

Preparing Young Christians for Baptism and Communion



Village Bible Church

Preparing Young People for Baptism: Mentor's Guide by David Michael

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NOTE: Some sections, including Session 6 adjusted from its original to match Village Distinctive on Baptism.

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Introduction

This guide is the fruit of a vision that began several years ago when my oldest daughter was in 6th grade and was invited to attend a baptism preparation class at our church. Even though this was a good experience for her, I was unsettled. I wondered why I was not included in the process. “She’s my daughter!” I reasoned. “I’m responsible for nurturing her faith! Shouldn’t someone ask me if I think she’s ready to be baptized? Shouldn’t I contribute something to her preparation?” It was even more unsettling because I did not think she was ready, even though she had been given the green light to proceed.

Rather than encouraging her to move forward in the process, I invited Amy to join me for a special time of preparation before her baptism. I prepared seven sessions to cover the basics of faith, baptism, and church membership. She took these sessions seriously, and we were both surprised by how much we enjoyed them. Each time we met I felt like I was doing my job as the spiritual leader, and when we were finished I felt more confident that my daughter was ready for baptism. We also discovered that the time spent in these heartfelt discussions about eternal realities drew us closer as father and daughter, reinforcing a special spiritual bond between us that we both will cherish for a lifetime.

Three years later, I became Bethlehem’s Pastor for Parenting and Children’s Discipleship, and this experience with my daughter shaped the way we have prepared young people for baptism ever since. As a parent, and now as a leader in the church, my desire is that the church faithfully oversees the ordinance of baptism, while preserving and reinforcing the responsibility, privilege, and blessing that belongs to parents to prepare their children to take this important step of obedience and faith. May the Lord be pleased to use these efforts for His glory and for the joy of the next generation.

For the Joy of the Next Generation,

David Michael

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Masculine Pronoun

Note: In order to avoid cumbersome wording we have chosen to use the masculine pronoun when referring to the candidate. Please understand that we are using this pronoun generically.

Process for Baptism of a Young Christian

Candidate expresses interest.

Parents of prospective baptism candidates usually enter the process at their own request or in response to a letter of invitation from the church.

Consent is obtained from parents.

Candidates under age of 18 gain the consent of their parents before beginning the preparation process. This includes candidates whose parents are not believers.

Mentor is chosen.

Each candidate has a mentor. Usually the mentor is the candidate's father— if he is a believer and living in the home. If not, the candidate's mother, grandparent, or another mature believer may assume this responsibility. If neither parent is a believer, the candidate selects (or seeks help finding) a mentor who can lead him through the preparation process and encourage his walk with the Lord following the baptism. Candidates in the same family may share one mentor, but the mentor is encouraged to meet with the candidates separately.

Mentor attends Baptism Foundation Class.

This meeting is designed to help prepare mentors for their significant role in leading the candidate through the preparation process. Spouses are also welcome to attend, but **the candidate should not attend this class.**

Mentor leads 6 individual sessions with candidate.

Mentors are encouraged to have at least six separate one-on-one sessions with the candidate over the course of about eight weeks. This guide details the goals and process of leading the young person through each of these sessions. During this time, mentors determine if the candidate should continue in the preparation process or be encouraged to wait. These sessions are as follows:

- 1. Preparing the Candidate**
- 2. Understanding the Gospel**
- 3. Assurance of Salvation**
- 4. Affirmation of Faith**
- 5. The Meaning of Baptism**
- 6. Preparing a Testimony**

Please Note: The reason we are not conducting these sessions in a classroom is to remove the pressure that young people (or their parents) can feel to proceed with baptism even if they, their parents, or the elders feel they are not ready. This same pressure can exist when more than one child in a family is being prepared at the same time. It can be awkward in a family if it is determined that one sibling is ready and the other sibling should wait. And it is particularly awkward when the older sibling is the one who should wait.

Mentors and candidates meet at a Saturday morning group session.

Mentors and candidates meet together with one or two church leaders. Candidates share their testimonies with the group and review the meaning of baptism. The candidate must submit their written testimony at least one week prior to this session.

It is important for candidates to understand that they are being baptized into the body of Christ and that their church is the local expression of that “body.” Accordingly, we emphasize the importance of active participation and formal membership in the church. Candidates are introduced to the meaning of church membership. The church covenant and statement of doctrine are also reviewed.

Elder interviews candidate for baptism.

After both the candidate and mentor have indicated the candidate's readiness to move ahead with baptism, the candidate will be interviewed to confirm a credible profession of faith, an accurate understanding of the Gospel, and a comprehension of the meaning and significance of baptism. The interview team will include an elder, an adult leader (e.g., Sunday School teacher, small group leader, etc.) and, when available, an older youth who is a member. During this interview, the candidate gives his or her testimony and responds to questions from the team concerning the candidate's faith and some general questions to discern a basic understanding of the church.

Elder interviews candidate for church membership.

If, at the time of the baptism interview, the candidate desires to proceed with church membership, the membership interview will be combined with the baptism interview (above). The aim of this interview is to determine the candidate's readiness for church membership. The interview team will be interested in the candidate's grasp of the church covenant, the statement of doctrine and the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

Candidate participates in a scheduled baptismal service.

Once the interview team recommends the candidate for baptism, the candidate will be scheduled for a future baptismal service.

How Mentors Should Prepare



Like most things in life, you and the candidate will get more from this experience if you take time to prepare. Here are three suggestions.

1. Examine yourself and pray

You may not consider yourself to be a shining example of faith, and thus may feel reluctant to lead the candidate through this process. This job does not require you to be a theological or spiritual “giant,” but it does require you to lean on the Lord's grace, which is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul was one of the greatest spiritual mentors of all time and yet affirmed that his message and his preaching were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Corinthians 2:4), so that his faith was not resting in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Weakness, however, should not be confused with hypocrisy. Obviously you cannot lead a young person through this process if you are not a believer. So first follow Paul's admonition and examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Furthermore, you cannot presume to give spiritual direction to anyone if you are walking in disobedience and deliberately sinning against the Lord. Paul rebukes Roman teachers who taught others but did not teach themselves:

. . . you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Romans 2:21-24).

If you are trusting Christ and walking in His ways, waging war against sin, and striving to be an example to others in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (1

Timothy 4:12), then pursue this opportunity to encourage the candidate in faith and join with the Apostle who said:

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, under-handed ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

2. Enlist prayer support

We can devise and execute a system for baptism preparation and can coax the flesh to cooperate with us. But only God can touch the heart and generate an authentic response to truth. Recognize that God may be pleased to use this time to advance His work and to touch the candidate's heart (and yours) in a meaningful and life-changing way. Also be careful not to underestimate what the enemy of our faith and our souls may do to oppose this work. Invite one or two people who are close to you and the candidate to join you in praying that God would speak to the heart and that the enemy would be thwarted.

3. Encourage spiritual discipline.

If the candidate does not have a regular time of personal Bible study and prayer, this would be a good time to begin. Along with daily Bible reading and prayer, you may want to assign memory work or homework for the candidate to work on between sessions. You may also want to encourage keeping a journal of thoughts, insights, and highlights gleaned from personal time in the Word and from these preparation sessions. Consider keeping your own journal as well, to document your thoughts, impressions, topics discussed, questions raised, observations made, and insights gained throughout this process. You may want to spend part of your session sharing with each other the gleanings from time in the Word and prayer.

4. Plan your meeting times

It is important for you set aside sufficient time to meet privately with the candidate. This will communicate that these times are important and should be taken seriously. Plan at least six sessions. Even though it may be possible to race through the material quickly, we suggest that you spread the sessions out over several weeks. Think of the steps as milestones in the process, and take as many sessions as you need to complete each step. This guide will provide enough detail to direct you through each session, but it is also flexible enough for you to lead the discussion in a way that fits you and the candidate.

When and Where

Establish a regular time and perhaps find a special place to meet with your candidate. One dad met in a local restaurant with his daughter every Saturday morning. At the end of the process, he wrote a note and said, *Although I initially*

approached these sessions with some fear and trepidation, we have had such deep conversations, I am actually looking forward to continuing these, even after baptism! Thanks for helping get us off the dime. If you are a parent who is stuck on “the dime,” consider that this process may help establish a regular time when your son or daughter can anticipate the opportunity to discuss important issues of life and faith with you.

It is important that you prepare ahead of time. Carefully review the goals for each session and think about how you will guide the candidate through each one. Keep in mind that this booklet is a tool to help you prepare. It is not designed simply to be read to the candidate. It is also not intended to be handed to the candidate to read for himself. We suggest you use this booklet to prepare, but then leave it behind when you meet with the candidate.

