenant. If multiple of these guidelines throw red flags, this should cause pause. Perhaps the child is ... a child. Perhaps he/she is not ready to be baptized and become a Christian. Perhaps we need to stop and ask ourselves, “Are we baptizing this young person for the remission of sins or the remission of discouragement?”

Summary

This has been the most practical chapter to this point. Hopefully, these guidelines prove helpful, and hopefully my youth, singleness, and inexperience do not prove to be insurmountable obstacles in pursuit of giving Christian parents some type of resource in assessing an ever-difficult situation in the life of raising a child. Please remember the following three important points to take away from this chapter:

- The real question is one of *accountability* and *responsibility* to the law of God, not just, “Does my child understand what he is doing?”
- The real question is one of *accountability* and *responsibility* to the law of God, not just, “Does my child understand what he is doing?”
- One more time for good measure, the real question is one of *accountability* and *responsibility* to the law of God, not just, “Does my child understand what he is doing?”

Chapter 8

How to Reassure Your Child

Parents are sure of many things that children are not. The parent is confident there are no monsters under the bed, little girls don't have cooties, vegetables are indeed good for you even though they taste like grass. Children are less sure of these same things, but one thing they are sure of is this: Dad and Mom know everything. If you have held your child down for a shot at the doctor's office very many times, they may not trust you unconditionally, but generally, children have incredible trust in their parents and God, who they know is watching them while they sleep.⁵² Because of this, they will be looking to you for reassurance of their soul's salvation, and you have the responsibility of judging their innocence based on the word of God and actually reassuring them with those words. Lord willing, this chapter will arm you with the biblical ammo you so desperately need for killing the premature doubts that will eventually arise in your child's mind.

Four Year Old Hurdles

Parents of four and six year olds have told me that their child has asked to be baptized already. In one situation, the child kept asking ... and kept asking. The parent would tell the child, "You don't need to be baptized, you're not going to hell." Nonetheless, despite these parental reassurances, the child continued to be distraught and ask to be baptized. We are talking about a four year old! What four year old does this? Well, there are a few out there. These examples are not fictitious. Some children are mentally mature for their age, but there is one thing everyone should be able to agree on: no four year old is accountable to the

⁵²There are exceptions to this rule of trust, but I would argue this is the general rule, especially of children asking to be baptized. I've never seen or heard of a child asking to be baptized who did not have a tremendous amount of trust in at least one of their parents or guardians.

law of God and bound for hell without baptism. What is a parent supposed to do with their child who continues to ask for baptism despite the child's obvious innocence? The same question applies to any child of any age who is not accountable and responsible to the law of God. But for right now, we will stick with the example of the four and six year old since children of these ages are *very* obviously innocent.

One of the hurdles for children in pre-adolescence is their inability to reason *abstractly*⁵³. It was noted in chapter four about child brain and psychological development that children do not typically start to reason abstractly until around the ages of eleven to fourteen years. This means they don't have the ability to process abstract, spiritual concepts like how Jesus could be both God and human at the same time, or how Jesus' resurrection from the dead accomplished the forgiveness of some immaterial thing the Bible calls sin. A four year old child might know what right and wrong is to some degree, but they don't have the mental capacity to process what is happening on a spiritual level when someone actually sins. This is a complex concept that is not concrete. All they really know is that they get in trouble when they do wrong (i.e., sin), and that the preacher and Mommy and Daddy talk about how sinners go to hell. These children don't even truly understand what everlasting punishment in hell is, but they know they don't want to go there. They know it terrifies them when they think about it. And they know that adults seem to be confidently safe from hell when they are baptized. And so, the child asks Mommy to be baptized, even though he/she does not have the reasoning capacity to truly process how this all works.

⁵³“Abstract reasoning, also known as abstract thinking, involves the ability to understand and think with complex concepts that, while real, are not tied to concrete experiences, objects, people, or situations.”

Cherry, Kendra. “What Is Abstract Thinking?” *Very Well Mind*, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-abstract-reasoning-5181522>. Accessed 10 November 2022.

**Your child has a
tremendous amount of trust
in you as their parent.**

Another hurdle for the four year old is his/her inability to understand scripture. This overlaps with the last point about reasoning through abstract concepts. Nonetheless, when the parent opens the word of God to reassure the child, the child will unfortunately not understand what the Bible passages are saying, even with parental commentary. This will improve incrementally as the child ages, but this will likely prove true and significant all the way through early and middle childhood (approximately birth to twelve years old).

These hurdles prove to be difficult, but the answer is not baptism for the remission of discouragement. As was made mention in the introduction, children of Christian parents typically have immense trust in their parents and a healthy respect for the word of God. They may not understand abstract ideas and the word of God itself, but they do trust their parents and what they say about the word of God. The key for parents who are found counselling their discouraged children is to capitalize on this strong level of trust in them (the parent) and the word of God.

Nine Bible Passages to Reassure Your Child

The parent should confidently and repetitively reassure the child with, “No, you’re not going to hell. You’re innocent. You don’t need to be baptized.” This alone will not always be reassuring enough for the child. If it’s not enough, the parent then needs to use the word of God to further reassure the child. The child will most likely not understand the Bible passages that are used even after a simple explanation is given. Go ahead and reason with the child from scripture anyway. Inform them that one day they will be able to understand what the scriptures are saying, and when they do, they will likely be at a point where they are no longer innocent and actually do need to be baptized. There is a chance that the child still insists he/she need to be baptized. The last piece of advice for this circumstance will be addressed at the end of this chapter. First, consider several Bible passages that you can use in reassuring your child of their innocence and the fact that God will not send them to hell.

Bible Passage #1—Matthew 18:1-4,10

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and *become as little children*, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ... Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their *angels* always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:1-4, 10)

In the Mark 10:14 synoptic account of this teaching of Jesus, Christ says “of such is the kingdom of God.” This conversation of Jesus was appealed to earlier in the book to prove the innocence of children. Jesus’ words here may be the most commonly cited words of scripture used by those who believe in and defend the spiritual innocence of children, and for good reason.⁵⁴ Why would Jesus tell adults to be like children, if children are sin stricken and depraved? Jesus says to be like them, because they are innocent, and their childlike qualities confirm this. Read this verse to your child and reassure them that Jesus said they are innocent and saved.

The statement of Jesus in Matthew 18:10 is also very significant. The statement “in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” is classically used to argue for guardian angels. However, there is good reason to believe a more simple

⁵⁴Interestingly enough, those who hold to the doctrine of total hereditary depravity champion the fact that children are miniature devils who only know wickedness that grows out of a depraved heart. Yet, when Matthew 18:1-4 comes up and Jesus is telling adults to become like children in nature, all the sudden the jargon changes and children are little angels and champions of humility and innocence. Here is a glaring contradiction. Children cannot be totally depraved and commended for this godlike character all in the same breath.

explanation is warranted. First, if all children have guardian angels, then why do many children experience trauma and death? Do their guardian angels fall asleep on the job? Second, the language “*angel*” is elsewhere used to describe a person’s spirit. In Acts 12:15, when Peter is found knocking at the door of the disciples’ house after having been miraculously freed from prison, the disciples inside the house refuse to believe the young doorkeeper’s report of Peter’s arrival by responding: “It is his *angel*.” An angel is a spirit without a body, and contextually, the disciples were referring to Peter’s spirit or ghost, not his alleged guardian angel. All this to say, when Jesus declares that the little children’s *angels* “always see the face of My Father who is in heaven,” He was declaring the children as innocent, saved, and spiritually in the presence of God. Children need to be informed and re-informed that they are innocent, saved, and spiritually in the presence of God—*always*.

