

LITTLE ONES AND THE LORD'S SUPPER: A THIRD WAY

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To my beloved wife Melanie who has stood by my side and supported my studies for many years. I love you and I am so thankful to have a wife and best friend whose life is about *Nothing But Jesus* (I Corinthians 2: 2).

## ABSTRACT

By not leading children to come quickly to faith, and then to the Lord's Table, we are effectively barring them from the table. In doing so, are we not thereby insinuating that their love for Jesus is somehow insincere? Is there something else that a child needs to do to receive the Lord's Supper other than coming to simple faith in Jesus Christ? I believe the best way to move forward is for intense elder shepherding of our people to lead their families in every spiritual discipline, including the table of the Lord. When our children see the spiritual growth and nourishment that comes from the table, they will desire it for themselves.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The question of when infants and young children should partake of the Lord's Supper has been a subject of vigorous debate in the American Presbyterian Church (PCA). The minority position, and that of some PCA ministers and congregations, is to admit young children, and even infants, to the Lord's Table.<sup>1</sup> The majority position holds that covenant children should not partake of the sacrament until they are able to understand and articulate the essentials of the faith and evidence a theological grasp of the Lord's Supper. Some PCA churches simply do not admit covenant children to the table until they become communing members. The PCA's position is to prevent covenant children from receiving the sacrament until they are interviewed and approved by a Session member.

In what follows, the PCA's established theological position with respect to paedocommunion, will go largely unchallenged. I maintain that there are serious reasons for opposing paedocommunion, not least of which is that this position stands in express contradiction to the theology of the Lord's Supper set forth in the Westminster Standards. As the Westminster Confession of Faith makes abundantly clear, only those who are capable of receiving the elements *by faith* are worthy of participating in the sacrament of communion.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as a young child is incapable of faithfully discerning the body and blood, he/she is not yet fit to receive the bread and wine. In downplaying the role of faith, proponents of paedocommunion thus risk endorsing a somewhat superstitious view of the Lord's Supper, whereby the

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1. PCA ministers must notify their Presbytery if they hold to the minority position.

2. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996.

sacrament operates automatically (*ex opera operato*) on the one who receives of the elements. Without therefore departing from the established PCA position, because the current divide strikes me as wanting, I intend to rekindle a sense of covenantal urgency with respect to the question at hand and attempt to offer new theological reflections. Most of the literature and resources regarding Reformed paedocommunion are either staunchly “for” or “against” it. These sources are abundant, and there is no need to rehash what has already been well articulated. It is my goal to use this study to contribute a new perspective to the Reformed, and specifically PCA, theological tradition. Perhaps there is indeed a “third way” of approaching the theological question of paedocommunion while remaining true to the PCA majority position.

Whatever our own theological positions are, however, it is incredibly important for us to be able to state opposing positions with grace and charity—exercising what Kevin Vanhoozer calls the “dialogical virtues.”<sup>3</sup> I intend to avoid caricatures of the paedocommunion position and to state the position in such a way that its proponents will hear their own views rightly described, even while I do not share them. Our theology regarding practice should have practical consequences. Therefore, I will suggest concrete steps throughout this thesis.

The goal of my theological reflection is not to convince people to become proponents of paedocommunion, but to instill in our leaders the urgency of properly bringing our children to the table. I am not suggesting we change the way we admit children, as I continue to believe that they should be fenced until meeting the church and PCA requirements. However, when we fail to shepherd our parents to prepare

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3. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation?” in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, eds. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 259.

their children for the table at an early age, we are not complying with the PCA requirements for eldership. In many ways, the questions surrounding paedocommunion are symptomatic of a much larger problem facing the PCA. The problem, as I see it, is a lack of urgency to bring young children to the table. There is no reason why a four, or even five- year-old should not be ready to come to the Lord's Table while remaining true to the PCA conviction against the classic paedocommunion position. In this paper, I will explore all aspects of the theological conversation in order to demonstrate, not that the paedocommunion side is the "right" side, but rather how we need to carefully reflect on this issue as a whole. In this paper I will attempt to open the door to continued theological reflection on this issue while staying within the bounds of settled PCA doctrine.

#### Literature Review

While I use many additional resources in this thesis, I have identified the literature that I relied on most and found that focusing on the resources in this section faithfully summarizes the cross section of views on paedocommunion.

Cornelis P. Venema, *Children at the Lord's Table? Assessing the Case for Paedocommunion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

Cornelis Venema is a credocommunionist, but is sensitive to the paedocommunionist position. This book, a historical, exegetical, and systematic treatment of paedocommunion, is helpful in defining terms and explaining arguments for both sides of the debate. He focuses heavily on the history of the church's treatment of paedocommunion in confessions, teaching, and practice. Beginning with a broad discussion of church history, he then moves to the issue in Reformed confessions, the parallels with Passover, the NT evidence for paedocommunion, and ends with extensive commentary on 1 Cor 11:17-34. He argues that Christ's death is

central and criticizes the “lack of aggressiveness” or “neglect” in churches with regard to bringing children to the table.

Guy Prentiss Waters & Ligon Duncan, “An Introduction to the Paedocommunion Debate,” in *Children and the Lord’s Supper: Let a Man Examine Himself*, eds. Guy Waters & Ligon Duncan (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2011), [11-30].

The articles in this volume examine virtually all facets of the paedocommunion debate. In the introduction, Waters and Duncan, are judicious in their citation of primary paedocommunionist sources. Both are credocommunionist Presbyterians but are fair in how they present paedocommunionist arguments. Their main argument against paedocommunion is that even though all baptized individuals have the privilege of eating at the table, not all are automatically ready to *exercise* that privilege. They clearly contend that baptized children belong at the table, but they must first meet the requirements of 1 Cor 11.

Iain M. Duguid, “Christ Our Passover,” in *Children and the Lord’s Supper: Let a Man Examine Himself*, eds. Guy Waters & Ligon Duncan (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2011), [59-74].

This article is a great resource for specific information about how Passover works and who participated in the rite. Duguid gives much detail about how the ceremony worked and its place in Jewish theology. This is a helpful resource for understanding Passover, both its ancient practice and its observation during Jesus’ ministry. It helps us to be accurate about Passover as we compare it to the Lord’s Supper. Duguid is a credocommunionist but spends most of this article describing the OT practice instead of advocating against paedocommunion. There are parallels between the two rituals, but Duguid argues for credocommunion based on 1 Cor 11.

Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: the Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow: Canon, 2003).

Jeffrey Meyers is a vocal advocate for paedocommunion. Published by Canon Press, an organization associated with Douglass Wilson, this book is connected with the Federal Vision movement. Meyers is creative and convincing in handling 1 Cor 11, by pointing out the context of disunity. At the same time he does not address the significance of vv. 23-26 and children's participation in a sacrament centered on unity to one another through Christ's death. But Meyers is thorough in both his treatment of how Calvin handled this issue and his presentation of what *dokimazo* means in this context. He argues that children can do this.

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

Berkhof writes with profound theological clarity and is helpful in understanding the Roman Catholic view of the sacraments compared to the Reformed understanding. Within the Reformed understanding of the sacraments, the partaker must have faith for the sacrament to have meaning. He pays careful attention to how the Reformed confessions have handled paedocommunion, but agrees with credocommunionists. This is required by his understanding of the phrase 'discern the body,' which he takes to mean discerning between the elements used in the Supper and ordinary bread and wine, which children cannot do.

Shawn D. Wright, "The Reformed View of the Lord's Supper," in *The Lord's Supper*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner & Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H, 2011), [248-84].

This volume is a follow-up to *Believer's Baptism*, and it presents the Baptist view of communion. The volume includes articles from the Roman Catholic, Zwinglian, Lutheran, and Calvinist views on communion, one of which is Shawn Wright's. At the same time, only one of the thirteen contributors does not come

from a school associated with the Southern Baptists. Wright only dedicates a few paragraphs to the issue of paedocommunion, instead focusing on of covenant theology's broad issues. His focus, however, was not Calvin's doctrine of the Supper; he argues that Calvin and the *WCF* overemphasize the Eucharist's power and critiques the Reformed view of the sacraments as a means of grace.

Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

Bakke's book is a significant contribution to understanding how the spread of Christianity changed the view of children in the wider culture. He carefully examines primary sources from the first four centuries of the church and concludes that Christianity was vastly more "child-friendly" than the Greco-Roman world. Paedocommunion is not his primary focus, but Chapter 6, "Children's Participation in Worship," is helpful in this regard. Bakke neither makes an argument for contemporary paedocommunion nor credocommunion, though he clearly demonstrates that paedocommunion was a common early church practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL STUDIES

In a report to the sixteenth General Assembly, upholding covenant children's fencing from the sacrament, an appeal was made to the writings of classically reformed theologians, Herman Witsius and Herman Bavinck who argued against paedocommunion based on the distinction between baptism and communion. The relation between these two sacraments drives to the heart of the debates surrounding paedocommunion. Advocates of paedocommunion question why we baptize infants but deny them the table, while critics of the practice, such as Witsius and Bavinck, counter that baptism is the initial sacrament, while the Lord's Supper is the "sacrament of nutrition" and requires active participation by "taking and eating of the bread" as solid food.<sup>4</sup> This, unlike baptism's passive requirements, is a command infants would be unable to fulfill. Critics of paedocommunion also hold in high regard Paul's command for self-examination in 1 Corinthians 11 and deem covenant children unable to adequately examine themselves before taking part in the Lord's Supper. This concern for self-examination, perhaps even more than the distinction between the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, seems to be the overriding concern of most PCA pastors in regard to paedocommunion. Additionally, critics of paedocommunion believe that fencing the table does not preclude children from the benefits and the means of the covenant of grace. As Herman Bavinck insists,

Withholding of the Supper from children deprives them of not one benefit of the covenant of grace. This would indeed be the case if they were denied baptism. One who does this must suppose that the children stand outside the covenant of grace. But it is otherwise with the Lord's Supper. Whoever

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4. Herman Witsius, "The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man," Vol. II, ET (London, 1837), 456. In *PCA Digest Position Papers 1973-1993*, Part V, Ed. Paul R. Gilchrist, "Report of the Ad-Interim Committee to Study the Question of Paedocommunion" (Atlanta: Presbyterian Church in America, 1993), 498.

administers baptism and not the Lord's Supper to children acknowledges that they are in the covenant and share all the benefits of it. He merely denies to them a special way in which those same benefits are signified and sealed when that does not suit their age. The Supper does not convey any benefit that is not already given before in the Word and in baptism through faith.<sup>5</sup>

Are infants and children denied the means of grace when denied the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? Can an infant or a young child adequately meet the requirements of I Corinthians 11 regarding self-examination? Does the distinction between the two sacraments essentially bar infants from the Lord's Supper (since they cannot self-examine) and basically bar children (since we cannot be sure of their point of conversion until later in life)? These are questions I hope to explore in this study.

Before answering these questions, both sides of the paedocommunion debate deserve attention. This issue is not whether or not children of the covenant are invited to the Lord's Table. On the contrary, if a covenant child's baptism means anything, "it means that they are invited to respond in faith to the Lord's gracious promise, which would qualify them to receive the sacrament that nourishes faith."<sup>6</sup> But there remains something preventing these children, or any others, from coming to the table, and that is "the absence of an appropriate response to the invitation."<sup>7</sup>

Proponents of paedocommunion argue that the "admission of children to the sacrament of Holy Communion best conforms to the ancient practice of the church."<sup>8</sup> They argue that the practice was widespread in the earliest centuries of Christianity. Further, "Paedocommunion has been and continues to be the practice of all ancient

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5. Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* Vol. IV (Kampen: Kok, 1911), 642. In *PCA Digest Position Papers 1973-1993*, Part V, Ed. Paul R. Gilchrist, "Report of the Ad-Interim Committee to Study the Question of Paedocommunion" (Atlanta: Presbyterian Church in America, 1993), 498.

6. Cornelis P. Venema, *Children at the Lord's Table? Assessing the Case for Paedocommunion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 2.