Plan for these to be eyeball-to-eyeball and heart-to-heart discussions. **Rather than reading aloud from this booklet, it would be better to make your own notes.** This will communicate that what you are saying comes from your heart, and that you consider these matters serious enough to take the time to prepare.

Prayer with the Candidate

Make prayer a significant part of each session. Encourage the candidate to pray with you. If you are a parent and prayer with your son or daughter has become awkward or mechanical, you may need to give some structure to your prayers. Praying through a particular Bible text is one way to guide the candidate in prayer. There are also helpful formulas like “ACTS” (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication) that can help direct you and the candidate in prayer.

Head and Heart

Remember that in each session you want to influence not only the “head” but also the “heart.” It is important for the candidate to understand the truth, but his heart response to the truth is even more important. Be alert for an authentic heart response to the things you discuss together.

Actions for the Mentor

- ▣ Choose a time to examine yourself. _____
- ▣ Who are three people you can ask to support you both in prayer?

- ▣ In what ways will you encourage spiritual discipline?
 - ▣ Bible Reading ▣ Regular Prayer ▣ Prayer Journaling
- ▣ What helps will you provide for the candidate?
 - ▣ Bible ▣ Prayer Journal
- ▣ Where will you meet? _____
- ▣ Would you be willing to continue meeting with the candidate regularly?

Important Considerations before Proceeding



Faithfully preparing a young person to follow the Lord in the obedience of baptism and to become a covenant member of a local church is an important responsibility entrusted to Christian parents and to the church. We believe that parents are responsible for instructing their children and overseeing their spiritual development. The church leadership is responsible to sustain and guard the ordinance of baptism and to faithfully “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:1-3). We believe this “faithful shepherding” includes preparing our young people well. Therefore it is fitting for leaders of the church and parents to work together in preparing young people for baptism and for the responsibility and privilege of church membership.

Goals of the Preparation Process

The goals of this process are to:

- Glorify Christ and the redeeming work of the cross.
- Help discern the candidate’s readiness for baptism.
- Involve the spiritual leader of the home in the preparation process.
- Provide the candidate with another opportunity to profess faith in a credible, decisive, public and memorable way.
- Inspire the candidate to live in obedience and faithfulness to the Lord.
- Prepare and equip the young person for the privilege and responsibility of membership in the local church.
- Provide an opportunity for the immediate family and the wider community of believers to publicly affirm, support, encourage and pray for the candidate.

The Ordinance of Baptism

Jesus established two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are to be practiced by the church. The church leadership is charged with overseeing and conducting these ordinances in a manner that is biblical and pleasing to the Lord. We practice "believer's baptism," which means that candidates must have a publicly credible faith before they are baptized and admitted into membership. Recognizing that only God can perfectly discern the affections of the heart, the elders of have adopted this process to aid in their discernment. The elders recognize the insight parents have concerning the spiritual conditions of their children's hearts. This process is an effort to draw upon that insight and also honor the rightful place of parents (especially fathers) in the spiritual instruction of their children, without compromising the responsibility of the elders to "shepherd the flock" (1 Peter 5:2).

When should a young person be baptized?

There are differences among those who embrace believer's baptism concerning the timing of baptism for children who profess faith in Christ. Some argue for "immediate participation," meaning that children should be baptized as soon as they can confess faith in Christ. We lean toward the second view, which suggests waiting to baptize children until there is evidence of regeneration and the ability to reason independently in spiritual matters. See Appendix I for more discussion on these two views.

It is our practice to wait until a child is at least 11 years old before considering him for baptism. More importantly, it is our practice to wait until there is evidence of regeneration and enough maturity to articulate the Gospel and give a credible profession of faith. Therefore we depend on the candidate's parents (or mentor) to discern when the young person is ready to begin the preparation process.

We encourage children to wait for several reasons:

Wait for Understanding

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

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 young people have the capacity for reasoning and for more independent thinking, they are more likely to embrace as their own the decisions and commitments they make. Therefore it is reasonable that we refrain from baptizing children until they

are more likely to remember the experience and more fully embrace the commitment that is represented by this public declaration of faith.

Wait for Significance

Encouraging children 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 children wait, 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.

Wait for Maturity

The process for preparing young people for baptism is designed to instruct and encourage them in their faith. It is also designed to help parents and church leadership to discern the candidates’ readiness for baptism. As it is, this process is a stretch even for many 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 “coming of age” – the time when a person puts “childhood” behind and picks up the mantle of maturity.

1. Preparing the Candidate

Session 1 Activity: "Symbols of Childhood and Maturity"



Before you meet with the candidate, find a stuffed animal or favorite toy from his childhood. A picture of a special memory would also work. Then take a few minutes for each of you to describe the importance that item or event once held. Explain to the student that baptism is an important symbol of the new life God gives to a Christian, and of how those who enter into baptism are leaving behind their old way of life to follow Jesus in obedience.

Goal of this Session

The goal in this session is to prepare the candidate for the time you will be spending together. The aim is to clarify expectations and to impress upon the candidate the significance of the discussion you will be having. The hope is that by the time this first meeting comes to an end the candidate will realize these meetings are important and resolve to take them seriously.

Communicate Your Expectations for the 6 Sessions

Begin by making sure the candidate understands the reason for meeting and encourage him to describe his expectations for these sessions and what he hopes will come from them. It will also be important for you to talk about your expectations and vision for your time together. You could say something like this:

"This is a time for us to talk about important issues of faith and obedience. I want to make sure you understand the saving work that I believe the Lord has done in your life and to help you put it into words. I also want to help you understand what baptism means and make sure you are feeling ready to move

ahead with it. You may come to the end of this time and feel very ready or you may also feel that you want to wait. I want you to feel ready to be baptized but not pressured into it.”

A Call to Spiritual Manhood or Womanhood

Consider the following texts in 1 Corinthians and emphasize that the time has come for the candidate to move away from spiritual childhood.

1 Corinthians 3:1-2: And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it.

1 Corinthians 13:11: When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

1 Corinthians 14:20: Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.

1 Corinthians 16:13: Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

The candidate should understand that even though God is the one who calls us out of spiritual darkness and gives us a heart that can respond to Him, we must personally respond to God in faith and, by His grace, walk in obedience. Emphasize that the candidate must now take responsibility for himself in ways that he could not when he was a little child. This analogy may be helpful:

“When you were a baby, you were totally helpless. You could not be responsible for feeding yourself or cleaning up after yourself, or keeping yourself warm, because you were physically unable to do those things. Spiritually you were also helpless. You were not mature enough and your brain was not developed enough to understand sin, your need for salvation, and all that Jesus did to deliver you from sin. Little by little, you have been growing in your understanding of these things so that by now you are fully responsible for acting on the truth you understand.”

A Call to Joy

In this first session and in the ones that follow, it will be helpful to impress upon the candidate that you are committed to his joy. You want him to be blessed, and that blessing flows from both the fear of and the delight in the Lord. We want him to tremble and dance in the presence of the Lord. *Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments! (Psalm 112:1b)*

There are numerous biblical texts you can take him to that would emphasize that the call to follow the Lord is a call to pursue joy in this life and in the life to come. Psalm 16 is the testimony of a man who feared and delighted in the Lord. Consider this text or perhaps one of your favorites with the candidate and identify together the joy that the psalmist found in following the Lord.

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night a/so my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD/ always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life, in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:1-11).

A Call to Readiness

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a coming judgment.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ' . . . Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. '...And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46).

Make clear to the candidate that you, as his mentor (father), have a responsibility for him and for his faith. You are responsible to point him to the Lord, to teach him the truth, and to warn him of the coming judgment, but emphasize that you cannot respond for him. You cannot embrace the truth for him. This is something he must do, and he can only do it with God's help and by His grace. The following text may help him understand this principle:

"So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul" (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

As your mentor (father) I am like that watchman. God calls me to faithfully teach and guide you in His way. If I don't do that, you could die in your sin but the Lord will hold me responsible. If I faithfully lead you to the truth, you could still reject it and die in your sin, but the Lord will not hold me responsible.

We can be certain that Jesus will return, and we can be certain that we will all die unless Jesus returns first. No one knows when either of these things will take place. Consider the following texts:

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven... But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:26-27, 32).

“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:19-20)

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that” (James 4: 13-15).

Even though the Bible does not tell us when these things will take place, it does tell us to be prepared. Consider these texts:

“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning — lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (Mark 13:33-37).