Bible Passage #2—Romans 7:9

I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived⁵⁵ and I died. (Romans 7:9)

Romans seven is a difficult chapter; however, that doesn’t mean that some things within the chapter are not straightforward. Verse nine seems to be one of those moments of clarity within this difficult treatise of Paul about his sinful past. The only seemingly logical explanation of how Paul was “alive once without the law” is that Paul is describing his time as a child and living in an unaccountable state toward God’s law. Every person, like Paul,

⁵⁵The NASB translates the phrase “revived” in the NKJV as “sprang to life.” The word “revived” carries the connotation that sin was previously alive in Paul at some point in childhood, died at a later point, and then revived again at an even later point when he became accountable to the law of God. “Sprang to life” makes more plain this idea that Paul was born innocent and remained innocent until the point in time that he became accountable to the law of God.

The Bible. New American Standard Bible, The Lockman Foundation, 2020.

experiences innocence in childhood. And like Paul, every person experiences that transition “when the commandment came, [and] sin [sprang to life] and I died.” There is no specific age attached to this common human experience that Paul describes when a child transitions to manhood and the “commandment comes” in such a way to spring to life accountability and responsibility to the law of God, but this does occur for everyone. Explain to your child that they are spiritually alive, not accountable to the law of God. But there will be a time coming when sin will spring to life, and they will then need to get baptized for the remission of sins. This might also be a good time to review with the child the guidelines from chapter seven.

Bible Passage #3—2 Samuel 12:23

But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” (2 Samuel 12:23)

In this passage, King David is talking about his son that was a stillborn child. This tragedy was the result of his sin with Bathsheba. She became pregnant, but the baby died physically as a consequence of David’s sin. In David’s statement, he assures his servants that the child died in the arms of God, because children are innocent, free from sin. When David says, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me,” he is expressing hope in the opportunity for himself to see the child in heaven one day. There is no doubt in David’s mind; his child went where all children go—heaven. Tell your child that all babies and children go to heaven, just like David’s child. And David’s child wasn’t baptized.

Bible Passage #4—Deuteronomy 1:39

Moreover your little ones and your *children*, who you say will be victims, who today have *no knowledge of good and evil*, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. (Deuteronomy 1:39)

The children Moses refers to in this passage are the children of Israelite parents roaming in the wilderness, due to the parent's failure to trust God in defeating the enemies in Canaan. God is declaring that the children of this faithless generation will not be held accountable for the sins of their parents, and though the parents will not enter the land of Canaan, the children, who were innocent of this sin of faithlessness, will enter the land. Why? Because children are innocent. And though a child may know that they aren't supposed to get cookies out of the cookie jar without permission, they do not understand sin (i.e., good and evil), atonement, and salvation. When Moses quotes God as saying, "[children] have no knowledge of good and evil," this is an idiom for "children are innocent."⁵⁶ Children asking to be baptized need to know that they are like these innocent, Israelite children during the wilderness wandering.

The passages recommended for reassuring children to this point are passages that witness to the innocence of children. The rest of the recommended passages speak to the love and faithfulness of God. These are good passages to teach children about the nature of God, and why they can trust God to protect them from the devil and hell. If God said children are innocent, then we can be sure that He will not let anything happen to them that would compromise their spiritual safety.

⁵⁶Interesting note: here is a good example under the OT of children who were in covenant relationship and yet did not "know the Lord" up to this point in life. This reinforces the contrast between the two major covenants that Jeremiah 31 explains.

Bible Passage #5—Isaiah 49:14-15

But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Isaiah 49:14-15)

“Zion” is a reference to the nation of Israel. Isaiah is quoting Israelites who are doubting God. They are doubting that God remembers them and will show mercy to them. But God says He is more attentive to His people than a mother is to her own newborn child. Isaiah 49:15 isn’t a verse written to reassure children, but it should reassure us all (children included) that God does not forget His people, and children are included in that. He will not forsake them; He will not forget them. Read this verse to your child and affirm to them this message: “As much as Momma and Daddy love you and would not send you to hell, you can be sure that God loves you and would not send you to hell.”

Bible Passage #6—Romans 8:35

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (Romans 8:35)

Again, Paul was not talking about children here. This verse is speaking to Christians going through persecution and renewing their spirit of trust in God. Paul is saying that there is no external force or circumstance that can separate a faithful Christian from the love of Christ. Everything Paul says in this verse to reassure persecuted Christians is also true for children. Nothing can separate a child from God's protection, as long as he/she is a child. It is true that one day that child will become accountable to the law, break that law, and will then be a sinner in need of the blood of Christ. But as long as he/she is a child, he/she is innocent and safe. Shall a sermon on hell, fire, and brimstone separate our children from the love of Christ? Certainly not. Shall their

premature doubts separate them from the love of God? Certainly not. Shall a wicked man or woman separate them from the love of God? Not in a million years.

Bible Passage #7—Lamentations 3:22-23

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations and speaks on behalf of the nation of Israel in these verses. He acknowledges the great mercies, compassion, and faithfulness of God. These awesome character traits of God are not lost on children.

Bible Passage #8—Genesis 18:25

Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not *the Judge of all the earth do right?* (Genesis 18:25)

Abraham is the speaker in this verse. He cries out to God, pleading with Him on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, and acknowledging God's just character in the process. Abraham is confident that God will do the right thing, because God is God, and He always does the right thing. Children need to hear this, and based on this, children can be sure that God will not send a child to hell.

Bible Passage #9—2 Samuel 24:14

And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man." (2 Samuel 24:14)

This passage is pulled from a conversation that King David has with Gad the prophet. Gad had come to David to rebuke him and declare judgment from God for an unauthorized census that David had conducted throughout the kingdom of Israel. David was given three judgment options. Two of the judgment options entailed Israel being afflicted directly by God Himself through plague and famine. The third option was that David be afflicted by his enemies. David's choice and his spoken response is very thoughtful and expresses God's nature very well. If David has to choose, he would rather fall into the hands of God rather than men, because with God, you know there will be true justice, and at the same time, God is much, much more likely to be merciful than human enemies. Again, children need to know that God will do right, but they also need to know that God's mercies are great, far greater than any human they know. If a child is in a state of confusion and doubt about their soul's salvation, they can be reassured that God does not think like humans think—children specifically. God's mercies are great. God will not send a child to hell.

