

# The Lord's Supper for Parents & Children

## Redeemer Presbyterian Church

We are excited that you and your family are considering what it means for your child's greater participation in the body of Christ at Redeemer Presbyterian Church. Though they are covenant children by birth, becoming a communicant member is an important milestone in their life in the church.

You, as parents, know your child and your family better than anyone else. Additionally, as parents, you have taken membership vows that include 'teaching your children the doctrines of our holy religion'. Parents, therefore, are to take the primary responsibility in preparing their children for admittance to the Lord's Table. At the same time, the Session at Redeemer Presbyterian Church takes seriously our responsibility to assist parents in that preparation; we, as a Session, are ultimately responsible before God for the admittance of members to the Table.

In order to help you determine whether or not your child is ready to come to the Lord's Table, we have assembled tools to assist you in this process. We are not concerned about age as much as we are understanding – your child's ability to actively participate in this special meal for the family of God.

- First, read the attached document (below): "Children and the Lord's Supper" and speak with your elder about your thoughts and/or concerns for your child.
- Secondly, we offer a Communicant's Class twice a year that provides an opportunity for parents to teach and interact with their children about this important step with review sessions taught by a Pastor or Ruling Elder.
  - While this class is not required, it is an important tool for parents and their children to better determine if they are ready to participate in the sacrament of communion. It is recommended that every child complete the class for your and the Elder's benefit.
  - It is also important for parents to understand that when a child becomes a communing member at Redeemer Presbyterian Church they also become voting members. Because of that, this class has additional information that helps them understand church government and their responsibilities as a voting member.
  - At a minimum, the child should be prepared to answer the membership questions and the interview questions (see attached document "Children and the Lord's Supper) in an age appropriate manner.
- Lastly, if you are new to Redeemer Presbyterian Church and have young children who have already been admitted to the Lord's Supper by another church, we would recommend that you and your children take the next opportunity to participate in the Communicant's Class. It is a great opportunity to learn together the importance of the Lord's Supper.

Please see below for "Our Children & Coming to the Lord's Table"

## Our Children & Coming to the Lord's Table

The Lord's Supper is a gracious gift from God to help his people both understand and experience his love for us in Christ. It is therefore important that we understand and clearly communicate when and why our children are to be admitted to this sacrament.

### Households and the Covenant of Grace

It is often simply assumed that children are born unbelievers, and then at some point they must "become" Christians. And while it is true that every Christian must embrace the promises of the gospel and turn to Christ in faith and repentance, it is out of step with both Scripture and our Reformed tradition to treat our baptized children as unbelievers (1 Cor 7:14; Eph 6:1; Col 3:20 (cf. Rom 8:8).

Since creation, God has given his promises to entire households. At every stage of the development of the Covenant of Grace, we see God not only keeping families in view, but actually carrying out the promises through the family. This pattern includes the promises of the New Covenant found in the prophets. When Jeremiah says that God will "give them one heart," he adds it will be "for their own good and the good of their children after them" (Jer 32:39). In the same way, Isaiah speaks of a time when God "will pour my Spirit upon your offspring" (Is 44:3).

This household principle is then confirmed in the NT in several places. In Acts 2, Peter virtually quotes from Gen. 17 (a passage concerning the promise to Abraham and his descendants), and tells the crowd that "the promise is for you and for your children" (Acts. 2:39). And later, we find several whole households being baptized (Acts 16:15, 31-34; 1 Cor. 1:16).

### The Status of Children

The children of believers have always enjoyed a special relationship to God. In fact, they are born into that relationship, with all its privileges and responsibilities. Consider that every Israelite boy knew from the time he could talk that he himself was an Israelite. He did not have to become one. And yet, over and over again, the OT calls Israelites to be circumcised of heart (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29). It has always been the case that God's people had to embrace his promises at an inward level, or it was all for naught.

In the same way, our children are born into a relationship. As the Westminster Directory for Worship states, "They [our children] are Christians, and federally holy before baptism." (That language may make some in our circles uncomfortable, but it was written by the same men who wrote the rest of our standards.) In other words, because their parents are Christians, the children of believers are born members of the Church of Jesus Christ. This is why (and the only reason why) they can pray the Lord's prayer; they can hold out their hands at the benediction, and actually expect a blessing; they can sing "Jesus Loves Me."

Much more could be said (certainly about the necessity of regeneration, how/if you can know it has occurred, etc.), but the point is, our children are not outsiders. And we shouldn't treat them like outsiders. They are members of the covenant community.