Also consider the parable of the ten virgins waiting for the bride-groom (Matthew 25:3ff) and the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14ff).

As you conclude this session, emphasize that before moving ahead with baptism you want to make sure he is ready — ready to be baptized and especially ready to meet the Lord when He returns.

Actions for the Mentor before the Session

- ❑ Purchase prayer journal for candidate.
- ❑ Find a symbol of the candidate’s childhood for the opening illustration.
- ❑ Plan meeting outline (prayer, illustration, content, candidate action challenge, prayer).

Actions for the Candidate after the Session

- ❑ Start daily devotions (Bible reading plan, prayer, prayer journal).

2. Understanding the Gospel

Session 2 Activity: "The GOSPEL"



Start out your time together by each describing your life in only 6 words. Let the candidate share his 6 words first, and then explain why he chose those words. After he's done, take your turn to share and explain the 6 words you would choose to describe your life.

Explain how there are six words that describe life for every human: God, our, sins, paying, everyone, and life. If your meeting place allows, take 5 minutes to watch the exciting video that explains these truths in detail. Allow for any reaction to the video, and then jump into the content for this session. The video can be found at villagebible.org/gospel, or by scanning the code.

GOD created us to be with Him.
OUR sins separate us from God.
SINS cannot be removed by good deeds.
PAYING the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again.
EVERYONE who trusts in Him alone has eternal life.
LIFE with Jesus starts now and lasts forever.



Goal of this Session

The goal in this step is to deepen the candidate's understanding of and appreciation for the Gospel so that by the time he comes to step 6, the candidate can demonstrate an understanding of and affection for the Gospel.

Walk through the Gospel Outline

Begin the session by asking the candidate about his understanding of the Gospel. This will help you discern what he already understands and which of the following elements of the Gospel you will need to emphasize in your instruction.

What is your understanding of sin and the consequences of sin? Why did Jesus have to die? How does Jesus' death accomplish our salvation? What must we do to be saved?

After discussing each element, encourage the candidate to put the Gospel in his own words. Review often, even outside the session.

One way to frame the Gospel for the candidate is to explain that God's saving work began long before we were born. The decisive point of salvation was at the cross, not when we personally came to Christ. Your job is to help the candidate understand and be able to describe what Christ did at the cross and resurrection to save him.

Another way to frame the Gospel is to explain that there was a problem that needed to be solved, what God did to solve it, and how we benefit from the solution.

However you choose to frame your explanation of the Gospel, there are four essential elements that the candidate will need to understand and be able to put into words.

Truth about God

a. God is holy.

He does not sin, do evil or make mistakes.

- "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind." (Numbers 23:19a).
- ... God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one (James 1:13b).

God is separated from sin.

- Holiness is more than "not sinning." To be holy is to be completely separated from sin. Sin and holiness cannot be in the same place. When Adam and Eve sinned they hid from the presence of the Lord. The "holy of holies" in the tabernacle and temple reminded Israel that God was separated from them because He was holy.

Because God is holy, we must be holy, too.

- "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

- Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).
- ... but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy". (1 Peter 1:5-6).

b. God is devoted to His glory.

Everything God has done, all that He is doing, and all that He ever will do is for His glory and His glory alone.

- He has compassion on His people so that Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear [His] glory (Psalm 102:15).
- He restrained His hand from Pharaoh "...to show [His] power, so that [His] name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exodus 9:16).
- Jesus came for the glory of God (John 17:5).
- Jesus healed for the glory of God (John 11:4).
- Jesus prayed for the glory of God (John 17:24).
- In the end (God's goal), "...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD..." (Habakkuk 2:14), "... from the rising of the sun, to its setting, [His] name will be great among the nations..." (Malachi 1:11).

God created (made) us for His glory.

- "... bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth...whom I created for my glory..." (Isaiah 43:6b-7b).

Because we were made for God's glory we must live for His glory.

- So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Truth about Sin

a. Because of Adam's sin, we all as human beings are born in sin— we have a corrupt nature, which means we are born sinful.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... (Romans 5:12).

b. Because of our sin, we have failed to please God.

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8).

We have failed to be holy.

- “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12).

We have failed to live for His glory.

- ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23).
We don't love Him like we should, we don't trust Him like we should, we don't treasure Him like we should, etc.

c. Because of our sin, God is very angry with us.

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Romans 2:5).

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins... and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3).

d. Because of our sin, we are condemned to hell.

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).

“Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'” (Matthew 22:13).

Truth about What Christ Did

The main point to emphasize is that Christ is our substitute. He took our place. He bore (carried) our sins instead of us. He became the object of God's wrath instead of us. He died instead of us.

a. Christ bore our sins.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24).

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures... (1 Corinthians 15:3).

b. Christ became a curse for us.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us— for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

c. Christ became our righteousness.

In Christ, we can be holy.

- For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

- For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

In Christ, we glorify God.

- "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them" (John 17:10).
- "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (John 13:31b).

Truth about Faith

a. Faith is the way we benefit from what Jesus did for us.

For by grace you have been saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8a).

b. Faith is not something we do; it is a gift of God.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8b-9).

c. Faith is trusting in Christ alone for the forgiveness of our sins and the fulfillment of all His promises to us.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

d. Faith is treasuring Christ.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46).

"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20-21).

Treasuring Christ Together

We want the candidate to understand the Gospel and be able to communicate it in a coherent and personal way. However, the ability to know, understand, and

articulate the Gospel does not necessarily point to authentic faith. A young person can memorize the elements of the Gospel and the supporting texts without ever treasuring Christ as his own.

As you review the Gospel with the candidate, take time to glory in the love and work of Christ.

Pause from time to time to pray, worship, and give thanks to the Lord. Perhaps look at some hymns or worship songs that often help us express our affection for Christ and for the Gospel.

Let the candidate see your emotion. Let him hear how you express your love for Christ.

Consider giving your own testimony of how you came to understand and cherish the Gospel. Encourage him to ask others to share how the Gospel became precious to them.

Actions for the Mentor before the Session

- Watch the GOSPEL video and figure out a way to show it in your session.
- Choose six words that describe your life to share in the illustration.

Actions for the Candidate after the Session

- Continue daily devotions (Bible reading plan, prayer, prayer journal).

3. Assurance of Salvation

Session 3 Activity: "Are You Certain?"



Take about 10 minutes for each of you to share 3 things about which you're absolutely certain. These could be facts about creation, facts about your family, or about yourself. Explain that our salvation from Jesus is something about which we can be absolutely certain. Share a little bit about what helps you feel assured about your salvation.

Goal of this Session

In this step your goal is to help the young person *Examine [himself], to see whether [he] is in the faith* (2 Corinthians 13:5), and if he is in the faith, then this step will help to strengthen his assurance.

Young people who have grown up in Christian homes and have had early experiences with the Lord are often prone to doubt and uncertainty about the authenticity of their faith.

Did I really know what I was doing at 6 years old when I accepted Jesus in my heart? Do I believe just because I was taught to believe a certain way, or am I genuinely and personally trusting in Christ?

In this step, it will be important for the candidate to have ample opportunity to express any questions or doubts he may be wrestling with. Encourage him to be open and honest about his thoughts and feelings concerning the Lord. Assure him that no sincere question is a stupid question.

Can I lose my salvation?

First, establish that a true Christian — a person who is truly treasuring Christ — will not fall away but will persevere in faith to the end of his life. Consider the following texts with the candidate:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him, should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:38-40).

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31).

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister (Colossians 1:21-23).

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:12-14).

How can I know if my faith is real?

If we can have confidence that a true believer is secure in Christ, ask the candidate to consider how we can know if a person is truly a believer or not? How do we know if our faith or someone else's faith is real?

In Chapter 40 of his book, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Wayne Grudem offers three practical questions to help us discern genuine faith. These questions are introduced briefly in this section, but the entire article with supporting texts and further explanation is reprinted in Appendix 2 of this booklet. If you have time, we suggest you review the full text of Grudem's article and work through some of the related verses with the candidate.

Do I have a present trust in Christ for salvation?

"Do I today have trust in Christ to forgive my sins and take me without blame into heaven forever? Do I have confidence in my heart that he has saved me? If I were to die tonight and stand before God's judgment seat, and if he were to ask me why he should let me into heaven, would I begin to think of my good deeds and depend on

them, or would I without hesitation say that I am depending on the merits of Christ and am confident that he is a sufficient Savior?" [Grudem, p, 803; Appendix 2, p. 56]

Is there evidence of a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in my heart?