When the Bible Isn't Enough

Don't misunderstand this heading. The Bible *is* enough. But for some children, confident reassurance from their parents and the Bible isn't enough to satisfy them. What then? What do you do when you have gone through all the steps that Aaron recommended in his book and your child is *still* asking to be baptized?! Surely you have experienced a child who asks "Why?" even after a thousand explanations have been offered already. Sometimes reason is not enough. The child may truly not understand, or the child may just be unreasonable. Regardless, a responsible parent does not just give a child what he/she wants when that thing is not in the child's best interest. For example, a child may want to eat a whole bucket of chocolate, but a responsible parent won't let them. Allowing the child to eat as much chocolate as he/she wants without measure can prove detrimental to the child's well-being. What should the parent say to the child in this circumstance? The parent should say something akin to, "No, you can't eat the whole bucket of

chocolate.” If the child asks “Why?” the parent explains why. If the child still doesn’t understand after reasonable efforts have been made to explain why, the parent may eventually say, “Because I said so” or “Just trust me.”

A child incessantly asking to be baptized is not the same thing as a child asking to eat an entire bowl of chocolate. Baptism is a *much* bigger item than chocolate. And that’s the point. If you wouldn’t just let your child go ahead and eat a whole bowl of chocolate because they keep asking, why would you let your child go ahead and get baptized?

Additionally, parents should always remember they are the parent and remind themselves not to exhibit childlike behavior when exasperated by their children. Parents can always say, “We will talk about this again at a later time. Stop asking me about being baptized for now.” If a parent says this, they must not forget to follow up! The child will remember, even if you do not. Parents can also give their insistent children assignments to consume their persistent energy. This assignment may prove to be three-fold in purpose: 1) to occupy their time and energy, 2) to assess their true readiness, and 3) to demonstrate to the child your true interest and investment in their concerns.

Here is one last piece of advice: be calm, cool, and collected. That doesn’t mean that you actually are calm and cool under the surface, but let your child see a confident and collected parent that instills trust and reassurance in them. This is very helpful in crisis situations. I have found this fine detail to be very helpful in my ten-year nursing career. When a patient comes into the Emergency Dept. suffering from a severe stroke, a traumatic injury, or even cardiac arrest, having an experienced staff member who is calm, cool, and collected while communicating with and reassuring the family is irreplaceable. I’ve seen family members screaming and going ballistic over their family member who was suffering, because no one was communicating with them and the staff displayed panic and helplessness. On the flip side, I have seen very anxious family members stand by in relative silence and feeling reassured that their family member

was getting exhaustive and competent care, simply because the staff displayed calm and confidence along with good communication with the family. Again, an anxious child wanting to get baptized is not the same as an anxious family member witnessing the potential death of their loved one. And that's the point. The latter situation is *much* more intense, and yet a calm, cool, and collected demeanor by the person(s) in charge makes all the difference. Demonstrate this reassuring demeanor to your child when they express anxiety about needing to be baptized.

Summary

Whatever you decide to do, don't baptize your child for the remission of discouragement. You will be doing more harm than good if you do: more on the consequences of this in the final chapter. Instead, keep bringing your child up "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Keep reassuring them. Go back to the nine passages in this chapter and other passages that you may find helpful in affirming your child's innocence and salvation to them. A child's faith is essentially their parent's faith up to the point that they are able to think independently and responsibly; so, remember these takeaway points for increasing that faith.

- Your child has a tremendous amount of trust in you as their parent.
- Your child should have a tremendous amount of trust in the word of God if they are sincerely wanting to get baptized.
- Use the word of God to reassure your troubled child.
- Be calm, cool, and collected.

Chapter 9

Placing Responsibility Back on Fathers

It's time to change directions. To this point we have discussed children who are asking to be baptized. We have learned a lot about child development, what a child is according to scripture and society, what the new covenant is, guidelines for responding to a child asking to be baptized, and advice on how to reassure a child in this situation. Now, let's step into the baptistry. Imagine the parents of a child have decided he/she is ready to be baptized. These parents come to a brother-in-Christ and request that he baptize their child, because the father has never done anything like this, and both parents want to make sure it is done correctly. What now? In this chapter we will briefly survey the responsibility that parents have in the process that leads up to the waters of baptism. This truly is a significant item of discussion that deserves its own chapter.

Fathers, Train Up Your Children

There is no greater act of evangelism for parents than to evangelize their children. This special act of evangelism starts when the child is very young. When I was just a baby, my father and mother read the Bible to me and my siblings on a nightly basis with rare exceptions. When I was three years old, I could quote John 3:16, and it wasn't because I was some prodigy. It was because my father took up his God-given responsibility to train me and my siblings in the "admonition of the Lord" as Paul says in Ephesians 6:4. The fact that all four of us were familiar with the Bible, what it teaches about God, and what God expects of His people by the time we were all in middle to late childhood

There is no greater act of evangelism for parents than to evangelize their children.

was not an accident. Neither was it an accident that all of us were baptized for the remission of sins during our adolescent years. My father was not a perfect parent; such a thing does not exist. But he was a spiritually responsible parent, and he took the role that God had delegated to Him very seriously. By the time I walked into my father's office at fourteen years old and told him I needed to be baptized, it did not take him long to agree with this request. Why? Because he was very familiar with my readiness. He knew me better than any man or woman at church. He knew very well what I did know and what I didn't know about God's word, its requirements of a repentant sinner, and its requirements of a regenerated Christian. He knew that I had been reading the Bible on my own since I was twelve. He was able to make a very competent judgment of my accountability and responsibility level because of all these factors.

All Christian fathers bear the responsibility to know their children's spiritual development inside and out. Notice Ephesians 6:4 again.

And you, *fathers*, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

In this passage Paul gives the directive and responsibility of child training namely to the *father*. He doesn't address this grave responsibility to the mother, though she does have an active role to be sure. Paul doesn't address the leaders at the Ephesian church and tell them to train all the little ones in the Lord. Paul doesn't indicate in any way that some type of church ministry properly substitutes for a father shepherding his own children. No. Paul essentially says, "Fathers, do your job. And here it is ..."

A disease true of every generation—past, present, and future—is that fathers neglect their physical and spiritual responsibilities. We see the consequence of physical neglect in the world every day; we see the consequence of spiritual neglect in the church far too commonly. If you look and find even one Christian father

neglecting to take up his spiritual responsibility to train up his child in the Lord, this would qualify as a *far too common* occurrence. Many Old Testament scriptures are echoed by Paul's directive in Ephesians 6:4. Here is a good list: Genesis 18:19; Exodus 12:25-27; Deuteronomy 4:7-10; 6:6-9; Psalms 78:1-7; Proverbs 1:8; 2:1; 3:1; 4:10, 20; 5:1; 7:1; Isaiah 38:19; Joel 1:2-3. We have to place the spiritual responsibility for shepherding and evangelizing children where it belongs—on the Christian father.

Will You Baptize My Child?

The fictitious scenario created in the introduction of this chapter had a father of a child going to another brother-in-Christ and asking this brother to baptize his child. What I am about to say is not law, but I do believe it is very wise, and it seems to be the most straightforward way of putting the responsibility of shepherding and evangelizing children back on the shoulders of the Christian father.

