

WHY WAIT?

Four Practical Reasons for Withholding Baptism Until Children Are Older by Pastor David Michael

When I encourage parents to wait until children are at least age 11 before baptizing their children, I have in mind at least four things that I believe are worth waiting for.

1. Wait for Understanding

Children can confess faith in Christ when they are very young but they will likely not be able to contemplate the significance of the baptism until they are older. It is important for children to understand the meaning of the ordinance and also have enough maturity to understand the significance of this act of obedience.

2. Wait for More Independent Thinking

It is not uncommon for those who were baptized during their pre-teen years to feel a need to be "re-baptized" when they are older. Memories of the first decade of our lives are often fuzzy at best. Even if we do remember a decision or an event like baptism, we usually cannot recall any reasoning behind the decision or event. Once a young person has the capacity for reasoning and for more independent thinking they are more likely to embrace the decisions and commitments they make as their own. Therefore it is reasonable that we refrain from baptizing a child until they are more likely to remember the experience and more fully embrace the commitment that is represented by this public declaration of faith.

3. Wait for Significance

Encouraging a child to wait until they are more mature reinforces the significance of baptism. This is especially true in a "me-oriented" culture that reinforces a mistaken notion that "if you want it, you can have it and you can have it now". Our hope is that as a child waits there will be a growing sense of anticipation as they look forward to following the Lord in the obedience of baptism. Such anticipation can add meaning and significance of the experience when they are eventually baptized.

4. Wait for Maturity

The process for preparing a young person for baptism is designed to instruct and encourage young people in their faith. It is also designed to help parents and church leaders discern the candidate's readiness for baptism. As it is, this process is a stretch for most eleven-year-olds and most children younger than this simply lack the maturity they need to satisfactorily complete the process. Moreover, baptism can be one of the experiences in a young person's life that mark the "coming of age" – the time when a person puts "childhood" behind and picks up the mantle of maturity.