Grudem suggests six evidences of this "regenerating work":

1. "The subjective testimony of the Holy Spirit within our hearts bearing witness that we are God's children (Romans 8:15-16; 1 John 4:13). This testimony will usually be accompanied by a sense of being led by the Holy Spirit in paths of obedience to God's will (Romans 8:14)." [p. 804; Appendix 2, p. 56]
2. "...if the Holy Spirit is genuinely at work in our lives, he will be producing the kind of character traits that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit, (Galatians 5:22)" [p. 804; Appendix 2, p. 56]
3. "Related to this kind of fruit is another kind of fruit—the results of one's life and ministry as they have influence on others and on the church... *'You will recognize them by their fruits...every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.'* (Matthew 7:16-20)" [p. 804; Appendix 2, p. 56-57]
4. "Another evidence of work of the Holy Spirit is continuing to believe and accept the sound teaching of the church. 'No one who denies the Son has the Father... If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father' (1 John 2:23-24). John also says, '... Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us....'(1 John 4:6)" [p. 804; Appendix 2, p. 57].
5. "Another evidence of genuine salvation is a continuing present relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus says, *'Abide in me, and I in you'* and, *'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'* (John 15:4, 7) This abiding in Christ will include not only day-by-day trust in him in various situations, but also certainly regular fellowship with him in prayer and worship." [p. 804; Appendix 2, p. 57]
6. "Finally, a major area of evidence that we are genuine believers is found in a life of obedience to God's commands. John says, 'Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. '(1 John 2:4-6)" [p. 804-805; Appendix 2, p. 57]

Do I see a long-term pattern of growth in my Christian life?

"The first two areas of assurance dealt with present faith and present evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. But Peter gives one more kind of test that we can

use to ask whether we are genuinely believers. He tells us that there are some character traits which, if we keep on increasing in them, will guarantee that we will 'never fall' (2 Peter 1:10). ..This implies that our assurance of salvation can be something that increases over time in our lives. Every year that we add to these character traits in our lives, we gain greater and greater assurance of our salvation. Thus, though young believers can have a quite strong confidence in their salvation, that assurance can increase to even deeper certainty over the years in which they grow toward Christian maturity." [p. 805; Appendix 2, p. 58]

At this point, reviewing past experiences can help the candidate see a long-term pattern. Looking back to see God's work in his life can reinforce the assurance that *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6b). Encourage the candidate to talk about personal experiences that he has had with the Lord.

Try to discover ways in which his faith has been personalized and "real" to the candidate. You may recall moments in early childhood when the candidate seemed especially responsive to the Lord. Talk about those times and encourage him in this. You may even want to pause and rejoice in the Lord, giving thanks for making Himself known to the candidate.

Consider giving the candidate an assignment to interview one or two people who have known him long enough to see evidence of faith in his life. This can be an encouraging experience for the candidate and another way to reveal a pattern of spiritual growth and development in his life.

At this point in your sessions, you or the candidate may not see sufficient evidence of saving faith. Perhaps there are areas of rebellion, disobedience against God, and/or unbelief that have surfaced in your discussion. If this is the case, encourage the candidate to pray and to spend time seeking the Lord in His Word. Working through the next two goals will help you decide if you should press on toward baptism or wait until there is more evidence and assurance of saving faith.

Make sure you earnestly pray and intercede for the candidate. In Genesis 25, Isaac prayed with the Lord for a child to be born to Rachel and *the Lord granted his prayer* (v. 21). How much more will the Lord hear our prayer when we ask Him to reveal Himself to our children? I believe and have found it to be true in my own parenting experience that the Lord loves to answer that kind of prayer. Let's trust Him to do it.

Actions for the Mentor before the Session

Actions for the Candidate after the Session

4. Affirmation of Faith

Session 4 Activity: "All In"



Take a few minutes to try out a new card game called "All In." The object of the game is to end up with all the cards. After the cards are shuffled, divide the cards into two equal portions. Each player simultaneously takes the two top cards and looks at them. He then has three options from which he must quickly choose.

1. He can lay down both cards if he thinks his cards total more than the cards of their opponent. If he's right, he wins the round and all four cards are returned, face down, to the bottom of his stack.
2. If he's afraid his cards will lose, he can lay down the lower card face up, sacrificing it to keep the other card.
3. If he is very certain he will win the round, he can declare "All In" and risk his entire stack to win his opponent's entire stack, winning the entire game.

Each game is limited to 10 rounds. If no one has declared "All In" after the 10th round, each player counts his cards and whoever has the most cards wins.

Play the game several times, allowing each player to go "All In" at least once. Explain how this illustrates that when we're certain about something, we can go "All In" for it. Christians can go "All In" and trust Jesus because He holds power over all.

Goal of this Session

This session is intended to provide the candidate with an opportunity to consciously and solemnly express his trust in and allegiance to Christ, thus exalting the regenerating power of the Gospel over his will. It also provides a safe place to freely respond to the questions he will be asked at his baptism. If the candidate does not feel ready to answer "yes" to these questions, he is more likely to respond truthfully in the privacy of your meetings than he would if he were standing up to his waist in water and surrounded by a crowd of people.

Personal Accountability to God

Help the candidate understand that each of us must respond to God personally and individually. The candidate will stand before an infinitely righteous Judge one day and will have to give an account for the life that he lived. Have the candidate read the following texts and describe in his own words what the text is teaching.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God... (Romans 14:10).

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Remind the candidate that his hope at the judgment will rest not in the church he attended or in the faith of his parents, but on whether he is trusting and treasuring Christ.

Affirmation of Faith

Explore several texts in the Bible where people were given the opportunity to express their intention to follow Jesus.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:21-22).

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew, sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him (Matthew 9:9).

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

Review the four baptism questions.

It is important to make sure the candidate understands the questions before you ask them.

- 1. Are you a sinner deserving of the judgment of God?**
- 2. Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son, sent to save sinners by His perfect life, death, burial, and resurrection?**
- 3. Do you repent of your sins and place your faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and for the fulfillment of all His promises to you, even eternal life?**
 - a. Reinforce that this question affirms trust in Christ.
 - b. Reinforce what he is trusting Christ for.
 - c. Reinforce the word "alone." And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).
- 4. Do you now desire to place yourself under the lordship of Jesus Christ and intend by faith to follow Jesus as Lord and obey his teachings?**

The aim of this question is to affirm the candidate's intention to obey and follow Christ, recognizing that apart from Him and His grace we can do nothing, including obeying and following Him. Like the first question, this is really expressing our trust in Christ.

The candidate responds.

When you are ready, look the candidate straight in the eye and ask him the four baptism questions directly

Encourage the candidate to pray and express his resolve to the Lord.

Example: Dear Jesus, now that I am older and have heard the Gospel again, I understand better the seriousness of my sin, I still desire to turn away from my sin and trust You for forgiveness and to follow You wherever You lead me.

At this point, you might want to document the candidate's response by recording it on a piece of paper or in a Bible.

Example: On this day, [date], after my [Father, Mother, Parents, Mentor] reviewed the Gospel with me again, I declare that I am trusting Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins, for the hope of eternal life, and it is my sincere desire to follow Him in obedience all the days of my life.

Actions for the Mentor before the Session

Actions for the Candidate after the Session

5. The Meaning of Baptism

Session 5 Activity: "A Picture Paints a Thousand Words"



Take three images and share 5 words that come to mind. Use the images at the end of this session, or bring along a few of your own. Explain that just like these pictures can paint a thousand words, baptism is a symbol that illustrates several different realities: (1) the death and resurrection of Jesus, (2) what God has accomplished, (3) washing/cleansing from sin, and (4) entrance into the body of Christ, the Church.

Goal of this Session

Start with what the candidate already understands about baptism. Affirm what is true and fill in what is missing.

Baptism is an act of obedience to the Lord's command and follows His example.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You,

and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)

Baptism is a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

In baptism we express, with our whole body, our heart's acceptance of Christ's Lordship. Becoming a Christian involves the body as well as the heart. In conversion the heart is freed from sin to be enslaved to God.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Romans 6:12, 13)

Explain that since the Lordship of Christ lays claim to our whole body, it is fitting for us to express our surrender to His Lordship with our whole body. *"Baptism gives expression that we are God's from head to toe."*¹

Baptism is a symbol.

1. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures... (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

2. What God Has Accomplished

Baptism is a symbol of the spiritual change that God has worked in our lives. It is a transition from spiritual and eternal death to spiritual and eternal life. It is moving from hopelessness into hopefulness, from darkness into light, and from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ. In baptism we symbolically express our acceptance of death with Christ, putting an end to our old way of life and rising with Christ to begin a new kind of life in Him. Explain this using the texts below.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also

in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:3-11)

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:9-14)

3. Washing/Cleansing from Sin

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name. (Acts 22:16)

4. Entrance into the Body of Christ, the Church

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12,13)

Explain to the candidate that this is why baptism usually occurs in the context of the local church and why baptism is often connected with church membership.

Baptism is only for believers.

Since baptism is a symbol of beginning the Christian life, it is clear that we should only baptize when there is evidence of new birth and the candidate is able to give a credible profession of faith in Christ.

Baptism is immersion into water.

This is the basic meaning of the word “baptism” but for the Christian its meaning is much richer and deeper.

Baptism is in the Trinitarian Name.

Baptism means doing this immersing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* This means that not just any immersing is baptism. There is a holy appeal to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to be present in this act and to make it true and real in what it says about their work in redemption. There is no salvation without the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we call on their name, we depend upon them and honor them and say that this act is because of them and by them and for them.

Baptism is a blessing

The candidate should understand by now that baptism does not accomplish our salvation, but he should not miss the great blessing in the baptism experience. The following quote captures the beauty of this blessing:

In all the discussion over the mode of baptism and the disputes over its meaning, it is easy for Christians to lose sight of the significance and beauty of baptism and to disregard the tremendous blessing that accompanies this ceremony.

The amazing truths of passing through the waters of judgment safely, of dying and rising with Christ, and of having our sins washed away, are truths of momentous and eternal proportion and ought to be an occasion for giving great glory and praise to God.

When baptism is properly carried out then of course it brings spiritual benefit as well. There is the blessing of God's favor that comes with all obedience, as well as the joy that comes through public profession of one's faith, and the reassurance of having a clear physical picture of dying and rising with Christ and of washing away sins. Certainly the Lord gave us baptism to strengthen and encourage our faith — and it should do so for everyone who is baptized and for every believer who witnesses a baptism.²

Actions for the Mentor before the Session

- ▣ Prepare three photographs for the illustration activity.

Actions for the Candidate after the Session



6. Preparing a Testimony

Session 6 Activity: “The Ultimate Infomercial”



Spend a few minutes being a live infomercial for a product in your home you find very useful. Share (1) the problems you had before you got the product, (2) how you found out about and acquired the product, and (3) what life has been like since you’ve had it. Give the candidate an opportunity to try it with something that he owns.

Explain that a testimony is just explaining these three elements of your relationship with Jesus. Because one’s relationship with Jesus is far more important than anything else, this illustration can only go so far. Our testimony is the ultimate event that’s ever happened to us!

Goal of this Session

Before a candidate is baptized, he will likely have three opportunities to give his testimony:

1. To the other candidates and their mentors when they meet together for the first time.
2. To an elder and his interview team.
3. To the congregation gathered at the baptism service.

This step is intended to help the candidate prepare his testimony for these events, but also to help him to learn how to express his faith in a way that will glorify God, encourage others, and point people to Christ for years to come.

Navigating the Intimidation Factor

In preparing young people for baptism, mentors often find that the anticipation of giving a testimony can be intimidating to a young person. In some cases the fear of this is enough to keep the candidate from following through with baptism.

We should do all that we can to encourage the candidate, while recognizing that a measure of apprehension and concern about this is good. This is an opportunity to remind him that when we follow Jesus, He leads us "in paths of righteousness" but those paths are not always easy. A concern the candidate may have about giving his testimony provides an opportunity for him to learn how to look to Jesus for the courage and grace he will need to follow Jesus. This may bring some to the place where they must "count the cost" of following the Lord.

Demonstrating a "Credible" Profession of Faith

The testimony is important to the elder who will be interviewing the candidate and confirming that the candidate is ready to be baptized. The elder will be depending heavily upon the recommendation of the mentor and upon this testimony for discerning a credible profession of faith.

A credible testimony has both objective and subjective reality to it. Objectively, the testimony should reflect an understanding of the Gospel and the meaning of baptism. Subjectively, the testimony should communicate that the candidate is born again. Is this real for him or is he just parroting what he has been taught to say? Does the Gospel seem precious to him? Does he manifest genuine affection for Jesus? Is the grace of God "amazing" to him?

Preparing the "Objective" Part of the Testimony

Preparing the candidate to communicate objectively will be relatively easy if he was tracking with you in the preceding sessions, especially sessions two and five. Keep in mind that in his testimony the candidate should answer the following questions:

- What was the problem?—Why did I need salvation? (with texts)
- What did God do through Christ to solve that problem? (with texts)
- How did I benefit from what Christ did? (with texts)
- How did God bring me to the point where I was willing to obtain this benefit?

Also, keep in mind that we are not expecting a young person to provide an exhaustive treatment of the doctrine of salvation, but we do hope he will be able to say one or two things in response to each question that reflects a basic understanding of these glorious truths.

The fourth question is often where testimonies begin and end. It is encouraging for people to hear (and tell) the story of how Jesus became precious, and the changes He wrought in our lives. Young people growing up in Christian homes can sometimes feel like there is not much to say here. Many will say "*I grew up in a*

Christian home where my parents introduced me to Jesus when I was young and I have been trusting Him ever since."

Remind the candidate that if this is his story, it is no small blessing to be given godly parents who treasure Christ. Millions of people have been born into the godless families where they have been cut off from the truth and have ruined their lives. Consider with him the providence of God in bringing him into a Christian home. Encourage him to consider how God worked to bring his parents to faith in Christ, and perhaps their parents before them. *What if your parents had never known the Lord? What if your parents had never known each other?*

Also, remind the candidate that according to Ephesians 1:3-4, God's saving work in his life began before the world began.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Preparing the "Subjective" Part of the Testimony

In preparing to communicate the objective part of the testimony, it is often helpful for the candidate to write down what he wants to say. However, when it comes to communicating his heart for the truth, his love for Christ, and the preciousness of the Gospel, a written document can often be a hindrance. The following are some ideas for how to help the candidate with this.

When preparing his testimony, encourage him to express his thoughts in his own words.

Writing out his testimony is important in helping him organize his thoughts, but once he has done that encourage him to try sharing his testimony without the manuscript. Fewer, imprecise words coming from the heart are often more meaningful to the listeners than well-structured, well-articulated thoughts that are read from a prepared statement.

Emphasize that the testimony is an opportunity to glorify God, and encourage him to concentrate on pleasing Him with his testimony.

Help the candidate shift his attention away from himself and consider those who will be listening to what he has to say. Give him a vision for how the Lord might be pleased to use his testimony to bless others. How might the Lord bless the elder who is interviewing him? Perhaps the Lord will be pleased to use him to encourage other believers in their faith. Perhaps there will be a dad in the audience when a candidate is baptized who is concerned about an unbelieving son. Perhaps the Lord will use this testimony to fuel his prayers and keep him trusting the Lord for his son. There are almost always unbelieving friends and family members present when young people are being baptized. Perhaps the Lord will use this testimony to open their eyes to the beauty of Christ and glory of the Gospel (which, by the way, is another good reason for including the Gospel in our testimonies). Pray about these

possibilities and invite others to pray with you and the candidate as he prepares his testimony.

Ultimately, we look to the Holy Spirit to "bear witness" in our testimony that we are children of God and encourage the candidate to relax and trust that He will do it according to Romans 8:16.

Actions for the Mentor

Actions for the Candidate

Next Steps

Can the candidate genuinely answer yes to the following questions:

1. Are you a sinner deserving of God's eternal judgment?
2. Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son, sent to save sinners by His perfect life, death, burial, and resurrection?
3. Have you repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and for the fulfillment of all His promises to you, even eternal life?
4. Do you now desire to place yourself under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and do you intend by faith to follow Jesus as Lord and obey his teachings?

If so, and if you believe that the candidate is ready for baptism and if the candidate agrees, notify your church leadership and proceed with the subsequent steps in the process.

Appendix I: Two Views on Childhood Participation in Church Ordinances

by Scott Holman and Jared Kennedy

Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, Kentucky³

There are two positions within the Baptist tradition regarding the questions of childhood participation in the church ordinances, baptism and communion, and as childhood church membership. The two views are:

Withholding baptism and communion from children until they reach a level of maturity that is independent of their parents in matters relating to God and the church.

Immediate participation in baptism and communion for believing children, who are recognized as church members with limited responsibilities.