Parents need to be the ones preaching the gospel to their children, and consequently, fathers should be the ones actually baptizing their children to show this role of responsibility. Parents need to have some real skin in the game. Their spiritual training experience should encompass more than listening to their child's random request for baptism and then going to a male leader at church to inform them: "My child wants to be baptized. Will you baptize them for me?" Recall from the introduction when my grandfather ran to Uncle C. W. asking what to do when my dad requested to be baptized. Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying this is the prevailing circumstance when children want to be baptized, but it does happen. And if it happens even one time, this is a far too common occurrence. This action is understandable for a parent who is new to the church or maybe one that is just waking up to this responsibility, but it is inexcusable for Christian parents who have been aware of this parental responsibility for years and have been spiritually lazy about bearing this cross, if this is the case.

Some exceptions do arise, but it is my personal practice to place the responsibility on the father when he comes asking me to baptize his child. I believe this is important for two reasons. First, no one should know the child better than the father. Since judging a young person's readiness for baptism is such a difficult issue that it deserves its own book, I feel most comfortable having the father baptize his child. Many times, I may not feel comfortable baptizing the children for my own reservations and uncertainties. In that case, this is all the more reason for the father to do the deed. If there is no father in the picture, and other special circumstances present themselves, then there are occasions when I will baptize a young person for the remission of sins.

Second, when the father is asked to baptize his own child, this should magnify and reinforce the responsibility the father bears in all of this. If the father decides to baptize his child but the leaders of the church believe the child is ... a child, then the father bears the responsibility. This should at least cause him to think twice about what he is doing. If he recognizes the child is not ready to be baptized, this should then instill in him a great sense of urgency to be reassuring his child of his/her innocence. Ideally this is accompanied by discipling the child, so that when the child does become a responsible adolescent, the father and child are both confident. The ultimate goal is to make an informed decision that is unblurred by emotional baggage.

Summary

If you like short and sweet, this chapter is for you. What you need to remember can be summed up with these few points:

- The responsibility to train up children in the Lord falls on the father at home, not on the leaders at church.
- Fathers need to be the ones performing the baptism of their child unless special circumstances prevent this. This is wise, because no one knows the child like the father and mother, and this re-emphasizes to the father that he bears primary responsibility in the matter.

Chapter 10

Re-baptizing Adults

You may have looked at the table of contents and skipped chapters one through nine to get here. If you did, please go back and read what comes before. The phrase “re-baptism” seems to always draw attention. Sadly, there are many adults who look back on their youth, they start questioning their baptism, and they come to the conclusion that they didn’t actually know what they were doing at the time and/or they weren’t responsible and accountable. Sometimes there is merit to this. Sometimes there may not be. In this chapter we will focus on the re-baptism of adults; specifically, we will concentrate on those situations wherein the adult was originally baptized as a child.

The Biblical Basis for Re-baptism

There is at least *some* biblical basis for *re-baptism*⁵⁷. In Acts 19:1-7, Paul comes across “some disciples” (verse 1) who were baptized “into John’s baptism” (verse 3). Without creating a diversionary discussion about what exactly distinguished being baptized “into John’s baptism” versus being baptized “on Christ Jesus,” it will suffice to point out that these twelve men received water baptism again; “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (verse 5). Regardless what this passage teaches about John’s baptism versus Christian baptism, we can hopefully agree that this constitutes an example of someone who was baptized incorrectly the first time, and they needed to be baptized correctly a final time.

⁵⁷Remember, “re-baptism” is somewhat of a misnomer. There is only one biblical water baptism—for the remission of sins. A person is either a responsible and accountable adult who is baptized for the remission of sins, or he isn’t. Thus, when the phrase “re-baptism” is used throughout this chapter, it is used for the sake of simplicity: to distinguish between a child who was baptized in water for the remission of discouragement and the same person who is later baptized in water for actual remission of sins (i.e., re-baptism).

Even if Acts 19:1-7 were not in the Bible, God-given reasoning alone should confirm to us that if someone is, in fact, baptized for reasons other than the remission of sins, that person would need to be baptized a final time for the correct reason.

“I Didn’t Know What I Was Doing”

I have heard many Christians describe their experience of being baptized as a ten year old or thereabouts as: “I didn’t know what I was doing.” Now, remember from chapter seven that knowledge alone is not what constitutes responsibility and accountability. This is an important factor, but knowledge isn’t the sole criterion for baptism. This statement, “I didn’t know what I was doing,” is too vague without further clarification. Sometimes the person means that they were so young they literally did not have the abstract reasoning capacity to comprehend what they were doing and getting themselves into. Other times, the person means that they had the ability to reason abstractly, but they didn’t actually understand the responsibility of becoming a Christian. They may have been taught that being baptized and becoming a Christian was centrally about avoiding hell, but they later were taught that becoming a Christian is primarily about serving the King, Jesus Christ. The person is now an adult, and they are trying to express that they now understand these things. They wish that the adults in the room had vetted them more carefully before they were baptized at eight, nine, or ten years old, but that didn’t happen, unfortunately, and so here they are questioning whether or not they should be baptized again.

Many times these types of situations arise because parents and church leaders whisper to each other out of earshot of the child, “If we don’t baptize them, they’ll eventually stop asking.” Another adult in the circle says, “You have a point, and we certainly don’t want to discourage them.” Red flags should be popping up everywhere when these statements precede any baptism of any age.

First, baptism is either carried out *for the remission of sins* or it's not. There is no biblical basis for baptizing anyone *so they won't be discouraged or stop asking*.

Second, what results from baptizing children *so they won't get discouraged* is very ironic. Many times those same children grow up to be adults who are discouraged because of the very thing that was supposed to alleviate discouragement. And why shouldn't this adult be discouraged? They have every right to be discouraged. If they truly weren't baptized for the remission of sins, then are they really a member of the New Covenant? Do they have their sins forgiven anyway based on some covenant baptism construction we have created? When they were baptized for remission of discouragement, did this make the blood of Christ dormant and potential in some way until actual understanding and accountability was achieved, at which time the blood of Christ transitioned into active mode and began actually cleansing the individual who was baptized in a state of innocence? Don't worry, if you think this elaborate explanation I just spelled out is confusing, you're not alone. There is no basis for this kind of scheme, but this is what must be occurring when we baptize children, and this is what confuses and discourages the adult in his/her grown up state. Baptism for remission of discouragement only delays discouragement. It doesn't truly remove discouragement, it doesn't remove sin, and it doesn't place one in covenant community with God and the church.

Should I Be Re-Baptized?

Making the decision to be baptized a second time can be just as difficult as the first time in many ways. Perhaps up to this point in the book you have been constantly thinking about your baptism at a young age. Maybe this has distracted you so much that you weren't even able to fully concentrate on everything that was said. This is understandable and an unavoidable consequence of discussing this subject. What should you do? Should you be re-baptized?

