

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 18:1 “ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. 6 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ...

10 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

''For the Children's Sake''

The title of our sermon comes from a book on education by Susan Schaeffer McCauley and is a phrase we have often used in ProLife work here in California. Today we want to consider it from the perspective of God's Covenant: What does Jesus think of our children and what does He want His Church to do 'for their sake?'

We began the New Year and our new work here in Menlo Park looking to the example of Simeon who held the baby Jesus at the Temple and demonstrated how we are to be a people who have hope, contentment and a great vision. I then began a three part series of messages to consider how we see our children as part of God's Covenant people and why they should receive both of the signs and seals of that Covenant: The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We reminded ourselves of the importance of looking to the Bible, ALL of the Bible, for a proper understanding of what we should do. We looked at God's Covenant with Abraham and how God alone passed between the animal carcasses demonstrating salvation by grace in the Old Testament and we looked at Paul's instructions to the Ephesians to see God's eternal Covenant.

Last month we turned to Peter’s powerful sermon in Acts chapter two to consider whether children born to covenant families should receive the covenant sign of baptism in the same way as adults who repent of their sins and turn to Jesus for salvation. We saw that they should be baptized: And that when we, as God’s Covenant people do this, we are showing the same Great Faith that Jesus saw in that Roman Centurion. Now we will consider the question of whether young children should partake of the Lord’s Table

- **We want to consider how Jesus viewed children and just what Paul means by discerning the Body in I Corinthians chapter 11.**

I am certainly NOT going to exhaust all of the arguments for having children at the Table, nor will I have time to answer all of the objections that might be raised...

For those with questions or concerns after the message we have included four outstanding books that you might consider studying to have a fully understanding of the issue. Our parents should be very diligent in making sure that can “give an answer” to those who might ask.

IF you are coming from a Baptist background and now see that children as members of God’s covenant community should have the sign of the covenant and be baptized. You would more likely understand the importance of feeding the children at the Table as well... Those who are baptized always come to the Table unless they are under discipline.

With a reformed background, you know our children should be baptized but you will struggle with when they should come to the Table based on teachings which say that they must be able to properly discern the elements and examine themselves before they partake.

- **In both cases, I think it is good to remember the vast majority of church history is on our side... Holding that covenant children should partake of both sacraments!**

The church stood united in having children baptized and participating at the Table for the first one thousand years of its history. After the East / West split the Eastern Church continued in the same way to the present day. While the Baptists have certainly carried the day in modern America, we need to see that their view is still a very small part of Christendom. The Roman Catholic Church as well as the reformed and Anglican churches have continued to baptize covenant children.

- **Of course, church history does not trump the Scriptures which is why we made the case from the Bible last month for baptizing our children**

On the question of having children at the Table, church history is also on our side. Again, the entire church had their children at the Table for the first one thousand years and the Eastern Church has continued the practice to this day.

In the western church came the error of transubstantiation: The belief that the elements of bread and wine magically become real flesh and blood during what the Catholics now call the Mass. As this became prominent in the Roman Catholic Church they first removed the children from the Table out of fear that they would desecrate the body or blood of the Lord by dropping some of the bread or spilling the wine. Later the cup was even removed from the adults and the bread became wafers with no crumbs to drop.

The Reformers rightly restored the proper Biblical understanding and practice of the Table but most thought it a bridge too far to reinstate the children, mostly out of concern for the warnings that the Apostle Paul gives in I Corinthians 11: John Calvin went so far as to ask why we would want to risk giving poison to our children.

- **So what we want to do this afternoon is make the case from the Bible as to why our children should be at the Table AND then to consider Paul's warnings**

As we saw with Baptism last month, if we consider all of the Bible, it would not surprise us that children would participate. The account of the first Passover is very clear and when the Law of the Covenant is given at Mount Sinai, the 5th Commandment is given directly to children... The first commandment with promise, Paul points out!

- **Our reading from Matthew's Gospel shows the heart that Jesus has for children**

Far from excluding them, Jesus often placed them at the center of His discussion as examples of the faith we should have... Children are born dead in their trespasses and sins needing the Savior, but they have often not learned all the adult skills of making excuses and rationalizing!

So we come to where the objections are raised with Paul's discussion of the Table given to the Saints at Corinth. The specific instructions are given in chapter 11, but it is important to note the context in which Paul gives these instructions about the Table. As we all know the Corinthians had some problems: Throughout the Epistle, Paul admonishes them to set aside their divisions and remember that they are the people of God...

- **This is especially important as they come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper**

Paul begins the discussion about the Table in chapter ten where we read:

“1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that ALL our fathers were under the cloud, ALL passed through the sea, 2 ALL were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 ALL ate the same spiritual food, 4 and ALL drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.”