Early in the church's history, some began wrongly baptizing infants. This was in spite of the fact that the church during the New Testament times had only baptized believers—baptizing only after evidence of a changed heart. Infant children were considered to be part of "covenant families"—children of Christians to whom God had promised a family inheritance. Families who baptize their infant children expect that God will confirm this promise by giving faith to their children as they grow to adulthood. In churches that practice infant baptism, a child's faith is often "confirmed"—sometimes with a special ceremony—once the child has reached an age of accountability. The Baptist tradition, though only several hundred years old, has always practiced believer's baptism, rejecting the infant baptism of the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed traditions.

Both positions on childhood participation in church ordinances have strong historical support. In 1858, Southern Baptist theologian, John Dagg, wrote in favor of immediate participation for children:

Intelligent piety has, in all ages, been found in children who have not yet reached maturity; and such children have a Scriptural right to church-membership [which would imply participation in baptism and communion].⁴

In 1864, Charles Spurgeon, an English Baptist pastor who wrote extensively about teaching the gospel to children, preached a sermon, in which he seems to imply that his Metropolitan Tabernacle also welcomed children as members:

Of the many boys and girls whom we have received into Church-fellowship, I can say of them all, they have gladdened my heart, and I have never received any with greater confidence than I have these.⁵

On the other hand, it is worth noting — if only as an historical point — that most Baptists in history were not baptized until their late teens or early twenties. Most held jobs before they were baptized. Even Spurgeon waited to baptize his own sons — who may have been believers for years — until they were eighteen. Simply put, as far as Baptists were concerned, baptizing young children was rare.

This is not the case in Southern Baptist churches today. Between 1977 and 1997 there was a 250 percent increase in the number of baptisms of children under age six in Southern Baptist churches.⁶ Moreover, there is evidence that this trend is not only recent but distinctly American. English Baptist Anthony Cross observes that Southern Baptists tend to approve of baptizing younger persons than do Baptists in England.⁷ Why is this the case?

Perhaps our parental desire to see our children saved has trumped our responsibility as both parents and church members to protect our children and the church from error. We want to see our children embrace Christ and experience authentic salvation. This is right and good, but it can nevertheless be dangerous if we are not equally wary of deceiving our children by giving false assurances. In our day, there is a tremendous amount of social pressure on the church's pastoral leadership to confirm the conversion of a young child.⁸ Pastors and teachers must take care not to pressure children for a quick decision without waiting for understanding about what it means to turn away from sin and truly trust in Jesus. Parents also should consider how dangerous it is for the church to allow nominal Christians — those who are believers in name only — into its membership. Nominal Christians weaken the church by giving a false witness to the watching world, and pose even greater dangers if given positions as teachers or leaders. In the 1840s, J. L. Reynolds issued the following warning:

The recognition of unconverted persons, as members of a Christian Church, is an evil of no ordinary magnitude. It throws down the wall of partition which Christ himself has erected and obliterates the distinction between the church and the world... An accession of nominal Christians may enlarge its numbers, but cannot augment its real strength. A Church that welcomes to the privileges of Christ's house, the unconverted, under the specious pretext of increasing the number of his followers, in reality betrays the citadel to his foes.⁹

So, the issue of childhood baptism and church membership is important on at least two levels. First, it has to do with our children, for whom we desire salvation. Second, because it involves the ordinances (baptism and communion), it has to do with the visible witness of the church in the world.

Position #1: Withholding

The arguments for withholding baptism and communion from children until they reach a level of maturity that is independent of their parents in matters relating to God and the church are as follows:¹⁰

Children, just like adults, are sinful, and they are in need of Jesus' saving work (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-21).

Children can be saved. Christ invites children to come to him (1 Samuel 1-3; Psalm 22:9-10; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34:35; Jeremiah 1:5-8; Luke 1:15; Luke 18:16), and he uses children as examples of the humility necessary for those who wish to enter Jesus' kingdom (Matthew 11:25; Matthew 18:2-4; Matthew 19:13-14; Mark 10:15-16; Luke 10:21; Luke 18:14-16).

Baptism and communion should be given immediately when one's confession of faith is publicly credible. For adults, this means living in the community of faith for a time and being examined by the elders and larger community who watch for an authentic trust in Christ that is independent of others.

It is not clear in the New Testament that children were ever baptized or that we should expect they should be (e.g., Acts 4:4,32; Acts 5:6, Acts 12:14; Acts 6:1; Acts 8:1-3, 12; Acts 9:2; Acts 10:24, 33, 44-48; Acts 12:13). All followers of Christ described in the New Testament are baptized as adults, who are actively participating in church life.

A child's faith is primarily nurtured by his or her parents (Ephesians 6:4)—primarily the father, who provides pastoral direction to his child. The New Testament teaching that children must obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20) implies that children relate to God and the church primarily through their parents, and they are not on independent standing before God (see also 1 Corinthians 7:14).

Moreover, children are easily deceived. They require the constant supervision and care of parental authority (Proverbs 22:15; Ephesians 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 13:11).

Due to immaturity, children have had little chance to express their trust in Christ independently from their parents. For example, they have had few opportunities to choose between Christ and their peers in a deep way. They cannot make a publicly credible confession.

Therefore, baptism and communion should be withheld from children until they reach a level of maturity that is independent of their parents. Moreover, baptism and communion are inseparable from active membership and participation in the local church. So, children should be excluded from church membership as well.

God's saving grace is not given through baptism and communion. So, there is no danger to the child in waiting. In fact, waiting can increase the honor associated with this event, as well as allow time for the child's discipline and faith to grow.

"Withholding" at its Worst

In its attempt to judge the faithfulness of each individual's testimony by the fruits of that person's life (Matthew 7:16; 1 John 4:1ff; James 2), the church begins to emphasize good works as a means of self-assessment. Tender children (and adults), in whom the Spirit is at work, may be discouraged by their continuing sinfulness and lack of apparent fruit. A well-intentioned policy may become a stumbling block that encourages these children to have a fearful and introspective view of their spiritual lives. Parents may be discouraged as well, and "withholding" could become an excuse for them to lower their expectations and put off training their children in spiritual things. The adolescent period may be prolonged and filled with many failures. If this occurs, God will judge the church's teachers for being stumbling blocks to the little ones in their care (Matthew 18:6).

"Withholding" at its Best

The church welcomes young adults into its membership with the confidence that they have demonstrated evidence of change and new life throughout their adolescent years. These young people demonstrate a deep understanding of the Christian faith without confusion, and they gladly look forward to their public confession and baptism. Once joining the church, these adult believers have fond memories of their baptism as a significant event and rite of passage. In the process, the church's reputation and leadership is protected from those who are Christians in name only.

Resources for Parents:

Dever, Mark E. "Who Should Be Baptized? At What Age Should Believers Be Baptized?" Sermon at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., on Sunday, April 21, 2002.

Elliff, Jim. "How Children Come to Faith in Christ." And "Childhood Conversion." MP3s available at Christian Communicators Online, www.ccwonline.org/cconv.html.

Position #2: Immediate Participation

The arguments for immediate participation in baptism and communion for believing children who are also recognized as church members with limited responsibilities are as follows:¹¹

Children, just like adults, are sinful, and they are in need of Jesus' saving work (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-21).

Children can be saved. Christ invites children to come to him (1 Samuel 1-3; Psalm 22:9-10; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34:35; Jeremiah 1:5-8; Luke 1:15; Luke 18:16), and he uses children as examples of the humility necessary for those who wish to enter Jesus' kingdom (Matthew 11:25; Matthew 18:2-4; Matthew 19:13-14; Mark 10:15-16; Luke 10:21; Luke 18:14-16).

Believing children should be welcomed into the church through baptism. The New Testament authors addressed these children as members within the church (Ephesians 6:1 "in the Lord;" Colossians 3:20), and we should as well.

The New Testament knows nothing of un-baptized followers of Christ. If a child is a believer, he or she is a disciple. If a child is a disciple, then Christ commands that this child participate in baptism and communion (Matthew 28:18-10).

Baptism and communion are intended for every member of Christ's church. They are ways of experiencing and remembering God's goodness and the gracious gifts that he has lavished on his people. None of Jesus' gracious gifts—worship, teaching, preaching, community, pastoral care, communion, or even church discipline—should be withheld from young followers of Christ.

