

command
change
keep it to
ourselves?

in their
language,
in God's time

Parents' Guide to Baptism



One of Perinton Community Church's (PCC) strengths is that children from ages 5-6 and up are with us during the entire service on Sunday mornings. So while this parents guide focuses on the baptism, we need to keep in mind the larger context for this special celebration as a church family: Worship.

PCC is convinced that worship puts us in the presence of the God who is extravagantly gracious and good. Sensing this confidence on Sunday mornings, our children will be ready -- even eager -- for the challenge of living with God and for God in this world. And by His grace, as our children mature, worship will be the touchstone that fuels their faithful lifestyle.

We don't include children in worship to make them good but rather that they will come to know the Lord we are praising. Worship that is sourced in Scripture will transform their lives...and feed their imaginations, and that's a good thing. Children have a wonderful ability to engage the world around them, and Jesus has a wonderful way to connect with children in ways that we adults cannot.

Sooner or later, a child who is in the home of PCC on a Sunday morning when we celebrate a baptism is going to ask, When can I do that? When can I be baptized? And from a parent's point of view, the heartfelt question is, When should my child be baptized?

We'll get to these questions in this guide. Moms and dads, the fact that you're taking the time to read this will be a blessing to your family.

In the following pages, the meaning of Baptism is presented in depth. The intent is not to be repetitive or overwhelming or to make a simple act of worship into something complicated. Rather, the hope is that you'll find just the information you need to share with your child in the manner best-suited to the way he or she learns. Then you and your child can make an informed, prayerful decision about baptism.

No one knows your child better than you. But let's keep in mind the other side of this dynamic. Your child knows you pretty well, too. He or she will take their cue from you in this matter. So understanding Baptism also brings to the forefront a matter for parents to have settled in their heart and mind:

If I am going to teach my child the meaning of Baptism, I need to make sure I understand it. Do I believe what I am teaching my child? Your son or daughter will sense where you stand in this matter!

Take your time reading through this parents guide. May it strengthen and deepen your own faith, or even awaken it. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the church office at 223.7494.

Pastor Jeff, on behalf of PCCs leadership teams

SOURCE HELPS IN PREPARATION

I am indebted Alistair Begg, John J Davis, Sinclair Ferguson, Tim Keller, J.I. Packer, Eugene Peterson, Gary Pratico and Douglas Stuart. Their help in conveying the meaning of baptism through their articles and books has been invaluable in preparing this guide. Should you wish to read their books or listen to their lectures I would be more than happy to share my library with you and/or point you to reliable websites. *(JF)*

A Word About Baby Dedication at PCC

The dedication of a child is a statement of intent entered into by the child's Christian parents and church family. For the parents, it is the moment when they publicly give the child back to our loving God for the working out of His perfect will, and promise to raise the child under the Lordship of Christ, that he may at some future time personally accept Christ as his Lord and Savior. For the church, it is the moment when they witness the parents' promises and also pledge their own love and prayers and assume responsibilities for spiritual education.

Biblical precedents for Baby Dedication are found in I Samuel 1, when Hannah offered back to God the baby Samuel, for whom she had prayed, and in Luke 2:22, when Joseph and Mary presented the 40-day-old Jesus to the Lord for His purposes. Unlike infant baptism or christening, dedication is not a sacrament or ordinance in which divine grace or blessings are bestowed upon the child.

It is simply an act of acknowledging God's ownership of the child and of obedient intent to be godly parents. What a joy and privilege it is for one to be able to totally surrender one's child into the loving hands of the Almighty Father!

Part One: What is Baptism?

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.”

Peter, a follower of Jesus, Acts 2:28

command

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keep it to ourselves?



BAPTISM IS A COMMAND

Matthew 28:19

Titus 3:5

Acts 2:38-39

Acts 16:31-33

Romans 6:3-5

1 Peter 3:21

Galatians 3:27,28

Ephesians 4:4-6

Please look up these Bible verses; they are the foundation of this guide. If you don't have a Bible, just let us know and we'll make sure you have one, as PCC's gift to you. If you're not sure how to navigate the Bible, or if you have questions about what you're reading, don't hesitate to call the church office and ask for one of the pastors (223-7494).

As you read these passages, you'll notice something interesting that we tend to overlook: Jesus did not command his disciples to remember His birth. But He did instruct them to remember His death and resurrection.

THE 'BIG PICTURE' and BACKGROUND of BAPTISM

Please read Romans 6:1-18

You may be at a point in your life where you want things to change. You want *you* to change. You've tried several ideas and suggestions or pathways, but nothing seems to work. But thankfully, you and your child are now part of PCC, a faith community whose purpose is to: Worship Jesus and share His love.