### 1 Corinthians 11

The warning in 1 Corinthians 11 can be confusing. What we want to show here, is that the warnings are for Christians.

*<sup>27</sup>Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup>That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup>But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup>But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup>So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup>if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.*

Obviously, something has gone wrong at Corinth. People were dying in direct reference to their misuse of the Supper. But notice, this judgment is a “discipline” (v32). Further, it is “so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” In other words, Paul is warning Christians, inside the church, about how to take the Supper properly. While it certainly would be wrong for non-Christians to partake, that’s not what Paul has in view here.

What does this have to do with admitting children (or anyone else) to the table? It means our task is to determine if the child has the ability to “examine himself” (v28) and “discern the body” (v29). We are looking for an age-appropriate maturity. Infants simply cannot “examine” things, and so it would be unfitting for them to partake in this sacrament (a sacrament, unlike baptism, designed to include our cognitive participation). But that is very different than saying, infants can’t be Christians. We should never believe that.

### **Becoming a Communing Member**

When a child is admitted to the Table, he or she is not “joining the church.” Baptized children are already covenant members of the visible Church. Neither is it a public statement from the elders that “now we know you’re a Christian.” What we are saying, is that this child has demonstrated a sincere desire to both actively consider Jesus’ work on the cross and enjoy his fellowship every week. He or she is ready to participate at a more mature level. An easy way to think of it is this: as a communing member, this child has the maturity of faith to listen and respond to the fencing of the table.

It is important to remember that, just as admission to the table is not a proof of regeneration, being denied admission is not a statement about a lack of regeneration. Not being allowed to come to the table need not be anything more than “this child doesn’t exhibit the maturity/ability to respond to the fencing of the table at this time.” Parents need to be reassured that you are not telling them their son or daughter is or isn’t a Christian (we can’t see the heart!). The parents’ job is not to make their kids Christians, but to both teach and demonstrate what it means to be a Christian, while praying for the faith and maturity to come.

### **Some Questions (as well as a review of interview questions by elder)**

It’s always helpful to walk through the membership questions and check their understanding of what is being asked.

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

Some of the questions that may be asked of your children in the interview with your elder prior to coming to the Lord's Table (tailored to the age of each child):

- **Why do you want to come to the Table?** (There may be some prodding and explanation necessary here; as well as coverage in the Communicant's Class).
  - What is sin and what does God think of sin?
  - Why do Christians describe themselves as sinners?
  - Who is Jesus Christ and what did he do for sinners?
    - Did Jesus Christ die for you?
  - How does the Lord's Supper help us grow closer to Jesus?
- **Why do we ask you the questions (vows) in front of the church?** (A public profession - acknowledging their sin, professing their trust and faith in Christ, their need of God's grace and his Spirit, the importance of the church, and our need for the church and discipline.)
- **Who should you be thinking about when you come forward?**
  - What does the Lord's Supper remind us of?
  - What does the bread and wine represent?
  - As you eat the bread and drink the wine/juice? (The person of Christ, his work on the cross, his spiritual presence by faith, his love and goodness to us.)
- **What does this mean for you? What do you "get" from Jesus?** (Thinking in terms of what Jesus gives us; his benefits – forgiveness, righteousness, adoption, sanctification; the cost of our salvation, sorrow for our sin, God's love for us in Christ Jesus, part of God's family, a longing to follow Christ, etc.)
- **Why are we doing this together as a church body?** (They are my brothers and sisters in Christ – Christ died not just for me but for a people; if we love Christ we will love his people.)
- **Are you excited about coming to the Lord's Table?** What makes you excited? (Feeding on Jesus by faith, trusting in him, rejoicing in his love, giving thanks, wanting to love him and his people more and more.)

Other helpful considerations – at a bare minimum we want those coming to the Lord's Table who believe in Triune God of the Bible; a belief in heaven and hell; have a love for the Lord Jesus Christ and are trusting in him for salvation, and know that Jesus died for their sins and he was raised from the dead.

- Capable of self-control when coming to the table (1 Cor 11:26).
- Is this meal more than an ordinary snack of bread and wine (discerning the Lord's body, 1 Cor 11:29)?
- Capable of some measure of self-examination (1 Cor 11:28).

Obviously, a child will not understand these concepts to the same degree as an adult, and even adults grow in their understanding as they grow in the faith. The faith of a child need not be as doctrinally developed as the faith of an adult. Neither will a child usually be able to articulate their faith in anything but a simple manner. But just because their faith is simple does not mean that it is not sincere.