In his pastoral epistles, Paul limits the position of elder to men (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 3:2). Moreover, the term "elder" itself suggests that the attainment of age and experience is required for one to exercise this role in the church (though Timothy should not be considered to be too young—1 Timothy 4:12). Paul also sets an age limit (age 60) for widows who can receive support from the church (1 Timothy 5:9). In the spirit of these limitations, it is suggested that church leadership roles and responsibilities that call for a certain level of maturity should be withheld from children until they reach that level. In other words, believing children are full-fledged members of the church that have limited responsibilities until they reach a level of independence from their parents. Until that time, their primary responsibility in the Lord is to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1).

"Immediate Participation" at its Worst

The social pressure on the church's leadership may lead them to confirm the salvation of children at a very young age. Teachers and parents may pressure children for quick decisions without waiting for understanding about what it means to turn away from sins and truly trust in Jesus. False assurances may be given to some children. As these children grow, their Christianity is shown to lack credibility, and this damages the church's public reputation as well as its witness to the gospel. As loving shepherds of the church, the elders are responsible to confront any

professed believer (adult or child) whose life is not lived in accord with his confession (2 Timothy 4:1-5; Hebrews 13:17). Therefore, if a baptized child continues in sin without repenting, the elders will have to take corrective measures. The goal in any "church discipline" situation is restoration, and our hope is that any correction from our elders would augment parents' discipline. The worst case scenario would occur if the elders were at odds with the parents.

"Immediate Participation " at its Best

The church teaches parents that salvation is a work of God and not merely a decision by the believer. Children, like adults, show understanding and evidence of believing faith before the church accepts them for baptism. Christ's goodness, love, and gracious mercy are taught to children. The church receives believing children into its membership and corporate worship gatherings with confidence and glad hearts — knowing that their faith is made strong by Christ. The children, encouraged to obey their parents, read their Bibles, and talk to God in prayer, grow in wisdom and grace even as they grow in stature.

Resources for Parents:

Christman, Ted. *Forbid Them Not: Rethinking the Baptism and Church Membership of Children and Young People* (booklet). (Owensboro, Kentucky: Heritage Baptist Church).

Spurgeon, Charles H. "Children Brought to Christ, and Not to the Font." Sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Sunday, July 24, 1864. Available at The Spurgeon Archive, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0581.htm>.

Appendix II: What Can Give a Believer Genuine Assurance?

By Wayne Grudem ¹²

If it is true...that those who are unbelievers and who finally fall away may give many external signs of conversion, then what will serve as evidence of genuine conversion? What can give real assurance to a real believer? We can list three categories of questions that a person could ask of himself or herself.

1. Do I Have a Present Trust in Christ for Salvation?

Paul tells the Colossians that they will be saved on the last day, “provided that you *continue in the faith* stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Col. 1:23). The author of Hebrews says, “We share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end” (Heb. 3:14) and encourages his readers to be imitators of those “*who through faith* and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12). In fact, the most famous verse in the entire Bible uses a present tense verb that may be translated, “*whoever continues believing in him*” may have eternal life (see John 3:16).

Therefore a person should ask himself or herself, “Do I today have trust in Christ to forgive my sins and take me without blame into heaven forever? Do I have confidence in my heart that he has saved me? If I were to die tonight and stand before God’s judgment seat, and if he were to ask me why he should let me into heaven, would I begin to think of my good deeds and depend on them, or would I without hesitation say that I am depending on the merits of Christ and am confident that he is a sufficient Savior?”

This emphasis on *present* faith in Christ stands in contrast to the practice of some church “testimonies” where people repeatedly recite details of a conversion experience that may have happened 20 or 30 years ago. If a testimony of saving faith is genuine, it should be a testimony of faith that is active this very day.

2. Is There Evidence of a Regenerating Work of the Holy Spirit in My Heart?

The evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts comes in many different forms. Although we should not put confidence in the demonstration of miraculous

works (Matt. 7:22), or long hours and years of work at some local church (which may simply be building with “wood, hay, straw” [in terms of 1 Cor. 3:12] to further one's own ego or power over others, or to attempt to earn merit with God), there are many other evidences of a real work of the Holy Spirit in one's heart.

First, there is a subjective testimony of the Holy Spirit within our hearts bearing witness that we are God's children (Rom. 8:15-16; 1 John 4:13). This testimony will usually be accompanied by a sense of being led by the Holy Spirit in paths of obedience to God's will (Rom. 8:14).

In addition, if the Holy Spirit is genuinely at work in our lives, he will be producing the kind of character traits that Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22). He lists several attitudes and character traits that are produced by the Holy Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). Of course, the question is not, “Do I perfectly exemplify all of these characteristics in my life?” but rather, “Are these things a general characteristic of my life? Do I sense these attitudes in my heart? Do others (especially those closest to me) see these traits exhibited in my life? Have I been growing in them over a period of years?” There is no suggestion in the New Testament that any non-Christian, any unregenerate person, can convincingly fake these character traits, especially for those who know the person most closely.

Related to this kind of fruit is another kind of fruit—the results of one's life and ministry as they have influence on others and on the church. There are some people who profess to be Christians but whose influence on others is to discourage them, to drag them down, to injure their faith, and to provoke controversy and divisiveness. The result of their life and ministry is not to build up others and to build up the church, but to tear it down. On the other hand, there are those who seem to edify others in every conversation, every prayer, and every work of ministry they put their hand to. Jesus said, regarding false prophets, “You will know them by their fruits.... Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit.... Thus you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16-20).

Another evidence of work of the Holy Spirit is continuing to believe and accept the sound teaching of the church. Those who begin to deny major doctrines of the faith give serious negative indications concerning their salvation: “No one who denies the Son has the Father...If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:23-24). John also says, “Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us” (1 John 4:6). Since the New Testament writings are the current replacement for the apostles like John, we might also say that whoever knows God will continue to read and to delight in God's Word, and will continue to believe it fully. Those who do not believe and delight in God's Word give evidence that they are not “of God.”

Another evidence of genuine salvation is a continuing present relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “Abide in me, and I in you” and, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:4,

7). This abiding in Christ will include not only day-by-day trust in him in various situations, but also certainly regular fellowship with him in prayer and worship.

Finally, a major area of evidence that we are genuine believers is found in a life of obedience to God's commands. John says, "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:4-6). A perfect life is not necessary, of course. John is rather saying that in general our lives ought to be ones of imitation of Christ and likeness to him in what we do and say. If we have genuine saving faith, there will be clear results in obedience in our lives (see also 1 John 3:9-10, 24; 5:18). Thus James can say, "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" and "I by my works will show you my faith" (James 2:17-18). One large area of obedience to God includes love for fellow Christians. "He who loves his brother abides in the light" (1 John 2:10). "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14, cf. 3:17; 4:7). One evidence of this love is continuing in Christian fellowship (1 John 2:19), and another is giving to a brother in need (1 John 3:17; cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

3. Do I See a Long-Term Pattern of Growth in My Christian Life?

The first two areas of assurance dealt with present faith and present evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. But Peter gives one more kind of test that we can use to ask whether we are genuinely believers. He tells us that there are some character traits which, if we keep on increasing in them, will guarantee that we will "never fall" (2 Peter 1:10). He tells his readers to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love (2 Peter 1:5-7). Then he says that these things are to belong to his readers and to continually "abound" in their lives (2 Peter 1:8). He adds that they are to "be the more zealous to confirm your call and election" and says then that "*if you do this* (literally, "these things," referring to the character traits mentioned in vv. 5-7) *you will never fall*" (2 Peter 1:10).

The way that we confirm our call and election, then, is to continue to grow in "these things." This implies that our assurance of salvation can be something that increases over time in our lives. Every year that we add to these character traits in our lives, we gain greater and greater assurance of our salvation. Thus, though young believers can have a quite strong confidence in their salvation, that assurance can increase to even deeper certainty over the years in which they grow toward Christian maturity. If they continue to add these things they will confirm their call and election and will "never fall."

The result of these three questions that we can ask ourselves should be to give strong assurance to those who are genuinely believers. In this way the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints will be a tremendously comforting doctrine. No one

who has such assurance should wonder, "Will I be able to persevere to the end of my life and therefore be saved?" Everyone who gains assurance through such a self-examination should rather think, "I am truly born again; therefore, I will certainly persevere to the end, because I am being guarded 'by God's power' working through my faith (1 Peter 1:5) and therefore I will never be lost. Jesus will raise me up at the last day and I will enter into his kingdom forever" (John 6:40).

