

## **An Open Letter Concerning Our Position on the Baptism of Young Children**

We, the Elders of the Journey at First Baptist Orange City, believe in the importance of Scriptural baptism for all who come to faith in Christ. We also believe that baptism should not be unnecessarily delayed for a new believer, and that after a period of instruction, a young Christian should be welcomed to give their profession of faith and to follow in their obedience to be baptized as soon as it is practicable.

We affirm our love for young children under our care and our support for the faithful families in our church who are working to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Holding our commitment to Scriptural baptism and declaring our love for children and families in our fellowship, we also must face a difficult reality regarding the baptism of young children: many children are being brought to the waters of baptism who later declare they did not understand the seriousness of that commitment, or that they were not truly converted at the time, or that their understanding was so limited by their age that they were unable to discern the meaning and significance of conversion to the Christian faith.

As parents faithfully train, pray for, and teach their children the doctrines of our holy Faith, children will quite often at a tender age make professions of faith in the gospel. We should never do anything to discourage a child's love for the Lord, but we must be aware that the spiritual development of young children is very difficult to discern. The degree to which they understand the Gospel is hard to measure. Their maturity in the faith can sometime be masked by the strong faith and godly influence of parents, older friends and siblings. Questions about their faith in Christ and their desire to live the Christian life can be answered simplistically just by saying, "Yes." However, a child's ability to keep those promises is often limited not by their desire but by their capacity to understand the reality of the gospel, their stages of emotional and intellectual development, their spiritual maturity, or by their need to please others.

In order to give guidance to Christian parents who wish to present their children for baptism, we have felt that we must address the increasingly lower ages at which children are now being welcomed for Christian baptism. In some churches, children as young as five years are being welcomed. Experience is showing that the fruit of such practice is not establishing these children in their faith but may be confusing the children or creating in them false assurance of a faith that they do not yet possess.

These issues are not new to the church. In the past, the age of 12 was almost universally held by churches as an age where a person becomes more morally accountable and spiritually responsible. The age of 12 is significant, because by this time most children have matured intellectually to a level where they can understand abstract concepts of the Christian faith such as sin, redemption, salvation, substitution, wrath, and forgiveness with more depth and understanding than is possible for younger children to grasp. The issue is not spiritual hunger or desire on the part of the children but their ability to have a full and solid grasp of the implications and obligations of baptism.

We, the Elders, after prayerfully searching the Scriptures and discussing what the appropriate age of baptism should be for our church, are implementing a policy that the baptism of children will be offered to those who have attained the age of 12. Once a person reaches the age of 12, they will be allowed to be baptized upon a credible profession of faith and completing the appropriate steps established by the church to be a member. The question we are examining in regard to baptism is not the salvation of children but the ability of the church to be fairly confident that a child has had a genuine conversion experience. We never want to rush a child into making a decision before he or she is ready.

There is great value in waiting for privileges. Whether waiting to get a license to drive or waiting for a marriage license, the benefit of waiting is to consider the implications of the decision; to understand what is expected; to honestly and openly prepare to assume those duties; and then to be welcomed by others who have taken this responsibility before them.

To be baptized is to join with the assembly of those who have died with Christ and who have risen with Him. It is to give a public and outward testimony of a faith that you will hold for the rest of your life. By delaying the baptism of children, they can be taught more carefully, their faith can be strengthened, and we can work to prevent confusion or false assurance brought on by ushering children to this precious sign of Christ's death and resurrection before they have the capacity to adequately grasp what a treasure it is.

We commit to pray for and to work with the children of our church to the end that they might profess their own faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that they would, before that time, be supported and nurtured by the faith of their parents and the encouragement of their church family. We are committed as a church to pray for the children of our church and teach them the essential tenets of the Christian faith. They will be warned of the dangers of sin and restrained from evil by the study of the Word of God and by the testimony of other Christians. They will be encouraged to strive for the Kingdom of God with all their hearts: to quest after a living faith; to live fruitful and sacrificial lives; to be taught to support Christian ministry and mission through giving of their time and tithe; and to learn many portions of the Word of God as they are moving toward the day when they make their own profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized to publically declare that commitment.

Our commitment is clear: we desire for every child to become a fully devoted follower of Christ, progressing on the Road of Faith. It is our passion, as your Elders, to bring the children that God has led to our church into a true and authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. We desire to remove processes that confuse or that defeat the power of the Word of God in their lives. We desire to nurture the implanted Word and to see the gospel drop in children's lives and have them grow unto maturity.

Some parents may object to the establishment of a minimum age for baptism. To those parents, we would ask for your forbearance, and we would ask for the honor of engaging in further dialogue (for a complete explanation, please see our detailed position on-line at [thejourneyoc.net](http://thejourneyoc.net)). We hold this position with the wisdom given to us by the Holy Spirit and our hearts' desire to protect the Gospel, to fight for the purity of our church, to support true and real conversion in our children, and to guard against false assurance for a child who does not yet know the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ and with deep love as your servants,  
Pastor James, Pastor Jason, Pastor Jeremy, and Pastor John