

Little Children AND THE Sacrament

Our little children sensed that the sacrament was important to us. We could have done more to help them see that it was also important to them.

By Aaron L. West

Have you ever wondered why we allow unbaptized children to partake of the sacrament? Is it just to avoid the inevitable squawks and struggles when they want a piece of bread? Is it just to make the ordinance easier to administer, just to keep the peace?

I don't think so. I believe there are deeper reasons. I believe this because I believe that when Jesus Christ says "all," He means all. And when He speaks to a multitude, He doesn't exclude anyone.

When the resurrected Savior introduced the sacrament to His people in the Americas, He emphasized that the ordinance had special meaning for those who had been baptized.¹ Even so, He commanded His disciples to "give [the sacrament] unto the *multitude*."² That multitude included "little ones."³

When priesthood holders today pronounce the sacrament prayers, they ask Heavenly Father to bless and sanctify the bread and the water

"to the souls of *all* those" who partake.⁴ All. Each person who partakes—including each little child.

If in partaking the bread and water, children receive these emblems as a blessing to their pure souls, there must be a way to help them find meaning in the ordinance.



With this understanding, I look back at the days when my children were little. My wife and I did a pretty good job of keeping them quiet during the administration of the sacrament. I think they sensed that the ordinance was important to us. But we could have done more to help them see that it was important to *them*.

What could we have done? We could have remembered that little children are capable of keeping the promises in the sacrament prayer. They can understand, in their own small but powerful way, what it means to “always remember” Jesus. They can pledge to “keep his commandments.” They can even show that they are “willing to take upon them the name” of Christ, knowing that they will soon have that privilege when they are baptized and confirmed.⁵

But what about renewing covenants? Church leaders have taught that when we partake of the sacrament, we renew all the covenants we have made with the Lord.⁶ Little children don’t have any covenants to renew.

I think again about the time when our children were little. We couldn’t have helped them look back on covenants, but we could have helped them look forward. I

picture myself with a young son or daughter on a Sabbath morning:

“When you are eight years old,” I say, “you will be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. You will make a covenant. The covenant you make *then* will be like the promises you make *now* when you take the sacrament.



“When I take the sacrament today, I will renew my baptismal covenant, like I’m making those promises again. You will be there with me, but you won’t renew a covenant. You haven’t made one yet. Instead, you can *practice* making a covenant. Every time you take the sacrament, you can prepare to be baptized and confirmed. That way, you’ll be ready when you turn eight years old.”

If it seems unusual to use the word *practice* in this way, consider this: In a reverent setting, a father might help his children prepare for the ordinance of baptism by showing them how they will stand together in the water and by sharing the words of the baptismal prayer. He doesn’t perform the ordinance in that setting. In a sense, he helps his children practice. That way, they will not worry about what will happen when they enter the waters of baptism. I believe that mothers and fathers can also help children practice making and keeping the baptismal covenant. Each sacrament meeting can be a sacred practice session for little children as they partake of the emblems of the Savior’s Atonement.

And so I return to my original question. Why do we allow unbaptized children to partake of the sacrament? Is it just to “keep the peace”? Of course not. We help our little ones partake of the sacrament so they can remember their Savior and keep His peace—a peace unlike anything the world can offer.⁷ We help them prepare to receive that peace in greater and greater abundance in the future, when they will make and keep covenants with Him. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. See 3 Nephi 18:5, 11.
2. 3 Nephi 18:4; emphasis added.
3. See 3 Nephi 17:21–25; 18:1–4.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; emphasis added.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
6. See L. Tom Perry, “As Now We Take the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 41.
7. See John 14:27.