

# Is my Covenant Child Ready for Communicant Membership in the Church?

*“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)*

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”  
(Deuteronomy 6:5)*

**New Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
*Preaching God's Sovereign Grace to a World of Need*  
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## Is my Covenant Child ready for Communicant Membership in the Church?

By Pastor David Barker

### Introduction

What an important step it is for someone to become a Christian! How glorious to hear someone profess his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and take his place among the community of believers! How crucial for every person we meet to be “born again” (rf. Jn. 3:3) and be identified visibly with the family of faith. As a believing parent, you are undoubtedly eager and prayerful that this be particularly true in the hearts and minds of your own children as you watch them grow.

The elders of the church look forward to that, too. The Bible says the elders are charged with the shepherding and maintenance of the unity and purity of the church. As part of that responsibility, it’s their job to examine each prospective member regarding his profession of faith. They look to admit into communicant membership those who truly understand the gospel, grasp the depth of their own sinfulness and helpless condition, and recognize and embrace Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. It is toward that end that parents strive, teach, and pray for and with their children - always with the goal that one day they might come to confess the name of Christ and be received into full membership in the church.

This booklet has been prepared to help you through that process. I want parents to understand what is necessary and give them the guidance they need in preparing their child for this important step. I ask that you read through the booklet carefully and then come freely to the session with any questions you may have.

(By the way, as you read through this, you will notice that when I speak of communicant children, I am addressing boys and girls alike. But for purposes of expressing these principles simply - and for ease of your reading - allow me to describe your child using the masculine pronoun.)

## Does this mean my child will be “joining the church”?

For believing parents who themselves are members of the church the answer to that question is a profound and wondrous “no”. In a very real and significant sense, they actually are already members.

You see, a great joy about the relationship that God has made with his people is found in the Scriptural teaching that the church is generational: the promise of God is to us and to our children. This Old Testament teaching - that God’s covenant was made “in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:7) - was reiterated and emphasized in the very first sermon preached in the New Testament Christian Church (Acts 2:39).

What this means is that our God is a God of families. When you parents became members, your children - present and future - came with you at that time into the visible church. It is a matter of great comfort to understand that God includes our children under the umbrella of his covenant and that they already belong to Him as we belong to Him. As long as they remain under your parental care and oversight, they have a place with God not enjoyed by the child of an unbeliever.



However, having said that, this principle does not absolutely guarantee and insure your children’s eventual regeneration, redemption, and salvation. Any teaching which says a personal profession of faith is not necessary if a person was born within the visible church is wrong. Christian parents - as well as the church family as a whole - have an urgent, necessary, and daily duty to teach, train, pray for, and call each covenant child - first to a saving faith in his Lord Jesus Christ, and then to make a public profession of that faith when such can indeed be deemed credible.

When that day comes, therefore, our covenant children are not “joining the church” as if they have only been outsiders all the time they have been growing up. When they stand up and take the vows, they are confirming the covenant that God has made

with them all along. On the day of their profession before the church, they are embracing and claiming it for themselves and for their own future generations.

Let me repeat, this verbal confession is absolutely vital. From birth that child has had a part in God’s covenant. But how he responds to that covenant as he matures is up to him alone. Throughout his life - as he grows into adulthood - he will prove to be either a *covenant-keeper*: affirming the promise of God and the faithfulness of the parents in making his own profession of faith, or else he will prove to be a *covenant-breaker*: casting off and rejecting the gift of God and suffering the everlasting consequences. Examples of this can be found throughout the history of the Bible describing covenant keepers and breakers: Isaac’s sons, Jacob and Esau; Aaron’s four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar; and David’s sons, Absalom & Solomon.

For this reason, you pray and teach, nurture and encourage your little ones to come early to a saving knowledge and profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Then, when we see the evidences of a mature faith in our growing children, we desire to see them make that profession publicly in the church and take their place as full communicant members.

## What are the steps that parents need to take?

Visibly, communicant membership means several things:

- ✓ to demonstrate his own eagerness and faithfulness to partake of the means of grace (prayer, worship and Bible study),
- ✓ his own witness of the gospel & service for His kingdom,
- ✓ his own sacrifice & obedience to the Word, and,
- ✓ his own desire and yearning to knowledgeably receive the sacraments of the faith.

