

Believer's Baptism and Membership for Children

at Philadelphia Baptist Church

The following points identify some of the foundational convictions (based on Scripture) that are guiding PBC's beliefs and guidelines concerning the baptism of children.

- Baptism is the outward sign of the new covenant and should be administered by the church.¹
- The church should only administer baptism to those who have repented, or turned, from their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ. It is through repentance and faith that God unites us to Christ by his Holy Spirit, and thus we receive the benefits of Christ's saving work. Baptism bears witness to the (objective) work of God in salvation and the (subjective) response of the person being baptized.²
- Though baptism does not merit salvation, the New Testament closely connects baptism with repentance, faith, and the reception of the Holy Spirit.³ Baptism should therefore follow closely upon conversion after a credible profession of faith has been affirmed by the church.
- Because baptism marks those who belong to Christ by faith, it is prerequisite to church membership and to receiving the Lord's Supper.
- Like all baptismal candidates, the credibility of a child's profession of faith should be evaluated by the elders and affirmed by the church. Depending on a child's age, maturity level, life circumstances, and other factors, it may take longer for parents and/or the elders to evaluate whether a child's profession of faith is credible.
- We do not believe Scripture gives us a warrant to impose a minimum age requirement for baptismal candidates. Therefore, we do not want to knowingly forbid a child who has made a credible profession of faith from obeying Christ in baptism.
- We acknowledge that the church's decisions concerning the credibility of an individual's profession of faith are not infallible. Nevertheless, through the help of the Holy Spirit and in submission to God's design for the church, we trust that God will use our efforts to apply Scripture's teaching about baptism for the upbuilding of the church.

¹ Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Matthew 28:18–20.

² Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27; Acts 9:17–18, 10:44–48; 1 Peter 3:21.

³ Acts 8:12–13, 10:43–48; 18:8.

- The responsibilities of church membership can be carried out in age-appropriate ways by children who are members. Just as adult members rely on the wisdom of the elders and other members in various situations, so also, in a similar way, children may participate in the responsibilities of church membership by relying on the leadership of their parents, the elders, and other members.
- Parents of children who are members should, in accord with their child's level of maturity, exercise discernment in terms of their child's exposure to and involvement in certain matters of church business or church discipline.

In light of the information above, the elders of Philadelphia Baptist will address the decision to baptize children who profess faith in Christ on a case-by-case basis. If, after serious inquiry, we agree with the parents that a child is truly a believer, then we will recommend that the child be baptized. We join with the angels' rejoicing over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10) and we welcome these children into the church through the waters of baptism. The church, alongside the child's parents, will joyfully receive its responsibility to teach and disciple this new believer and encourage him or her to participate in the fellowship, ordinances, and life of the church.

If the elders are unable to affirm that the child's profession is credible, then the child's parents will be encouraged to continue talking with the child and with the elders in order to encourage a more accurate understanding of the gospel and the response it requires. We recognize that this can be a difficult and even confusing time for the child and for the parents, and we do not want to discourage children from continuing to pursue Christ and the ordinance of baptism in any way. In some cases, it may be obvious that the child is not ready to be baptized, while in others, the elders may simply be unable to affirm the child's profession of faith at this stage. Either way, we want to work with families to affirm the evidences of grace that we see and to encourage further instruction and conversations with the children.

We believe that God is able to bring children to saving faith at a very young age. However, since baptism is an ordinance of the *church* and not simply based on the desire of an individual or his/her family, we are convinced that elders and other church members should be able to affirm the child's profession of faith. We recognize that the decisions of the elders are not infallible, and that God's judgment is ultimately decisive. We rejoice in the fact that salvation is of the Lord and that, by His grace, even our fallible decisions will not thwart His saving purposes in the lives of His people.

Baptism and the subsequent implications of church membership where children are concerned is a subject that the elders have spent a great deal of time deliberating, studying, and praying over. The position outlined above, and the procedural steps which follow, are the product of that extensive process. These are the steps by which a child will be received as a candidate for baptism and church membership at Philadelphia Baptist Church:

- Child Professes Faith in Christ
 - A child must first give a credible profession of faith in Christ.
- Child Expresses Desire to Be Baptized
 - Parents should encourage a child who professes faith in Christ to follow the Lord through believer's baptism but should not pressure or bribe the child to do so.
 - If a child does not have believing parents, a church member should assume this responsibility in the child's life.
- Parents Contact an Elder
 - Parent contacts an elder and have a brief conversation about the next steps.
 - Elder provides a copy of "Gospel Conversations with Your Children" as a tool for parents to explore their child's understanding of the gospel more deeply.
- Discipleship Partner Contacts Parent
 - Baptism is a church ordinance, and we value having the child's faith affirmed by multiple people, so the next contact will be from a Discipleship Partner.
 - The Partner will set up a meeting with the parent(s) to talk through the options for how the next steps could take place.
 - The Discipleship Partner could be an elder or a church member assigned by an elder.
- Discipleship Sessions
 - With the help of a parent and a Discipleship Partner, the child completes a series of one-on-one discipleship sessions using *The Gospel Truth*, a discipleship resource provided by the elders.
 - The length of time to complete this process will vary, but parents and Partners are encouraged to take enough time to adequately address the material and assess the child's understanding of the gospel, salvation, their basis for assurance of salvation, and their understanding of the meaning of baptism.
- Debrief & Elder Interview
 - The child, parent(s), and Discipleship Partner will meet with an elder where they will review the candidate's understanding of the gospel, have the child share his or her testimony, and receive a guide to help the child prepare a written testimony which will be given before the church at the child's baptism if the elder believes the child to be ready for baptism.
- Membership Class
 - The child and parent will participate in the Membership Class where they will cover what it means to be a member of Philadelphia. The classes will also specifically cover baptism and taking the Lord's Supper. These classes are scheduled as needed.

- Baptism Scheduled
 - Once the candidate's testimony has been reviewed and approved by an elder, the baptism will be scheduled.

- Celebration
 - Parents are encouraged to plan a celebration of their child's baptism so that other believers can rejoice with him or her over the work Christ is doing in his or her life.

- Equipping for Discipleship
 - Parents and the church share the responsibility of discipling our children. Philadelphia will provide parents with resources for discipling their children through various stages of spiritual development.

- Church Membership
 - As a follower of Christ and having been baptized, the child will be received for membership and enjoy every other privilege and responsibility that belongs to members of the church.