



SHOULD KIDS OF DIVORCE BE BAPTIZED WHEN THEIR PARENT DOESN'T ATTEND CHURCH

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

11/16/2016

Several years ago, I had a child in our [DC4K](#) (Divorce Care for Kids) group who accepted Christ as her personal Savior. She wanted to follow in baptism. The child's dad was not in the picture, but the mom was all for her daughter being baptized. This child had experienced a chaotic home life along with some unspeakable abuse from the dad. She was no longer allowed to visit her dad.

In DC4K we had talked about how God will never leave you or forsake you. We had discussed how much God loves each one of us. We discussed turning all our fears over to the Lord. We talked about how to trust Christ and how to accept him as our Personal Savior, forever a friend and the boss of our lives.

I tell you all of this because I truly believe this child understood what asking Christ to be her Savior meant. Because of some personal things that had happened to this child, she truly needed to see a Heavenly Father figure and she wanted a relationship with her personal Savior.

The church would not allow the child to follow in baptism because the elders didn't think the child was sincere. They were also concerned the mom didn't come to church very much. The mom's life was pretty "out of control," and she was not leading a Christian lifestyle.

In the article, "[Are We Raising Kids to Be Fake Christians](#)" Dale Hudson says,

"Parents are the most important influence on their children's faith. Kids with an apathetic faith are often the product of parents who have an apathetic faith. Kids must see their parents passionately following Jesus and living out their faith."

While I agree with this in theory, I have to wonder about the divorced family where neither parent is living a Christian lifestyle or no longer living a Christian lifestyle?

Dale goes onto say,

"Children's ministries that want to see kids grow up to follow Jesus would be wise to spend just as much time influencing parents as they do children."

Oh, how I wish this had been true in the church where my friend was in attendance! I reached out to the mom but the church leaders did not. It was a small church that had prejudice against a so-called "wild divorced woman."





SHOULD KIDS OF DIVORCE BE BAPTIZED WHEN THEIR PARENT DOESN'T ATTEND CHURCH

Page 2 of 3

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

11/16/2016

Why do I bring this up?

You may be thinking that in this day and age there are few church people that feel this way, but you'd be wrong. I'm amazed at the prejudice that is still out there in our churches today against divorced parents.

We all know that no one can prevent a child from accepting Christ into his or her life. It is a personal decision no matter the parent's agreement or permission. With my young friend the issue wasn't salvation but wanting to be baptized.

This child and many other children of divorce need to feel they belong to Christ and are accepted into a church family. Following in baptism is important to them. It is an outward expression of a very inward personal decision. It is an experience they can hold onto when life gets complicated and confusing. It says to them that they belong just like the other kids from two-parent families belonged.

I knew that more than likely her mom would continue to move her around the country. I doubted she would be taken to church or even encouraged to attend church in her teen years. But if she could be baptized, she could have the memory of a loving church family that accepted her being a child of the King. She could carry the memory of that one act of baptism with her throughout her somewhat turbulent life.

I posed the question on a closed KidMin Facebook page,

"Should kids of divorce be baptized when their divorced parent doesn't attend church?"

I really liked what Vi Workman said:

"If the child is not sincere and goes through the motions of baptism, later in life she will get a wakeup call from God to sincerely get baptized."

Could there be legal issues?

Many children's ministers on Facebook brought up legal issues. For example, would the church be overstepping its boundaries to baptize a child if only one parent in a custody situation agreed to allow the baptism to take place? What about a step family situation where the child wants to be baptized in the step mom's church?

I consulted with an attorney about this issue. She specializes in divorce and child custody. She said (while she couldn't give legal advice) that in most situations in today's court, faith-based issues and religious training are no longer mandated by the court. She said rarely is it even brought up in child custody hearings. There is only one





SHOULD KIDS OF DIVORCE BE BAPTIZED WHEN THEIR PARENT DOESN'T ATTEND CHURCH

Page 3 of 3

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

11/16/2016

denomination that actively pursues religious training, and in those cases if one of the parents is adamant the judge might mandate both parents be included in any religious decisions. Even that type of court order is rare.

Each church will need to make its own decisions on how to handle a situation like this. Here are some questions to consider.

- Should permission of the parent that brings the child to church be required?
- Should permission of both parents be obtained in a shared custody situation?
- What will you do if one parent says yes to the baptism but the other parent gives an adamant NO?
- What if the child is attending church with a non-custodial parent and only in your church for summer vacations, etc.? How will you handle this child's request?
- If neither parent attends your church but your church requires the parent's permission what will you say to the child who is begging you to be baptized?

There are many issues to consider. It certainly can be tricky whichever way you approach it.

Kid's faith

Karl Bastian in his blog post, "[No more sinner's prayer](#)" says,

"Kids obviously will learn much more about their faith as they grow, learn and mature – but that added knowledge doesn't void their initial faith. God is faithful to begin, maintain, and eventually complete their spiritual journey, even if we didn't do everything "exactly" right at the beginning."

He goes onto say,

"A journey has to have a beginning. We must invite children to begin their journey of faith..."

Regarding my young friend: Nothing I said could convince the elders at that church to allow this child to be baptized. Like Karl said, "A journey has to have a beginning." I believe my young friend was at the beginning of her journey. I have prayed she will grow and learn more about our loving Father as she matures. I have prayed that she holds onto her faith. I have asked God to bring a Christian mentor into her life even if she doesn't attend church any longer as a young adult.

Should kids of divorce be baptized when their parent doesn't attend church? Or perhaps the bigger question is – are you going to punish a child because of the parent's lifestyle? Lots to think about it. What does your church do in situations like this?

