



When Am I Old Enough To Be Baptized?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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When am I old enough to be baptized? This is a question that many who have heard God's teachings about the necessity of baptism ask. And, this is a commendable question. It demonstrates that a young person is interested in obeying the commandments of the Lord. This individual is interested in remembering his/her Creator in the days of youth (as instructed in Ecclesiastes 12:1). Although the Bible does not give us a specific age at which every child is ready to become a Christian by being baptized, it does give us enough guidelines so that we can make that decision for ourselves. Let's consider.

When I Have Sinned

An individual is old enough to be baptized when he/she is old enough to commit sin. In fact, until an individual is old enough to commit sin, there is no need for an individual to be baptized! This is why it is foolish to baptize babies and young children. They have never committed any sin. Although many people believe that we are born in sin, the Bible actually teaches that we are born pure and without sin (see Ezekiel 18:20 and Matthew 18:1-4).

It is not until we can possess a knowledge/understanding of good and evil that we are morally responsible/accountable for our own actions. For instance, whenever God told the Israelites that they would not enter the promised land of Canaan because of their rebellion against Him, He promised that those younger than 20 years old would enter the land (see Numbers 14:29-30). Deuteronomy 1:39 says that these had "no knowledge of good and evil." This was the reason for their innocence in the matter. Now, this is not to say the age of 20 is the age at which a person becomes morally accountable. God's judgment of this particular case was that these individuals under 20 years old were innocent of this particular rebellion. Yet, the principle of moral responsibility is established in this passage. It is when an individual becomes morally responsible that he/she can commit sin.

Sin occurs whenever an individual is capable of knowing right and wrong and chooses to do that which is wrong. 1 John 3:4 defines sin as "lawlessness." That is, sin is acting against, without, or contrary to God's laws. James 4:17 says that the one who "knows to do good and does not do it"

commits sin. Therefore, without a mental capacity to know right from wrong, we cannot commit sin. It is only those who are capable of sinning against God who are in need of what baptism accomplishes. Sin separates the sinner from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and leads to everlasting punishment in Hell (Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8). It is in baptism that God forgives sin (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), saves from the consequences of sin (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21), and puts an individual in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). Therefore, an individual must determine if he/she has committed sin in order to know whether he/she is old enough to be baptized.

When I Can Hear God's Word

An individual is old enough to be baptized when he/she can hear and truly understand the saving message of the gospel. Now, this does not mean that a child who can hear a story and remember some fact about a story is ready to be baptized – as even very young children are capable of this. Rather, the hearing that God requires is a true understanding of His saving plan of salvation.

Along with being baptized, God has commanded that an individual hear His word (His saving message). In fact, an individual must hear God's message before he/she can believe and obey it. In Matthew 17:5, God commanded people to hear His Son, Jesus Christ. Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." And, Acts 18:8 gives an example of the necessity of hearing God's message. Many of the Corinthians, "hearing, believed and were baptized." Certainly, they could not have even known that they needed to be baptized without first hearing God's word preached to them.

But, what do you need to hear and be able to understand before you can be baptized? The people who were baptized during Bible times were not expected to understand everything God has said before they could be baptized. Instead, they were only expected to hear and understand the basics of the gospel. They needed to hear and understand the basics truths about God, about sin, about Jesus Christ, and about what God required them to do to be saved. Therefore, an individual must determine whether he/she is capable of hearing and truly understanding the basics of the gospel to know whether he/she is old enough to be baptized.

When I Can Believe

An individual is old enough to be baptized when he/she can truly believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Now, this is not just accepting that there really is a God. Even very young children can acknowledge that there is a God, believe in a person named Jesus, and accept as truth the things they are told about Him. Instead, this involves truly understanding and being convicted that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He left Heaven in order to come to this earth, that He lived a sinless life, that He gave His life on the cross so that sinners could be saved, that He was buried in a tomb, and that He is risen from the dead.

God teaches that faith is essential to being saved. And, God teaches that it is required before an individual is baptized. In Hebrews 11:6, we are told that it is "impossible" to please God without faith. Instead, we must both believe that God exists and that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. In John 8:24, Jesus said that we will die in our sins if we do not believe that He is the Christ, the

Son of the living God. In Mark 16:16, Jesus says that those who believe and are baptized will be saved, and that those who do not believe will be condemned. And, whenever an Ethiopian man had heard about being baptized and saw an opportunity to be baptized, he asked the one who taught him, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized” (Acts 8:36)? The teacher responded, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:37).

