

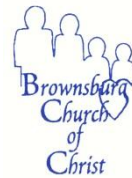
When Can I Be Baptized?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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PM Assembly



Introduction:

One of the most difficult meetings I ever face is when a parent says, "My son (or daughter) wants to speak with you." Inevitably, the child is between 8 and 14, wanting to know if they can be baptized. Over my few years, I have taken different approaches. At times, I have asked simple questions and if they knew the answers, let them be baptized because I didn't want to be the one who said, "No." At times, I worked hard to keep them from being baptized because I didn't want to be the one who dunked them, letting them think they were alright when they didn't know what they were doing. At times, I left it up to the parents who know their children better than me. At times, I have given study books for the parents to go through with their children. In the end we still wonder when a young person is ready to be baptized? No matter how I feel about making this choice, it seems people will forever look to the preacher to decide. Instead of turning to me to make this decision, I would like to share with you how you can know when you are ready to be baptized. The fact is we can know a young person is ready to be baptized the same way we can know anyone is ready to be baptized.

Discussion:

- I. No set age.
 - A. When the Israelites refused to enter the Promised Land, God established an age of accountability for that sin. Everyone who was 20 years old and upward would perish in the wilderness (**Numbers 14:28-32**). We may try to find a similar cut off age for sin accountability in the New Testament, but we can't find one.
 - B. **Romans 9:9-11** demonstrates newborns have not done anything good or bad. They are not accountable. We are not worried about their salvation; they are safe. Somewhere along the way, this changes. Paul demonstrates this in **Romans 7:9-10**. Paul said there was a time when he was alive apart from the Law. However, he was speaking of the Law of Moses (*cf.* **Romans 7:7**). That Law had been established by the time Paul was born, yet he had a period during which he was safe because he was apparently not accountable to the Law. At some point that changed. He became aware of the commandment, not in the sense of memorizing, but understanding. Then he violated it, granting life to sin; he died. At some point, he moved from being unaccountable to accountable. He became lost, condemned. He needed a Savior.
 - C. **Isaiah 7:15-16** provides a good marker, speaking of a child who is old enough to refuse evil and choose good. This is far more than knowing if I take the cookie, I will get spanked and, therefore, refusing the cookie. This is understanding the command and understanding why it is bad to violate the command. The problem for us is there is no set age. This doesn't happen developmentally for everyone at the same time. We don't put our 12 year and 364 day old child to bed knowing when they wake they will have developed a sense of morality and understanding. Everyone is different. Please, do not think if your child was not baptized by the same age as Suzie something is wrong. Everyone is different.
 - D. How then can we tell when someone is ready to be baptized? I believe the best model is found in **Matthew 5:3-6**: the first four beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Examine them and see what they say about being ready for salvation.
- II. Are you poor in spirit? (**Matthew 5:3**)
 - A. The kingdom of heaven is for the poor in spirit and no one else. If we are not poor in spirit, it doesn't matter how old we are, we are not ready to be baptized. This is a picture of absolute spiritual poverty, recognizing we have nothing to offer God with which to buy our way into His kingdom. It means being spiritually broken such that you know you have nothing left to do but crouch in God's presence begging Him for mercy. A great example of one who was poor in spirit was the tax collector in **Luke 18:13** who could merely say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (ESV).
 - B. It is one thing to say you must be poor in spirit. But think for a moment what that means. What must you know and do to be like that poor in spirit tax collector?
 1. *He knew he was a sinner.* That means understanding sin at some level. I don't mean that you can make a list of everything that is a sin. Nor do I mean that you can provide an encyclopedic definition of sin. But, you know that God has a law and you know you've violated it (**I John 3:4**). Have you sinned? This is im-

portant. If you have not sinned, you do not need to be saved because you have never become lost. You are safe. Consider an illustration; a person who never fell out of the boat is safe, not needing to be saved. Only when one falls out of the boat does he need to be saved. If you examine your life and say, "I haven't sinned, disappointing God, violating His will," you are not ready to be baptized. I know this is upsetting for some young people who know intellectually they are supposed to be baptized at some time. Understand this, if you do not see sin in your life, then we could dunk you under the water, but you didn't get baptized. Baptism is only for sinners.