The answer to this question is not cut-and-dry, unfortunately. Many people would like it to be black and white, but it's not. Answering this question will take personal investigation, personal responsibility, and personal judgment. Because of the many variables at play, there are very few cases where I can confidently look someone in the eye and tell them they need to be re-baptized. This is especially true of those cases where the individual was baptized at the transitional age from childhood to adolescence (appx. 11-14 yrs. old). While I can't make that judgement for you, I believe there are some helpful things to consider while you weigh the matter. First, remember the question that looms large regarding baptizing children or adolescence is one of accountability and responsibility (see chapter 7). This includes understanding but is not limited to this singular item. When asking the question, "Should I be re-baptized?" people overwhelmingly narrow the issue down to a matter of understanding. "I understood what I was doing back then." That's great. But were you actually accountable of sin and responsible enough to bear your cross? The thirteen guidelines discussed earlier in the book will help you gauge this question.

Second, ask your parents and the person that originally baptized you, "Did you have any reservations about my baptism? Did you ask me any questions in order to verify that I was ready to become a Christian? Did I demonstrate to you that I was already bearing some responsibilities that a Christian should bear?" Maybe you're like me. I can't remember that I even talked to someone with the passing of a week. It is very difficult to remember details from ten, twenty, thirty years ago when you were a kid. And the details are important. As the previous chapter noted, parents carry a large responsibility in readying their children to become Christians and verifying that they actually are ready to be baptized when the time comes. Unfortunately, in conversation after conversation that I have had with adults asking this question

Baptism for remission of discouragement only delays discouragement. It doesn't truly remove discouragement.

“Should I be re-baptized?” I find that few parents ask their children any questions before baptizing them. Many adults relay the experience of a preacher coming through for a gospel meeting when they were a kid; they went forward during an invitation song, and the preacher then baptized them without any sit-down with the parents to confirm the child had any business being baptized. It’s not a perfect comparison, but this is like unto a physician performing a surgical procedure on a patient for which he has no medical history. No physician would do this, because they understand the assumed risk and liability of doing such a thing. They realize that performing an operation without such knowledge could actually do more harm than good for the patient. All that to say, go back and ask your parents and the person that baptized you if there was any investigation made as to your readiness for baptism. What kind of investigation was it? This will either ease your conscience or provide further confirmation that maybe you do need to be re-baptized.

Third, read the scriptures, pray, and then consider the things written in this book—in that order. Do not jump back into the baptistry willy-nilly. Make sure you do it right this time.

Fourth and finally, *you* must make the decision. No one else can make it for you. I’m not God. I may have written this book, but I’m not the arbitrator of such cases. It’s possible that you do need to be re-baptized. The only other thing I can suggest is to answer your conscience. That’s partly what baptism is after all, “The answer of a good conscience toward God,” (2 Peter 3:21). Don’t let peer-pressure keep you from answering a good conscience. Don’t let pride keep you from it. Don’t let insecurity about what other people will think keep you from it. No one else will be giving account for your conscience on judgement day. You will, and you alone.

Because of everything just discussed, it would prove helpful if every person would write down and archive the reason why they are getting baptized. This would aid memories down the road. Encourage your child to write down why they are being baptized when you baptize them. Have them journal about the event and

everything they are thinking about. You as the parent: do the same. It would also help if preachers like myself would place responsibility on the parents to baptize their own children (see chapter 9). This is especially true for visiting preachers holding a gospel meeting where they really have no familiarity with the child who comes forward asking to be baptized. Re-read the personal testimonies from chapter 1, and I believe you will find that our normal procedure for going about baptizing young people has proved more harmful than helpful.

Final Considerations

One time I had a friend come to me questioning their baptism from childhood. We talked about many of the things in this book before I wrote my thoughts down. After several discussions and much consideration, this friend decided it was time to be baptized scripturally. There was one obstacle, though. My friend asked, “Do I have to do this in front of the whole church?” People in this situation can easily find themselves embarrassed. It is embarrassing for them that they have been walking around for years and years thinking they were a Christian but ultimately being naïve and confused. The answer to this question is “No.” Nowhere in the Bible is there any indication that a baptism has to be public and for all to see. It’s likely that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 had a whole caravan of witnesses at his baptism, but in the story itself, there is only Philip, the eunuch, and the driver of the chariot who was commanded to stop. The important thing is that you do the will of God.

Summary

It is possible that many people in your church need to be “re-baptized.” If that’s the case, then so be it. Don’t let embarrassment or pride get in the way of salvation. Remember the following:

- There is a biblical basis for being baptized again for the right reason.
- When people say, “I didn’t know what I was doing,” they either mean they literally didn’t have the reasoning

capacity to understand, or they were not responsible and understanding of what becoming a Christian is actually about.

- Baptizing children for the remission of discouragement has no biblical basis, and it ironically produces more discouragement later in life.
- Read the scriptures, pray, discuss these things with mature Christians, and then get baptized again if the situation demands it—for the remission of sins.

Chapter 11

Covenant Baptism Reinvented

Every single day a new baby is "baptized."⁵⁸ What you are about to find out, if you are like me a few months ago, is that most of those babies are not being baptized with the intent of washing away inherited sin. I grew up with a vague conception of what the Catholic church observes in terms of baptizing babies for remission of sins, and so I just assumed that all denominations were doing the same thing when they performed their water ritual. I was wrong. Many churches are actually practicing what is sometimes called *covenant baptism*.

In this chapter we will learn what covenant baptism is, and then we will compare this historic practice with what is taking place in churches of Christ and the baptizing of children. I saved this chapter for last, because it is a bit meatier than previous chapters, the conclusions of this chapter stand as *supportive* evidence instead of *primary* evidence, and I was afraid that if I presented this content too early in the book, people might stop reading before getting to arguably the most helpful and encouraging portions.

Infant Baptism for Remission of Sins

For sake of clarity, I believe it is helpful to explain why some denominations like the Catholic church do baptize infants for the remission of sins. Perhaps even this concept is completely new to you.

Most denominations hold to the belief that children inherit the guilt of Adam's sin and/or a sinful nature that was created by

⁵⁸To describe sprinkling water over a baby's head or dipping its head in a basin of water as "baptism" is another misnomer. In the Greek, baptism literally means immersion, but for the sake of discussion in this chapter, I will proceed to use the phrase "baptism" very loosely to include sprinkling or partial dipping.

Adam’s sin. The idea is that this sin guilt and/or sin nature is transmitted through the flesh from parent to child, all the way back to Adam. And if children are indeed born guilty of sin, then there is a logical problem. The problem presents itself when a child dies before he/she can express faith in Christ. What happens to the child’s sin-stricken soul? Augustine (354-430 A.D.) believed that infants who died without being baptized were “consigned to hell.”⁵⁹ Until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), there was no funeral ceremony for unbaptized babies in the Catholic church, and they were buried in “unconsecrated ground.”⁶⁰ A more recent panel of Catholic theologians in 2007 came out and expressed, “[There are] grounds for hope that unbaptized infants who die will be saved and enjoy [heaven].”⁶¹ If all this is true, it sounds like babies need some baptizing.