7. Venema, *Paedocommunion*, 2.

8. *ibid.*, 5.

bodies of Eastern Christianity.”<sup>9</sup> These Orthodox churches continue to “serve Communion to infants on the occasion of their baptism and thereafter.”<sup>10</sup>

But Reformed Christians who argue for paedocommunion do not just argue from history – they generally agree that the “Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, not the traditional practice of the church, finally determine the faith of the Christian church.”<sup>11</sup> There must be a clear scriptural teaching for including children at the table. Venema says paedocommunionists most often appeal to three biblical arguments: “the covenant argument, the Passover/Lord’s Supper analogy, and the 1 Corinthians 11 argument.”<sup>12</sup>

The covenant argument is that there is no basis “for denying children under the new covenant a privilege that was extended to their counterparts under the old covenant.”<sup>13</sup> Paedocommunionists argue that fencing off covenant children from the table is akin to “excommunicating” them. This thinking, they say, does not “fully acknowledge the rights and privileges that belong to every member of the covenant community.”<sup>14</sup> Venema summarizes the argument that, “If the sacramental practice of the Reformed churches is to measure up to its covenantal view, these proponents say, the children of believing parents, who have received the sign and seal of covenant membership in baptism, ought to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>15</sup>

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9. Blake Purcell, “The Testimony of the Ancient Church,” in *The Case for Covenant Communion*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Monroe: Athanasius, 2006), [131-46], 131.

10. Venema, 5.

11. *Ibid.*, 6.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Guy Prentiss Waters & Ligon Duncan, “An Introduction to the Paedocommunion Debate,” in *Children and the Lord’s Supper: Let a Man Examine Himself*, eds. Guy Waters & Ligon Duncan (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2011), [11-30], 16.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.

The second major argument for paedocommunion is the analogy of the Passover and the Lord's Supper. If circumcision, the old covenant seal of membership, is analogous to baptism in the new covenant, what is analogous to the Lord's Supper? Jesus himself makes the connection at the last supper, a Passover Seder. Not only is the sacrament called 'the Lord's Supper' (1 Cor 11:20), but also "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21), "the Eucharist" (from "giving thanks," Mt 26:27), "the breaking of bread," (Acts 20:7), and "the cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16). Together these metaphors refer to the night of Jesus' betrayal, the night of Passover.<sup>16</sup>

Since the Supper "was instituted on the occasion of the Passover as the new covenant fulfillment of the old covenant rite," paedocommunionists say the church "should admit children to the Supper just as they were formerly admitted to the Passover."<sup>17</sup> In the OT we read that entire families, "including children, partook of the Passover, the Hebrew predecessor to the Lord's Supper. In fact, the very *youngest* child, in Jewish practice, has always had a prominent place in the ceremony."<sup>18</sup>

The argument then follows, "if the children of believers were permitted to eat of the Passover meal, on what grounds do we deny them access to the corresponding new covenant meal, the Lord's Supper?"<sup>19</sup> Paedocommunionists point to passages like 1 Sam 1:1-8, in which Elkanah takes his family to Shiloh. They go for the annual festivals, and the entire family "partakes of the sacrificial food (1 Sam 1:4), most

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15. Ibid.

16. Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 458.

17. Venema, *Paedocommunion*, 7.

18. Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1985), 114.

19. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 16.

likely a Passover meal. The entire family rejoiced together in their covenant meal with the Lord (Deut 12:7).”<sup>20</sup>

On the surface the connection between Passover and the Lord’s Table is obvious: “both are meals in which the covenant community gathers to celebrate its deliverance through a miraculous intervention of God on their behalf.”<sup>21</sup>

Paedocommunionists see these parallels as paramount. If children ate at Passover, why not the Lord’s Supper? But there are also differences between the two rituals: “Passover was an annual event, in which the central feature was the slaughter of a lamb, while the Lord’s Supper is generally celebrated more frequently and involves the use of bread and wine.”<sup>22</sup> These are important and will be addressed below.

Lastly, paedocommunionists interpret 1 Corinthians 11 differently than credocommunionists. The main lynchpin in the argument against paedocommunion is 1 Cor 11:27-29, “whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.” Children are excluded, then, because they cannot examine themselves or “discern the body”. But paedocommunionists make a case from context and ask these questions: “To whom does Paul address this admonition? What does the verb ‘examine’ mean in the context of 1 Cor 11? Does it actually require an ability to perform internal soul-

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20. Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord’s Service: the Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow: Canon, 2003), 379.

21. Iain M. Duguid, “Christ Our Passover,” in *Children and the Lord’s Supper: Let a Man Examine Himself*, eds. Guy Waters & Ligon Duncan (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2011), [59-74], 59.

22. Duguid, “Christ Our Passover,” 59.

searching and deep personal introspection before one can be judged worthy of participation at the Lord's Table?"<sup>23</sup>

The admonition of vv. 27-29 comes in the context of Paul's correction of how the Corinthians were observing the Supper. Therefore the admonition to discern the body of the Lord is not so much a rule for all who take the Supper to properly understand Jesus' death. According to paedocommunionists, "it is a specific charge to some believers in Corinth who were acting inappropriately in the context of the celebration of the Lord's Supper (and some believers today who may commit a similar offense)."<sup>24</sup>

Believers were fostering "divisions" (1 Cor 11:18), and that sets the stage for the discussion of the Lord's Supper. It is argued that "unworthiness" refers to fostering "divisions and promoting factions. A person must therefore 'examine himself,' that is, ensure that he is living in such a way as to promote the unity and fellowship of the body."<sup>25</sup> The word for "examine" (δοκιμάζω, *dokimazō*) will be discussed below under "Passover and the Lord's Supper". In the following quote, Meyers, a paedocommunionist, describes the situation in Corinth:

They refused to wait for one another at the Lord's Supper, even going so far as to eat their own private family or cliquish meals (1 Cor 11:20-22, 33-34). This way of eating the Lord's Supper had the effect of dividing the body, and since the rich were using the table as an occasion for a feast with their rich friends, the weaker, poorer members of the body were being treated as second-class Christians at the meal.<sup>26</sup>

According to paedocommunionists, Paul's message in 1 Cor 11 is that those who "fail to commune the body's youngest, weakest members are not 'discerning the

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23. Meyers, *Lord's Service*, 369.

24. Venema, *Paedocommunion*, 8.

25. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 19.

26. Meyers, *Lord's Service*, 370.

body' and are therefore eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner."<sup>27</sup> Waters and Duncan are helpful in their summary of this paedocommunion argument:

He must particularly 'discern the body', that is the unity of the body of believers, before he would partake (1 Cor. 11:29). Since all members of the church – young and old alike – are capable of meeting such qualifications, therefore all members of the church may be invited to come to the table. Far from overturning paedocommunion, Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11 is said to uphold the practice.<sup>28</sup>

This is a serious charge, because it could mean the "historic Reformed practice of excluding children from the table of the Lord represents a failure to discern the body or church in a manner that is similar to the practice Paul condemns."<sup>29</sup> This will be dealt with further in the section below, "Passover and the Lord's Supper." But to summarize here, paedocommunionists understand the "self-examination" in 1 Cor 11 to mean asking a simple question:

The question is something very objective and concrete: How do you treat others in the church? Have you proven yourself to be one who promotes the unity of the body of Christ? Do your words and behavior in relation to others in the body of Christ show that you are one who judges the importance of the oneness of the Body? Are you reconciled with your brothers and sisters in Christ when you come to the table? If not, you will be judged (11:29-32).<sup>30</sup>

How do credocommunionists respond to these arguments? With the covenant argument, both paedocommunionists and credocommunionists agree that the child of "at least one professing believer is a member of the visible church."<sup>31</sup> Presbyterians have historically argued that this membership is "the birthright of the covenant child.

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27. Meyers, *Lord's Service*, 369.

28. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 19.

29. Venema, *Paedocommunion*, 8.

30. Meyers, *Lord's Service*, 392.

31. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 21.

This birthright explains why covenant children are granted the privilege of the sacrament of baptism.”<sup>32</sup>

Credocommunionists also agree with all paedobaptist interpreters who see an analogy between circumcision and baptism: “they serve as the initiatory sign and seal in the old and new covenants, respectively.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, everyone agrees that while circumcision was only undergone by males under the old covenant, baptism is given to both sexes in the new covenant. The ordinances are not exactly the same in the old and new covenants, and “one cannot simply transfer the terms of participation in one old covenant ordinance to an analogous new covenant ordinance.”<sup>34</sup> Life in the new covenant is not going to completely align with the old covenant, because the old covenant was a shadow of the future in Christ.

In response to the paedocommunionist argument from the analogy of Passover and the Lord’s Supper, some credocommunionist interpreters argue that it is “not altogether clear that children under the old covenant ate of the Passover meal... whether we are considering the household observance... or the observance at Jerusalem,” (Exod 12; Deut 16).<sup>35</sup> But that is not the majority opinion; most interpreters agree that children partook of the OT feasts. However, that is not the only argument credocommunionists make against this position. Waters & Duncan say this:

We recognize that the Passover is analogous to the Lord’s Supper. To affirm this point, however, says nothing determinative of how the Lord’s Supper is to be observed under the New Covenant. To put it another way, simply because old covenant children may have been admitted to the Passover feast does not

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32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 17.

34. Ibid., 18.

35. Ibid., 16.

necessarily mean that new covenant children are now to be admitted to the Lord's Supper.<sup>36</sup>

Louis Berkhof represents the majority position when he says, "Children, though they were allowed to eat the Passover in the days of the OT, cannot be permitted to partake of the table of the Lord."<sup>37</sup> The reason is that they cannot "meet the requirements for worthy participation. Paul insists on the necessity of self-examination previous to the celebration."<sup>38</sup> This is why 1 Cor 11:28 is the lynchpin. According to Berkhof, only those who "earnestly repent of their sins, trust that these have been covered by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and are desirous to increase their faith, and to grow in true holiness of life" can be given the Eucharist.<sup>39</sup>

While the paedocommunionists' attention to context in their interpretation of 1 Cor 11 is admirable, the difficulty with their understanding of the passage is that it deemphasizes or neglects Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:23-26. Without question, Paul is linking the Lord's Supper to Jesus' death. In these verses, "Paul stresses that the sacrament fundamentally sets forth the death of Jesus Christ for the sins of his people."<sup>40</sup> If we understand the Lord's Supper as a "remembrance" of Jesus,

Then surely this 'remembrance' character of the sacrament defines what it means for the recipient to be qualified to approach the table. To 'discern the body', to 'examine oneself,' and to eat and drink in a 'worthy manner', in context, must refer to a participation in the Lord's Supper that acknowledges and upholds what Christ has instituted the Supper to be.<sup>41</sup>

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36. Ibid., 16.

37. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 656.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 19.

41. Ibid., 20.

Credocommunionists and paedocommunionists disagree about the application of 1 Cor 11:23-29. In response to paedocommunionists, credocommunionists see vv. 23-29 as having “wider applicability than simply the church in Corinth, and simply the problem of church division. They apply to the church in every age, ‘until [Jesus] comes’ (1 Cor. 11:26).”<sup>42</sup> That is why children need to be shepherded to the table. According to Thabiti Anyabwile, the proper participants in the Lord’s Supper are “those who trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation as he is offered in the gospel and who have received the sign of membership (baptism) in the body of Christ, his church. The Lord’s Supper is for professing believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who have discerned the body of the Lord, that is, the church.”<sup>43</sup>

To conclude, the paedocommunionist and credocommunionist positions can further be compared in terms of how each group understands differences between baptism and the Lord’s Supper, “self-examination” and the eating and drinking of judgment, and the dynamics of the visible and invisible church.

As for differences between baptism and the Lord’s Supper, both groups agree that the “purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to bring people into union with Christ. It is not a badge of our conversion but a means to bring us into the real, spiritual presence of Christ.”<sup>44</sup> Paedocommunionists, however, seem to distinguish less between the old covenant analogy (Passover) and the new covenant reality (the Lord’s Supper), while credocommunionists make a sharp distinction between them.

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42. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 21.

43. Thabiti Anyabwile & J. Ligon Duncan, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” in *The Gospel as Center: Renewing Our Faith and Reforming Our Ministry Practices*, eds. D.A. Carson & Timothy J. Keller (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), [231-52], 250.

44. Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds*, 114.