On the other hand, this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, if rightly understood, should cause genuine worry, and even fear, in the hearts of any who are "backsliding" or straying away from Christ. Such persons must clearly be warned that only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again. If they fall away from their profession of faith in Christ and life of obedience to him, they may not really be saved—in fact, the *evidence* that they are giving is that they are not saved and they never really were saved. Once they stop trusting in Christ and obeying him (I am speaking in terms of outward evidence) they have no genuine assurance of salvation, and they should consider themselves unsaved, and turn to Christ in repentance and ask him for forgiveness of their sins.

At this point, in terms of pastoral care with those who have strayed away from their Christian profession, we should realize that *Calvinists and Arminians* (those who believe in the perseverance of the saints and those who think that Christians can lose their salvation) *will both counsel a "backslider" in the same way*. According to the Arminian this person was a Christian at one time but is no longer a Christian. According to the Calvinist, such a person never really was a Christian in the first place and is not one now. But in both cases the biblical counsel given would be the same: "You do not appear to be a Christian now—you must repent of your sins and trust in Christ for your salvation!" Though the Calvinist and Arminian would differ on their interpretation of the previous history, they would agree on what should be done in the present.

But here we see why the phrase *eternal security* can be quite misleading. In some evangelical churches, instead of teaching the full and balanced presentation of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, pastors have sometimes taught a watered-down version, which in effect tells people that all who have once made a profession of faith and been baptized are "eternally secure." The result is that some people who are not genuinely converted at all may "come forward" at the end of an evangelistic sermon to profess faith in Christ, and may be baptized shortly after that, but then they leave the fellowship of the church and live a life no different from the one they lived before they gained this "eternal security." In this way people are given false assurance and are being cruelly deceived into thinking they are going to heaven when in fact they are not.

Appendix III: Quest for Joy: Six Biblical Truths

By Bethlehem Baptist Church¹³

Did you know that God commands us to be glad?

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

1. God created us for His glory.

“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth,... whom I created for my glory” (Is. 43:6-7). God made us to magnify his greatness—the way telescopes magnify stars. He created us to put his goodness and truth and beauty and wisdom and justice on display. The greatest display of God's glory comes from deep delights in all that he is. This means that God gets the praise and we get the pleasure. God created us so that he is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

2. Every human being should live for God's glory.

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). If God made us for his glory, it is clear that we should live for his glory. Our duty comes from his design. So our first obligation is to show God's value by being satisfied with all that he is for us. This is the essence of loving God (Matthew 22:37) and trusting him (1 John 5:3-4) and being thankful to him (Psalm 100:2-4). It is the root of all true obedience, especially loving others (Colossians 1:4-5).

3. All of us have failed to glorify God as we should.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

What does it mean to “fall short of the glory of God?” It means that none of us has trusted and treasured God the way we should. We have not been satisfied with his greatness and walked in his ways. We have sought our satisfaction in other things, and treated them as more valuable than God, which is the essence of idolatry (Romans 1:21-23). Since sin came into the world we have all been deeply resistant to having God as our all-satisfying treasure (Ephesians 2:3). This is an appalling offense to the greatness of God (Jeremiah 2:12-13).

4. All of us are subject to God's just condemnation.

“The wages of sin is death...”(Romans 6:23) We have all belittled the glory of God. How? by preferring other things above him. By our ingratitude, distrust and disobedience. So God is just in shutting us out from the enjoyment of his glory forever. “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (II Thessalonians 1:9).

The word “hell” is used in the New Testament twelve times —eleven times by Jesus himself. It is not a myth created by dismal and angry preachers. It is a solemn warning from the Son of God who died to deliver sinners from its curse. We ignore it at great risk.

If the Bible stopped here in its analysis of the human condition, we would be doomed to a hopeless future. However, this is not where it stops...

5. God sent His only Son Jesus to provide eternal life and joy.

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” (1 Timothy 1:15).

The good news is that Christ died for sinners like us. And he rose physically from the dead to validate the saving power of his death and to open the gates of eternal life and joy (1 Corinthians 15:20). This means God can acquit guilty sinners and still be just (Romans 3:25-26). “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God* (1 Peter 3:18). Coming home to God is where all deep and lasting satisfaction is found.

6. The benefits purchased by the death of Christ belong to those who repent and trust Him.

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out” (Acts 3:19). “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

“Repent” means to turn from all the deceitful promises of sin. “Faith” means being satisfied with all that God promises to be for us in Jesus. “He who believes in me,” Jesus says, “shall never thirst” (John 6:35). We do not earn our salvation. We cannot merit it (Romans 4:4-5). It is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is a free gift (Romans 3:24). We will have it if we cherish it enough to receive it and treasure it above all things (Matthew 13:44). When we do that God's aim in creation is accomplished: He is glorified in us and we are satisfied in him — forever.

Does this make sense to you?

Do you desire the kind of gladness that comes from being satisfied with all that God is for you in Jesus? If so, then God is at work in your life.

What should you do?

Turn from the deceitful promises of sin. Call upon Jesus to save you from the guilt and punishment and bondage. "All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Start banking your hope on all that God is for you in Jesus. Break the power of sin's promises by faith in the superior satisfaction of God's promises. Begin reading the Bible to find his precious and very great promises, which can set you free (2 Peter 1:3-4). Find a Bible believing church and begin to worship and grow together with other people who treasure Christ above all things (Philippians 3:7).

¹This insight came from an evening baptism meditation by John Piper, September 28, 1980.

²Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 969, 980-981

³From the booklet, *Childhood Baptism and Church Membership: A Position and Policy for Sojourn Community Church*, by Scott Holman and Jared Kennedy. The entire booklet may be viewed at www.sojournchurch.com

⁴John L. Dagg, "Chapter 4: Infant Church Membership" in *Manual of Theology, Second Part: A Treatise on Church Order*, (Greenville, South Carolina: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), available at wwwFOUNDERS.org/library/dagg_vol2/ch4.html.

⁵Charles H. Spurgeon, "Children Brought to Christ, and Not to the Font [of Infant Baptism]." A sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Sunday, July 24, 1864; available at The Spurgeon Archive, www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0581.htm.

³Mark E. Dever, "Baptism in the Context of the Local Church" in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 346. Also see W. Y. Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 43-45.

⁶Tony Hemphill, "The Practice of Infantile Baptism in Southern Baptist Churches and Subsequent Impact on Regenerate Church Membership," *Faith & Mission* 18.3 (Summer 2001): 74-87.

⁷Anthony Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Carlsisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2000), 393 n. 23. Cross gives English Baptist examples of churches accepting children ages 8-12 but observes that English Baptists rarely accept preschool age children for baptism.

⁸John Withers, "Social Forces Affecting the Age at Which Children are Baptized in Southern Baptist Churches," Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996.

⁹J. L. Reynolds, *Church Polity or the Kingdom of Christ* (1849), in *Polity*, ed. M.E. Dever, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 327.

¹⁰See Jim Butler, "Church Membership and Young Children" a paper presented to Free Grace Baptist Church, Chilliwack, British Columbia, on April 14, 2001; Mark E. Dever, "Baptism in the Context," 344-50; "The Baptism of Children at Capitol Hill Baptist Church," a paper presented to Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C. in 2004; "Who Should Be Baptized? At What Age Should Believers Be Baptized?" a sermon at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., on Sunday, April 21, 2002; Jim Elliff, *How Children Come to Faith in Christ*, (Little Rock, AR: Family Life, 1994), [MP3s are available at Christian Communicators Online, www.ccwonline.org]; *Childhood Conversion*, available at Christian Communicators Online, www.ccwonline.org/cconv.html, 1997; Jim Elliff and Daryl Wingerd, "Is Baptism a Requirement of Church Membership?" available at Christian Communicators Online, <http://www.ccwonline.org/baptismrq.html>, 2006; and David W. Merck, "Children and Church Membership," available at The Reformed Reader, <http://www.reformedreader.org/rbs/cacm.htm>, accessed December 7, 2007.

¹¹Ted Christman, *Forbid Them Not: Rethinking the Baptism and Church Membership of Children and Young People* (booklet), (Owensboro, Kentucky: Heritage Baptist Church); John L. Dagg, "Chapter 4: Infant Church Membership" in *Manual of Theology, Second Part: A Treatise on Church Order*, (Greenville, South Carolina: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858); text found at http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/library/dagg_vol2/ch4.html; Charles H. Spurgeon, "Children Brought to Christ, and Not to the Font," a sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Sunday, July 24, 1864; available at The Spurgeon Archive, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0581.htm>.

¹²Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 803-806) Copyright a 1994, Wayne Grudem. Used by permission.

¹³Bethlehem Baptist Church, *Quest for Joy* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 1996) Used by permission.