- **The discussion begins with Paul reminding them that we are ALL part of the Body of Christ AND with Paul giving a severe warning to get things right!**

Paul now makes it clear that he is addressing their behavior at the Lord’s Supper:

15 “I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”

- **So Paul is driving home the theme that we are all part of the Body of Christ, in the Old Testament and New, & we should all come together around the Sacrament of the Lord’s Table.**
- **Paul goes on to discuss idolatry, not offending a brother and the question of proper submission**
- **In chapter 11, Paul then shows what is wrong with how the Saints at Corinth were practicing the Lord’s Supper:**

17 “Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.”

- **As we believe here at Christ Covenant Church Paul stresses that ALL the covenant members should be coming together to celebrate the Lord’s Table**

The controversy comes with Paul’s instructions that follow, which are often discussed outside the context of Corinth’s history and even the context of Chapters ten & eleven

- **Paul gives the beautiful instructions from the Savior that we have all heard many times:**

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

- **No major disputes yet, except that we should note that when Paul is referring to the elements of the Table, he speaks of the bread and the cup or the body and the blood**

- **Verse 27 begins with "therefore" and we should all know what question to ask!**

"27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

Now, if we step back from all we might have heard or read or thought about this portion of Scripture, and simply ask what do you think Paul means by "an unworthy manner" what should the answer be?

- **The context would demand that it is having divisions in the Body or looking down on others parts of the Body as they were...**

IF a church does this, the Supper does not bring the blessing that is intended but rather judgment... It can indeed be the poison that John Calvin feared giving to our children, but it can apply to any of us!

- **Paul gives the solution and in this two simple verses rests almost the entire argument for keeping children away from the Table in modern reformed churches:**

"28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

- **To properly understand these verses, we should ask two simple questions: What is expected? & Who is it expected of?**

The participant is told to examine himself lest he or she partake while not properly discerning the Lord's Body. Please note that here Paul does NOT say the body and the blood or the bread and the cup, but rather the Body of Christ which has been at the center of his discussion since the beginning of chapter ten!

- **It is NOT an intellectual understanding of the elements that is required, but rather the right attitude and practices toward our brothers and sisters in Christ...**

- **The Corinthians had divisions among them and it even carried over to their celebration of the Lord's Supper and Paul is here warning them that it will have serious consequences.**

Before we see those consequences, let me quickly address the other question of who this applies too: Reformers will argue that small children CANNOT examine themselves and therefore they must be held back from the supper: We would answer that they can examine themselves at an appropriate level... NOT punching a brother or sister as they pass the elements for example...

- **BUT in general, this instruction is not directed at young children.**

A good example to illustrate this is Paul's instruction to the Thessalonian church where he says that if a man will not work, let him not eat... How foolish it would be to apply this command in a strict sense to the toddlers in a church!

- **And yet this is exactly what is done with Paul's instruction here and it ends up excluding a part of the Body of Christ from the Lord's Table, which is exactly the problem Paul has spent almost two chapters trying to address!**

An honest reading of Paul's conclusion confirms this:

“For this reason [*NOT properly discerning the Body... Christ's Church*] many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

There are those at Corinth who are weak and sick and some who have even died NOT because they violated some rules regarding the Lord's Supper but because the Church at Corinth was not functioning as the Church looking out for the needs and cares of one another! We see this again with Paul's final admonition:

33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment.”

- **Just as he said about the example of the Old Testament Saints, Paul's discussion now ends by reminding them that they are ALL part of the Body of Christ and by giving them a severe warning to get things right!**

Today the Holy Spirit uses Paul's admonition to those in Corinth, to remind us that all who are baptized into Christ Jesus are to come together as the Body of Christ, waiting for one another around the Lord's Supper each week

In the coming weeks and months we will study the member covenant that Lord willing you will join together in signing as the members of Christ Covenant Church. One of those vows says you will “train and educate any children God may give you in the fear, nurture and admonition of the Lord, including them in the church’s two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”

- **We take this stand for the sake of our children because it is what the Bible commands us to do: God’s promise is to us & to our children!**
- **And when we talk about feeding our covenant children, it is more than just the Lord’s Supper**
- **It is all the commands of Deuteronomy to teach them when we rise and when we lie down, in the home and on the road...**
- **It is being faithful in attending worship on the Lord’s Day where they learn to respond to God’s call, to confess their sins and know the love and forgiveness of Jesus!**
- **They are instructed in God’s Word and learn that God accepts our gifts of money and prayer.**
- **And yes, they should feast with us at the Lord’s Table and then learn that they have been created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God foreordained that they should walk in as they are commissioned to serve their Risen and Reigning Savior!**

Communion Meditation:

Mark 10:13 “Then they brought little children to [Jesus], that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.”