As mentioned, the paedocommunionists argue that those who would keep covenant children from the table are the ones who need to examine themselves, lest they eat the bread unworthily. Credocommunionists see the need for self-examination as being grounded in the death of Jesus, in that people must know they are sinners. Further, the one who “eats the bread or drinks the cup” in an unworthy manner will be guilty of “profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27; cf. 1 Cor 11:29). Credocommunionists emphasize how high the stakes are in this question. This question has consequences, because “if paedocommunionists are mistaken, then they are placing young persons in the church in a position that Scripture has warned the church not to place them.”<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the visible and invisible churches, both groups are in agreement that inclusion in one does not necessarily mean inclusion in the other. That is, the visible church is the “empirical and tangible” body, while the invisible one is “spiritual and transcendent.”<sup>46</sup> But one must remember that the essence and goal of the visible church is the invisible church, and the invisible church “comes to us only in the form of a visible community of believers. We have the spiritual only in the material, the eternal only in the temporal.”<sup>47</sup> No one is arguing that partaking of the table makes a person an automatic member of the invisible church. On the contrary, the disagreement has been when children can be given the bread and wine.

As we will see, how one construes the location of children in Israel’s celebration of the Passover has significant implications for how one determine

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45. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 28.

46. Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 70.

47. *Ibid.*

children's place in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Passover was the most sacred feast of the Jewish religious year. It was the first "of the three great annual festivals in the Old Testament, occurring at the time of the barley harvest in early spring."<sup>48</sup> It was followed seven weeks later by the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost "at the time of the wheat harvest, while the Festival of Ingathering or Tabernacles took place along with the fruit and olive harvest in the early fall."<sup>49</sup> All three festivals have parallels in Canaanite culture, but the Israelite festivals were all given "a redemptive-historical motivation, tying these general celebrations of God's providence together to his great acts in redemptive history."<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, the calendars used in Israel and Canaan demonstrate Passover's importance. While the Canaanite calendar began and ended in the fall (the Festival of Ingathering), Israel's calendar "began with the month of Abib in the spring, as a memorial of God's great work of salvation in the Passover (Exod. 12:2)."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, from the outset "a redemptive-historical view of the world was imposed on the festival year simply by starting the year with the celebration of God's great work of redemption in the exodus."<sup>52</sup>

The Passover always took place on the first full moon of the first month of the year. On the tenth day of the month, "each family was to select a one-year old male lamb or goat, without defect (Exod. 12:5)."<sup>53</sup> They took care of these animals until the

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48. Duguid, "Christ Our Passover," 60.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 60.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 61.

night of the fourteenth, “when they were to slaughter it, daubing some of the blood on the doorpost and lintels of the doorway.”<sup>54</sup> Each time the Passover was celebrated,

The participants joined together in a sacred meal before the Lord. In it, through the death of the sacrificial lamb, the participants experienced renewed fellowship with God, who protected them from his own judgment curse that fell on their enemies and promised them a glorious inheritance. They reminded themselves that they were strangers and aliens in this world, living between deliverance and consummation.<sup>55</sup>

The situation became complicated when the temple was destroyed after 586 B.C. There was no longer a place to sacrifice the lamb, so it is probable that at this stage the “cup was introduced into the Passover ritual; according to the Mishnah, the wine was mixed with hot water (*Pesachim* 7:13), which must have increased the symbolism of the liquid as representing the blood of the lamb.”<sup>56</sup> This was not part of the original ritual but was part of the ceremony Jesus observed.

Those holding a paedocommunion position often appeal to certain passages in the Old Testament seeming to suggest that infants and children participated in the celebration of the Passover.

Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.<sup>57</sup>

The phrase, “according to the number of persons,” demonstrates that each family was to take what was required for those in their home and seems to indicate that each family member, including infants and children should eat Passover. The next phrase,

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54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 62.

56. Duguid, “Christ Our Passover,” 63.

57. Exodus 12:3–4 (ESV).

“according to what each can eat”, (לפי אכלו, *ish lephey achlo*) does not indicate a belief requirement, demonstrating that it did not depend on the person’s cognitive ability to discern and believe, but rather to eat. The same phrase is found again in Exodus 16 in reference to the manna from heaven. In the context of Exodus 16, infants and children had to eat the manna since it was their only source of food. It is safe to deduce from these two passages that they did partake of the Passover. But is this enough evidence to require that infants and children be permitted to the Lord’s Table?

The early church admitted children to the Lord’s Supper because they viewed the new covenant sacraments as fulfilling the sacraments of the old covenant. In Deuteronomy 16:11-14, we find a clear example of children’s admission to the old covenant counterpart of the Lord’s Supper:

And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants...celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be joyful at your Feast—you, your sons and daughters...

The word son (בן, *beyn*) is the immediate offspring of a parent, either male or female. The inclusion of the female counterpart (בת, *baht*) to בן is striking, indicating an inclusion of not only females in the feasts, but female children. Perhaps most interesting is the inclusion of the word sojourner (גר, *gar*), which means, “stranger, foreigner, i.e., one who is of a different geographical or cultural group, often with less rights than the reference group.”<sup>58</sup> The sojourner’s inclusion in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper has significant theological implications. In fact the whole sense of verse 14 is that all are welcome, including even the sojourner.

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58. J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Verse 14, therefore, begs a much larger question than whether or not infants and young children should be admitted to the Lord's Table. If the Old Testament feast of Passover is the parallel of the Lord's Supper, who is welcome at the Lord's Supper?<sup>59</sup> In other words, if we use the Scripture available to conclude that children were welcome at the Old Testament feasts, would we also be obligated to apply the same exegetical approach and admit everyone?

Many differentiate between the inclusion of infants and young children. Such a distinction is often drawn, not primarily from the biblical witness, but rather from the "light of reason." Infants, it is argued, cannot digest food like children. It is therefore unlikely that they participated in every food element offered in the Old Testament Feasts. In Joel 2:15-16, however, God expects that both children and infants will partake in his feasts: "Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber."<sup>60</sup> No age limits were set as the covenant children, including nursing infants, were expected to participate. Therefore, if an advocate of paedocommunion uses Old Testament passages regarding the feasts as Scriptural support for paedocommunion, it would also be logical to include "nursing infants." But even Heidel, who began this contemporary debate with his 1975 *Westminster Journal* article, does not go that far. Even so, he gives no reason for excluding nursing infants:

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59. Many years ago, I was at a large Anglican church in Jacksonville, Florida. The rector was passing out the elements, and at the time, I did not feel I was in a place to partake. I had not adequately self-examined or prepared. When he offered me the elements, I politely refused. He kindly looked at me and asked, "are you sure, I have plenty?" It is striking how differently denominations born from the Reformation approach fencing of the table.

60. Joel 2:15-16 (ESV).

By the word “infant” this article will mean those who are physically capable of eating the Lord’s Supper. Thus we are not advocating a strict return to the ancient practices of forcing food and wine down the throat of a child, or of intinction. By “children” it will mean those youngsters who have not yet reached an ‘age of discernment’.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, it seems that advocates of paedocommunion are divided into two camps: those who admit children but exclude infants and those who admit both infants and children.

In Exodus 10:10, Pharaoh offers to allow the Israelites to hold their feasts if they will leave their children with him. Moses responds in Exodus 10:9: “Moses said, ‘We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.’”<sup>62</sup>

Moses’ unequivocal response to Pharaoh suggests Moses’ sense of covenantal urgency in regard to children and the Old Testament feasts. Perhaps this was one reason, as demonstrated earlier, the admittance of covenant children in the early church to what is widely regarded as the New Testament equivalent of Passover was a given.

All of this, of course, presupposes a one-to-one correspondence between the Lord’s Supper and the original Exodus Passover. As many opponents of paedocommunion have noted, however, there is strong biblical evidence for considering the Lord’s Supper the New Testament fulfillment, not only of the Jewish Passover, but also of all Old Testament sacrificial meals. As Brian Schwertley argues,

All of the sacrifices point to Christ himself who is our Passover (cf. Jn. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:19-22). Since the Lord’s Supper shows forth the death of Christ and thus replaces all bloody sacrifices and their sacrificial meals, it is exegetically illegitimate to *arbitrarily* select the biblical account of the

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61. Keidel, “Is the Lord’s Supper for Children?,” 305–306.

62. Exodus 10:9 (ESV).

Egyptian Passover meal as the *only* or *primary* text that sets forth the terms of communion for the Lord's supper.<sup>63</sup>

Locating the Lord's Supper in relation to the plurality of Old Testament sacrificial meals makes the above arguments concerning the admission of children to the Lord's Supper problematic, for different covenant meals often entailed distinct terms of admission. In the covenant meal on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:9-11), for instance, only Israel's male leaders were admitted. At the least, the existence of diverse sacrificial meals (many of which excluded infants and young children) should prevent us from making assumptions based on young children's involvement in the Exodus Passover to infants' and young children's admittance to the Lord's Supper. Any attempt to determine the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper (such as the one advocated in this paper) must therefore rely on a complex number of biblical, historical and theological judgments.

We should also consider the possibility that the Christians in Corinth were confusing the Lord's Supper with the "agape meal". The Eucharist and the agape meal are not the same and must not be confused. The agape meal is "an exemplary byproduct of the whole worship celebration. After the formal worship has ended we can then share the fruits of our labors with others in a wider fellowship meal."<sup>64</sup> Is it possible that the Corinthians are confusing these meals? Could it be that Paul is telling them to "discern the body" so as to set apart the Eucharist from an agape meal? Nonetheless, their agape meals can also "be a means of grace so long as faith and love are present, but it must not be called a communion of the body and blood of Jesus

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63. Brain Schwertly, "Paedocommunion: A Biblical Examination," <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/paedocommunion-schwertley.htm>, Accessed 2 June, 2014.

64. Bloesch, *The Church*, 164.

Christ.”<sup>65</sup> This makes it possible that the children ate the agape meal but not the Supper.

Regardless, “Passover” and the “Lord’s Supper” are not interchangeable. Rather, the Supper “has unique eschatological significance, pointing the people of God forward to the consummation of the Kingdom of God already inaugurated in the accomplished, redemptive work of Christ.”<sup>66</sup> In light of this eschatological significance, why would different qualifications for participants be surprising? It is significant that the Passover points forward and the Lord’s Supper points backward:

The Passover set forth the Christ who was to come. It did so as type and shadow. The Lord’s Supper, however, is administered ‘in remembrance’ of the Christ who has already come, and will return in glory. The Lord’s Supper commemorates the accomplished death of Christ for sinners, and it is this death that believers ‘proclaim’ as often as they partake (1 Cor. 11:26).

Because the Lord’s Supper is tied to the accomplished redemptive death of Christ, Paul stresses that to partake of the elements ‘in an unworthy manner’ is to render oneself ‘guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord’ (1 Cor. 11:27). In other words, what has transpired in the progress of redemptive history from the Passover to the Lord’s Supper has lent a poignancy and significance to the Supper that heightens the sin of careless or heedless partaking.<sup>67</sup>

Children in the OT feasts were not required to examine themselves the way Paul makes clear in 1 Cor 11. As mentioned above, Paul uses the word *dokimazo*. Paul usually uses this word to mean “prove yourself” (cf. 1 Cor 3:13; 2 Cor 13:5), and so we could translate 1 Cor 11:28 like this: ‘let a man prove himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup’.<sup>68</sup> Consider how Paul warns ministers with regard to this “proving”: “each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it,

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65. Ibid.

66. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 17.

67. Ibid., 18.

68. Meyers, *Lord’s Service*, 369.

because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will prove [*dokimazo*] what sort of work each one has done” (1 Cor 3:13; see also 1 Thess 2:4; 1 Pet 1:7).<sup>69</sup> Compare also 2 Cor 13:5, which states: “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test.”<sup>70</sup>

The admonition of 1 Cor 11:28 can be taken to mean both a cognitive understanding of the significance of Christ’s death and an assurance that the body is unified and not excluding anyone from the Lord’s Supper. The paedocommunionists have a point about the context of Paul’s admonitions. As Meyers puts it,

A man ‘proves himself’ by *how* he eats, not how much he understands or how thoroughly he searches his heart. There are those in the Corinthian church whose behavior in the church and especially at the Lord’s Table manifests selfish pride and therefore divisiveness. They are *doing* the Lord’s Supper in a way that visibly violates one of its defining purposes. The table ought to constitute the people of God as one.<sup>71</sup>

Can this not be true while, at the same time, the Supper is also about understanding the significance of the bread and wine? As Berkhof writes,

In order to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner, it is necessary to discern the body, 1 Cor 11:29, that is, to distinguish properly between the elements used in the Lord’s Supper and ordinary bread and wine, by recognizing those elements as symbols of the body and blood of Christ. And this, too, is beyond the capacity of children. It is only after they have come to years of discretion that they can be permitted to join in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>72</sup>

There is still conflict here between these interpretations, and that is why I am suggesting a third way. There is no easy way to answer the question of when children

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69. Ibid., 370.

70. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 21. The authors also comment, “See also Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 171 for a helpful summary of the Scripture’s teaching concerning what is involved in this self-examination.”

71. Meyers, *Lord’s Service*, 370.

72. Berkhof, *Theology*, 657.

should be welcomed to the table, nor is there one answer for all situations. But while pursuing an answer, several facts are clear. First, covenant children in Christian families “want to participate in worship; for this reason, participation in the Lord’s Supper cannot be postponed beyond a point that is hard to define without damage to the child.”<sup>73</sup> Second, all NT accounts portray the Lord’s Supper as eaten responsibly, with the ability to “(1) discern the Lord’s body, (2) examine oneself, (3) remember Jesus Christ, and (4) know that one gathers at the table in the fellowship of the Christian community.”<sup>74</sup> What this means for the paedocommunion debate is this: “The time at which a child comes to have faith and when a child can responsibly participate cannot be determined precisely. Faith is certainly an early fact for the child who lives in a community of faith, and faith and responsible participation are possibilities at earlier ages than we sometimes have thought.”<sup>75</sup>

We have to be responsible in how we handle the Lord’s Supper, because it is a “visible and pointed expression not only of our union with Christ in his death and life (1 Cor. 10:16), but also of our corresponding bond with fellow believers as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:17).”<sup>76</sup> These realities can be distinguished but never separated. The Corinthians failed with others and with understanding Christ’s death. They failed to remember Jesus, crucified for sinners, which is the event we witness when we eat the Supper, and “proclaim his death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). “The Lord’s

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73. John H. Leith, *Pilgrimage of a Presbyterian: Collected Shorter Writings*, ed. Charles E. Raynal (Louisville: Geneva, 2001), 227.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 20.

Supper is a powerful and public testimony to the church's commitment to the gospel of grace."<sup>77</sup>

Having demonstrated the biblical issues involved in the debate, we turn now to the theological significance of the relation between the Lord's Supper and the Jewish Passover.

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77. *Ibid.*, 27.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The word “sacrament” does not appear in Scripture, but is “derived from the Vulgate translation of the Greek word “mystery” (*mystērion*) as found in the NT.”<sup>78</sup> While this “mystery” applies to both baptism and the Lord’s Supper, it is especially associated with the latter. A sacrament is a visible sign joined with the promise of God, and in the New Covenant God has instituted the practices of baptism and communion as the means by which he attests to his saving work and nourishes the church body.

According to the Second Helvetic Confession, baptism is the sign of this covenant by which a person is “enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God”; while through the supper the community is continually “spiritually fed and nourished.”<sup>79</sup>

The Protestant – and especially the Reformed – interpretation of the sacraments is vastly different from the Roman Catholic understanding. Berkhof summarizes the issue like this:

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that it [the Supper] works *ex opere operato*, which means, ‘in virtue of the sacramental act itself, and not in virtue of the acts or disposition of the recipient, or of the worthiness of the minister (*ex opere operantis*)’. This means that everyone who receives the elements, be he wicked or pious, also receives the grace signified, which is conceived of as a substance contained in the elements. The sacramental rite itself conveys grace unto the recipient.<sup>80</sup>

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78. Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 458.

79. “Second Helvetic Confession,” *16th and 17th Century Reformed Confessions*, Vol. 2, ed. James T. Dennison, (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage, 2010), Vol. 2, ch. 20.

80. Berkhof, *Theology*, 655.

But we do not believe the Lord's Supper works *ex opere operato*. The Supper is not a cause of grace, "but merely an instrument in the hand of God. Its effective operation is dependent, not only on the presence, but on the activity, of faith in the recipient."<sup>81</sup> That is why unbelievers may receive the elements externally, "but do not receive the thing signified thereby."<sup>82</sup> For Berkhof, "discerning the body" has to do with understanding this sacramental reality. He says those who eat the Supper must have "a proper understanding and appreciation of the Lord's Supper, must discern the difference between it and a common meal, and must be impressed with the fact that the bread and wine are the tokens of the body and blood of Christ."<sup>83</sup>

In other words, "the Lord's Supper does not create spiritual life in a person. The Lord's Supper nourishes the spiritual life of the believer."<sup>84</sup> Therefore it falls to the church to decide who is ready to receive the Supper. Churches should withhold the Supper from several groups of persons: "unbelievers; believers who are living in unrepentant sin; believers living out of communion with fellow Christians; and children of Christian parents who have not yet professed faith in Christ."<sup>85</sup> Unless the believer has spiritual life, "the Lord's Supper will not profit him spiritually. Unless a person has made a public and credible profession of faith, the church has no biblical warrant to admit him to an ordinance designed to nurture faith."<sup>86</sup>

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81. Berkhof, *Theology*, 656.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.* And echoing Calvin, Berkhof continues, "And, finally, they must have a holy desire for spiritual growth and for ever-increasing conformity to the image of Christ."

84. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 23.

85. Shawn D. Wright, "The Reformed View of the Lord's Supper," in *The Lord's Supper*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner & Matthew R. Crawford (Nashville: B&H, 2011), [248-84], 277.

86. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 23.

This is the Reformed understanding of what happens to the bread and wine during the Eucharist. Christ, however, is not just present in the elements, but also in the entire celebration of the table. That is why “Calvin contended that in the Eucharistic meal Christ is more vividly present than in any other rite or ceremony of the church.”<sup>87</sup> But what happens to the bread and wine? Bloesch describes it this way: “An ontological change occurs, but it is in the hearts of those who believe, not in the elements... we feed upon Christ spiritually as we eat and drink of the material elements that become signs of his real presence in our midst.”<sup>88</sup> Most importantly, “The Supper is the continuing proclamation of the redemptive significance of Christ’s death; it is spiritual food and spiritual drink for the time between the times, as manna and water from the rock after the exodus and before the entrance into Canaan; in its constant repetition it spans like in the present world, until he comes.”<sup>89</sup>

Reformed theologians have always argued that there is a special spiritual benefit extended to Christians’ children and that it includes not only the spiritual blessing of being raised in proximity to the teaching of the gospel, but also inclusion in the covenant people of God. Thus, the Reformed Confessions speak with one voice against the Anabaptist teaching that baptism is reserved for those capable of responding in faith, and this on the grounds that Scripture distinguishes between the children of Christians and those of unbelievers (Acts 10:47), and therefore “belong to the covenant and people of God.”<sup>90</sup> Observing that children are “written into the covenant of God” (Acts 3:25), the Second Helvetic Confession’s article on baptism

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87. Bloesch, *The Church*, 161.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Ridderbos, *Paul: an Outline of His Theology*, 425; quoted in Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 460.

90. “Heidelberg Catechism,” *Reformed Confessions*, Vol. 2, # 74.

closes with a series of questions, “Why then should not the sign of the covenant be given to them? Why should they not be consecrated by holy baptism who are God’s peculiar people and in the church of God?”

Proponents of paedocommunion simply extend the logic of these questions to the table, holding that if infants receive the sacrament of baptism, by which they are initiated into the covenant community, then they should also be permitted the sacrament of communion, by which that covenant membership is nourished and maintained: “If children have a right to be admitted to one sacrament, they have the same right to be admitted to the other...If parents can claim for their children the promise of the covenant signified in the sacrament of baptism, they can equally claim for them the same promise signified in the sacrament of the Supper.”<sup>91</sup>

Thus, while proponents of paedocommunion readily acknowledge a distinction between the two sacraments, they do not believe that it should result in the barring of infants and most young children from the table. Baptism is a beginning ordinance, and the Lord’s Supper is a continuing. Why would we grant young children the former but not the latter?

As Presbyterians, we have to understand that the “Westminster divines had a consciousness against paedocommunion while they stated paedobaptism as a biblical practice.”<sup>92</sup> This is seen in how they explained the difference between “the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper” in the Larger Catechism Q & A 177:

Q. 177. Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper differ?  
A. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the

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91. Mark Horne, “You and Your Son and Daughter: Christ’s Communion with Young Children” (unpublished paper written to persuade people who were members of the PCA to adopt paedocommunion, September 1997), 499.

92. Jeon, *Calvin’s Covenant Theology*, 205.

Lord's supper is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.<sup>93</sup>

I believe we do “deny the sacrament,” by default or inaction, when we fail to properly shepherd our families into bringing our covenant children to the table when they are ready. To explain this position, I will call attention to the fact that infant baptism requires the parent and the Session to act. The parent, after having been shepherded and instructed by the Session, presents the child for baptism. The same should hold true for the other sacrament, the Lord's Supper. Instead of passively waiting for the family or child to make a decision about his or her faith, we need to shepherd them so that they bring their child to the table as soon as possible (through the established channels) “through faith.” We have to nurture the individual's existing faith.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 12:13 name the Lord's Supper as belonging to all those who are “one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” It is a visible presentation of how believers are united with Jesus in his death (1 Cor 1:30). When united with Jesus, “believers also have fellowship with one another as members of one body (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27).”<sup>94</sup> Here is how Calvin describes this unity:

Since he has only one body, of which he makes us all partakers, it is necessary that all of us also be made one body by such participation. The bread shown in the Sacrament represents this unity. As it is made of many grains so mixed together that one cannot be distinguished from another, so it is fitting that in the same way we should be joined and bound together by such great agreement of minds that no sort of disagreement or division may intrude.<sup>95</sup>

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93. Quoted in Jeon, *Calvin's Covenant Theology*, 205-06.

94. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 20.

95. *Inst.* 4.17.38, quoted in Jeon, *Calvin's Covenant Theology*, 200.

By prohibiting covenant children from partaking of the Lord's Supper are we not in effect (unintentionally) administering discipline on them? Have we "admitted the children, not to a membership in the church, but only to a neutral area of potential membership, a kind of limbo between the church and the world?"<sup>96</sup> Are we not denying our youngest church members, many of whom display far greater faith than the average adult, the signs and seals of their inheritance through our ambivalence toward their participation? This does not align with the covenant, so we must shepherd covenant children to the table as soon as they are ready to participate.

Covenantal theology, considered under the aspect of the Abrahamic administration, can be summed up, "I will be a God to you and to your seed" (Genesis 17:7ff). Those who are baptized as infants are passively united to Christ and therefore entitled to partake of the signs and seals of the Lord's Supper, also passively, as infants. The way children receive the signs and seals of faith is a perfect illustration of the heart of the Reformed faith: "faith is a response to the prior grace of God... An infant baptism shows that covenant children are lame and must be brought to the font. The inability that children can only illustrate is what all adult converts should confess."<sup>97</sup> To paedocommunionists, this truth is no less evident when children come to the table because "God's provision of nurture, sustenance, and life is not by our doing. We can't earn it or buy it. Our best response is an ever-deepening gratitude ("thanksgiving," or Eucharist)."<sup>98</sup> Young children, then, should be able to partake of the Lord's Supper as soon as they are able to articulate a love for Jesus.

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96. Horne, "You and Your Son and Daughter," 499.

97. Gregg Strawbridge, "Introduction," in *The Case for Covenant Communion*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Monroe: Athanasius, 2006), [1-2], 2.

98. Strawbridge, "Introduction," 2.

In paedocommunionist churches, a formal profession of faith is not required of covenant children before they partake of the Lord's Supper. The logic behind such a position is straightforward: what sense does it make to initiate an individual into the covenant community only to subsequently deprive them of the spiritual nourishment promised to the church? There is a distinction, though, between what Venema calls "soft" and "strict" paedocommunion:

Some advocates of paedocommunion favor the admission of children to the Lord's Supper only at an earlier age than is customary among many Reformed churches (middle to late adolescence). This so-called 'soft' view admits younger covenant members who have made a simple but credible profession of the Christian faith. Other advocates of paedocommunion take a "strict" position, favoring the admission of any baptized child of believing parents who is physically able to receive the Communion elements.<sup>99</sup>

We are advocating a third way, a "soft" view of paedocommunion: covenant children belong at the table, and we need to do everything possible to encourage them. Just as a child is fed and nourished by her parents until she is capable of acquiring her own nourishment, so a child born into the covenant community through baptism is fed and nourished by her parents' faith and various means of grace promised to the church (prayer, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments) until she can actively participate, by faith, in the spiritual nourishment available to all believers in the church.

