

A Brief on Baby Dedication

Some parents desire to “dedicate” their infants or small children to the Lord, but what does it mean to “dedicate” a baby to the Lord? Is this simply a sentimental ceremony, or is it something much more serious and important? Is this baby dedication the same as infant baptism? Is a baby dedication a church sacrament? Does it dispense grace? Since various Christians would answer these questions differently, the purpose of this brief is to clarify what we believe.

Before we begin, we want to make sure to say that we will perform “baby dedication” ceremonies, but only with certain considerations taken into account.

In the Jewish religion, male infants are circumcised in obedience to the Mosaic Law. In Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other reformed churches, infants are baptized into the church; however, we believe that only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can a child become a part of the body of Christ.

Like us, many churches do not practice infant baptisms, because they believe that in the Bible baptism is taught to be something done *after* a person chooses to follow Christ. As an alternative, many of those churches practice “baby dedications”. A baby dedication is not a baptism (there is no water involved). It’s more like a public pledge by the parents to raise their babies in the Lord. Passages such as 1 Samuel 1:11-28 and Luke 2:21-39 are often used as the basis for this idea.

However, the difficulty with using the 1 Samuel passage as the scriptural basis for a baby dedication ceremony is that Hannah left Samuel with the High Priest Eli to serve the Lord all the days of his life at “*the house of the LORD at Shiloh*” (vs.24). Most parents are not truly giving their child at birth to the work of the Lord in the house of the Lord. They are not promising to raise their child up to be a pastor, for example.

The origins and particular traditions surrounding baby dedications are not clear. It does not appear that baby dedication was practiced by the early church, and there isn’t anything in the New Testament indicating that babies of believers are to be dedicated to the Lord in a special church ceremony. When Jesus was brought to Simeon (Luke 2), this was in the process of fulfilling a Mosaic Law requirement (cf. Leviticus 12), an old covenant expectation for Jews. It does not directly point to baby or child dedication as an ordinance of the church.

Having said that, and while baby dedication is not an officially instituted ordinance of the church, like baptism or the Lord’s Supper, it might not necessarily conflict with Scripture, as long as parents do not view it as assuring the salvation of the child.

Basically, it is presenting a child to and in the setting of the church. Parents present their child before God and His people asking for grace and wisdom in carrying out their responsibilities. Parents also come praying that their child might one day trust Jesus Christ as Savior for the forgiveness of sin. Before the actual ceremony, passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-7 might be used to counsel the parents. Parental responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Staying married (this is not meant to exempt single parents).

- Being the spiritual leader of their children through their own relationship with Christ.
- Maintaining the health, safety, and welfare of their children.
- Praying for their children's salvation and sanctification to the glory of God.
- Shepherding their child's heart toward a full relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

So we might define baby or child dedication like this: "A public testimony by parents acknowledging that their child is a gift from God (cf. Psalm 127:3) and that they are responsible to instruct the child in the Word of God, that they will guide the child in Christian living and they will lead the child to seek a personal relationship with Jesus Christ". In this way, since baby or child dedication ceremony is not about the salvation of the child, it is about the relationship between the child, the parents, and the church more so than between the child and God.

Indeed, this is why we would see "baby dedication" as a two way street, between the family of the child and the family of the church. In this way a baby dedication service would represent the desire of the parents to promise to bring the child up in the admonition of the Lord. In turn the congregation would promise that they will be a support and help in this process.

Parents are tasked with the responsibility of raising the child in the faith, and in the church. The church is tasked with the responsibility of nurturing the child and the family in the faith. Since the dedication is not an established ordinance of the universal church, like baptism or the Lord's Supper, it comes under the sphere of a particular local church and its community of believers.

In that sense baby or child dedication is actually parent dedication. And church dedication. It is the parents' public acknowledgement that God has given them a child and their promise to raise their child in the Lord. At the same time, the entire congregation likewise makes a promise that they will help the parents fulfill their vow. It is a pledge of teamwork between the particular family and the particular church.

This future commitment of the church to the family would obviously require a past commitment of the family to the church. How else would either part be held accountable for their part in this series of promises?

Parents who are not members of the church may request that a pastor meet with them to pray for their child's health and salvation, but the public dedication of families will be limited to those already in a covenant relationship with the church through membership. A baby dedication in church is a family event, both the individual family and the local church family, and it loses its significance if the parents formally proclaiming their dedication to the Lord are not formally part of the family. Those who are not part of our local church through covenant membership should seek to do the Lord's will first in church membership before they publicly present themselves before the church for a baby dedication.

We will perform baby or child dedication services at the end of a Sunday worship service. Our aim is to make "baby dedication" a special time where the child is dedicated to the Lord, with the parents publically recognizing that their child is a gift from God and affirming their commitment to fulfill God's expectations, and the church dedicates themselves to the child and to the family, to nurture and support the cause of Christ in the life of this child to the glory of God.