So, this kind of true belief must not just be facts that an individual accepts as being true. Instead, it must be whole-hearted belief that leads an individual to obedience. James 2:14-26 demonstrates that a faith that only accepts certain facts as being true is worthless to God. Instead, He wants people to have faith that causes them to live their lives obeying Him. Hebrews chapter 11 demonstrates the same truth. Abraham believed God so much that he obeyed God when God commanded him to leave his homeland and sacrifice Isaac. Noah believed God so much that he obeyed God when God commanded him to build an ark. Therefore, an individual must determine whether he/she truly believes in God and Jesus Christ to know whether he/she is old enough to be baptized.

When I Can Repent

An individual is old enough to be baptized whenever he/she can truly repent of the sins he/she has committed. As we have already considered, this also implies that an individual must be old enough to have committed sin. For, an individual cannot repent of sins he/she has never committed.

God commands repentance as being necessary for salvation. And, repentance is instructed to come before an individual is baptized. In Acts 17:30, the apostle Paul said that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Jesus said that unless an individual repents, he/she will die in sin (Luke 13:3, 5). And, the apostle Peter commanded both repentance and baptism as being necessary “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

What is it that God requires in repentance? Repentance is more than just being sorry for committing sin. Repentance is the result whenever an individual experiences godly sorrow over the spiritual consequences of his/her sin and determines to turn away from sin. In repentance, an individual determines that he/she will no longer live for sin. Instead, he/she turns away from sin and determines to live for God. Therefore, an individual must determine whether he/she has committed sin and will turn away from that sin to know whether he/she is old enough to be baptized.

When I Can Confess Christ

An individual is old enough to be baptized whenever he/she can make the good confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But, this God-given requirement does not just mean that an individual must be old enough to make a confession. Instead, he/she must be old enough to truly understand what he/she is confessing – and be able to live his/her life according to that good confession.

God commands that this confession must be made. And, this confession is seen as being required before an individual is baptized. In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus said that He will confess before His Father those who confess Him before men, and deny those who deny Him. In Romans 10:9-10, the apostle Paul said that those who confess the Lord Jesus with their mouths and believe in their hearts

that God raised Him from the dead will be saved. And, in Acts 8:37, the Ethiopian who wanted to be baptized made the good confession prior to his baptism, saying, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

This confession must be made prior to an individual’s baptism. Then, this confession must continue to be demonstrated throughout that individual’s Christian life. This requires an absolute conviction that Jesus Christ is who the Bible says He is – and a willingness to make a public confession of an individual’s allegiance to this Jesus. Therefore, an individual must know whether he/she is capable of truly confessing the Lord Jesus to know whether he/she is old enough to be baptized.

When I Can Live For Christ

An individual is old enough to be baptized whenever he/she is old enough to make the determination to live for Jesus Christ. You see, being baptized is not just a decision about being immersed in water. Instead, it is through baptism that an individual is forgiven of his/her past sins and becomes a follower of Jesus Christ.

Then, God requires that an individual remain faithful to Christ throughout his/her earthly life (see Revelation 2:10). The Bible teaches that it is possible for the one who becomes a Christian to sin and be lost once again (see Galatians 5:4). Therefore, baptism is only the beginning of a life-long commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus taught that an individual must count the cost of discipleship. He/she must determine whether he/she is truly willing to put God absolutely first in his/her life. Living the life of a Christian will not always be easy, as there will be trials, temptations, and persecutions. But, it is the only kind of life that is truly rewarding (as it rewards, in part, with everlasting life in Heaven). Therefore, an individual must know whether he/she is truly willing to live his/her life dedicated to faithfully obeying Jesus Christ in order to know whether he/she is old enough to be baptized.

Conclusion

When all of these things are true about you, you are old enough to be baptized. And, whenever you know you have sinned, hear the word of God, believe in God and Christ, repent of your sins, make a public confession of Jesus Christ, and determine to live your life for Christ, you *should* be baptized immediately! Do not delay, for the sinner’s soul is in great spiritual danger!

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Written by Eric Krieg

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