A question we consistently engage as a church gets to the core of our desire to change: If I am a Christian, how does my relationship with Jesus affect my life? What we believe should make a difference. This passage in the book of Romans tells us about how faith in Jesus leads to life-change.

Apparently, not everyone at the house churches in Rome was keen on the kind of change pastor Paul (the author) advocates. We can tell this from the questions in verses 1 and 15. They are similar questions, and they arise because of something Paul said in the previous chapters. He said that Christianity distinguishes itself from all other religions and philosophies by proclaiming that salvation is received, not achieved. We're not part of God's family on the basis of our own goodness or merit, it's by God's grace.

Grace. God loves us because He loves us...period. If salvation is by grace, not by the way we live, then why not live any way we want? That's what some of the Roman Christians were wondering. Their question is understandable, if not bold. They were intrigued by idea of sinning to bring on even more of God's mercy.

Paul's response is: If we understand who we really are, and if we understand who Jesus really is and what He's done...then a question like, *Why would I even want to change the way I live?* ...is going to be eclipsed by a simple, profound approach to living: ***Thank you Lord, for my new life with you.***

Romans 6:1-18 is not an easy passage to look into, and you may wonder what it has to do with thinking about your baptism or your child's baptism. But the truth in this passage, and a couple others we'll consider a bit later, are foundational to putting us on the same page when it comes to the meaning of baptism.

Let's Ask Ourselves: Am I Making a Good Thing Into the Ultimate Thing?

This question is a hallmark in the teaching of NYC pastor Tim Keller. He's asking us to face the idols in our life. Look at vs16. Offering ourselves to someone as a slave is an unsettling thought, isn't it? It affects us in a different way, though, than it affected Paul's original hearers. When we think of slavery our filter is colonial, new world slavery: race-based and for life.

But in the 1st Century Greco-Roman culture, if someone was facing an enormous debt it wasn't uncommon for that person to sell themselves to someone else for a period of years, in order to work off the debt. Paul is saying to the Romans: *If you do this, you're working to get rid of debt and save yourself from a lifetime of slavery. OK, but now the person you're subservient to has complete control over your life.*

Then in the second half of v16, Paul says something that startled his original hearers. He says there are 2 kinds of people: People who obey the one true, living God and serve Him; and, people who are spiritually enslaved to something else.

Paul has the 1st and 2nd of the 10 Commandment in sight here, part of which read: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery. You shall have no other Gods before me...do not make anything else your god." Most of us have at least heard of the 10 Commandments. These commandments present us with a choice. **We can acknowledge that God is God or we make something else God.** If we do not worship the true God, something else will be God in our life.

There's no one without a god. Everybody lives for something that gives us significance and security, such as: career; family; achievement; etc. The point is, we're going to live for something, and whatever we're living for can control us.

We think that what we live for and work for does something for us. Yes, there are blessings we enjoy from creating healthy relationships and from working hard and well at our job or school studies. We have satisfaction and security and significance in our good work and achievements. But the evil side to our nature leans toward committing ourselves to these things above God.

There's an ancient Greek word in the text that explains this. In verse 12, you'll see the word 'reign.' It's referring to what rules us. One way to understand this is that if sin rules us we will be controlled by 'evil desires.' However, the original word for 'reign' can also mean: a longing for something, or an inordinate desire or passion for something.

Sometimes this excessive desire is for a good thing. There are good things in our life that we make into ultimate things, and they end up controlling us. They become our significance and security; we just have to have them. If we're not free of the illusion that something, even something good, can rule us, then we won't see much change brought about by what we *say* we believe. When this is happening, sin is having it's way in us and we may not yet recognize it.

So it's no wonder we come up with questions like: If salvation is all by God's grace, then why even do God's will? Why not live any way we choose, since God is going to forgive us anyways? If we keep on sinning, God will keep on forgiving, right?

We Can Be So Clever, Can't We?

...when what we really are is being naïve (or in denial) about our broken hearts, and about God's remedy.

People were arguing with Paul that the good news of God's grace would actually encourage people to sin more. People today raise the same objection. They think: It's presumptuous and arrogant to assure people that their sins will be forgiven simply by faith in Christ. It's dangerous. Tell people that and all moral restraint disappears. Is that where the Good News about Jesus Christ is supposed to lead us?