#### Theology of Self-Examination

As mentioned above, one of the most common arguments against the practice of paedocommunion is Paul's exhortation to the church in Corinth: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then,

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99. Venema, *Paedocommunion*, 2-3.

and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”<sup>100</sup> Those who prevent young children from participating in the Lord’s Supper do so primarily on the grounds that a child cannot perform the requisite self-examination. Any theological consideration of paedocommunion must therefore seek to understand what Paul means by self-examination. Only then can we determine whether or not young children are able to perform the kind of introspection necessary for participation in the Lord’s Supper.

Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is generally understood to mean that if we have not confessed our sins and partake of the Lord’s Supper, we “eat and drink our own damnation.” This has led many to abstain from the Lord’s Supper or approach the table with fear and trembling. This has led others to question whether or not we will ever be worthy of receiving the sacrament. A closer examination of the passage, however, reveals that Paul is primarily encouraging the Corinthians to understand their unity in Christ as they eat from a single loaf (1 Corinthians 10:17). While different theories abound regarding the meaning of “discerning the body,”<sup>101</sup> it is generally acknowledged that Paul was addressing a growing discord between the haves and the have nots in the Corinthian congregation. As Berkhof describes it,

There were practices among the Corinthians which really made their participation in the Lord’s Supper a mockery. When a person is conscious of being estranged from the Lord or from his brethren, he has no proper place at a table which speaks of communion. It should be stated explicitly, however, that lack of the assurance of salvation need not deter anyone from coming to the table of the Lord, since the Lord’s Supper was instituted for the very purpose of strengthening faith.<sup>102</sup>

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100. 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 (ESV).

101. One school of thought holds that Sunday was a workday so many could not make it to church on time. Those with means, who had time off on Sunday, would partake of the meal without “discerning” or waiting for the rest of the body. Others hold that the division was not between the rich and the poor *per se*, but between those who belonged to a particular household and those who did not. See B. W. Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth: An Alternative Reconstruction,” *Reformed Theological Review* 37 (1978): 73-82.

102. Berkhof, *Theology*, 657.

The problem was not that believers in Corinth were failing to discern the Lord's spiritual presence, but that they were not living in community together (thus disrupting the church body). This suggests that the evangelical church has been overly preoccupied with extreme penitence. I argue for a healthy tension between self-examination and a bold approach to the throne of grace; no matter how much we self-examine, we will never be worthy.

The heart of the matter is this: we cannot self-examine alone: "we always stand 'before God' (*coram deo*) in all our actions with our conscious or unconscious motives."<sup>103</sup> Only God can see our hearts, "and sometimes he comes with friendly encouragement and at other times with 'severe mercy', but always in friendship. The relationship is always a graced relationship."<sup>104</sup> It is only because we are friends of God that we "carry on our practices of eating and drinking and 'by faith' feed on Christ to life eternal."<sup>105</sup>

Communion in the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church was an extremely somber event, in part because of its close connection to penitential systems that required the complete confession of sin in order to participate in the table. As Thomas Tentler has shown, opposition to the doctrine of complete confession was a central element of early Protestant sacramental theology.<sup>106</sup> Luther and Calvin both

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103. Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 97.

104. Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 97.

105. *Ibid.*

106. On the importance of polemic against Catholic penitential systems at the time of the Reformation, see the work of Thomas Tentler, "Postscript" in *Penitence in the Age of Reformations*, ed. Katharine Jackson Lauldi and Anne T. Thayer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 241; *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

argued that complete confession of sin was impossible,<sup>107</sup> and that any such condition for participation in the Eucharist fully undermined the consolation of justification in Christ. As John Calvin declares, “How could we, needy and bare of all good, befouled with sins, half-dead, eat the Lord’s body worthily? Rather, we shall think that we, as being poor, come to a kindly giver; as sick, to a physician; as sinners, to the Author of righteousness; finally, as dead, to him who gives us life.”<sup>108</sup>

Calvin extended his discussion of self-examination further, suggesting that participants should have “inward assurance of heart upon the salvation,” which involves: “[An] acknowledgement of inner assurance of salvation by mouth, fervent desire to imitate Christ, and sacrificial love for neighbors and others.”<sup>109</sup> Here is Calvin’s interpretation of Paul’s admonition to examine oneself before taking the Supper:

By this (as I interpret it), he meant that each man descend into himself, and ponder with himself whether he rests with inward assurance of heart upon the salvation purchased by Christ; whether he acknowledges it by confession of mouth; then, whether he aspires to the imitation of Christ with the zeal of innocence and holiness; whether, after Christ’s example, he is prepared to give himself for his brethren and to communicate himself to those with whom he shares Christ in common.<sup>110</sup>

At the same time, Calvin fought the medieval idea that one had to be in a perfect state of grace to receive the sacraments. He criticized the idea that we can

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107. Luther, “A Brief Exhortation to Confession,” *Book of Concord: The Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand et. al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 478; Calvin, *Institutes*, III.4.18. Note especially Calvin’s interpretation of Psalm 19:12, where he argues that

108. Calvin, *Institutes* IV.17.42.

109. Jeon, *Calvin’s Covenant Theology*, 201. Based on this, Jeon argues “we can assume that Calvin was against paedocommunion because children are not able to discern for themselves whether they are spiritually qualified or not.”

110. *Inst.* 4.17.40, quoted in Jeon, *Calvin’s Covenant Theology*, 201.

atone for our unworthiness ‘by contrition, confession, and satisfaction’.<sup>111</sup> He was clear that a “perfection of faith” is impossible, and in that sense, “the Lord’s Supper was ordained ‘not for the perfect, but for the weak and feeble’ to spark and stimulate ‘the feeling of faith and love.’”<sup>112</sup>

Unfortunately, however, this belief in the need for perfect confession in order to partake has influenced many Reformed churches. Historian, Dwight Bozeman, has recently argued that later and more pietistic expressions of the Reformed faith were not always faithful to this point of early Protestant beliefs. He argues that Reformed piety was often heavily influenced by Catholic penitential handbooks, and that in some cases the Catholic doctrine of complete confession was fully reinstated, only this time in “Protestant dress.”<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, in many Reformed churches today, the practice of communion can become almost exclusively a sober experience. As Robert E. Webber notes,

In more recent years I have come to question the extreme sobriety, the heavy emphasis on self-examination, and the notion that remembrance is something we do by way of thinking about a past event. I do not mean to deny that there is an element of truth to sobriety, self-examination, and remembrance. Rather, I wish, by way of contrast, to emphasize that the central key to the table is not what I do, but what God does in and through the bread and the wine. In short, God acts to proclaim his saving reality and presence to the believer. Consequently, the real meaning of remembrance is a celebration of Christ’s resurrection and presence. The service should bring us through the death to the joy and gladness of his present resurrecting power in our lives. Through the Supper, God acts in our midst.<sup>114</sup>

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111. Jeon, *Calvin’s Covenant Theology*, 202.

112. *Inst.* 4.17.42, quoted in Jeon, *Calvin’s Covenant Theology*, 202.

113. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 150-155.

114. Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 75-76.

Calvinists might disagree with the above statement. On the surface, it does not seem coherent with Reformed theology. In fact, however, it is pregnant with Reformed theology, particularly Webber's insistence that "the central key to the table is not what I do." One of the problems with extreme self-examination is that none of us will ever become "worthy" to receive the sacrament.

Indeed, Michael Horton has recently argued that this is precisely what distinguishes a properly Reformed sacramentology. "Reformed theology has always affirmed that the sacraments, though primarily a divine pledge, also call for the appropriate response of the covenant partner. Yet it is the pledge and its ratification that create that appropriate human response."<sup>115</sup> Horton contrasts this view with those Baptist theologies that conceive of the sacraments as acts of worship rather than means of grace.

The Lord's Supper belongs to those who belong to Christ, for our worthiness in approaching the Lord's Table comes wholly and exclusively from the worth of Jesus Christ. As Calvin continues, "The worthiness, which is commanded by God, consists chiefly in faith, which reposes all things in Christ, but nothing in ourselves; secondly, in love — and that very love which, though imperfect, is enough to offer to God, that he may increase it to something better."<sup>116</sup> Calvin emphasized the humble attitude needed to come to the table, because "the spiritual worthiness consists mainly 'in faith' and 'in love'."<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, "Calvin pointed out that although faith and

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115. Michael Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: WJKP, 2008), 110-113.

116. *Ibid.*

117. Jeon, *Calvin's Covenant Theology*, 202.

love are not perfect, God increases them for those who come with humble and broken hearts with trust in Christ.”<sup>118</sup>

While both advocates and opponents of paedocommunion readily agree with Calvin that our participation in the sacrament is contingent upon our participation in Christ, the point of divergence between these two positions ultimately hinges upon one’s understanding of the nature and role of faith in the life of the baptized child. According to opponents of paedocommunion, young children simply cannot display the faith necessary to participate in the Lord’s Supper. According to Calvin, faith is “a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>119</sup>

It is difficult to imagine an infant or even a young child capable of such a rational assent to the promises of God. Without denying the persuasiveness of this line of reasoning, it is important to note that Calvin was not purely an intellectualist when it comes to the doctrine of faith. In fact, Richard Muller maintains against R. T. Kendall that Calvin has a more properly voluntarist doctrine of faith, in which saving faith is seen fundamentally as a response of the heart which is “higher and deeper than understanding.”<sup>120</sup> In any case, Calvin clearly recognizes that the knowledge that attends saving faith is often limited or seriously deranged, but that this does not

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118. Cf. *Inst.* 4.17.41-42; Jeon, *Calvin’s Covenant Theology*, 202.

119. Calvin, *Institutes* III.2.7.

120. Richard A. Muller, “*Fides* and *Cognitio* in Relation to the Problem of Intellect and Will in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Seminary* 25/2 (1990): 207-224, reprinted in *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 159-173.

prevent the simple from participating in Christ, as faith is always “persuaded of what it does not grasp.”<sup>121</sup>

On this basis, Barbara Pitkin has argued that, while Calvin’s rejection of the Catholic doctrine of “implicit faith” leads him to emphasize faith’s intellectual dimensions, this polemic was not intended to deny faith’s humble and simple nature, but rather primarily indicates that faith is a mode of passively receiving the benefits of Christ’s work.<sup>122</sup> This suggests that Calvin might have made more room for childlike expressions of faith that are intellectually simple or unsophisticated.

Yet, in any case, we must acknowledge Scripture’s implication that children can evince such saving faith in the promise of Christ. As the Gospel of Mark recounts,

[The crowds] were bringing children to [Jesus] that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”<sup>123</sup>

We often judge the legitimacy of a child’s faith against the standards of an adult’s, but Jesus tells us that unless one comes as a little child, he will have no part in the Father’s kingdom. This apparently indicates that the adult’s most childlike faith is most perfect. Without committing ourselves to the paedocommunion position, we must allow such passages to inform the way we think about the faith of our covenant children. Jesus’ command, “let the children come to me,” and his association with children as the “greatest in the Kingdom,” should instill in us a sense of covenantal

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121. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.41.

122. Barbara Pitkin, *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin’s Doctrine of Faith in Its Exegetical Context* (New York: OUP, 1999), 135.

123. Mark 10:13-15; See also Mt. 19:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17.

urgency in bringing them to the table.<sup>124</sup> So even as we recognize that the benefits of Christ conveyed in the table are received only by faith, we can also acknowledge that faith may be most profound which is intellectually simple.

