

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

On March 4, 2014, we received the following inquiry:

“Dear Brothers, I noticed in the past District Conventions, younger ones, as early as the age of 9 years old, getting baptized. In our congregation, a close friend of my son with the age of 10 years old became an unbaptized publisher last year. After reading *The Golden Age* June 6, 1934 p.571 from the article "What is Real Baptism?" and Luke Chapter 2, it was clear Christ was not baptized as a babe nor a child. He was around 12 years old when found in the temple reasoning out with the teachers of the Law. He got baptized when he reached the age of 30, the legal majority age then observed by the Jews. It was also the perfect time for dedicating his time and effort to fulfill the prophecy for His Father.

“Given these Scriptures, while we are not to follow strictly Jewish customs with reference to age, would it not be more Christian to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to the baptismal age? This means that the Society should not allow infants, as well as children under the majority age of today, to be baptized. More than the age is the spiritual maturity which I think should be way past teenage years, e.g. 20-25 years old and above. Looking forward to your comments. Thanks.”

To the author, thank you for your email. To directly answer your question, no, we do not think it is necessary for young ones to wait until they are 20 or 30 years old to make a personal dedication to doing the Father’s will and getting baptized into Christ. One does not have to reach 30 in order to know whether he wants to worship God and follow the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Think about it. Children as young as 5 years old make decisions about who they will imitate. Some choose ‘superheroes.’ Some choose entertainers or athletes. Some choose their parents or other close family or friends. Why should they not be able to decide that they want to imitate Jesus?

This is not a tough decision to make either. Jesus said his “yoke is kindly and his load is light.” (*Matthew 11:30*) And he counseled his apostles to stop preventing the children from coming to him because they, too, are heirs to the heavenly kingdom:

“Then young children were brought to him for him to place his hands on them and offer prayer, but the disciples reprimanded them. Jesus, however, said: “Let the young children alone, and **do not try to stop them from coming to me, for the Kingdom of the heavens belongs to such ones.**” – *Matthew 19:13-14*

The only reason one might think it is necessary for a person to reach an age of maturity before getting baptized is when man has burdened the concept of baptism with their own rules and laws. For example, getting baptized with the Watchtower organization is more than just a simple dedication to the Father and public acknowledgment that one has chosen to live a Christ-like life. It is also a kind of contract. The individual is not only subjecting him or herself to the will of the Father, but they are subjecting themselves to an organization and the rules of men. As part of the Watchtower baptism, one of the questions is: “**Do you understand that your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in association with God's spirit-directed organization?**” This is far beyond what the Father and Christ Jesus require!

We think young ones are wholly incapable of understanding the ramifications of such a statement and contractual relationship. For that reason, our opinion is that baptism **with the Watchtower organization** should be held off until a person reaches the age of maturity, at least 18 or 21 years, and is fully aware of the potential negative impact.

This is an issue that has been raised by many people over the years, but more so in recent years as the Governing Body asserts its grip of authority more aggressively over the congregations. Once a person has been baptized in connection with the Watchtower organization, that person cannot voluntarily leave without suffering severe repercussions. If the reason for leaving is a disagreement with the teachings, such a person will be disfellowshipped as an apostate. If the reason for leaving is a decision not to follow the rules, they will be disfellowshipped as a gross sinner. In either case, the entire congregation is commanded to shun all disfellowshipped persons. And not just the congregation, even intimate family members are obligated to do so. And if those family and friends do not strictly shun the person who has been disfellowshipped, the friends and family may also be disfellowshipped and shunned! It is estimated that the fear of being shunned is what is keeping about a third of Jehovah's Witnesses from leaving the organization.

When one makes a dedication to the Father and is baptized into Christ Jesus, there are no penalties associated with it. The gift of freewill allows a person to decide to worship God and then later to decide not to worship God. Freewill is free. It has no strings attached. Though everyone, young and old, will always be subject to the basic law of reaping what one has sown (*Galatians 6:7*) that is quite a different matter than being punished for exercising free will.

We can illustrate it this way: If a person drives a car recklessly, he may get into an accident. If he does, he is reaping what he has sown. But if the reckless driver also gets a ticket and has to pay a fine, that is a punishment for driving recklessly. Accordingly, when a person decides they no longer want to associate with the Watchtower organization, they will no longer be viewed as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. That is reaping what one has sown. But the Watchtower Society goes further. They punish those who no longer want to be Jehovah's Witnesses by demanding that even their family members shun them, not even saying a greeting to one's own flesh and blood! This is a punishment that far exceeds the "crime" of exercising freedom of religion.

This is why baptism of very young people becomes problematic. A 9-year-old child is not sufficiently equipped, mentally or emotionally, to make an informed decision on whether to subject themselves to these ramifications. Their innocence and inexperience prevents them from discerning the potential harm and isolation that will result from a decision to leave the Watchtower organization.

Many secular governments recognize the incapacity of young ones to enter into contracts that have detrimental consequences. While they allow minors to enter into such contracts, the law does not hold the minor accountable if they decide they no longer want to be bound by the contract terms. In fact, if a minor enters into a contract, years later when they are adults they can void the contract because they were minors when they agreed to the terms. If the Watchtower Society honored the innocence and inexperience of the young ones in their midst, and only applied their disfellowshipping procedures to those who were baptized (and contracted with the Watchtower organization) as adults, a great deal of sorrow and misery would be avoided. And so would the question of whether it is wise for young ones to get baptized.

The way we see it, the Governing Body encourages young ones to be baptized so that the number of active Jehovah's Witnesses will increase. And a threat of disfellowshipping will keep them from leaving in the future. However, if a 9-year-old, or even an adult, wanted to be baptized so that they could be with Christ in heaven, we strongly doubt that the overseers would allow it without aggressively seeking to change their minds. The official opinion is that those who want to be with Christ in heaven are probably "mentally or emotionally unbalanced." (August 15, 2011 *Watchtower*, page 22) Only if they change their hope will their baptism be approved!

Because of the seriousness of getting baptized with the Watchtower organization, we would strongly discourage any children from getting baptized with them. Instead, we would encourage private baptisms in the presence of those who love them and who are looking out for their best interests. We would encourage them to undergo what we call "free agent baptism" that allows them freedom of worship without the encumbrances of the rules and laws of men. Their baptisms can be small private events with close family and friends. They can be performed practically anywhere there is a body of water – a pool, a lake, an ocean, etc. They do not need to be sanctioned by men or priests. Doing it in the presence of the Father and Christ Jesus is all that is required. See the article, **What Prevents Me?** for examples of how these types of baptisms have been performed.

Practically every Christians religion, other than Jehovah's Witnesses, acknowledges "free agent baptisms." When you arrive at a church and tell them you have already been baptized into Christ, they accept that and welcome you as a member of their church. Only Jehovah's Witnesses (as far as we know) require re-baptisms so that the newly baptized one would be subject to the Watchtower rules of conduct and discipline and would be beholding to the oversight of the Governing Body. To them, it is not just a baptism; it is a contract of allegiance to men.

So, in summary, we would never discourage a young one from being baptized into the Christ. But we would surely discourage a young one from being baptized into any organization, the Watchtower organization or any other one. An organization is not your mediator, not your true leader, not your redeemer, cannot transfer you from death to life, and is not the judge over your eternal existence, your destiny or your hope. Children simply are not capable of making an informed decision to dedicate their lives to such infallible organization and men. But they are absolutely safe and secure if their baptism only subjects them to the Father and Christ Jesus.

We hope that answers your question.

"Elia Luchnia"
