

Considering Confirmation

Rites of initiation

When Abraham became the first of God's chosen people, God gave him a way for every man to show that he chose to belong to God. It was called circumcision and is still practised by Jews and Muslims today.

Jews who had fallen away from faith and wanted to show their commitment to returning to it adopted a new rite called 'baptism' in the hundred years or so before Jesus was born. The most famous practitioner of this kind of baptism was 'John the Baptist' who called people to the Jordan river to 'repent' - that is show they were sorry for not following God and that they were determined to live as his followers in the future. Jesus and his disciples used baptism too for those who followed Jesus.

Christians who were not Jews adopted baptism as the main rite to show that they had become followers, after St. Paul persuaded the Jewish leaders of Christianity that there was no need for foreign believers to be



circumcised. When adults were baptised they often brought all of their households to be baptised with them—that is, their children and grandchildren, and their servants and slaves and their children too.

Today all churches use baptism as the way of becoming a member. Some only baptise adults (Believers' Baptism), and

some also baptise children. The churches that baptise children all accept each others' baptisms as valid, but often Baptist and Pentecostal churches will only accept baptism they have administered themselves.

Being baptised shows that a person belongs to Jesus and intends to live as his disciple. If that person is a small child, the intention is of the adult carer, who will bring the child up to follow Jesus. In this case, the child will need to decide for him or her self whether this really is the life they want to lead.

Where did confirmation come from?

In the early days of the church, bishops were always a part of baptism. The deacon would baptise, and then the new church member would come into church from the baptistery (a separate building in those days) and be welcomed by the bishop, who laid his hands on their heads.

As the church got bigger, bishops could not look after all the churches, and appointed priests to look after them instead. But the

bishops still wanted to welcome the new members. So if a bishop could not get to the baptism service, he came another time to welcome and lay his hands on the heads of the believers. Eventually this became a full blown sacramental rite—confirmation. When that happened it became a chance for those baptised as children to wait and use confirmation as away to show their own commitment to their baptismal promises.

Inside...

A gift of the Spirit	2
Showing it's my faith too!	2
Affirmation	2
Taking responsibility	3
Am I old enough for this?	3
Who can help me?	3
My options	4

How does this affect me?

- It's something I've got to pray about!
- It's about how I show my faith belongs to me—not my parents!
- But it means making choices!
- Ultimately what matters most is being a follower of Jesus.

A gift of the Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit comes to people in a special way when they are baptised. This began with Jesus—people saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove. But the Holy Spirit comes at all sorts of times! In Acts 8: 17 Peter and John visited a group of Samaritan people who had already been baptised, but had not received the Holy Spirit. The apostles laid hands on the Samaritans, prayed, and asked the Holy Spirit to come to the Samaritans—and then the Holy Spirit came, just like the day of Pentecost.

Today, this is the central part of a confirmation service. There might be a bishop there (if it is a Church of England confirmation there must be a bishop) - or it might be the local priest or minister. Whoever it is, the prayer is for the Holy Spirit to come. For example, in the United Reformed Church, the minister might use this prayer:



'God of all grace, confirm and strength V
In the power of the Holy Spirit,
That *she/he* may be your servant in the world
And see your glory in the world to come. Amen.'

Of course, the Spirit can come to anyone, at any time, but in confirmation we especially ask the Holy Spirit to come, to help a person who has decided to live as a follower of Jesus to be able to do that. And we believe that the Lord hears our prayers just as He heard those of Peter and John, and will send His Holy Spirit in answer to our prayers too.

Showing it's my faith too!

Whether you were baptised or dedicated as a baby, if you are a believer who really loves Jesus you probably feel very grateful to your parents or carers for bringing you up as a Christian. But for every young believer a time comes when you need to live out your faith for yourself, instead of just doing it because your parents have told you to.

For some young people, the moment for doing this comes when they leave home to go to uni, or on a gap year, or to go to their first job.

*'It's not just my parents'
faith—it's mine too!
I am a Christian!'*

Others realise while they still live at home that it is time to say 'it's not just my parents' faith—it's mine too! I am a Christian!'

If you were dedicated as a child, this is the best reason to think about being baptised. If you are already baptised, it is the time to think about being confirmed. Whichever of these you do, it is a very public service, and that is deliberate. If you really want to own your faith for yourself, everyone should know about it—and then those who see you make the commitment have a commitment of their own, to support you and help you to succeed in your faith journey. No matter how mature any of us is, we always need people alongside us to help us on the journey.

Affirmation

Sometimes people who are already baptised need a way to say 'yes!' to faith without making a commitment to church membership. Perhaps it is because the commitment to church membership has already been made through Believers' Baptism or Confirmation, and the person has slipped away from faith for a while and is now coming back.

