

We like simple answers to simple questions. Unfortunately, simple answers are often inadequate. The question, "Should my children take the Lord's Supper?" would seem to require a simple "yes" or "no." However, there is more at stake than a short answer can communicate. Thus, we need to look a little deeper into the issue at hand.

What is critical, in my mind, is not so much which answer you give to your children, but **the reasons you give the answer that you do**. In the process of helping children develop their understanding and appreciation for the traditions of the church, it is important that we do more than give simple yes or no answers. In regards to the question at hand, the answer you give will depend on your understanding of Communion as well as the lessons you want your children to learn.

It is of great importance that the parents decide what is best for their children. This makes the Lord's Supper a teachable moment. To simply let the children decide what they want to do, or worse, to just give in to the child's demands so that they don't make a scene is to make the Communion service nothing more than crackers and grape juice. While this may be understandable behavior for non-Christians or new Christians, it is unacceptable for those who have a deeper appreciation for the body and blood of Christ.

"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

How can we best teach our children the significance of the bread and the cup? Let's consider two completely different answers to this question.

Your Children Should Take the Lord's Supper

Parents who decide that they want their children to participate in Communion are generally thinking in terms of community. They want their children to feel part of the community of believers. Children, after all, are part of the church family; and what family doesn't allow everyone to come to the table for a common meal? Everyone is welcome to participate regardless of their knowledge, or lack thereof. The Communion was originally part of a genuine meal. Everyone would be at the table eating when someone might announce, "The body of the Lord" while passing a plate of bread for all to eat. Later they might announce, "The cup of the new covenant" while passing a single container of wine for all to share. This common sharing symbolizes the unity they have in Jesus. Even though it is rare now for the bread and cup to be part of regular meal, one can explain this concept to their children so that they can understand the community aspect of the "meal."

Your Children Should Not Take the Lord's Supper

Other parents want their children to wait to take the Lord's Supper until they can have a greater appreciation for the meaning behind the bread and the cup. Typically they want their children to wait until they have been baptized so that they will have a greater appreciation of forgiveness of sins, salvation, and the new life in Christ. They reason that when children have to wait for something they appreciate it more. Thus, the first time they take communion will be when they have an understanding of their own sinfulness and an appreciation for Jesus' sacrifice for sin on the cross. They can reflect on their own baptism to realize that, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, they too were raised to live a new life. They are more inclined to express thankfulness for the gift of the Holy Spirit who is at work in them shaping their lives into the image of Jesus.

So What Decision Should You Make?

Parents who decide they want their children to share in the bread and cup might be focusing attention on the fact that, *"we who are many, are one body"* (1 Corinthians 10:17). Parents who decide they want their children to wait might be focused on the words, *"do this in remembrance of me"* (1 Corinthians 11:24). Some parents have developed a kind of middle ground where they allow the children to participate in special communion services but not every week. You as the parent need to know in your own mind the reasons for your decision and be able to explain them to your children.

A Word of Caution

It is important that you not use your reasoning as a basis for judging others. The Lord's Supper is for the purpose of maintaining unity in the body of Christ and nothing creates more division than a judgmental attitude. When your child complains, *"But John gets to eat the crackers, why can't I?"* take advantage of the teachable moment. If you are not careful your response could be teaching your child to be arrogant and judgmental. A thoughtful reply might be, *"People think about the Lord's Supper in different ways. I don't know why John's parents allow him to take communion, but here is why I think it is best for you to wait."*

Be Fully Convinced In Your Mind

The Apostle Paul's words, in answer to another issue where people held different opinions, are instructive for us in this issue as well; *"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind"* (Romans 14:5). I would suggest that you do the following:

- Pray and ask God to give you wisdom and good judgment (See James 1:5).
- Study relevant passages of scripture and discuss them with your spouse and/or children (For example 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-26; Matthew 26:17-30).
- Talk to other parents whose children are near the age of your children. What are they doing and why?
- Talk to spiritually-minded parents whose children are now grown. What did they do and why? Would they make the same decision now? What advice do they have?