2. *He knew he needed mercy from God.* **Isaiah 59:2** says our sin separates us from God. **Romans 6:23** says the wages of our sin is death. We need mercy to overcome these consequences. Here is the simply way to recognize this. If you died right now, what would happen to you? If you believe you would go to heaven, then you do not recognize a need for mercy and don't need to be baptized. If you believe you will go to hell, then you see that you are separated from God and need His mercy.
 3. *He knew he couldn't save himself.* He had nothing to offer God. Look at the difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee was sharing all the reasons he was righteous. He thought he had something to offer God. The tax collector knew he had nothing. So he just asked for mercy.
- C. This is poverty of spirit, seeing our sin, knowing our need for mercy, understanding we can't save ourselves.

III. Do you mourn your poverty? (**Matthew 5:4**)

- A. I have known kids who were baptized because Mom and Dad were breathing down their neck or because they had done something wrong and they thought this was a way to get their parents off their backs. But these do not make anyone ready to be baptized. We must be poor in spirit if we wish to be baptized. Further, we must mourn that poverty in spirit.
- B. If you are poor in spirit, you recognize your sin. Are you sorry for that sin? I am not asking if you are sorry you got caught. I am not asking if you are sorry your parents punished you. I am asking are you sorry for sinning? Do you feel guilt, shame, and remorse? Do you wish you could go back and do it over and do it differently, avoiding the sin and not just avoiding capture? Are you sorry for disappointing God? Do you want to live differently so you won't disappoint Him again?
- C. This is the mourning God wants. This mourning prepares us for baptism. In **II Corinthians 7:8-11**, Paul talked about godly sorrow. The mourning that prepares us for baptism leads us to change, producing earnestness in us and zeal for doing right because we do not wish to disappoint God anymore. Do you mourn your sins and your poverty of spirit?

IV. Are you ready to submit with meekness to Jesus? (**Matthew 5:5**)

- A. Even adults who have studied **Matthew 5:5** for years struggle trying to define this meekness or gentleness. For the purposes of our study, we need simply recognize gentleness and meekness have to do with submission to Jesus' way instead of continuing on our own path.
- B. Within the Sermon on the Mount, we see what this means. In **Matthew 7:13-14** it means we are ready to walk on the strait, narrow, and difficult way of Jesus instead of on the broad and easy way propagated by the world. According to **Matthew 7:21-23**, it means we long to follow the law of God and not just do anything we want and call it religion. According to **Matthew 7:24-27**, it means we are willing to build the house of our life on Jesus' Word and not on society's ideas. Gentleness means being willing to submit to Jesus in all things.
- C. What must you know and believe to be willing to gently submit to Jesus?
 1. Do you know what the Bible says about Jesus? I don't want to know if you can write a theological treatise about Jesus, cross referencing New Testament passages with Old Testament prophecies. I also don't mean that you know it necessarily in the terms I use, but that you grasp the concepts.
 - a. According to **Luke 3:23-38**, Jesus is the Son of God. **Romans 1:4** says His resurrection declared His Sonship with power. Do you know Jesus is the Son of God?
 - b. According to **John 1:1**, Jesus is the Word of God who is divine. Jesus is not the Father, but He is every bit as much God as the Father is; just as you are every bit as much human as your father. Do you know Jesus is divine?
 - c. According to **John 1:14**, Jesus, the divine Word, became flesh. He dwelt among us. Do you know Jesus became flesh and lived on this earth as a human?
 - d. According to **John 1:29, 36**, Jesus is the lamb of God who came to take away our sins. Jesus lived among us to die among us. He lived as one of us to die as one of us. He died to be the atoning sacri-

fice for our sins. We can't bring ourselves into God's presence, but God offered the sacrifice to do it. Further, He offered that sacrifice knowing full well all the sins we would commit (**Romans 5:6-8**). Some ask how they can get past their own past. The only way is through the blood of Jesus Christ. Do you know Jesus is that sacrifice for you?

- e. According to **Acts 2:36**, Jesus is both Lord and Christ. That is, He is the anointed one of God who is our prophet, priest, and king. What we need to understand is He is the ruler who has all authority (**Matthew 28:18**). On a practical level, that means knowing Jesus may tell us what to do and we are to obey Him (**Luke 6:46**). Do you know Jesus is Lord?

