

On Children and the Lord's Table

Some thoughts by Pastor Ron

From time to time I am asked by parents, "When should I let my child participate in the Lord's Table?" As our church does not have a written position (it, however, has been discussed by the elders) I thought it beneficial to share some ideas since this is a very important question for parents to consider.

The simple answer to the question is that the Lord's Table is open to anyone in our congregation who has come to personal repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is available to all who, by God's grace, desire to follow the Lord all the days of their life. If parents are convinced that the above describes their child, then they are free to encourage their child(ren) to meaningfully participate.

But there is more to consider if one is inclined to do so. There is a more **complex answer**. Before allowing your child to partake of the Lord's Table parents might want to consider the following:

1. **Early Church practice** – The Early Church connected baptism and the Lord's Table. They considered baptism an initiation rite, that is, baptism celebrated one's entrance into the believing community. The Lord's Table, on the other hand, was the community meal open to all who had declared their unity with the believing body through baptism. Thus, to the leaders of the early church, baptism should precede one's participation in the Lord's Table. It is interesting to note that a similar arrangement was seen with the Old Covenant rites of circumcision (initiation into the community) and the Passover (the community meal). For this reason parents may want to encourage their children to wait until they are baptized before partaking in the Lord's Table.
2. **Paul's warning** – In 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29 Paul writes, "*Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.*" We can see from these verses that Paul is concerned that people do not partake of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner. He instructs his readers to examine themselves (ie: to examine the genuineness of one's faith and walk) so as to avoid taking upon oneself the judgment of the Lord. To the extent that a given child is not able to partake in a worthy manner and to examine himself (which may be due to lack of maturity or understanding), it would behoove parents to wait so as to heed Paul's warning.

If for the above reasons one is inclined to encourage his child to wait, take note of the following:

- ♦ **Make waiting positive.** Instead of only focusing on why your child shouldn't partake, focus on your eager anticipation when they *will* partake. If you can do so truthfully, let your child know how you have seen evidences of the Lord in their lives, and how you look for them to grow. Help them to see, as well, how much better it is to participate when one can do so meaningfully. Tell them, with God's help, that time will surely come.

- ◆ *While you wait, prepare.* If your children are with you during the Lord's Table allow them to hold your hand as you hold the elements. Quietly whisper the significance of each element. Share with them how much the Lord loved us to give His life for us. Pray with them thanking the Lord for His death and life.
- ◆ *Set an example of worthy partaking.* If bitterness or anger or any sin troubles you, do not partake. This will show your child that you are serious about Paul's admonition that we should not partake of this in an unworthy manner.

I hope these thoughts have been helpful. Let's work together to carefully instruct and direct the next generation into meaningful communion with the Savior and Shepherd of their souls.