### • Is my child ready?

When are they ready? Is there a proper age?

There can be some difficulty in knowing with a measure of confidence whether or not the time is right. The sounds of faith from their lips, the signs of faith in their conduct - these things occur at different ages in different children. And there can be

much disparity in the pace of this growing process to maturity from child to child.

We may, of course, rule out infants and toddlers and some, though not all, of those below the average age normally identified with maturity. Nevertheless, it is my judgment that Scripture does not prescribe a particular age as a general rule. What is clear from Scripture is that parents must work together with the elders to ascertain the readiness of each individual child for this important step.

To determine whether your child is ready, consider these questions:

- **Has my child been baptized?**

The Bible teaches that the children of believers are to receive the covenant sign of baptism - either upon birth or upon the reception of newly converted parents into the visible church. This conviction is not based on a man-made tradition or a groundless superstition. It is a clear instruction of God from the totality of His Word. God's Word - when studied as a whole from Genesis to Revelation - teaches one God, one people, one baptism, and one salvation through one Savior according to one covenant promise (Eph. 4:4-6).

Throughout the unfolding of redemptive history, God has always provided a sign to be given to His people as an identifying mark of His covenant with them. Before Christ's coming, circumcision was that sign:

*"This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, ... . My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."* (rf. Gen. 17:3-14)

But with the coming of Christ, the sign was changed to baptism with water (Mt. 28:19). Paul explains the transition from circumcision to baptism clearly in Colossians 2:11-12. The

meaning and purpose of the New Testament sign of water baptism, therefore, is rooted in the meaning and purpose of the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament.

Further, the Bible teaches that the sign of the covenant is to be given not only to adult converts, but also to children born to believing parents because those children are already claimed by Christ. The baptism of our children symbolizes that they are *holy* (1 Cor. 7:14), meaning they are already set apart in the sight of God - set apart to be raised in Christian homes - which, indeed, is a rich spiritual blessing. Believing parents are called upon to realize what an awesome obligation it is to raise a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In baptizing their children, believing parents take vows to promise God that they will teach their children from God's Word, live the life of faith in the home, and trust God to move in the hearts of their children by the Holy Spirit.



We are aware that Christians differ on the subject of infant baptism. However, it is clear that circumcision has given way to baptism as the sign of the covenant, and there is not the slightest hint or suggestion in the Old Testament or the New Testament to withhold this sign of God's promise from the children of believers. Quite to the contrary, in the very first sermon of the early church, Peter said the promise is to our children's children (Acts 2:39; cf. Ps. 103:17-18). Moreover, we read that entire households were baptized at a time (Acts 16:11-15, 25-34; 1 Cor. 1:16). This is what we would expect to see, and this is the correct biblical pattern for the church today.

If you would like more information about covenant child baptism, I would be glad to talk with you. If you would like to have your child baptized, you may speak to any member of the session.

- **Has my child been taught the basics of the Christian faith?**

More is expected of one entering into communicant membership than religious-sounding words. Certainly the

profession of one's faith is required, but it must be made credibly (believably) and with knowledge and understanding. The child must be able to explain what he means by his words, explain why he believes and why he desires to enter into this new level of relationship to the visible Church.

The first place the gospel is to be seen and heard is in your child's home. God places the parents in charge of their children's Christian education. Knowing how important this is and yet also knowing how often it is neglected, the session strongly urges every Christian father to take the initiative and responsibility to lead his family in regular, daily devotions and prayer, and to guard the Lord's Day from being infringed upon by outside and worldly influences and activities so that it remains free for worship, family, rest and Christian training and ministry.

The second place your child should learn of the gospel is from participation in the Worship services and the Sunday School program of New Covenant Presbyterian Church.

Your children, from the time they are old enough to begin schooling, should begin to be trained to be with their families hearing the Word preached from the pulpit. For every growing



child, this takes some time to adjust to and begin to benefit from and parents should not be dismayed from the energy and discipline it will take to get your children used to it. As your child grows old enough to consider

communicant membership, he should be listening eagerly and growing from the worship and preaching week after week.