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124. When Jesus says, “you must come as a little child,” is faith in view? We need to be careful not to minimize the faith of a child, which will look much different than that of an adult. Are simple declarations such as “Jesus loves me,” “Jesus saved me,” “Jesus died on the cross for me,” adequate to demonstrate the faith of a child? Therefore, if s/he demonstrates that faith, does that bring them a step closer to the table? Regarding self-examination, we should not discount a child’s ability to profoundly and deeply self-examine. When I was just four years old, I had a profound sense of guilt because of my sin, and it was not until my father shared with me Romans 8:1, that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, that my fear abated. I was deeply self-examining even at that young age, perhaps more so than I do as an adult.

## CHAPTER 4

### PAEDOCOMMUNION THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Although this is a theological study, not a research paper, the subject matter makes relevant this issue's development through church history. Because of this paper's purpose, I will not offer a complete survey of paedocommunion practice, only a brief summary highlighting its significance.

In 1975, a Westminster Theological Seminary student, Christian Keidel, brought the practice of paedocommunion back to the forefront of Reformed thought with his groundbreaking and controversial article titled, "Is the Lord's Supper for Children?" He asked, "why not let baptized infants and children back into the Lord's Supper?" This question, still taboo in most PCA circles, is not nearly so strange once we note that paedocommunion seems to have been widespread in the early church (although there are some who debate this evidence.<sup>125</sup>

Reformed Christians have always had a complicated relationship with the church's tradition(s). On the one hand, we care deeply about how the church has operated in history. On the other, one of our most cherished values is "Sola Scriptura," or "Scripture Alone." Like many theological issues, paedocommunion tests our belief in Scripture's authority against man's traditions. While it is important that most in the Reformed tradition have taught against paedocommunion, our primary concern should be scriptural teachings on this subject. If Scripture causes us to change or adjust our theological positions, so be it. One of the driving values of the Reformed tradition is that we must obey God rather than men, even if those men are

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125. Christian L. Keidel, "Is the Lord's Supper for Children?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 301.

respected fathers in the faith.

We are not ahistorical people, however, and we must engage with the great theologians and historians of the past in order to properly frame the discussion. Respected thinkers have disagreed on this particular issue. For instance, John Hus, whose life hung in the balance when he made theological decisions, restored the practice of paedocommunion to his Bohemian church. John Calvin, on the other hand, was so against paedocommunion that he questioned the mental capacity of those who argued for it.

Paedocommunion's role in church history should not lead us to conclude that it should be normative in today's church. However, its existence, especially if it was widespread, and especially if it was present in the church's earliest days, should cause us to deeply reflect on the Scriptures.

While there is some debate as to whether or not the early church practiced paedocommunion, the historical evidence strongly suggests that it was the early church's undisputed practice until the twelfth century. The first Jewish Christians likely included their children in the breaking of bread, especially if they too saw similarities between the Passover and the Lord's Supper.<sup>126</sup> Again, "the Jewish Passover was celebrated within the structure of the household, and all who were old enough to be physically capable of eating the food took part in it."<sup>127</sup> Further, neither the OT nor the NT explicitly objects to the "participation of children who had not yet

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126. "It is now well established that in the early days of Christianity it was not uncommon for infants to receive Communion immediately after they were baptized." The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1908), s.v. "Communion of Children," by Patrick Morrisroe. Other church historians who believe that paedocommunion was the practice of the earliest Christian Jews are Jeremy Taylor, Eugene L. Brand, Williston Walker, RJ Rushdoony, David J. Hamilton, Charles Crawford, J.H. Srawley, James Jordan, and Peter J. Leithart. Research attributed to Tommy Lee, "The History of Paedocommunion: from the Early Church to 1500".

127. Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 247.

reached a particular stage of intellectual and religious maturity. The only limitation is physical: the child must be old enough to be able to consume the Passover food.”<sup>128</sup>

Interestingly, in the next period of church history material found in Justin Martyr and Hippolytus refers to the Lord’s Supper in connection with baptism. The two sacraments went together, and “they take it for granted that all candidates for baptism receive their first communion immediately after they have been baptized.”<sup>129</sup> The two rituals worked together to incorporate people into the body. While this is generally true, the picture of ancient paedocommunion is not completely clear. Justin Martyr also described the Lord’s Supper this way: ‘We call this food ‘Eucharist’, which no one is allowed to share unless he or she believes that the things which we teach are true, and has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins and unto a second birth, and is living as Christ commanded.’<sup>130</sup>

Keidel and others who advocate for paedocommunion call the church to return to its early practices. However, in a response to Keidel, Roger Beckwith remarked that, for many theologians, paedocommunion’s existence in the early church remains an open question: “in the remotest antiquity it appears that infant and child communion did not exist.”<sup>131</sup> Leonard J. Coppes concurs with Beckwith: “the early fathers seem to have barred infants and children from participating in the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>132</sup>

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128. Bakke, *Childhood*, 247.

129. *Ibid.*

130. Bloesch, *The Church*, 163.

131. Roger T. Beckwith, "The Age of Admission to the Lord's Supper," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1976): 127.

132. Leonard J. Coppes, *Daddy, May I Take Communion?* (Thornton: Leonard J. Coppes, 1988), 35

In 1961, Theodore G. Tappert similarly wrote that “whether children participated in the Lord's Supper with their parents during the first centuries cannot be determined with certainty for want of evidence, but it is unlikely.”<sup>133</sup> These assumptions may go too far, but Waters and Duncan are fair in stating that it is “premature to conclude that paedocommunion has any rightful claim as the ‘majority report’ of the church’s practice in the first four centuries of her history. The evidence, rather, points to a diversity of practice in this period.”<sup>134</sup>

In his article, “The History of Paedocommunion: from the Early Church until 1500,” Tommy Lee wrote:

While examining the evidence that scholars and historians from the ancient church have inadvertently left regarding this issue, one notices that this information is very ‘accidental.’ If paedocommunion was the common, ancient, non-controversial practice that I am arguing it was, then this is exactly what we would expect. The ancient sources do not discuss paedocommunion as a strange or recent phenomenon; rather, it is casually mentioned as a standard part of life.<sup>135</sup>

There is much commentary to support Lee’s thesis that paedocommunion was an assumption of early church writers. Even John Calvin, while against paedocommunion, admitted its existence in church history. One is hard pressed to find polemics against the practice of paedocommunion that derive from early church theologians.

One of the earliest sources is a section in *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* called “The Constitution of James the Brother of John, the Son of Zebedee,” which was written around 60 AD in Palestine: “And after that, let the bishop partake, then

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133. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Lord's Supper* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 43

134. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 25.

135. Tommy Lee, “The History of Paedocommunion: Until 1500,” [http://www.reformed.org/social/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/sacramentology/tl\\_paedo.html](http://www.reformed.org/social/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/sacramentology/tl_paedo.html), accessed 1 June, 2014.

the presbyters, and deacons... and then the women... the widows; then the children; and then all the people in order, with reverence and godly fear, without tumult.”<sup>136</sup>

The children are explicitly named with all other partakers in the Eucharist.

Additionally, the *Apostolic Tradition* (possibly written by Hippolytus in about AD 215 in Rome, or compiled in AD 375-400 in Egypt) describes in connection with baptism a practice that appears to be paedocommunion:

[On the Lord’s Day] They were taken by a deacon into the water—infants (for whom their parents spoke) and children first...Coming out of the water the candidates were...dried, clothed, and brought to the assembled church. There the bishop laid his hand on each with prayer...the rite continued with a celebration of the Eucharist, in which the newly baptized participated for the first time.<sup>137</sup>

In 495 A.D., historian Gennadius of Marseilles wrote: “But if they are infants, or so dull as not to take in teaching, let those who offer them answer for them, after the manner of one about to be baptized; and so, fortified by the laying on of hands and chrism, let them be admitted to the mysteries of the Eucharist.”<sup>138</sup> Note that Marseilles even mentions “infants” among those who should be admitted to the Lord’s Supper. He is explicit, and we see that paedocommunion was certainly in place by the end of the fifth century. It is significant that he mentions “infants,” because many have attempted to divide the paedocommunion debate between “infants” and

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136. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book 8, Chapter 3, quoted in Purcell, “Ancient Church,” 132.

137. Quoted in Gregg Strawbridge, “Eucharistic Participants in the Early Centuries: Biblical and Historical Evidence for Paedocommunion,” 4; wordmp3.com; <http://www.wordmp3.com/files/gs/ETS%20Paedocommunion%202005%20Strawbridge.pdf>. Accessed July 19, 2016.

138. W. Smith, S. Cheetham, John Murray, eds., *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (London, 1876), s.v. “Infant Communion,” by W. Smith. Lee points out that church historian Evagrius (536-600), references an “ancient custom” at Constantinople, “when there remained a good quantity of the holy portions of the undefiled body of Christ our God, for uncorrupted boys from among those who attended the school of the undermaster to be sent for to consume them,” J.D. Douglas, ed. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1978), s.v. ‘Evagrius’, by Donald M. Lake.

“little children.” Infants partaking of the Eucharist, as Marseilles instructed, is even more jarring than young children partaking, as intinction is in view.

It seems evident therefore that children, even infants, were expected to partake of the Lord’s Supper in the earliest centuries of the church’s history. As mentioned, baptism and the Supper went together in the Christian initiation process. The earliest mention of infant baptism comes in Tertullian’s *De baptismo* (A.D. 200-206), “a document in which the author entertains reservations about giving baptism to infants.”<sup>139</sup> After Tertullian came Cyprian, who spoke not only of infant baptism but infant communion, a custom that did not draw protest. Barely fifty years separate these two leaders, and “the initial evidence for infant baptism and infant communion shows a proximity of time (A.D. 205-250) and place (North Africa).”<sup>140</sup>

This means it is likely that children in “the second half of the second century and the beginning of the third took part in the Eucharist as soon as they were old enough to be physically capable of eating the bread and drinking the wine.”<sup>141</sup>

Cyprian also wrote extensively on the practice of paedocommunion in *Lapsed*:

Could the servant of God, who had already renounced the devil and the world, stand there and speak and renounce Christ? ... But for many their own destruction was not enough... And that nothing might be lacking to cap the crime, infants also, placed in the arms of parents or led by them, lost as little ones what they had gained at the very first beginning of their nativity. When the Day of Judgment comes, will they not say: ‘We have done nothing; we have not abandoned the Lord’s bread and cup and of our own accord hastened to profane the contaminations. The perfidy of others has ruined us’.<sup>142</sup>

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139. Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 42.

140. Jewett, *Infant Baptism*, 42.

141. Bakke, *Childhood*, 247.

142. Roy Joseph Deferrari, *The Fathers of the Church*, (New York: The Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959), 64-65.

According to these early Christian writers, it seems a given that the early church practiced paedocommunion. Perhaps Saint Augustine offers the most compelling evidence regarding paedocommunion and the early church. According to Augustine,

Those who say that infancy has nothing in it for Jesus to save, are denying that Christ is Jesus for all believing infants. Those, I repeat, who say that infancy has nothing in it for Jesus to save, are saying nothing else than that for believing infants, infants that is who have been baptized in Christ, Christ the Lord is not Jesus. After all, what is Jesus? Jesus means Savior. Jesus is the Savior. Those whom he doesn't save, having nothing to save in them, well for them he isn't Jesus. Well now, if you can tolerate the idea that Christ is not Jesus for some persons who have been baptized, then I'm not sure your faith can be recognized as according with the sound rule. Yes, they're infants, but they are his members. They're infants, but they receive his sacraments. They are infants, but they share in his table, in order to have life in themselves.<sup>143</sup>

Here, Augustine not only mentions that paedocommunion was practiced, but he also doxologically demonstrates the theological importance of infants' partaking of the Eucharist. He seems to suggest by the phrase, "in order to have life in themselves," that the spiritual nourishment that comes to adults through the Lord's Supper also comes to infants by the same means, as everyone enters the kingdom like children.

The evidence from church history until the middle ages remains consistently in favor of paedocommunion.<sup>144</sup> It is not only noteworthy that the early church practiced paedocommunion, but also that it was an assumed practice and was not debated. It was not until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that church officials began to bar children and infants from the table for fear of mishandling the

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143. Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, 11 vols. Part III-Sermons. (New Rochelle, New York: New City Press, 1992), 5:261.

144. See Fifth Century history, Dionysius, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, trans. Thomas L. Campbell (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1981) 89-91.

elements.<sup>145</sup> This is when the doctrines of transubstantiation and concomitance were developed, and all of the laity – not just infants and children– stopped taking the cup out of fear.