"By no means!" says Paul. The actual phrase in Romans 6:2 is *"God forbid!" "May it never be!" "We died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?"*

It's at this point, from verse 3 on, that Paul reminds his readers of their baptism. Baptism was the recognized way of identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus. You were immersed under water, just as if you were being buried. It was a sign that we have died to our sinful nature. We have turned away from our default setting to serve our own needs and desires, our tendency to ignore God...our tendency to make even a good thing the ultimate thing.

"We died to sin, how can we live that way any longer?" asks Paul. Yes, this is a hard truth to understand. It seems abstract. It seems impossible for us to live that way. *Leadership Journal* has a cartoon of a group of people sitting around a living room having a Bible study on this very passage, Romans 6. One person announces to the group: *"I haven't actually died to sin, but I did feel a bit faint once."*

The point is that when you become a Christian, it's not that God comes along to give you a helping hand at being a better person. Instead, something dramatic happens: A death takes place on the inside. When Paul says we have died to sin, he's not saying that the sinful nature is no longer active. What he's saying is that the sinful nature no longer *has control* over us.

Sin is still with us but we don't have to obey it anymore. Another way to put it is: God's grace frees us not to sin. Our old self is crucified with Jesus. We don't have to return to old habits. We don't want to return to the old habits. We cannot successfully return to the old habits. We're free to live God's way, *with Him*.

It's a whole new life. Being raised up out of the water of baptism illustrates our new life. Verse 4: *"Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* New birth, new identity, new nature...by grace.

The Act of Baptism Doesn't Make One a Christian

....but by using the word 'baptized' Paul is talking about all who have truly given their lives to Jesus, verse 5. They are united to Jesus. 'United' is actually a gardening word that means 'grafted into the root.' The Christian's life has been inserted into the roots of Christ's life.

When we go under the water, we demonstrating that we're leaving the realm of sin behind. It's a symbol of burial. When we come up out of the water, we enter into the new life of grace. It's like a new life in a new land. It's a symbol of resurrection.

The following is from the book of Titus (3:3-8). It's a complement to Romans 6. Notice what it says about God's grace, our baptism, and the Christian's new life:

Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many... pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy....But when God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

Gordon-Conwell Seminary Professor John Davis, and pastor Tim Keller (a Gordon-Conwell graduate) both highlight a fascinating phrase in this passage: *new birth*. 'New birth' is one word in the original language, and I'm including it here not as a grammar lesson, but to underscore just how powerful and far-reaching the Christian's new birth is. The word is *palangeneseeah*. I know it's a mouthful, but sound it out. Part of it rhymes with 'Genesee.'

And for those who don't have the privilege of living in the Finger Lakes Region of New York, the word we tune into from *palangeneseeah* is 'genesis.' That's precisely what Paul wanted his first readers to pick up on. He's talking about renewal, about a new beginning on cosmic scale. Genesis.

In Paul's day there was a group of really smart philosophers called the Stoics. They were also sort of the Eeyores of that day. Stoics thought the world just kept getting worse and worse and every so often there would be a violent purging. Everything would be cleansed, made new and fresh....at least for a while.

The Stoics liked this idea of a cosmic renewal of all things, a new genesis. They knew what this word *palangeneseeah* meant. They just didn't think it would take. The renewal needed to happen over and over. Life on this planet was an endless cycle of birth and rebirth and catastrophe and rebirth and so on. Sounds somewhat like Hinduism and the teachings of Nostradamus stirred into the same pot, doesn't it?

Then along comes Paul the Christian pastor, using the word *palangenseeah*. And before Paul, Jesus himself appropriates this great word *palangenseeah*. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus says: At the 'palangenseeah.....meaning *at the end of time when I come back to earth...I promise that there will be renewal. And it will take. It will last forever.* In other words, there will be one great, awesome unmistakable setting of all things right, not an endless cycle of good tries. The new beginning that Jesus and Paul speak of is the point to which all history is flowing.

That's the background and big picture of Baptism. Whew! Since PCC is made up of people from different denominational backgrounds, and since some people come to PCC with little knowledge of what baptism is...as I said earlier, our time together looking at what these Bible texts say about baptism should put us on the same page.

The passages in Titus and Matthew and Romans are telling us: The Christian's new life with Jesus Christ is not merely a personal makeover. The moment we become a Christian, the Lord's power to regenerate what was spiritually dead into a new life...the power that will renew creation at the end of history...**that** power is at work in us for everyday life

That's the change God's grace brings about and it shows up in everyday life lived with God and for God. Paul looks back at his own life and writes to his friend Titus: *Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy.* His life didn't look too bad on the surface. Paul had probably memorized almost all the Old Testament Scriptures. And, he was a very good and moral person. But there came a moment when he looked under all the religiosity...all of the stuff, even the good stuff he was into... and saw his real condition: A sinner, in need of God's forgiveness.

