

wind, “blows where it wishes” (Jn. 3:8).

The Bible is clear that all of God’s covenant promises belong to “you and your children.” Covenant children are members of the covenant community and are entitled to its benefits. Just as circumcision was an advantage for Jews—“much in every way” (Rom. 3:2)—so too, those who have received the covenant sign and seal of baptism have all the covenant privileges. You will notice how enthusiastically these little ones receive the meal. Toddlers may not remember the day of their baptism, but they surely know that every Lord’s Day they belong to the faithful—not on the basis of what they have done, but on the basis of what He has done and on the basis of who they are in Him—and will eat the meal of blessing with all the congregation. Their parents have taught them, and continue to teach them, what this means, and that they are indeed a part of God’s people. Their baptism is not an empty symbol; it means that they belong, that they are not wandering for fourteen years in the wilderness, not whiling away the weeks in an earthly Presbyterian Purgatory, waiting to pass an exam to earn them full admittance to this institution supposedly founded on grace alone.

Young children were admitted to the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant. Preeminent among the feasts was the Passover, which was the meal that signified God’s deliverance

or salvation. As the blood of the Passover lamb was applied to the doorposts and lintels, entire households were spared the judgment of God, including (especially!) the children. The Passover meal commemorates this redemptive mercy of God. As the household participates in the Passover meal, the Bible tells us to expect a question from the children: “What do you mean by this service?” (Exod. 12:26). The meal is designed to be the occasion for instruction concerning the grace of the Lord—a rehearsal of God’s salvation. This weekly memorial teaches them who God is and what He has done, and thus leads to the worship of the God who made them and calls them to Himself.

The Lord’s Supper is the New Covenant counterpart to the Passover. It points to the Lamb of God—“Christ, our Passover”—who shed His blood for His people to deliver them from their sins. If godly parents instruct their children well, then they discern the body—they know what is going on. By faith we receive God’s promises, which are given to us and our children, and thus the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are likewise received with great joy by us and our children.

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Children’s Church

Greg Strawbridge

SO MANY CHURCHES dismiss their kids at worship. At All Saints we stay together. (Okay—some crying kids have to be taken out by the bouncers in the back. But most stay.) When we come to communion, as a central part of each Lord’s Day service, all those washed in the waters of baptism are invited to come to the feast, including little ones. We come forward and receive from Christ’s representatives the bread and the wine. As the minister, I may say to even a little child, “The cup of new covenant is given for you, believe that His blood was shed for you.” Really, we are all at “Children’s Church.” Jesus teaches us that we are all to come to Him as children or not at all (Mk. 10:14–15). We come as children to His Table.

At our men’s forums we may debate the influence of the Greek notion of substance on Ante-Nicene Fathers and the exigencies of an Orthodox aesthetic of worship. We parse the Reformation doctrine of the spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We exegete the relative merits of the Scottish Covenanter resistance to tyranny versus the reform of the *lesser*

magistrate, and diagnose the effects of the Second Great Awakening. But at the Table, we are children. We are all at children’s church.

At our fellowship celebrations we serve the fattest beers anyone has ever had—grab your spoon and join right in. At Epiphany we have cakes with frosting piled high. At Pentecost we have international foods and cross-cultural wines. In our community events we have wine tastings and beer revelry. But at the Table we are all children. We just need a little *way-bread* for the journey, and a sip of sweet wine with the burn of the cross.

In the preaching and teaching of our congregation, we say with the apostle, “In understanding be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20). We try to leave no stone unturned in Aramaic sections of the book of Daniel, or a discussion of the Old Testament images in Colossians, or in a study through Church history. Many of our children are being educated with a classical curriculum, with great books, Latin and Greek. As a minister, it is sometimes a challenge to stay well-read in the face of many of our members. But we cannot claim our maturity as grounds for receiving even crumbs from the

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Table. When we come to the Table, we are all children.

On the Lord's Day, we confess our faith with Nicene creed and the Apostle's creed. Most of our members from the youngest age can recite these from covenant-rote memory. Many can answer, "Who is the redeemer of God's elect?" with Shorter Catechism A. 21. My daughter, Julie (8 years old), answered my question at family worship, "What commandments did Nebuchadnezzar break in setting up the golden image?" —in Latin, no less (*non facies tibi sculptile neque omnem similitudinem . . .*). But when we come to the Table, we do not come because of our ability to profess our faith or our intellectual stamina. We come as children to the Table.

Even when I say, "We come to the Table," that betrays an overconfidence of ability. Like an infant brought to the font, held up by loving parents' arms, before heaven we come not of our own ability. Grace precedes faith. We must be brought to the Table. We are like Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:1–13). All who find themselves at the Table of the Lord were from the enemy's house, yet have been received because

of the grace of covenant love.

Sometimes we pretend that we stand up on our own two feet and make a place for ourselves at the Table. If we come in a spirit of pride, quite confident of the proper mode Christ's presence, dividing asunder joints and marrow of Zwingli, Luther, Calvin and the Fourth Lateran Council—when our prayer is, "I thank Thee Lord that I am not like the papists, nor the Zwinglians, nor the Lutherans"—then we have missed the necessary truth. We are little children whose place is set only by grace. We must be carried to His Table, if we are to be seated. And we are not just children at the Table. We are *lame*, undeserving children at the Table. But, thanks be to God, "Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet" (2 Sam. 9:13).

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