Paedocommunion faded in the Western church when the doctrine of transubstantiation was developed and officially codified at the Fourth Lateran Council in AD 1215.<sup>146</sup> Because of the doctrine of transubstantiation’s teaching – that “the sacramental elements of bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ,” – participation in the Lord’s Supper “became a more fearful prospect for believers and their children.”<sup>147</sup> The problem worsened throughout the medieval age when Scholastics taught that those “who are ‘in state of grace’ (*in statu gratiae*) are only worthy participants in the Lord’s Supper. In doing so, they viewed ‘in state of grace’ as a spiritual state to be ‘pure and purged of all sin’.”<sup>148</sup>

Perhaps most intriguing – especially to the Reformed theological tradition – is the fact that Jan Hus practiced paedocommunion. Hus, burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, sought to restore Communion not only to the laity, but also to infants and children.<sup>149</sup> David Holeton convincingly demonstrates how the Hussites practice of Paedocommunion not only instituted frequent communion in both the bread and the

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145. "When the chalice was finally withheld from the laity, it meant that infants no longer could receive communion at all, since the church had become accustomed to communing infants only under the form of wine. The conclusion was simple: no wine, no communion for infants. Infant communion, at least as a common practice, disappeared in the Western church during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries." David L. Percy, "Infant Communion Part I: The Historical Practice," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 7:1 (1980).

146. Venema, *Paedocommunion*, 5.

147. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

148. Jeong Koo Jeon, *Calvin and the Federal Vision: Calvin’s Covenant Theology in Light of Contemporary Discussion* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 201. Calvin later commented on this idea, saying, if their view obtained, no one would receive it except unworthily, since all to a man would be held guilty and convicted of their own imperfection," *Inst.* 4.17.42, quoted on 203.

149. Kiedel, 303.

cup, but also infant communion.<sup>150</sup> Jan Hus preached that those fighting against paedocommunion “have allowed their own will to triumph, rather than the authority of Scripture, in the matter of infant communion.”<sup>151</sup> Jan Hus’ influence on paedocommunion was most clear in 1418, when “Good King Wenceslas” faced “50,000 Hussite men in Bohemia who were willing to fight and die before they would see their infant children suspended from Holy Communion.”<sup>152</sup> The king was so alarmed that he made substantial concessions to the Hussites.

The norm of admitting young children, and even infants, continued unhindered until the twelfth century when the Roman Catholic Church ended this practice due to spiritual concerns surrounding the Mass. Infants and children were forbidden from the table because of the doctrines of transubstantiation and concomitance. Fear that infants “and children might spill the wine and thereby profane the actual body and blood of the Lord appears to have been the primary reason for this discontinuance.”<sup>153</sup>

The question now arises: were Roman Catholics and Reformers wrong to exclude children from the table? John Calvin does not believe so; he accepted this early practice stating, “This permission was indeed commonly given in the ancient church.”<sup>154</sup> Elsewhere, however, Calvin argues vociferously against paedocommunion:

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150. Holeyton, “The Communion of Infants and Hussitism,” 207-225; and Holeyton, “The Communion of Infants: The Basel Years,” 15-40.

151. *Ibid.*, 216.

152. Purcell, “Ancient Church,” 131.

153. Christian L. Keidel, “Is the Lord’s Supper for Children?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 302.

154. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.13.52.

The Supper is intended for those of riper years, who, having passed...infancy, are fit to bear solid food.... They cannot partake worthily without being able duly to discern the sanctity of the Lord's body. Why should we stretch out poison instead of vivifying food to our young children?... Circumcision, which as is well known corresponds to our Baptism, was intended for infants. But the Passover for which the Supper is substituted...was duly eaten only by those who were of an age sufficient to ask the meaning of it (Exod. 12:26). Had these men the least particle of soundness in their brain, would they thus be blind as to a matter so very clear and obvious?<sup>155</sup>

Calvin argued that there are two spiritual qualifications for taking the Lord's Supper: faith and love. He saw the "sacred bread of the Lord's Supper" as "spiritual food," only "healthful for pious worshippers of God."<sup>156</sup> Because of this, Calvin said that taking the Supper "without any spark of faith, without any zeal for love" "is from the people who do not discern the body of the Lord in which Paul warned in 1 Cor 11:27-29." Calvin goes on:

We see that this sacred bread of the Lord's Supper is spiritual food, as sweet and delicate as it is healthful for pious worshippers of God, who, in tasting it, feel that Christ is their life, whom it moves to thanksgiving, for whom it is an exhortation to mutual love among themselves. On the other hand, it is turned into a deadly poison for all those whose faith it does not nourish and strengthen, and whom it does not arouse to thanksgiving and to love. Physical food, when it comes into a stomach occupied by evil humors, and is itself also vitiated and corrupted, harms rather than nourishes.<sup>157</sup>

It is safe to conclude that, although paedocommunion seems to have existed in various ages of the church, its practice came to a screeching halt in the Calvinistic tradition. Waters and Duncan are insistent on this point:

With rare exception, paedocommunion has no historical precedent within the Reformed tradition... The sixteenth century Reformers and their heirs were well aware of the practice of paedocommunion and decidedly rejected it on biblical grounds. No historical Reformed confession espouses

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155. Calvin, *Inst.* IV.16.30.

156. Jeon, *Calvin's Covenant Theology*, 200.

157. Calvin, *Institutes* IV.17.40, quoted in Jeon, *Calvin's Covenant Theology*, 200.

paedocommunion, and many Reformed confessions expressly preclude the practice.<sup>158</sup>

This is especially clear in the Heidelberg Catechism, which answers the question, “for whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted?” like this: “For those who are truly displeased with themselves for their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmity is covered by his passion and death; who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life.”<sup>159</sup> This means the Lord’s Supper was not instituted for everyone, “nor even for all those who have a place in the visible Church of Christ.”<sup>160</sup> Rather, it is only for those “who earnestly repent of their sins, trust that these have been covered by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and are desirous to increase their faith, and to grow in true holiness of life.”<sup>161</sup>

## CHAPTER 5

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

#### Sloth

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158. Waters & Duncan, “Introduction,” 25.

159. Quoted in Berkhof, *Theology*, 656.

160. *Ibid.*

161. *Ibid.*

Before, addressing the practical implications of this study, I wish to address what I see as a disease plaguing theological reflection in today's churches, and how that disease relates to the topic of children and the table.

The contemporary definition of sloth is usually equated with laziness. However, a more historical definition of slothfulness is necessary to fully comprehend the weight of this "deadly" sin. Reggie Kidd, dean of chapel at Reformed Theological Seminary, puts it this way, "slothfulness means 'I don't care.'"<sup>162</sup> This ambivalent attitude is rampant among younger generations in the church and seems to be the typical response when I mention paedocommunion among other important theological issues.<sup>163</sup> In my opinion, slothfulness leads to depression, despair, and hopelessness.

Those struggling with sloth lack meaning and purpose in their lives, and the result is laziness. They "experience a general lethargy or lack of interest in formulating and pursuing long-term goals, or in severe cases, even short-term ones."<sup>164</sup> According to Solomon Schimmel, the sin of sloth has two components: *acedia*, which means a lack of caring, an indifference to things of God, and *tristitia*, meaning sadness and sorrow.<sup>165</sup> He notes that Christians traditionally hold Judas

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162. Reggie Kidd, "The Sacred Actions of Christian Worship," (Jacksonville: Institute for Worship Studies, 2006).

163. On the other hand, it is widely accepted that the generational sin, of those whom Tom Brokaw termed the "greatest generation," the builder generation, was, and is, pride. Perhaps this was due to the battles they had to face in the air, the land, and the sea. Perhaps this was due to the "pride" they took in re-building our great nation after the World War II had been won. Imagine the pride at "D-Day" when the allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy and broke the back of Adolf Hitler. Consider the pride at "V-Day" when the war was over and the powers of darkness had been defeated. But pride can also be very sinful. Unlike sloth, however, the proper channeling of pride at least has an upside to it.

164. Solomon Schimmel, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 191.

165. *Ibid.*, 193.

Iscariot's suicide as a greater sin than even his betrayal of Jesus because it "signaled his despair at repenting and returning to God."<sup>166</sup>

Perhaps what Schimmel calls "spiritual aridity" or "dryness" is a precursor to sloth and a more accurate depiction of many in the church. People who are "dry" have difficulty praying and finding meaning in worship. This results in feeling distant from God. However, those who suffer from spiritual dryness many times "yearn for spiritual reinvigoration."<sup>167</sup>

The opposite of sloth is zeal and joy in loving service to God.<sup>168</sup> Slothful individuals avoid worship practices requiring work and thought and are interested in instant, as opposed to delayed gratification. In the contemporary church, we have catered to this yearning for immediacy in worship and ministry. However, a long view is a more accurate reflection of a Biblical approach to the Reformed tradition. Terms such as "Eucharistic life," "cosmic story," "transcendence of God," along with study of John Calvin's theological, and often dialectical, teachings, and a cogent theology of the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper, take a lifetime to unpack and are discarded in favor of instant gratification. Instead, our generation opts for comfort, traditionalism, and even shallowness in worship and ministry.

Many people in the church suffer from sloth and don't realize it. They are depressed, discontent, edgy, irritable, tired, uninspired, and hopeless. Although they may appear happy, they have lost their spiritual zeal, or in many ways, their first love.

Sloth is manifested in the young teenage boy dressed in black with a downcast face and fleeting eyes communicating that he is ambivalent about life. He sees no

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166. Ibid.

167. Ibid.

168. Schimmel, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 193.

point, direction, vision, or excitement. Sloth is evident in the baby boomer who once showed zeal and love for the ministry but now rests on her past accomplishments.

Sloth's effects on ministry are worthy of several volumes of intense research and beyond this paper's scope. However, consider the impact of this sin on our view of children and the table.

The PCA *Book of Church Order* requires elders to inquire about family devotions. It is "assumed" that fathers have family devotions. The purpose of the inquisition is to be sure the father is on the right track and not to inquire whether or not he is even on the track. The fact that many practicing Christian families do not participate in family worship is evidence of sloth.

Sloth has notable consequences on our children's view of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Why should they strive to come to the table when they perceive that we do not care?<sup>169</sup> Sloth leads to passivity in worship and a lack of interest in where we came from. Sloth implies indifference to the Reformers and the early church, as they just want a few good songs and a "filling" sermon. These Christians certainly don't care (much) about paedocommunion.

When our communion services are dull, uncreative, ahistorical, barely even memorial (not even "bare memorialism"), and certainly not something we would describe as "spiritual nourishment," then we need to start asking better questions about worship.

For instance, how do our children perceive the way we receive communion? Is it important for us to teach them the history behind the Reformation and the resulting changes? Why do we demonstrate extreme sobriety when receiving the

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169. We need to proceed carefully when we talk about "bringing children to faith in Jesus" since we believe that it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates us. The means by which people are saved is through the preaching of the Word—both on Sundays and through the week.

elements? Do our children know the Calvinistic reformed position on the “spiritual presence of Christ”? What does the Word say about the way we take communion?

Most of us would identify the Lord’s Supper as a time to search our hearts, confess our sins, resolve conflicts, and commit to being a better person. We then remember what Christ did for us on the Cross. In many ways, our “celebrations” of the Lord’s Supper become primarily upper room re-enactments and a memorial-only approach. This is only one of several Biblical modes for receiving the sacrament, but it seems to be the evangelical church’s primary mode of reception.

Marva Dawn refers throughout her writings and lectures to “dialectical tensions. In short, a dialectical tension refers to the truthfulness of two opposite ideas.<sup>170</sup> For instance, it is true that we should observe the Lord’s Supper with a great deal of sobriety. However, it is also true that we should come to the table celebrating.

Could it also be true that we should “fence” some children from the table, but also include all covenant children who have come to faith (in spite of our questions regarding their ability to self-examine and/or understand the sacrament)? Could the trouble be that we have strived for balance when, instead, we should hold valued opposites in tension?