Also, for children as young as two, there are Sunday School classes that present and unfold all the basic truths of the Christian faith systematically. This is a serious ministry of New Covenant Presbyterian Church - one that has the commitment and oversight of the session, is managed by a committed and experienced coordinator, receives a sizable portion of our church's budget, and involves the training and duties of responsible teachers - all for the glorious purpose of teaching the gospel clearly to children of all ages. Besides the curriculum provided for the children, the

session also takes the adult education classes seriously. If you and your family are not yet enrolled and involved in these classes, this is the next step you should take.

Along with the regular Sunday School curriculum, the session offers a special class - usually once a year - for the specific purpose of preparing students - young and old - for communicant membership. In this class, all the basics of the Christian faith are studied and surveyed.

## *Inquirer's Class*

This class is open to anyone anytime, but there is a level of interest and maturity expected of the students. When the class is over, there is no obligation on your part or on the part of your child to seek communicant membership. However, the class is required of anyone who does.

### • **Does my child demonstrate a love and devotion to Christ?**

Sufficient knowledge of the gospel is important, but hardly all that defines the disciple of Christ. The fruit of the Christian life is a love for and personal devotion to the Lord, and its evidence is the same for the child as for the adult. Although there will be obvious differences due to age, certain signs must be apparent if the session is to confirm the verbal testimony.

Your child must demonstrate that his life reflects the reality of his faith:

- 📖 that he understands the deceitfulness and dangers of sin,
- 📖 that he has a personal relationship with Jesus as his Lord and Savior through his own prayer life,
- 📖 that he demonstrates a willingness to recognize sin, confess and repent of it, and strive toward obedience, and,
- 📖 in terms of conduct, that he is able to manage and demonstrate a level of self-control and self-discipline.

Such evidence demonstrates his readiness to move out from under the umbrella of his parents' relationship to God and to stand before God in his own right as a believer.

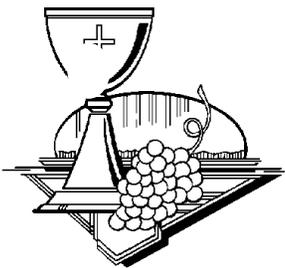
This does not mean that a child who is not yet fully mature cannot already be genuine believer in Jesus Christ. Parents should make it a healthy practice at home to be calling their growing children repeatedly to think on spiritual things, to pray their confessions and expressions of faith in Christ, and to act upon the knowledge & spiritual guidance that is proper for their age. In doing so, the child's spiritual maturity & understanding will grow right along with their physical development.

When the child is ready, he must be able to articulate his faith and demonstrate it to the satisfaction not only of the parents but also of the elders of the church. When the parents are confident and can grant their blessing upon the child's growth and maturity, it then becomes the duty and responsibility of the elders who, even though they be finite and fallible men, are given the authority and duty and must be allowed to make a judgment of the child's faith and his readiness to take his place in the church and take on the responsibilities of communicant membership.

- **May my child take communion before becoming a communicant member?**

As you may have guessed, this is the issue that has led to the designation "communicant member". A communicant member is one who may and should partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Scriptural guidelines for communion parallel those of communicant membership. "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup." (1 Cor. 11:28)



That means that he must a) know what communion is all about, b) know his own heart, and c) know what it means to desire the grace of God that is received by true believers through this sacrament.

Therefore the same principles that apply for membership apply to one's eligibility for partaking in communion.

If you as a parent are satisfied that your child understands the gospel, and that he professes it as his own "good news", and demonstrates his faith in his behavior, you should be encouraged

to proceed through the steps outlined above toward the goal of seeing your child confirmed by the session as a communicant member.

But parents by themselves should not feel authorized alone to determine this eligibility. The elders of the church are clearly appointed and ordained by Christ to be the spiritual leaders of the flock and you should look to them for their confirmation of your own conclusions before allowing your child to partake of communion.

Related to this principle is the issue of your child's readiness to take on a responsible ministry within the church or even to apply for positions such as "counselor" at a Christian summer camp or be involved with any short-term mission work. No one is interested in unbelievers filling those kinds of positions merely because parents want to "keep them busy" or "give them the right impetus or influence". First things first. Let them profess their faith publicly and show their desire to honor Christ in all parts of their lives, and submit to the teaching of Scripture and to the authority of their elders. Then let them go and represent Christ to others.