During the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic church saw the need to respond to the rival teachings of such men as Martin Luther and others by having yet another church council—the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The council leaders published a manifesto of up-to-date Catholic doctrine that is still considered authoritative and current to this day. Within Section Five, First Decree, Fourth Statement of that document, it says, “For, by reason of this rule of faith, from a tradition of the apostles, even infants, who could not as yet commit any sin of themselves, are for this cause truly *baptized for the remission of sins* . . .”⁶² There it is from the horse’s mouth. The Catholic church baptizes infants for remission of sins. Obviously, *remission of sins* is a common purpose for the baptism of infants within some denominations,

⁵⁹Since retrieving the information from www.vatican.va found in this chapter, the website has been removed. The reason for this is unknown. The original web address and date of access is still provided for transparency sake.

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html#_ftnref24, Accessed 26 October 2022.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²“Concerning Original Sin.” <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch5.htm>. Accessed 1 November 2022.

but many other denominations baptize infants for a very different reason.

Covenant Baptism of Infants

It was brought to my attention recently that most Protestant denominations baptize children, not for the remission of sins, but for the purpose of placing them into covenant relationship with God. To be certain, there is a fair bit of disparity among Reformed⁶³ scholars as to why an infant should be baptized and what precisely is going on when they are baptized. But one general point of agreement within the Reformed circle of thought is that children are placed into the New Covenant at baptism, and the baby is only baptized if its parent(s) have also been baptized. Contra what the Catholic church teaches, Reformed theology does not assign unbaptized children to hell. To one degree or another, they believe that God sovereignly applies His grace to these helpless children who have been diseased by the inherited sin of Adam, and in this way they are saved should they die before they are able to profess their own faith in Jesus Christ. If you didn't understand any of that, then understand and remember this: *covenant baptism is the baptism of babies to place them into covenant relationship with God, it is not for the remission of sins.* In this whole complex, the baby is not “saved” (formally) until he/she grows up to the point that he is able to place personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Don't take my word for all this. Read the following from Baptist preacher Stephen Wellum as he explains the doctrine of covenant baptism by examining the teachings of Presbyterian preacher Randy Booth.⁶⁴

⁶³There are several “Reformed” denominations, but one that practices covenant baptism of infants and is probably most familiar to readers of this book is the Presbyterian church.

⁶⁴Schreiner, Thomas R. & Wright, Shawn D. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ.* E-book, Nashville, B & H Publishing Group, 2006.

Along with most defenders of the Reformed view of paedobaptism,⁶⁵ Booth is clear that infant baptism does not entail any kind of *ex opera operato*⁶⁶ view of the sacrament or ordinance. *Just because an infant receives the covenant sign, whether in the OT or NT, does not entail that the infant is regenerated, nor does it guarantee a future regeneration, that is, a kind of presumptive regeneration. Rather, as Booth contends, “the covenant sign was God’s indication that its recipients were set apart for his special blessing and use. They therefore stood in need of cleansing, regeneration, and justification. The benefits of the covenant were to be appropriated by faith in the promised Redeemer.”* Hence, to be a “child of the covenant” does not necessarily guarantee one’s salvation. *Rather, it makes available to the infant all the benefits and privileges of the covenant which must, in the end, be appropriated by faith; otherwise this same “covenant child” will be found to be a covenant breaker and thus stand under the covenantal curse, namely, the condemnation and judgment of God. (emphasis mine)*

While Booth’s defense of covenant baptism is not necessarily a uniform standard explanation for all Reformed thinkers, it does offer a fair representation of the practice by and large. More than this though, Booth’s explanation of covenant baptism gives us a good reference point by which to compare what is going on when churches of Christ baptize children who are not culpable of sin.

⁶⁵Paedobaptism simply means infant-baptism. It is a transliteration of two Greek words: the prefix *paedo* which means child/infant and *baptism* which means immersion.

⁶⁶*ex opera operato* is a Latin phrase that literally means “from the works performed,” and in this context means that infant baptism does not secure salvation by some type of “works righteousness.”

“*ex opere operato*.” *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, Online, 2022,

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=334>

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Covenant Baptism Reinvented

The most significant contrast between the Reformed position of covenant baptism of infants and the church of Christ practice of baptizing children comes down to the doctrines of original sin and total depravity. In case you forgot, Reformed theology agrees with Catholic theology that children inherit the original sin of Adam and are totally depraved as a result. When an infant is baptized in a Reformed church, they are being placed into the New Covenant, or so they believe and teach. Being baptized into the covenant may not secure remission of sins, but it is believed to come with benefits by nature of being in the covenant. Richard Belcher explains the benefits quite clearly: “There are benefits and great privileges of growing up in a godly home. The prayer is that such blessing will lead to faith in Jesus Christ and an acceptance of covenant responsibilities by each child.”⁶⁷ In other words, if you have front row seats to a concert, you have much more advantage and likelihood of ending up on stage than if you are sitting in the nosebleeds. Children who are *in the covenant* and close to God’s saving power are much more likely to accept Christ personally than children who are not in the covenant and far away from God. So, no, the church of Christ does not teach that children are born in sin and totally depraved, but members of the church do sometimes practice something that smells very much like this Reformed practice of covenant baptism. We have reinvented covenant baptism, as it were.

There is obviously some similarity between our baptizing children and Reformed churches baptizing infants, because even though the child we baptize may be nine years old compared to their infant who is one week old, the level of accountability and innocence is the same. There is dissimilarity in the fact that the nine year old is a willing participant in the ritual of baptism and the infant is not. However, the level of guilt or lack thereof is identical: there is none. And so, based on this premise, I believe that if we look to the practice of covenant baptism, and what is

⁶⁷Belcher Jr., Richard P. *Genesis: The Beginning of God’s Plan of Salvation*, Scotland, Christian Focus Publications, 2012, 153.

taking place in that ritual as articulated by Reformed scholars, we will have the best explanation for what we are really practicing and unwittingly believe is happening when a child is baptized for “remission of sins.”

Though we label baptizing children as “for remission of sins,” it is in fact not for this reason when we go on to say things like, “Well, we don’t want to discourage the child,” or, “Eventually they’ll stop asking if we don’t baptize them now,” or “We’re going to have to do it eventually anyway.” In other words, we are going to proceed to baptize the child for *remission of discouragement*. These are all responses I have heard from parents which denote that something other than baptism *for remission of sins* is taking place, and the best description I can come up with for what is actually being practiced is: covenant baptism for children. Some parents will object and declare that their nine year old is a savant who has demonstrated that he/she, in fact, has a proper understanding of what he is doing and actually does have sins being washed away when he is baptized. Very well, without addressing those supposed special circumstances right now, I want to reiterate and qualify that what is being discussed here is children baptized for the above quoted reasons that are other than “for the remission of sins.”