You know what Titus?, he essentially says, *I made good things into the ultimate things. But then I became aware that spiritually speaking I was a dead man.* This is all part of the process of turning belief into a change in our character and lifestyle. We come face to face with an enormous fact we'd rather not have to face: We are all spiritually dead until the Lord's grace comes to us.

Now, if we're still asking, Since salvation is by grace, not by the way we live, then why not live any way we want? Or, Why would I want to change?, Paul's response is: Do you understand what's happened to you? Faith is not a get-out-of-jail-free card. You are united to Jesus Christ. We all want inner peace and a sense of security, but Paul wants to make sure we know there is so much more to the Christian life than that.

CS Lewis agreed with Paul about this. In *Mere Christianity*, he gives us a picture of God's grace changing and shaping the Christian's life:

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right, and stopping the leaks in the roof, and so on. You knew that those jobs needed doing and you are not surprised. “

“But then God starts knocking the house about in a way that does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of. He's adding on a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards.”

“You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage. But He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself. He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into radiant beings, pulsating with joy and delight and wisdom. The process will be long and in parts painful, but this is what we are in for, and nothing less.”

We cannot imagine the magnitude of the changes our new life with Jesus will bring. But when the Lord brings these changes, we'll be ever so grateful for them. That's good news....and baptism is like a spotlight on it.

We Aren't Supposed to Keep This Good News to Ourselves, Are We?

No. Baptism is a time for a Christian to publicly provide an outward picture, a sign, a symbol, of what has happened to them because they trust Jesus. Baptism keeps one of the core commandments in Scripture front and center: *“Hear O people of God. The Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”* (Deuteronomy 6)

In the Old Testament, water is a sign of judgment for sin. Think Noah and the Ark. Think Israel's Exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea. By faith, God's people were brought through these judgments. That's what baptism declares. The person is brought through waters of judgment, purified, because of the grace of Jesus Christ.

The person baptized lets everyone know: *I am not ashamed to say I belong to Jesus.*

Back in 1st Century, whenever an adult or a young person came to know Jesus it often was perilous for them. If you let others know that you had become a follower of Jesus Christ it was likely that your family or business associates or friends would cut their ties to you. By the Lord's mercy, that's not the case today in the safe home of PCC, where we celebrate baptisms. Tears, smiles and hugs are most appropriate.

But baptism is even more than letting everyone know: I am not ashamed to be a Christian. The person who is baptized also is saying to the rest of us: I want this for you as well. I don't want you to keep making good things into the ultimate thing. I don't want sin to keep its control over you. I want you to come through the Lord's judgment. I want more than anything for you to have the new life with Jesus.

Part Two:
In Their Language,
In God's Time

*Suggestions for teaching your child the
meaning of baptism*



We should be glad to teach our kids about baptism. However, we may not remember to talk to them about baptism in between the times that we celebrate it. Before we know it, they are almost teenagers and we still haven't talked with them about it.

PCC does not promote a particular age when a child is expected to be baptized. Nor does PCC require that a child be a certain age before being baptized. Rather, we support and resource parents in determining if their child is ready to be baptized, as a proclamation of their faith in Jesus.

I suggest keeping the following in mind as you think and pray about what it means for your child to be baptized:

Simplicity First...Build From There

Introduce your child to baptism as part of an ongoing conversation about who Jesus is and what He did. When explaining baptism to a young child it isn't necessary to give a complete and final explanation in one block of time. An understanding and appreciation of baptism will increase as the child grows in his or her faith and knowledge of the Lord.

Depending on your child's age and learning style:

Explain to your child what it means to be a Christian: We are sorry for our sin and recognize our need for God's forgiveness so that we can live the way God intends for us. Our sin must be forgiven so we can enjoy knowing God, and bring delight to Him. We must believe that on the cross Jesus paid the price for our sin; He was the only one who could do this (see Acts 4:11,12).

A helpful passage from Scripture that demonstrates this point is found in Luke 18:9-14, the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee who went to the Temple. Tax collectors were hated. They were considered some of the worst sinners of the day. In contrast, Pharisees were quite confident that since they practiced their religion just about perfectly, God owed them a blessing. (Actually, all of Luke 18 is a good read for you and your child in this regard.)

You may not be able to pinpoint that one specific moment when your child asks Jesus into their heart. That's OK. For the majority of Christians, coming to know Jesus is a process that unfolds over time, as God works in us.

