

Should my children take communion?

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Last week, we took our oldest son to college. I confess that it's been somewhat of a confusing time. On the one hand, he was ready to go; I was ready for him to go. I'm excited for him. He's no longer a boy; he doesn't need me to look out for him anymore; in fact, doing so will only hurt him and his future. Our relationship is changing; I can see myself becoming more of a cheerleader than a coach. He needs more encouragement and "rah-rahs" than Xs and Os directing him in exactly what he needs to do. He needs to start learning life on his own. And I have to let it happen.

Yet, I've got far too much invested and my love is far too great to simply move on. I'm going to wince when I hear and see his struggles. I'm going to pray in agony when he's discouraged and lonely. I'm going to be frustrated when he makes decisions that I can see aren't good for him and I can't do anything about it. But I'm working hard at catching myself holding on when I need to be letting go.

One thing I'm afraid for him is falling away from the faith. Many of you parents, I'm sure, can relate. We want our kids to know God, to live in light of his love, to walk after him, and to be used by God to bless others. But it's not exactly a college problem; anyone at anytime for a million reasons can fall away.

If you're unafraid of your kids or grandkids falling away from Christ, your head is in the sand and you don't know your Bible. Our Bible constantly warns us about falling away. The apostles and church planters of the NT lost sleep over the danger of their churches stumbling in their faith and walking away from the Lord. It was a constant threat and it happened (and still happens) all the time. And so when they would hear about their young brothers and sisters remaining faithful, pressing on, clinging to Jesus they couldn't contain their happiness. The Apostle John said in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." They're still following Jesus! Really? In spite of all the temptations? Even though there are constant trials? What joy!

What if I told you that letting your kids take the Lord's Supper too early and unthoughtfully might contribute to them falling away from the faith? Would that factor into your decision on how you help them participate and incorporate the Lord's Supper in their young faith? I think when we let our kids take the Lord's Supper without carefully discerning what we're telling them, what they think is happening, and how they understand faith and this time of worship in their young minds we are making it more difficult for them to walk with Jesus now and in the future. I feel the same way about baptism. We can't control whether our kids start walking or will keep walking with Jesus, but we we can help or hurt the cause and I want to try to bless you to be a help and not a hindrance to their faith.

To understand what role and function of the Lord's Supper (and baptism) should play in our children and grandchildren's lives, we need to start with a major parenting mistake we are all tempted to make. This mistake is often motivated by good intentions; we want to see our kids walking with Jesus. We want them to trust in the One and Only Savior of the world. And this prayer, this hope, gets projected in our desire for them to make a *decision* for Jesus. So we look, pray, and even encourage them to make this decision. But in that we already make our first mistake and let me tell you what that is: we're looking for the wrong thing. Saving grace rescuing us from sin and ushering us into the family of God is more a sovereign work of God's grace than a decision we make. Do we need to believe in God? Of course we do. Do we need to commit and decide to follow Jesus? Yes, indeed. But we can not and will never do such a thing without God initiating his grace in our lives and supernaturally and sovereignly (meaning, God does it himself by his power, not by our power) changing our dead, sinful hearts into soft, regenerated ones that believes in him. Unless that happens, unless God works, a person (a child) is not saved.

You see, we too often emphasize the wrong thing. We think, "If I can only get Junior to make a decision for Jesus. If I can only get her to pray the sinner's prayer, sign a pledge, then she will be saved." And then do you know how we measure the sincerity of a person's decision? Oftentimes by their emotional response; by their tears. So get this, we think the decision is the determining factor; it's not. The determining factor is the work of God in a person's life. A person can sign a pledge card, a person can pray a prayer, a person can cry tears or be pumped up after camp or a mission trip for reasons other than God performing his saving work.

Our criteria for assessing our children's and grandchildren's faith is misguided. Here's what we count as important and valuable.

- Did they make a decision?
- Were they emotional then (and sometimes now)?
- Do they know the Bible?
- Does it look like they have some zeal for God?

Did you know the Bible does not value or regard these things as signs or evidence of saving faith like we do? The Bible does not say that we should assess a person's faith on some past decision, on some emotional response, on how much a person knows, or if they possess some spiritual excitement. We think these are important; the Bible doesn't. Do you know what the Bible says we should use in assessing our children's faith (and, of course, our own, too)?

- Do they obey God's words? (Jn 14:15)
- Do they love other people? (1Jn 3:14)
- Do they love and care about the things of God? (Ez 36:26-27)
- Do their actions match a life turned to God? (Acts 26:20)
- Do they have a faith that overcomes the world? (1Jn 5:4), which means do they remain faithful to God when all the world's temptations come bearing down on them?

Instead of focusing on the decision or the emotional response our children make, what if we looked for the evidence of God's work? What if we looked for these things? I'm thinking we'd assess our children's faith a lot better. And wouldn't it be wiser of us if we weren't so hasty and quick in determining our children's eternal state? Instead of memorializing the day they made a decision, we should look for fruit and rejoice when we see the fruit of a life that is following God! I think we'd be much more thoughtful and discerning as to where our kids are at and what they needed if we did that. Because isn't that the point? We want to assess our children's faith well so we know how we should disciple them and lead them to Christ.

Now, let me tell you why this important in relation to the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a way we are affirmed in our faith. Affirmed. It's something we do as a Christian to remind ourselves and to proclaim to ourselves (and to others) what God has done for us in Christ. His gracious work. His efficacious work. Do you get what I'm saying?

1 Cor. 11:23-26 is a very important passage in understanding what we are doing when we take the Lord's Supper. Let's read that together and then we'll talk about it (READ). The first thing that's really important to see are the words of Jesus. Why does Jesus tell us we are to take the bread and the wine? Very plainly, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me." This meal serves as a remembrance.