- **What will meeting with the Session be like?**

When your child appears before the session

- 1) the elders will take note of the record of his baptism, the maturity of his speech and conduct as they have observed it, the faithfulness of the parents, and his regularity of attendance in Sunday School and the Membership Class;

- 2) they will ask for his profession of faith - of his relationship with Christ & his dependence upon the grace of God for salvation & for signs of its application in his life. Don't get nervous, it won't be an exhaustive doctrinal examination, just an opportunity to witness to the elders how & why he loves his Lord!

- 3) and when they are satisfied, a date will be set for the child to be called forward in the midst of a morning worship service, be introduced to the congregation as one ready to make a profession of faith, and asked the following questions. (The session gladly sets aside ample time beforehand to discuss these questions and

explain them to each prospective member's understanding and satisfaction.)

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?**

- **What if, after the interview, we are asked by the session to wait?**

It is not unheard of nor is it a sign of shame whatsoever to be told by the session before or after an interview with your child that it is their desire to see him wait a little longer, grow more in his understanding of the gospel and in his own experience with the Lord before taking the step of professing his faith publicly and partaking of the Lord's Supper.

There might be several reasons for this. Paul's warnings in 1 Cor. 11:27-31 are to be taken seriously. Becoming a communicant member is not merely some kind of graduation ceremony. For anyone - child or adult - merely to pretend to be a Christian for any reason can reap upon him grave consequences.

In the meantime, there is no harm done. As a parent, you should not regard or suspect that such a determination by the elders is a personal rejection of you or your child. They are deeply concerned about your child's spiritual welfare. But waiting may be a wiser course to follow if there is any doubt as to your child's present readiness. As a parent who knows your child best and

watches him daily, you might remain absolutely convinced of his readiness. If such is indeed the case, your patience will be rewarded. But do not overlook or dismiss the fact that the elders themselves must assent to what they see and hear with a clear conscience. That is the duty given them by the Lord and it is valuable to the church. When you think about it, you really wouldn't want that to be any different. You take your work as parents seriously, and you want the elders of your session to take their responsibility seriously, too.

### **What about all my other questions?**

The elders of the session stand ready at any time to discuss the matters related to you and to your child personally. They have no desire to treat any of God's children in a "cookie-cutter" fashion. Each Covenant child is special to them, too! If you would like, the elders can give you specific directions on any of the topics and subjects addressed in this booklet.

# **A Study Guide to the Vows for Communicant Membership**

## **To parents:**

There are many questions and issues that come to mind when we think about the burden we have for our children to publicly profess their faith. Your pastors and elders want to encourage you in this and be a blessing to the growing of your children and they want to stand beside you in your conviction that your child is ready to take this important step.

Before applying for communicant membership, the session wants your child to attend the Inquirer's Class that is offered annually in the fall months during the Christian Education hour on Lord's Day mornings. To help your child through this, recorded sessions of the course, along with the PowerPoint presentations and the Class Note pages are available to you online at the church's website under "Sermons and Courses" and then under "Christian Education Courses".

If your child attended this class already but had more than three absences due to conflicts or illness, the elders ask that you go to the church's website and listen with your child to the lectures he or she needs while following along on the notes pages. Then you may discuss what the lesson was about with your child to make sure he or she understands it.

The session would also like for you, as parents, to be represented during your child's interview or send along with your child's application a small letter written to the elders giving your affirmation and testimony that your child is ready to take this step. The letter will be read to the elders and held in confidence afterwards.

## **To our covenant youth:**

As a young person already within the covenant community, it has been the work of your parents and our work as elders of the church to teach you to love God and to obey and serve Jesus Christ. You are already a member of the church by birthright, and as one so blessed by God it is your duty and your privilege to

personally confess to Christ your need for, love of and commitment to Him, to bear witness to Him before men and to seek admission to the Lord's Supper for your growth in His grace. We are happy you are considering this important step.