Let God be God in this matter. He loves your child and is already at work in his or her heart and mind. Join Him in this by your reading of Scripture with them and prayer with them. You'll know when the time is right for them to genuinely open their heart to God...or they may even surprise you and let you know they already do know Jesus!

OR, depending on your child's age and learning style:

Take your son or daughter through the following questions and read the Scripture passages together. Help them understand what the Bible is saying, and let your child give his or her own answers.

Something happens that leads to baptism. What is it?

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Acts 18:8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

Acts 19:4-5 "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

These people were baptized because they first believed! They believed in who Jesus said he was, the Son of God and the savior of the world.

OR, depending on your child's age and learning style:

Admit: Admit that you are a sinner. Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

Believe: Believe that Jesus is God's son. John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

John 14:6 *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Confess: Confess that Jesus is Lord. Romans 10:9-10 *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

OR, depending on your child's age and learning style:

Go over these questions together.

1. Why should I be baptized?

To follow the example set by Christ. Mark 1:9 "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the river."

Why was Jesus baptized? Did he need to be saved?

No, He didn't need to be saved. He was perfect. Baptism doesn't save you. It is a symbol of obedience. Jesus commands that every Christian be baptized. Baptism tells others that we are really a believer.

2) Does baptism make me a Christian?

No. It shows that you are a Christian. For example, a wedding ring doesn't make me married, it is a symbol of a commitment that I made. One day I made a commitment to my wife before God and a lot of other people: I said "I do" and I gave my life to Joyce, for the rest of my life.

That commitment is what makes me married, not the gold ring. If I were to lose this ring, I'd still be married. The wedding ring is an outward symbol of an inward commitment. When it comes to our faith, it is our commitment to Jesus that saves us. Baptism says to everyone: *I'm not ashamed to tell the whole world what's happened to me. I've given my life to Christ.*"

3) Why should I be baptized by going under the water?

Some churches sprinkle a little water on the person's head; that's fine. At PCC, the person being baptized goes all the way under the water. Jesus was baptized that way. The word 'baptize' means: "dip under water." (This method best symbolizes a burial and resurrection.)

4) When should I be baptized?

As soon as you become a believer; as soon as you realize baptism's importance. Maybe you've been a believer for a while but you didn't realize how important baptism is until now.

Acts 8: *"Philip began with the scripture and told him the good news about Jesus and as they traveled along the road they came to some water and the man said, 'Look! Here's water. Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?'" Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The man answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*"

5) Will I have to say anything when I am baptized?

Yes, you'll have the joy of sharing how you came to know Jesus as your Savior. It doesn't have to be long, and you can write it out. PCC's pastors will be glad to help you with this.

Independent Thinking

Did your child come to faith in Jesus Christ on their own? Can they put into their own words what they believe, and what baptism is? Children are thinking more independently as they grow older. They are more likely to view decisions and commitments that they make as teens as their own, and not just the decision of their parents.

A believable profession of faith would be one in which the child is not prompted by anyone with answers. It is a thought-out expression of an awareness of and sorrow for sin, and that the death of Jesus on the cross was to pay for our sin: *Jesus died for my sins. There is nothing that I can do to pay for my sins.*

Sometimes it's hard to discern where a child stands in relation to God when they grow up surrounded by their parents' Christian faith. The natural assumption is that the child believes the same things. For example, a child may answer *yes* if you ask him if he believes in Jesus. Yet, this child shows no personal response to God that can be detected by mom or dad or anyone else. This child needs to wait for faith to awaken, let alone mature. Again, let God be God. He is your child's Savior, you are not.

Maturity and Understanding

If a child shows no sign of realizing that he or she is a moral being in the sight of God, and that he or she needs to make a decision about Jesus Christ, it is appropriate to tell that child to wait to be baptized. Children will differ in this age-of-understanding and responsibility. Some will be aware of intentionally giving their lives to Jesus at age five. Others will not have considered the possibility of saving faith until age twelve, or even later.

Any child who can genuinely, confidently speak of his or her own faith in Jesus is welcome to be baptized.

Parents, Thank You

It is not PCC's intent that all our children go through some sort of proper religious motions at the perfect time (whenever the 'perfect' time is). Our prayer is that in teaching your child, with PCC's help, he or she will come to know fellowship with the living Lord, and experience His life-changing, soul-satisfying work in their heart.

We invite you to set up some time with Pastor Jeff or DL, so that your child can share their faith with us. We look forward to that time to affirm what God...and you, Mom and Dad... are doing in your child's life.

I Can't Keep This to Myself, Can I?

***I am not ashamed to be a
Christian.***

I want this for you as well.





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