
QUESTION: What is baby dedication?

“Baby Dedication” does not adequately define what takes place at this special ceremony. A better description would be to call it “Parental Dedication,” due to the parent(s) making the actual decision involves which initiates this ceremony. The Bible over and over again admonishes parents to teach their children how to love and obey their God. Moses declared, “Impress them (commandments) on your children” (Deut 6:4-9). The bulk of the Book of Proverbs is an impassionate plea from a father to a son instructing him to know, live, and apply the Lord’s commands. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). During “Baby Dedication,” the parent(s) of the child or children are publicly declaring their personal commitment to Christ and their whole-hearted commitment to raising their children in the instruction of the Lord.

Why do we offer Baby Dedication rather than Baby Baptism? The bible teaches that salvation is secure by having a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Paul declares, “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” (Rom 10:9). Scripture also teaches that “Saving Faith” involves one’s whole being, their mind, will and emotions. We believe intellectually by understanding and confessing the factual elements of the message (Rom 10:14). We believe emotionally by realizing our need for Christ as our personal Savior and Lord (John 16:8-10). We believe volitionally by an act of our will as we surrender, commit, and entrust ourselves into Christ’s saving hands and to His authority over our lives (John 3:16, 36; Eph 2:8-10). Since an infant is unable to make any of these decisions it would seem awkward to baptize an infant. However, since parent(s) are able to make a decision to raise a child in the hope that they one day will make this salvific decision it seems Baby Dedication is a more appropriate ceremony to practice.

If my child is dedicated rather than baptized will they still go to heaven? Let me share two thoughts: (1) water baptism is commanded by our Lord for all believers. It is a symbol of the work of God cleansing an individual through a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ (salvation). Through baptism the believer declare their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. A person can go to heaven without being baptized, however to walk in obedience a believer needs to be baptized. (2) Although children are born into this world with natures inclined to sin, God provides a special grace. Grace is an undeserved blessing and love given to a person by God. This special grace is called prevenient grace and is a term used to describe God’s provision for their redemption during the period before reaching the age of accountability or the time when they are mentally able to respond to gospel message. Thus, a child who is baptized is not acknowledging their salvation. In reality, child baptism or dedication acknowledges this special grace of God and trust that the child when mentally able to respond to the gospel will do so. Once a person is mentally capable to respond to the gospel they must do so to be saved and go to heaven. In short, children are allowed entrance to heaven whether baptized or dedicated or not because of the prevenient grace of God. Once anyone reaches the mental capacity to respond to the gospel then such acceptance is necessary for salvation and thus entrance into heaven. Baptism saves no one, but out of obedience all that are saved ought to be baptized.

If my child has experienced infant baptism, does he or she need to be dedicated? Since Baby Dedication is primarily Parental Dedication, I would first ask, “Have you as parent(s) publicly declared your faith in Jesus Christ? The second question I would ask is this, “Have you publicly declared your whole-hearted desire to train and instruct your children in the things of God?” this is what is called a confession of accountability – where parents make themselves accountable to the entire church to live up to their commitment. In short, even if your child has experienced infant baptism, I would encourage parent(s) who have publicly declared their faith in Jesus Christ to take the step of publicly confessing their desire to raise their children in a God-honoring way.

In the Baby Dedication ceremony the parent(s) before the congregation declare their desire to dedicate their child to the Lord and accept the responsible to raise their children in a God honoring home as well as training them in the ways of the Lord. A prayer of blessing is given over the parent(s) to ask the Lord’s blessing and guidance as the parent(s) perform their parental duty. A prayer is also given over the child to ask that they will respond to the witness and parenting of his/her parent(s) and come to an early saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The church family is asked to commit before God and those involved in the Infant Dedication that they will live in such a way as to support the witness and training of the parent(s) for their child. The church is to be a safe place to raise one’s child in godliness and as such is to serve not as a stumbling block, but rather a help in this important responsibility of raising a child in the ways of the Lord.