You may have heard me say before, this kind of remembrance isn't the kind of remembrance like remembering where you put your car keys. You've lost them. They are nowhere to be found. What should we do? Oh, let's retrace our steps because we have *forgotten* where we put them. No, this kind of remembrance is like a mother telling her sweet son before he goes off to college, "Remember, I love you." When you're struggling, feeling alone, are confused where you belong, lose your way... remember, recall to mind, my love for you and know you can always call, you can always come home. A mom says, "remember" not because her son might forget, but because she wants it imprinted on his mind during especially challenging circumstances. This kind of remembering is meant to reestablish what's most important. We take the Lord's Supper to reestablish again in our minds and hearts that Jesus' death on the cross was enough for us, that his resurrection does bring new life, that he is alive right now forever more, and that we are a part of his family. It's not like we've forgotten what Jesus has done; but we do need it pressed into our minds and souls regularly. When you take the bread and the cup later this morning, you are supposed to think to yourself, "My nourishment comes from Christ; his love is sweet like the fruit of the vine. I need this everyday and he's done it all for me."

The second thing we see in this passage is in vs. 26 where Paul says that this meal is a proclamation of the Lord's death - For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Ok, but what does that serve? What does this proclamation do? Do you see that little word for starting vs. 26? That's like saying *because*. That means vs. 26 further explains how the previous verses are supposed to be understood. So, here's how we should understand that vs. 26: the proclamation serves our remembering. By

taking this meal we proclaim to each other and ourselves that Jesus died for our sins; that our sins are forgiven. The meal, then, is God's special way of affirming to us the great truthfulness and certainty of Jesus' work on our behalf. We do not need to doubt. We do not need to wonder. Jesus really did do all that was necessary for our salvation.

Now, here's the point when it comes to our children (or anyone else, for that matter) taking the Lord's Supper prematurely: what if our kids don't really know God, understand who God is, what God has done, but yet participates in this worshipful experience that affirms them in Christ? Put two and two together, FBC? That means our kids are being affirmed in something that may not be true of them.

One of the most important things about you, me, our children and grandchildren (whoever) is what we think or believe to be true. So if you believe you are (or your kids are) saved when they are not and then, on top of that, you (and them) participate in an activity that's designed to affirm you in your faith (that's not developed yet) you will think you are in a relationship of peace with God when in reality you are estranged and cut off. That, my friends, is an enormous problem.

So, generally speaking, I think it's important for us as parents entrusted with the spiritual well being and development of our children not to give them the wrong impression about their faith; we do not want to give them false assurance by encouraging or permitting an activity that affirms them in something that's not yet real. That's why we want to be careful when we encourage or permit the Lord's Supper and baptism.

Let's talk about the practical side of this. What should we do with our kids?

Assess well, FBC. That's been the primary focus of today's message. Assess your children's faith well and also what participating in the Lord's Supper means. Don't get those two things wrong. I just gave you a sermon's worth of info to help you do that. And you have pastors ready to help you; you have brothers and sisters in the Lord ready to help you when you need it. You can't teach your children in the ways of the Lord without assessing the truth and their faith well.

For me, I wanted to wait until my boys were around 7 or 8 to even talk about this. I wanted them to understand more than just "Hell is bad; heaven is good" before I permitted and encouraged practices that affirmed them as followers of Jesus. I wanted them to have a sense that nothing is better than Jesus. That Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead for our sins was the best news in the world. A 4 year old, 5 year old just isn't ready for that.

And here's something's really key: I didn't have a goal that my kids could take communion. Maybe that was their goal, but it's not mine. My goal was to discern. Now, do I have the goal that they would come to know Jesus? Of course. But I'm not trying to get them to take communion or get baptized ASAP. Remember: God is sovereign. He will birth new life in

our children when he does. I want to keep telling them the good news so that happens and wait patiently for the Lord to work.

I do think waiting longer for baptism is more important than communion. The reason for that is due to the one-time decision of baptism. We do communion over and over again because we need regular reminders. Baptism is different; baptism is the formal and one-time declaration that Christ is mine and I am his. I don't want my boys to do that until much later so that it truly is an expression of their informed faith and trust in Jesus. How do I help my kids with baptism? The same about communion. Teach. Assess. Discern. But my standard is much higher because baptism signifies something different. But again, the goal isn't for them to be baptized. The goal is for them to have true, authentic faith where baptism is the next faith step.

I'm well aware that when crackers and juice get passed around, our kids appetites tell them, "lunch time!" But we all know something bigger is taking place. Parents, resist giving in. Resist satisfying their pallet. Resist their pleas saying, "So-n-so gets to have some!" We will bear with you if your parenting and teaching comes with some whining and crying. If you can't say "no" when the communion trays are passed, how are you going to refuse giving them a cellphone when everyone else has one? Do you think you will be able to lovingly tell them and enforce, "You're going to SS/youth group because you need more of Jesus" when they are 15 when they don't want to if you can't say no to them taking the Lord's Supper. Start early, my fellow parents. If you think the will of a 5 year old is difficult, the will of a 15 year old who's been getting her way her whole life will be much more challenging to navigate.

Many churches have very strict rules and processes for kids when it comes to communion and baptism. There's first communion. Catechism. Baptism at birth (of course, we don't and wouldn't baptize babies). There's some wisdom in their more structured processes. But we believe so much in your parental responsibility of training and discipling children that we want to help and equip you, my brothers and sisters, so you can do the equipping and teaching and we provide the help. Take that calling seriously, friends. God will hold you accountable.