When we focus only on one extreme of a dialectical pole—in this case, when we only give our people the opportunity for introspective and penitential memorialism at the Lord’s Supper and a *de facto* exclusion of children—we lose the tension of the fullness of Biblical worship. In effect, we teach our children only half of the story –

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170. Reformed people may struggle with this concept. Dialectical tension does not have in view a kind of pluralism. Instead, a dialectical tension could be applied, for instance, to the transcendence and immanence of God. God is wholly transcendent and wholly immanent. In our finite minds, we cannot understand that. We simply affirm, through the revealed Word of God, that it is true. The Father is 100 percent God. The Son is 100 percent God. The Holy Spirit is 100 percent God. Again, dialectic tension. I do believe that dialectic tension is applicable and observable in more than just the obvious mysteries of God. I believe we see polar opposites that somehow complement one another in many areas of theology (Deut. 29:29 is in view).

“I want our children and grandchildren to do it better than we did.”<sup>171</sup> This will happen as we shed sloth, increase our depth of theological understanding, and move toward a Biblical and historical theology of worship...including at the table.

Under my church’s policy few children come before the Session to be approved to take communion. Even though we do offer a way for children to come to the table, it is not happening on a large scale, and it is sadly perceived that our children are barred from the table. This is due to several causes.

First, we have failed to set up a good system for elders to properly shepherd a large flock, not only in regard to children and the table, but also in other aspects of spiritual life. The lack of children coming to the table is therefore symptomatic of a larger problem.

Second, parents seem content to wait until the children come of age (normally the pre-teen years) before leading them to the table. There has been a growing movement in the church to have a family blessing party when children turn thirteen. I have been invited to several of these events, and they are extremely meaningful. However, I would hope the child had already partaken of the sacraments. As I have raised four young children, and helped raise covenant children in our church, I believe that when the child is six or seven years old parents should begin to think seriously about asking Session members to interview their children for admission to the Lord’s Table. I hesitate to set a fixed age, but I believe it will help us to “think differently” and more urgently about this problem.<sup>172</sup>

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171. Rev. Dr. Charles F. Betters, “Leaving a Spiritual Legacy” (sermon series preached at GRPC in 2012).

172. In my opinion, by five years old, it is generally accepted that a person has taken on their life-long personality and is basically “who they are going to be.” By five years old, a child can distinguish between right and wrong (many times better than adults) and should be able to articulate and understand a child-like version of our basic faith. At five years old, most of them should be able to adequately examine their hearts under a grace filled covenant.

Third, children do not sense an urgency or desire from their parents to come to the table.<sup>173</sup> I believe this is due to slothfulness, lack of understanding of covenantal theology, and a lack of biblical and historical creativity at the table.

When we fail to shepherd our children to quickly come to the table, we fail to take advantage of their formative years and the childlike faith they possess. I hope my recommendations will influence the PCA majority position, welcoming a third way of approaching children and the table.

### A Third Way

As the above considerations have shown, there are strong biblical and historical reasons for theologically reflecting on the position of administering the Lord's Supper to young children, and even baptized infants, which is why the PCA addressed this matter with both majority and minority positions. The majority opinion has been well documented in PCA circles. But the minority position remains, and some struggle with the theological issues inherent to an anti-paedocommunion position. With respect to this tension, I believe that there is a third way that allows us to remain true to the PCA's normative position on paedocommunion while also being more proactive in admitting covenant children to the table of the Lord, thus fulfilling Jesus' command concerning the "little ones".

We have to remember that "Supper is a privilege that all church members may exercise, or whether it is a privilege that only some church members may exercise."<sup>174</sup> It is one thing, however, to possess a privilege and another to exercise it. While we may affirm "that admission to the Lord's Supper is a privilege in the possession of covenant children, this privilege is not theirs to exercise until they meet the requisite

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174. Waters & Duncan, "Introduction," 22.

intellectual and spiritual qualifications of 1 Corinthians 11.”<sup>175</sup> It is the responsibility of church members to help children make a profession of faith, “and so voluntarily claim all the privileges that attend their membership.”<sup>176</sup>

I believe that the PCA majority position fits wonderfully with the results of my own theology. We should continue to fence the table, but it should be exceptional and not normative for covenant children to pass on the elements. If parents are properly training their children in catechism and theology and leading meaningful family devotions, and if elders are proactively inquiring and shepherding the flock through home visits and prayer and aggressively encouraging the children to come to the table, then I believe we can enjoy the benefits of both positions.

Where do we go from here? How do we pass down a more complete theology of the Lord’s Supper to our children? How do we present a theology that will encourage children to desire the table? I have already concluded that elders need to take an active, and even aggressive, role in shepherding children to the table. However, there are practical considerations for helping us to enjoy a more Biblical approach to the Lord’s Supper. We need to show our children by example what it means to be a people who find the elements spiritually nourishing. The following are some principles to help us consider the place of Lord’s Supper in the Reformed church and the theology that we are passing down to our children.

First, we should continue to emphasize preparing our hearts before the Lord, confessing all known sin, and seeking to resolve any conflicts with others. 1 Corinthians 11: 27-32 offers a sobering picture for those who do not prepare their hearts. We need to prepare our hearts for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

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175. Ibid.

176. Ibid., 22.

Second, after we have confessed our sins, it is time for a celebration. This is not a somber funeral procession, but rather a celebration of what Christ did for us. When we partake of the cup and the bread we are resurrected with Him. We should sing songs of celebration as we take part in the Lord's Supper. Yes, there will be times for a more somber rendering of the Lord's Supper, but this should be the exception, not the norm.

Third, we need to re-examine the frequency of communion. I firmly believe that, if practiced in the above format, there will be a desire from both clergy and laity for a more frequent communion.<sup>177</sup> While John Calvin did not believe that Word preached was more effective due to weekly communion or that God's command was broken by monthly communion, it is clear from his writing that he preferred weekly communion.<sup>178</sup> Calvin's main desire was to return to the liturgy of the ancient church. He appealed to Acts, the congregation of Corinth, the canons of Anacletus and Calixtus, and the decisions of the Councils of Antioch and Toledo.<sup>179</sup> Breaking bread was the primary reason the early church gathered (Acts 2:42).<sup>180</sup>

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177. The Directory of Public Worship (1645) does not address the frequency of Communion other than to state that it is at the discretion of the local Session. Berkhoff devotes 14 pages to a theology of Communion in his *Systematic Theology* and does not mention weekly communion. Charles Hodge devotes over 80 pages to Communion in his *Systematic Theology* and does not mention weekly communion.

178. DG Hart and John Muether write: "Infrequent communion, Calvin claimed, was a superstitious horror, "a most evident contrivance of the devil," and he considered it among the worst of the many abuses of worship in medieval Catholicism. For Calvin, weekly communion was no less important than other reforms he sought, such as the use of the cup by the laity and worship in the language of the vernacular." In *Ordained Servant* 6, no. 4 (1997): 97. On the other hand, Calvin was certainly willing to hold fast to his theological positions and convictions regarding the Lord's Supper as evidenced by his unwillingness to be swayed on fencing, spiritual presence, and issues of efficacy. Therefore, we can only deduce so much from Calvin's desire for frequent communion.

179. Calvin, *Institutes* IV.4.27.

180. At the same time, there are benefits of less-frequent communion. That is why the frequency needs to be *reexamined*. Donald Bloesch suggests a monthly communion for the following reasons: "Because of the Pauline admonition to examine oneself carefully before partaking of Holy Communion, my recommendation is that Communion be celebrated at least but ordinarily not more than once a month. If this sacred meal becomes too familiar, we begin to lose sight of the fact that it is

Fourth, drawing upon Robert Webber's<sup>181</sup> work, we might consider the Lord's Supper in terms of the four descriptions of the sacrament in Scripture: (1) the breaking of bread, (2) the Lord's Supper, (3) communion, and (4) Eucharist. As the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42-46), the sacrament could be celebrated more intimately in ways reminiscent of the gathering of believers in the early church. As the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11), the sacrament could be a somber occasion in which believers meditate upon the significance of Christ's death and commit themselves to the self-examination commanded by Paul. As communion (1 Cor. 10:16, 20), the sacrament could be addressed in terms of the union between Christ and his Church. This would be an excellent reinforcement of Reformed theology, as such union is not something that we accomplish, but that God does in and for us. As Eucharist (thanksgiving),<sup>182</sup> the sacrament would be an occasion for celebration as we consider what God has done for us and thank Him for Christ Jesus.

### Conclusion

By not leading children to come quickly to faith, and then to the Lord's Table, we are effectively barring them from the table. In doing so, are we not insinuating that their love for Jesus is somehow insincere? Can we really argue that a child needs something other than simple childlike faith in Jesus Christ in order to receive the Lord's Supper?

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a special occasion in the life of the church, and it is likely that we will ignore the injunction to examine ourselves and repent of all sin before communing," Bloesch, *The Church*, 164.

181. Webber, *Worship is a Verb*, 77

182. "[I]f you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving (eucharistia) when he does not know what you are saying?" (1 Corinthians 14:16; [ESV]).

I believe the best way to move forward is through intense elder shepherding that leads families in every spiritual discipline, including the table of the Lord. When our children see the spiritual growth and nourishment that comes from the table, they will desire it for themselves. We have a wonderful opportunity at GRPC to build on the rich tradition of Word and worship (music). We have built mature disciples at Glasgow through an unapologetic preaching of the Word; however, we are incomplete without also striving toward sacramental and covenantal living. A faithful church is one that places high priority on the Word and the resulting spirituality. This is the church we want to pass down to our children and their children. In closing, consider Jesus' words in Matthew 18:6: "But if anyone who causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone tied around his neck and to be drowned into the depths of the sea."

While I am not a proponent of paedocommunion, I am convinced that we are delinquent in this area. Many times the theological solution is right in front of us, but it is not obvious. In this case, the correct path lies in the hard and rewarding work of raising young children to come quickly to the Lord, and then the Lord's Table. Scripture demonstrates that young children partook of the Passover, and it is also likely that young children in the early church came to the Lord's Table. I am not, however, convinced that vague proof from Scripture, or even from the early church, should be enough to make us embrace a blanket approach to paedocommunion. Indeed, I believe that in our own theological and practical context, young children should not necessarily come to the Lord's Table. Why not? Isn't this conclusion woefully inconsistent with the Scriptural and historical proof for paedocommunion that I have provided?

On one hand I admit that Scripture and early church history seem to support some form of paedocommunion, but on the other hand, I am not advocating for paedocommunion. The fact is that families and churches have not been effective in bringing children quickly to the table, and as a result, such children should not come to the table. If it is an issue of discernment, there is no reason a child of three or four could not be taught to discern, even self-examine, and then be shepherded by her parents and elders to come quickly to the table. Could it be that early church children were so accustomed to the things of the Lord that they never remembered a time when they didn't have faith in the finished work of Jesus? Surely such children would have been brought to the Lord's Table for as "long as they could remember," since they would have had faith for as "long as they could remember." It is difficult for us to appreciate how different today's Christian family is from an Old Testament family or a Christian family in the early church. Whereas paedocommunion was once the natural by-product of spiritual training in the home and the accompanying faith of the child, it has now become a challenge.

It may seem as though I am saying two different things: that I am not an advocate for paedocommunion, but that I believe that young children should be welcomed at the Lord's Table. I am not saying two things, but am instead suggesting a third way. With the majority position of the PCA, I remain convinced that children must evince a saving faith in Christ in order to participate in the Lord's Supper. But by the grace of Jesus Christ and the godly leadership of our elders and parents, let us seek to bring the little ones to a place of faith as soon as possible, and from there, to a place at the Lord's Table.

Covenant children belong at the table, and it is the responsibility of church members and elders to help shepherd them to their rightful place among God's

people. The Lord's Supper is an essential part of the Christian life, and it is not healthy for covenant children to stay away for too long. We are being slothful if we are not working toward seeing our covenant children join us at the table. That is the role God has given us in their lives as their (older) brothers and sisters in Christ. Can children show themselves approved? If "putting yourself to the proof" is a manner of life, then perhaps we can conclude: "Children who are within the church by baptism, and are responsive to their parents, are continually "showing themselves approved." when parents and elders work together to foster covenantal urgency.<sup>183</sup>

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183. Peter J. Leithart, "A Response to 'I Corinthians 11:17-34: The Lord's Supper'," 303; quoted in Jeon, *Calvin's Covenant Theology*, 203.

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