

Wiser Lake Chapel Children & the Lord's Supper

After making a careful study, seeking wise counsel and engaging in long, thoughtful discussions, the Council of Wiser Lake Chapel has decided to continue the policy of welcoming the children of believing families to eat the Lord's Supper with us.

While this has been the informal practice for some time, the Council, after its consideration, has made this the formal policy of the church by adopting the following statement:

"By their baptism, covenant children are admitted to full communion in the church, including participation in the Lord's Supper. The Council will encourage and assist parents as they explain to their covenant children the meaning and significance of the sacraments to the Christian life."

Objections Answered

Since this action potentially raises many questions, the Council has considered the following possible objections and prepared brief answers:

Q. Will all children automatically be included in the Lord's Supper?

A. No. This whole discussion is about the children of believing parents – children who were baptized and are growing up in Christian homes. We call these children "Covenant Children" because of their unique position: God includes them in His promises to His people.

The children of unbelievers are not part of those promises until they understand the gospel and trust Jesus as their Savior. At that time they are to be baptized, joined to the church and admitted to this sacrament.

Q. Where does this idea come from -- children taking Communion?

A. It comes from the Old Testament where the children of God's people ate the Passover meal with the whole family (there was nothing else to eat that night). The Lord's Supper has now replaced the Passover as the covenant meal, but these covenant children should continue to participate with their parents.

Q. But we live in New Testament times; hasn't everything changed?

A. Certainly there have been many changes, but we should not change things that God has not told us to change. If He no longer wants the children of his people to worship in this way, where in the Bible did He say so? If, on the other hand, He never changed that policy, we should not change it either.

Q. But can children really understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper?

A. No one can completely understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper, but admittedly, most children will understand less than their parents. However, God gave us this sacrament as a means of grace – a tool to build up our faith. Certainly that's how it worked in the Old Testament feasts: when a child asked, "Father, why do we celebrate this," they were to be told of what God had done for them – the things remembered in the feast. So, in some ways this sacrament is even more appropriate for children than it is for adults, for it is a picture bigger than words – the way we often teach our children.

Q. Isn't this quite a change from how Christians have always done this?

A. Interestingly, it is not. There is evidence that infants and small children participated in the Lord's Supper for the first twelve centuries after Christ, and even more recently in some circles.

Q. But isn't this inconsistent with Reformed Theology?

A. Reformed Theology teaches us to follow the Holy Scriptures wherever they lead us, and thus to constantly reform the church. In that sense, anything that is changed because a more Biblical way is discovered, is Reformed!

But, admittedly, child-communion has not been the normal practice of Reformed Churches. Unfortunately, the Reformed practice has been largely based on an un-challenged misstatement by John Calvin concerning the practice of the ancient church (Institutes, IV, 19:4 with footnote #7 admitting the error).

Q. Don't children have to make profession of faith before they can be admitted to the Lord's Table?

A. When adult unbelievers hear the gospel, repent of their sins and trust in Christ the Savior, they are to be publicly baptized and thus, by this profession of faith, they are admitted to the church – including participation in the Lord's Supper. The Bible has many examples of this conversion of sinners to saints.

But when we look in the Bible for instruction or example of Covenant Children going through some confirmation rite, making some formal profession of faith or having some conversion experience, we look in vain. Certainly all of us need to be professing our faith every day, in our words and actions, inside and outside the church. But in the Bible there is no "profession of faith", by which circumcised/baptized children are admitted to the Passover/communion meal. It just isn't in the Bible!

Q. What about the exhortation to "examine yourself" before participating in the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:28). Doesn't this assume that a child is old enough to understand the meaning of the Supper and his relationship to it?

A. In that passage, The Apostle Paul is not addressing the question of who should participate; he is addressing a particular problem: they were taking the Supper lightly. Children, likewise, need to be taught from this passage the seriousness of trampling over the holy ground of this sacrament.

But to argue that children are excluded by this exhortation to examine oneself, is the same as arguing that children are excluded from baptism by the exhortations to "repent and be baptized" or "believe and be baptized." Those arguments ignore the long-standing commands of the Bible that children of believers are to be included in the covenant life of God's people, including the sacraments.

Q. What if children "go astray" as teenagers? Shouldn't we wait to see if they are going to really believe or not?

A. We have erroneously assumed that children would go astray and "sow their wild oats" during their youth. That has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. But the Bible never assumes that; indeed it commands us to be diligent to train and warn against it. In fact, many of the Biblical heroes of the faith are young men and women (probably teenagers) who we would just assume were not mature enough yet to make profession of faith! Consider Joseph, faithful alone in Egypt; David, trusting God, writing Psalms and killing Goliath as a shepherd boy; Daniel and his young friends, standing up to King Nebuchadnezzar; and the Virgin Mary, undoubtedly a teenager but teaching all of us about faithful submission to God. With our traditional practices probably none of these would have been permitted to make profession of faith yet! It is time we expect our young people to be faithful, train them to that end, and include them in the means of grace which God has appointed.

Q. But aren't we supposed to "fence the table" -- to guard it and make sure that it is not defiled by those who do not believe?

A. Yes we are. But the Lord Jesus commanded us: "Let the little children come to Me, do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." He also taught us that the greatest in the kingdom, indeed the only people in the kingdom, are those who come as little children. Now if the Lord included little children in His sacraments, as we know he did in the Passover, but we exclude them, we find ourselves working against Christ.

Q. Isn't this really just superstition: thinking that the sacrament has some magical value even if children don't comprehend it?

A. No, it was the rise of superstitious views of the sacrament (not one crumb of bread could be dropped because it was Christ's body) that prompted the church to begin to exclude their covenant children. A more Biblical view of the sacrament is that the risen Christ is present at dinner with his church to restore and nurture them by his body and blood sacrificed for them. That less superstitious view naturally tends to include the children whom God has included.

Q. Isn't this really just liberalism creeping into the church?

A. People whose theology is not constantly under the scrutiny and authority of the Scriptures will do all kinds of things – some true, some false. The fact that they call for change in the church or resist change in the church cannot be a factor in our thinking. We must be driven by the Bible: to change when we find we have misunderstood something, and to refuse to change even though everyone else has a new, but un-Biblical, idea. So, it is insignificant whether this policy puts us more in step with the liberals or not; we are still totally out of step with anyone whose authority is something other than the Scriptures.

Q. Why make a big deal of this? Even if this is right, it is certain to be misunderstood by others.

A. The desire to be liked by others is one of our greatest enemies as Christians; it can never be allowed to control our actions. The issues at stake here are too important to ignore: the faith of our children and our faithfulness to Christ's Word.

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