- 2. The question is not merely do you know these things. Do you believe them? In **John 8:24**, Jesus said, "unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (ESV). In the context, Jesus was referring back to His statement in **John 8:12** that He is the light of the world. That encompasses all we have said so far. Do you believe Jesus is all of these things? Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God, the divine Word who became flesh, living and dying among us as a sacrifice for our sins, becoming Lord and Christ? In **Acts 8:36**, the Ethiopian eunuch wanted to know if he was ready to be baptized. Philip simply asked if he believed with all his heart. The eunuch responded, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God" (**Acts 8:37**, NASB). Can you make that same confession? If not, you are not ready to be baptized.

- D. Only when we know and believe who Jesus is will we be ready to meekly submit. Are you ready to submit gently to Jesus, believing Him to be Lord, Christ and Son of God? Are you willing to sacrifice your life in order to let Him live through you (**Galatians 2:20**)?

V. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? (**Matthew 5:6**)

- A. Why do you want to be baptized? Because some of your friends have, because you know you are supposed to, because you want to get your Mom and Dad off your back, because you think it will fix some problem between you and your parents? None of this is biblical baptism. If you are thinking any of these things, you are not ready to be baptized. However, if you want to be baptized because you want the righteousness you abandoned in your sin, you are ready to be baptized. If you mourn your sin and your disappointment to God and want to be the person God is unashamed to call His child, then you can come to Jesus in baptism and receive that righteousness. Paul wrote about this in **Philippians 3:8-11**. If you want to be baptized in order to attain righteousness that comes from Jesus by His grace, then you are ready.
- B. Sadly, some are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness. They are simply hungering and thirsting for forgiveness. By that, I mean that they aren't pursuing forgiveness as the means to be righteous. Rather, they see forgiveness as permission to keep living mostly like they did before baptism. I have seen too many be baptized but not change. They still slept, goofed around, drew, chatted during the assemblies. They still held their commitment to sports teams, clubs, schools, scouts, etc. in higher regard than their commitment to Christ and the local church. They still didn't read their Bibles, pray, or spend time with other Christians regularly. They still told the same dirty jokes and used the same foul language. They still hung out with the same sinful crowd. They were still disrespectful to their parents and other adults. Even more sad, I have seen parents of these very children act like they had done their job because at least junior was baptized. Baptism is for those who long to be righteous, but have realized they can't, so they are turning themselves over to Jesus to gain righteousness from Him. If you view baptism as a means to let you do what you want because you punched the baptism card, you are not ready to be baptized. **Romans 6:1-2, 11-14** demonstrates if you are old enough to die to sin in baptism, you are old enough to be dead to sin and live for Christ. That is why Peter says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**).
- C. I am not saying you will never sin again. I am not saying overcoming sin won't be a growth struggle. It will be. It will be one you fight for the rest of your life. But if you are not willing to start fighting that fight, then you are not ready to be baptized, no matter how old you are.
- D. Understand this, if you are ready to be baptized, then you are ready to participate fully in the worship assembly, staying awake, singing out, praying along, and listening attentively. If you are ready to be baptized, you are ready to sing, study, and worship with your brethren when you go to a singing, Bible study, or other get together for worship instead of going off to the kids room to play or watch movies. If you are ready to be baptized, you are ready to be a working part of the congregation. That doesn't mean you will be teaching a Bible class next week, but it does mean you are ready to be given assignments by elders, deacons, evangelists, or teachers. If you are ready to be baptized, you are ready to be an example of godliness to your friends in the world. If you are ready to be baptized, you are ready to be a servant to your brethren, en-

couraging and edifying them. You are ready to visit the sick and shut in. You are ready to pray with others. You are ready to study with others. If you are not ready to do these things, you are not ready to be baptized. Again, I am not saying you have to be perfect. I am not saying these things won't be difficult sometimes. I am not saying you will have to do every single work in the congregation. I am just saying you have to be ready to step up to the plate and strive to grow in Christ's righteousness, otherwise, you are not ready to be baptized.

Conclusion:

I have no desire to make everyone think they were unready to be baptized. I know when I consider these points, I fear I wasn't poor in spirit or hungering for righteousness enough when I was baptized. These issues are matters of growth. You do not fully become poor in spirit and then get baptized. Rather, you begin to recognize your poverty and starvation for righteousness, but as you grow in Christ you naturally recognize this more. This doesn't mean you never obeyed the gospel. It means you are doing what Christians do; you are growing (**II Peter 1:5-8**). The point of this lesson is not to make anyone question their salvation. It is to help those who have yet to submit to Christ determine if they are ready. Have you submitted? Are you ready? Then why wait (**Acts 22:16**)?