

Preaching the Gospel to Our Little Ones at the Lord's Table

One of the most fateful, fruitful phrases a Christian parent ever will use is this one: "Because God says He wants it that way." A child in a Christian family may hear those words almost daily in answer to some question or another.

And the kid should. Hear it all the time, I mean. Not shouted in a screaming tizzy, not hissed through clenched teeth, not whispered icily from a frozen face. Just spoken clearly, calmly, matter-of-factly, with utmost conviction and compassion, by a parent who has woven it carefully into the very fabric of the family: we love each other by loving God, and we love God by doing what He says. 1 John 5:2 is in the air a Christian family breathes. ("*This is how we know that we love God's children: when we love God and obey His commands. For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands,*" HCSB) So are John's words from 2 John 1:5-6: "*So now I urge you... that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk according to His commands.*" (HCSB)

A loving Christian family is the first, best, greatest place for the Great Commission to be lived out:

Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:18-20, HCSB)

This is how Jesus wants it to be: first the choice of discipleship (repentant faith in Christ), then the sign of discipleship (baptism), then a life of discipleship (learning and doing the will of Christ). Every month, we play out a drama that Jesus gave us to remind us powerfully of those vital realities: the Lord's Supper.

And it's at the Lord's Table where little children sometimes have – or become – a big problem. You see, they naturally want to do whatever they see people all around them doing. If they're told they can't, their little hearts get hurt. When their hearts get hurt, their lower lips poke out, their little eyes fill up, and they may even throw a full-blown tantrum – right there in the pew. There are some parents who stay away from church when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, just to avoid the confrontation. Others knuckle under and give the child the bread and the cup just to keep him quiet. And, of course, there are always some parents who, in their own innocence, aren't even aware that, since the Lord's Supper was instituted as a meal *for disciples*, their children shouldn't eat and drink until they've become disciples in the way Jesus commanded. That is, they must choose to follow Jesus, and make that choice known by being baptized into the church, *before* they're eligible to take the bread and the cup.

Perhaps the main reason parents have trouble with this issue is that they're not *sure* it's God's will for them *not* to give the bread and cup to a child who clearly wants them. That's why I wrote what I just wrote: to give parents the ammunition they need, to let the little ones know that this is a matter, not just of what the parents or the church want, but of what Jesus wants. What does Jesus want? He wants little children to turn from their sin and trust in Him. He wants them to make their decision known by being baptized into the church. And He wants them to learn and live everything He has commanded, including all that He has commanded about the Table. He said so. And He calls Christian parents to make it so.

The Scripture says, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*" (1 Corinthians 11:26, HCSB). Each month, we have the unspeakable privilege of proclaiming the gospel to our own children, and confronting them with these eternally-important questions. Are you a disciple of Jesus? Do you know what a disciple is? Do you do what a disciple does? Who are you, little one? Who am I?

If it seems to you that those are awfully big questions for little people to deal with, I can lovingly respond only this way:

1. They're big questions for anyone to deal with.
2. They're Jesus' questions for everyone to deal with.
3. If we love our children, according to God's Word, we'll ask them tenderly, urgently, and often.

The Lord's Table is a regular opportunity to do just that. That's how Jesus set it up!

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