Now, not everything in the previous explanation by Randy Booth about covenant baptism necessarily cross applies to what we are practicing in our child baptism. For the sake of clarity, I italicized those key phrases in Booth’s defense that do seem to actually describe what we are practicing. When we baptize children for stated reasons other than “for the remission of sins,” we are really defending the theory that the child is placed in covenant with God by the ritual of baptism. And yes, baptism really becomes just a

When we baptize children for stated reasons other than “for the remission of sins,” we are really defending the theory that the child is placed in covenant with God by the ritual of baptism. And yes, baptism really becomes just a ritual at this point.

ritual at this point. Whether we state it or not, the logical progression of what we are doing is that the child will eventually become accountable de facto, and at that time they will (Lord willing) place “*faith in the promised Redeemer*” as Booth says.⁶⁸ “*Just because [the child] receives the covenant sign (baptism) ... does not entail that the [child] is regenerated,*”⁶⁹ because, again, the child does not actually have sin to remit at this point. “*Rather, it makes available to the [child] all the benefits and privileges of the covenant which must, in the end, be appropriated by faith.*”⁷⁰ Thus, the blood of Christ is placed in some type of dormant mode by the baptism ritual, and it becomes realized or activated at the point in time that the child places rational and responsible faith in Christ. The benefit of baptism then is not that it removes the guilt of sin, but that it places the child in the front row of the concert contrary to the requirement of Jeremiah for New Covenant members to “know the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:34). The child is much more likely to place personal faith in Christ when they finally do grow up than if they had not been baptized according to the doctrine of covenant baptism. See Figures 11.1 & 11.2 for a comparison and contrast between covenant baptism of infants and what I call “reinvented covenant baptism” of children.

⁶⁸Schreiner, Thomas R. & Wright, Shawn D. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*. E-book, Nashville, B & H Publishing Group, 2006.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Figure 11.1

COMPARISON CHART	
Covenant Baptism of Infants	Reinvented Covenant Baptism of Children
Not for remission of sins.	Not for remission of sins.
Infant does not “know the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:34).	Child does not “know the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:34).
Unable to place justifying faith in Jesus Christ.	Unable to place justifying faith in Jesus Christ.
The infant is placed in the covenant and in the best position to eventually place justifying faith in Christ one day.	The child is placed in the covenant and in the best position to eventually place justifying faith in Christ one day.
The hope is that the infant will grow up and place justifying faith in Jesus Christ.	The hope is that the child will grow up and place justifying faith in Jesus Christ.
No examples of this in the New Testament.	No examples of this in the New Testament.

Figure 11.2

CONTRAST CHART

Covenant Baptism of Infants

Infant unable to make a verbal confession.

Teaches baptism as the sign of the New Covenant.

Depends on covenant theology to justify the practice from a “scriptural” standpoint.

Advocates readily admit this practice is not for the remission of sins.

Reinvented Covenant Baptism of Children

Child able to make a verbal confession.

Teaches the cup of blessing as the sign of the New Covenant.

Depends largely on emotional arguments and anecdotal, personal examples to justify the practice.

Advocates readily admit this practice is for the remission of sins, even though other associated rhetoric contradicts this statement.

Figure 11.3 demonstrates visually how the different major views of baptism appropriate the items of salvation, baptism, and personal belief.⁷¹ All major views believe each of these items are important, but the order in which they are placed makes for very different outcomes.

Figure 11.3⁷²



No parent baptizing their child would ever say they are practicing covenant baptism or anything different from what we find in the

⁷¹I owe the origins of this chart to Brother Ron Courter. I added the second column detailing the sequence of covenant baptism.

⁷²Baptismal regeneration is the proper name for what the Catholic church practices. It’s the idea that “baptism is a ‘sacrament’ which has a sort of mysterious, innate power to remove the contamination of sin — independent of personal faith and a volitional submission to God’s plan of redemption.” Wayne Jackson sums it up in this way and proves this definition from *A Catholic Dictionary* by Donald Attwater.

Jackson, Wayne. “What Is Baptismal Regeneration?” *Christian Courier*, <https://christiancourier.com/articles/what-is-baptismal-regeneration>

scriptures; however, this is the only logical sense I can make of the practice that has been perpetuated in the churches of Christ for as long as I have been alive, and certainly longer. Either we are baptizing a responsible, adolescent/young adult for the remission of sins, or we are actually practicing a reinvented form of covenant baptism.

Summary

This chapter stands as the climax of all that I believe is suspect with baptizing children. The first five chapters of this book hit hard for me before I even put pen to paper. Defining what a child is biblically can be difficult, though I made my case in chapter five. But regardless of what you thought about chapter five, at least we can agree that there are many examples of children who have been baptized under the label of “for remission of sins,” that really were not “for the remission of sins,” and the only way to describe what is going on in those circumstances is what I have entitled “covenant baptism reinvented.” Here is what you can take away from this chapter:

- Some denominations do baptize infants for the remission of sins (i.e., the Catholic Church).
- Many other denominations baptize infants to put them into covenant relationship with God (i.e., covenant baptism).
- When parents baptize their child so that they will no longer be discouraged, they are actually practicing a reinvented form of covenant baptism.
- There are several points of contrast between the Reformed practice of covenant baptism and the church of Christ practice of baptizing children, but two major common features are 1) neither is for the remission of sins, and 2) there are no examples of either practice in the New Testament.

Conclusion

We have arrived at the end. If you made it this far, thank you for sticking around. You may be feeling upset at this point, because you disagree with the major premises in the book. You may be feeling encouraged and empowered as a parent with young children, because now you have some guidance on a difficult matter. You may be pricked, because you were baptized at a very young age, or you baptized someone else at a very young age, and your conscience is in a state of flux. Whatever you are feeling, I hope this book has given you a starting point for discussing this difficult subject. It is a difficult subject, because it does involve some level of human judgment, and discussing these things with others can make us feel uncomfortable.

Remember what I stated was the purpose of this book from the very beginning. I had three main purposes: 1) to help bring about awareness and good reasons to prevent against obvious cases where a child is being baptized, 2) to give Christian parents *some* type of scriptural and sound guidance for when their child comes asking to be baptized, and 3) to be biblical about the subject matter. My goal is not to sound smart, to put people in their place, to show everyone how this isn't actually a difficult subject; it's really black and white, or to be different for the sake of going against the grain. This subject has bothered me for a long time, and I am hoping this book truly helps those who are searching for answers like I was and still am in many ways.

At this point I would encourage you to go back to chapter 1 and re-read the account of my father's baptism at the young age of eight years old. You may not have been able to relate to his personal experience the first time you read it. But now that you have finished the book, read it again, and you will very likely have a greater appreciation for the way that his father and Uncle C.W. handled his request for baptism the first time. Hopefully, now you can relate to him and why he decided he needed to be baptized legitimately seven years later. Many of you did not have this experience, but be sure that others do. Many others do. This

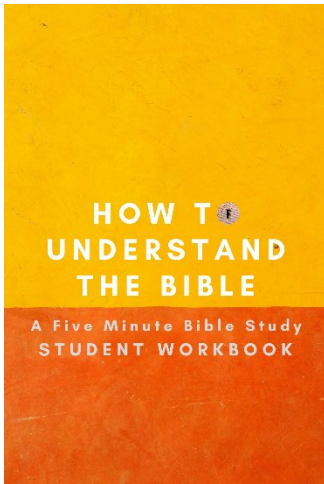
is not uncommon at all. If you do relate to my father at fifteen, then do like he did: “I decided I didn't care what anyone thought; I went forward and told Brother John I needed to be baptized.” Don't let anyone keep you from answering a good conscience.