It is the responsibility of the elders sitting in session to examine you to make sure you understand the Gospel. Additionally, it is important, as you move from being a non-communicant to a communicant member within the Church, that you have a basic understanding of the Lord's Supper.

The explanation below will tell you what you may expect in your interview. Feel free to work through the membership questions with your parents or other professed Christians. Write down the references to any Scripture passages you know and find that help you understand and express your answers. We encourage you to employ the wording of the Westminster Shorter Catechism in this process as well.

Prior to meeting with the elders, one elder will set up a time when he can sit down with you one on one and go over the examination process with you.

# Examination for Communicant Membership

## Part 1 – Do you understand and affirm the Gospel and the Membership Vows?

Why now? What are you seeking and why?  
Give us your personal testimony (3-5 minutes).  
What difference does it make to you and in your life now that you are a believer?

### 1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope, except through His sovereign mercy?

Think about this:

Who is God? What is man? Who am I?  
Where in the Bible does it teach of man's sin before God and its consequences?  
What does it mean to say "I am a sinner?" What is sin?  
How bad is it?  
Why does sin displease (anger) God? How do I know it displeases Him?  
Why does sin mean I have no hope for heaven on my own?  
What is mercy? Why must I depend on mercy? Why can't I do this for myself?

### 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and trust Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

Think about this:

Briefly tell the story of Jesus.  
What do we mean by calling Jesus the "Son of God"? What makes Him special?  
How does the Bible teach that Jesus is the Savior of sinners?

Why is the resurrection important? What difference does that make to me?

What is faith? What does it mean to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"?

What will happen when I die?

### 3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you endeavor to live as becometh the followers of Christ?

Think about this:

Who is the Holy Spirit? What is His job?  
Has the Holy Spirit come into your life? Tell us about it.  
Are you certain?  
How does He help you living the Christian life?  
What is grace? Why do I need "the grace of the Holy Spirit" to live your life?  
What does a Christian do that makes him different than others?  
What is the reason you must live differently than other people?

### 4. Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

Think about this:

What is worship? Why do we worship God?  
What is the Lord's Day? What does God call me to do on the Lord's Day?  
What is the church? What does it mean to be part of the church?  
What is the "work of the church"?  
Why do I have to promise to support the church? What does that mean?

## 5. Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to strive for its purity and peace?

Think about this:

What is the government of the church? How does this function?

What is the discipline of the church? What is this all about?

Why must I submit to it?

What does it mean that I strive for purity and peace in the church?

## Part 2 – The Means of God’s Grace

The Bible speaks of three, primary means by which a Christian receives the gift of grace from God day by day. All of these are important in the Christian’s life.

### 1) The Word of God

Think about this:

Do I read God’s Word on a daily basis? Am I familiar with it?

Do I listen eagerly to the Word proclaimed from the pulpit?

Do I trust God’s Word for direction and guidance in my life?

### 2) Prayer

Think about this:

How is my prayer life? Do I know of any models or guides for prayer?

How may I address God in prayer?

How does prayer change me?

### 3) Sacraments

#### a) Baptism

When was I baptized?

What does baptism signify? (What does it mean?)

#### b) Lord’s Supper

When does New Covenant Church ordinarily observe the Lord’s Supper?

How am I to prepare for the Lord’s Supper?

What is signified (meant) by the bread? juice?

What should I be thinking about while I am partaking?

What should I do after I partake?

## Part 3 – Additional Topics

In this section, the elders might ask questions of you related to depth of faith or knowledge. This is simply to get to know you better and have some understanding of how much you have learned over the years as well as to learn how the elders might help you to grow in the future.

Topics that might come up in this section include: the nature and attributes of God, the five points of historic Calvinism, or other material that was taught you in the Inquirer’s Class. All are important topics, to be sure, but not essential to becoming a Communicant Member at this time. It also gives you an opportunity to ask questions of your elders and to get to know them better.

**My Application**  
for Communicant Membership  
to the Session of  
**New Covenant Presbyterian Church,**  
Abingdon, Maryland

Write out in the space below why it is that you know you are a Christian and what difference it has made in your life?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Write two or three sentences about why you think this is the right time for this step?

This may be given to any elder of the church  
or turned in to the secretary's office.