Or perhaps the person does not want to have to choose a church, not yet anyway. For some young people from inter-church families, the rite of affirmation has given them the chance to say 'yes!' to God without having to choose a particular tradition to join.

They were even able to invite ministers from more than one tradition to take part as they renewed their baptismal vows and said 'yes Lord! I believe!'

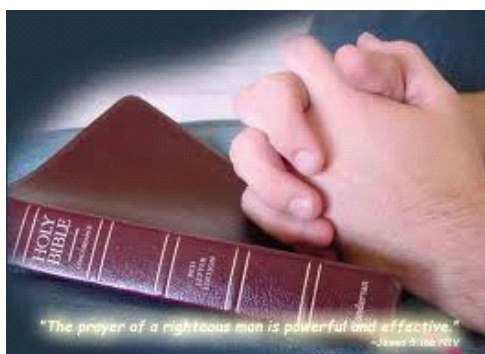


Taking responsibility

Both Confirmation and Believers' Baptism are ways of saying 'yes!' to God. And when you say that yes, you become a full part of the community of believers, all those other people who have said yes to God.

And this is where it gets hard. Because as a full member, you are expected to pull your weight.

You are expected to obey the rules of the church. Sadly, at the moment those rules still sometimes divide Christians from each other, which is why it is not always possible to be a member of more than one tradition. It isn't impossible—it just depends on which traditions you are trying to be a part of. For example, there are people who worship in Local Ecumenical Partnerships who join all the traditions involved—Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and URC, for example, in joint confirmations in Milton Keynes. But other traditions don't combine—you can't be Orthodox or a Roman Catholic and also be part of another church, for example.



Whether you belong to one or more traditions, as a full member of the church you are expected to take part in its activities—worship, social, and the boring meetings too! You will have a vote and you should use it when church officers are elected. You might even consider becoming a church officer yourself, or offering to serve your church community in another way, using the talents that God has given you.

And yes, when you start earning money, it is your responsibility to use some of that to support your church.

Most importantly, you are responsible for your life of prayer and studying the Bible, living your life in the way Jesus showed you to. That includes praying for your church and its ministers, and for your fellow church members.

Am I old enough for this?

Have you ever noticed how often God calls very young people to serve Him in the Bible?

For example, there is Samuel, who was only seven when he became God's prophet!

And David was only ten when he became the most important soldier in the Israelite army!

St Paul told his friend Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because he was young. He may have been the youngest guy in the building, but he was the one God had called to be the leader!

And then there was Mary, who was still in her mid-teens when she took on a huge job for God - becoming the mother of our Saviour and bringing Him up as a faithful Jew.

So don't worry whether you are old enough. The real question is: 'Is God calling you?'

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Who can help me?

Who do you trust?

If you are trying to work out whether God is calling you, and just what God is calling you to do, you need people you trust who will listen to you and give you good advice. And pray for you too.

You will know by instinct who these people are. Some of them might be related to you—parents, maybe, or siblings, or grandparents, or aunts or uncles. Perhaps you have godparents or older family friends you really trust and can talk to.

Some might be your age—friends at church or school.

Some might be people in authority—perhaps elders or ministers at church, or staff at school or a club you go to.



As you decide who to talk to, ask yourself: does this person listen to me? Will they give me good advice or impose their own agenda or ideas on me? Will they pray for me? Will they help me to make my own decision for myself?



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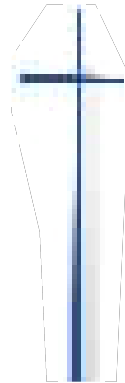


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*Lord, please give me the wisdom
To choose well,*

*And the love to live as your disciple,
Whatever I choose.*

Amen.

So what are the options for me?

Option 1: Do nothing!

Option 2: Affirmation of faith.

Option 3: Believers' Baptism if not already baptised. This may involve a commitment to being a member of one church only, but you'll have to check out the views of your local church.

Option 4: Confirmation if you were baptised as an infant. Again, this may involve a commitment to membership in only one church; or it may feel as though you are choosing to leave one church behind even if you are a member of more than one other church through confirmation.

Option 5: Ask for a shared celebration. If one of the churches you are asking is Roman Catholic or Orthodox, the answer will be 'no'. They might be open to your other minister taking part or supporting you in some way though. Even if you know the answer is going to be no, you might think it is worth asking anyway, so that your desires are known.

As you decide what you want to do, talk to the people you trust and spend plenty of time praying and listening to God.

Think about the people around you who love you, and how your decision will affect them.

Remember, though, that ultimately you have to go forward with the call to discipleship that God has given you, even if it does mean making a choice to leave one church.

That choice won't prevent you worshipping there with your family. It won't change the love your family has for each other.

The most important choice you can make is to follow Jesus. Wherever it is that your journey as His disciple takes you, so long as you are travelling with Him, you won't choose the wrong option!