If perhaps you are reading this book and you have never been baptized for the remission of sins, then please reach out to me. There are very, very few churches outside of the Church of Christ that baptize for this reason. Most churches baptize children at four and five, and this book is needless and foolish to them. But maybe you have read the scriptures discussed here, and you are starting to think otherwise. I strongly encourage you to search the scriptures daily to prove whether or not these things are so (Acts 17:11). May God bless you in your pursuit of truth and salvation.

About the Author

My name is Aaron Battey. At the time of writing this book, I have lived in Lawrenceburg, TN for just over three years. I work full time as an evangelist at the Chapel Grove Church of Christ in Summertown, TN and as a part time Emergency Dept. Registered Nurse at Maury Regional Medical Center in Columbia, TN. I am the creator of the Five Minute Bible Study website, podcast, and YouTube channel. I upstarted Five Minute Bible Study as a simple website in 2017 with the intention of producing easily understood content that would help the average Joe read and understand the Bible for himself. With the passing of time, this little upstart project has grown significantly, and in 2020 I wrote my first book *How to Understand the Bible*. My goal in all the books and resources that I produce is to provide a high-quality, low-cost product that is helpful, easy to understand, and directs people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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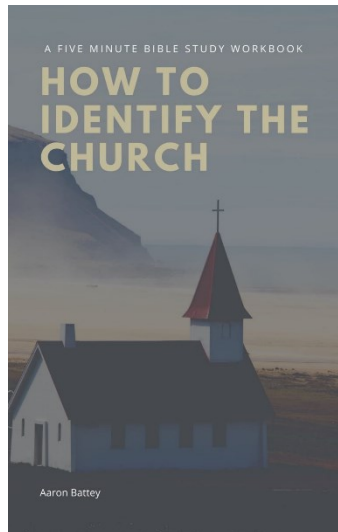
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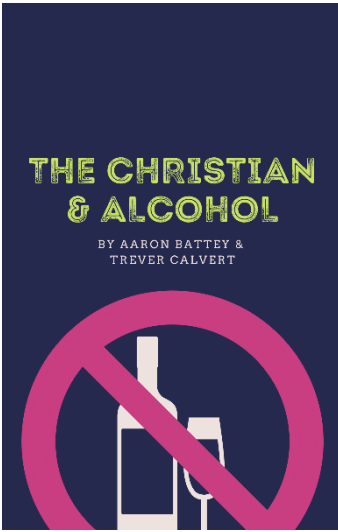
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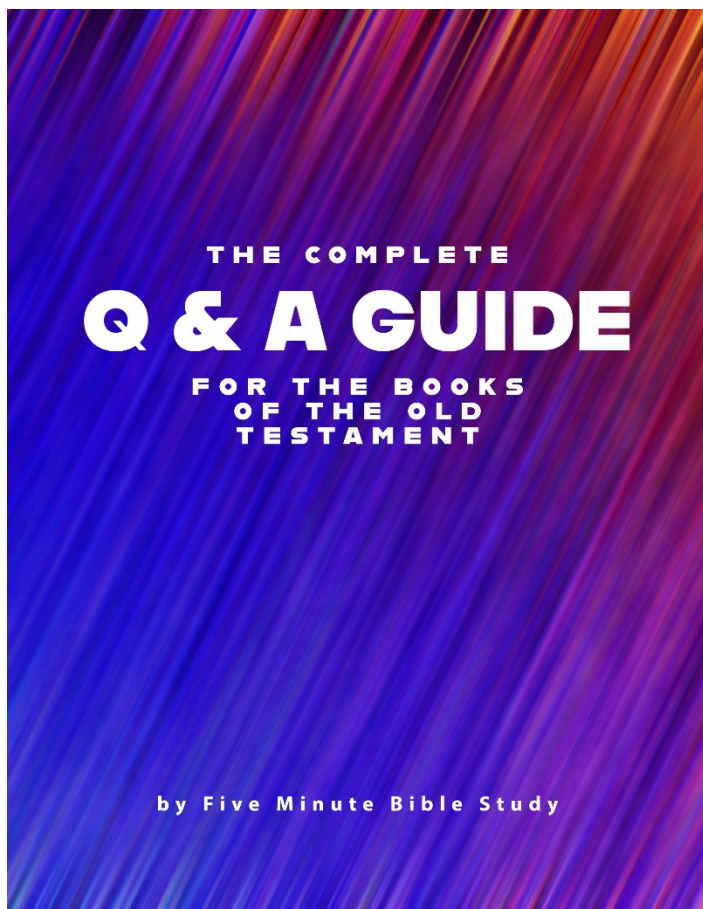




The Christian & Alcohol

Add the subject of alcohol and social drinking to the list of biblical topics for which there is much confusion and debate. *The Christian & Alcohol* is the first co-authored book. Trever Calvert, a pharmacist and brother-in-Christ, helped research and write this book in 2021. The book starts off by discussing the subject of “wine” the Bible and how many people naively repeat “facts” about this biblical subject that are simply not true.

Throughout the book, several classic texts that are used to justify the recreational consumption of alcohol by Christians are discussed: Jesus turning water into wine in John 2, Jesus being accused of being a winebibber in Luke 7, and Paul telling Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake in 1 Timothy 5. These texts and much more are discussed in this quick, easy to read book on a pressing subject matter.



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The Old Testament is a beast. Many Christians want to know more about it, but they are too intimidated to even approach it. This Q & A guide was written to help make it a little less intimidating. This book includes appx. 500 questions that cover every book of the Old Testament. The questions are written in companion with Thomas Nelson's *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*. Read through Nelson's brief and simple introductions to each book of the Old Testament and then answer the questions in the Q & A that follow. There is a full answer key

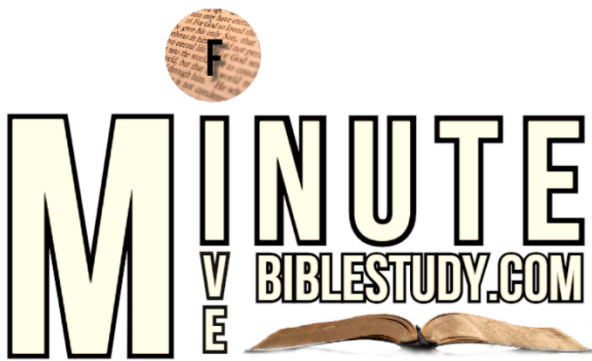
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with Ed Daniel.” The goal of the podcast is primarily to biblically inform and discuss those subject matters that often get neglected from the Christian discussion circle. Somebody has to talk about the things no one else will! Stream the podcast on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Google Podcasts, and more.



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