

## **The Table and our Children**

Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship

In terms of our family life, very little is more important to us than our children. They are our pride and joy, the apple of our eye, the fruit of our loins, (OK maybe that was one idiom too far ...) They are important.

With respect to our life together as a church very little is more important to us than coming to the Lord's table week after week. The table, in conjunction with the word, speaks to us of the fellowship of God. It is at the table that we see so clearly his grace and get a foretaste of the banquet that is to come.

When we put these two things together it is only natural that we should want to see our children partaking with us at the table of the Lord. But for many there are a lot of questions surrounding this moment. Some of these questions are products of our experience. Some of the questions result from a lack of knowledge. Still others are foisted on us by denominations and traditions.

This "catechism" is an attempt to answer some of the questions and hopefully spur on continued dialogue about these issues, after all they are two very important subjects.

### **1. How do I know if my child is ready?**

We believe that parents know their children better than anyone. You know their temperament, you know the exposure to the necessary truths that they have had. You know the sensitivities of their hearts. Given that what follows are a list of things to look for in your child:

- Is this something your child desires? A good sign that your child is ready to take the Lord's Supper is their own desire, which we must discern from peer pressure and parental pressure.
- Is your child able to discern and articulate (on an age appropriate level) his/her need for and appropriation of the forgiveness of Jesus? Things to look for:
  - understanding of the need for grace
  - inability to be justified by works
  - feelings of remorse for sin
  - thankfulness for Jesus' personal sacrifice for her
  - desire for obedience
- Is your child able to talk at an appropriate level about the meaning and symbolism of the sacrament?
- Is your child growing in their overall understanding of the Christian faith through available means such as SS, Christian Education, regular teaching at home, etc...

## **2. How can I encourage my child to think of the LS in a healthy way and prepare them to take the table?**

Parents do need to be proactive in preparing their children for the table. Our kids do pick up a lot by osmosis, but do need faithful steering. Of course part of preparing our children is preparing ourselves. Listed in the resource section are some articles that will aid your own understanding of the Supper and equip you to talk more confidently about it with your child. As you go:

- Speak positively about your own experience of and appreciation of the Lord's Table.
- Read pertinent scriptures with your child – Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:18-20, I Corinthians 10:14-22, 11:17-34
- Talk with them objectively about what is happening in the Supper. (One could certainly use the Westminster Shorter Catechism #96,97. Heidelberg Catechism #'s 75-82 as a rough guide) – specific topics to cover:
  - Assurance that we belong to Christ
  - Need to come to the table reconciled with others (Matt 5:23-24)
  - Strength the Holy Spirit gives us in union with Christ to obey

## **3. Is my baptized child incomplete without participation in the table?**

Quick answer, No. Unfortunately this has become a common misconception in many Reformed circles today. The thought is that baptized children are entitled to all the benefits of the covenant and if we withhold the table from them, at any age, it is tantamount to excommunication.

There are several ways to think about this issue. One way is to recognize that there are differences in the sacraments. Clearly baptism is an initiatory sacrament that is to be administered only once to an individual. That is not to say that we do not remember our baptisms or participate in some sense when we see baptisms administered to others, but in the strictest sense of the word it is one and done. The Lord's Supper (LS) on the other hand is something that is to be participated in regularly (weekly at Crossroads) by God's people as a sign and seal that we belong to the Lord. As such, it serves more of an assuring function as opposed to an initiatory function. We see some of this difference reflected in the activity level of the two sacraments. Baptism is more passive, something that is done to a person. The LS is much more active, "Take! Eat! Remember! Believe!", are words we typically associate with LS. All of this is to say that requirements for one are not necessarily requirements for the other. Furthermore, the Westminster Confession wisely reminds us that the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of administration (WC 28.5,6), emphasizing that one does not necessarily follow the other.

Given this it may be helpful to think of our children, and their place on the faith journey, as being *immature* rather than *incomplete*. My son, who is now 13, has

matured a lot in his life, he went from using his fingers to using a fork (sometimes), he went from picking up his toys to picking up the garage, he has gone from addition to algebra, from a piggy bank to National City, etc.... At any given stage he was complete, but now, with respect to these things anyway, he has matured. Paul says a similar thing about our spiritual development to the Christians in Corinth when he indicates that he “could not address [them] as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.” He says, “I fed you with milk, not solid food, *for you were not ready for it.*” (I Cor 3:1,2). This type of development is indicated often in the Scriptures and seems to say that we are always growing into our faith. Therefore, it is consistent for us to see our children as being in the covenant while they as yet do not partake of the LS. Certainly we want to encourage them in that direction, but we need not fear that we have somehow excluded them or that their growth is being stunted.

**4. What is the process for my child being admitted to the table at Crossroads?**

This is a process that will begin with you. Once a child expresses their desire to become an active participant at the Lord’s Table, you along with your child should make that desire known to the session (talk to an elder, a pastor, call the office). Once that desire is known a meeting will be set up with representatives of the session to discuss the child’s understanding of their need and appropriation of Jesus as well as their understanding of the table (see topics listed above). This interview will of course be an age appropriate interview. Assuming your child is received into communion they may begin taking the table without public ceremony. It should be noted that they are full members of the body as of yet, they are simply admitted to the table per the Book of Church Order.

**5. Is it correct that Crossroads has set an ordinary minimum age of five years old for admittance to the table?**

Yes this is correct. Given the PCA’s position on Paedo-Communion, this seemed wise to us to clearly demonstrate our commitment to denominational values. We recognize that there is a certain arbitrariness to this age, or to any age we would set. Yet 5 does seem to be an age developmentally where children can distinguish between allusion and reality and generally begin to develop more self awareness. This is not to say that 5 is an absolute age when children should start to think about the table, rather we are saying this is the earliest age when we as a session will entertain it.

**6. What should we expect in an elder exam?**

In short the elders are looking for the same things that you should be looking for in your child (refer to #2). They will seek to engage your child in conversations that would elicit answers indicating an understanding of their need for God, the basics of the sacrament, and how it all plays out in the Christian life. Two things are important to remember: First this is an interview for the child, while parents

can be present, Elders are looking for the child's answer to these questions. Second, Elders want to hear of God's work in the lives of all his people and therefore are excited about admitting your children to the table and are not predisposed against this. To say this another way, they are not out to make this overly difficult for your children.

## **7. What are some good resources I could look at?**

>> for parents who wish to review a biblical/theological understanding of the Lord's Supper for themselves... see: Richard D Phillips, *What Is The Lord's Supper?* (P&R); or Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper* (P&R) –both are brief, accessible and faithful to the reformed tradition.

>> for elementary / junior high, see: Q.92, 96-97 in Starr Meade, *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism* (P&R, 2000).

>> for 4yr olds through 6<sup>th</sup> graders, see Q.122-136 in *Catechism, Series N—Why Did God Give the Sacraments* (Children's Ministry International, available through CE&P) –this is a Sunday school curriculum, but covers the sacraments in a way that will allow parents the opportunity to educate their child

>> for middle and senior high, etc., Stephen Smallman, *Understanding the Faith: A Workbook for Communicants Classes* (P&R) [Also see his: *How Our Children Come to Faith* (P&R).] –the first is a workbook that covers more than the sacraments but which is quite helpful; the second is a brief, but helpful work, on what regeneration/conversion looks like for children raised in covenantal homes.