

# The Sacraments: A Reformed Perspective

## Chapter 10: Paedocommunion

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### Introduction

Any study of the Lord's supper would not be complete without considering the question: Who are the proper recipients of communion? As one aspect of this question, we will consider the issue of paedocommunion. The term paedocommunion refers to the teaching that infants and toddlers of believing parents who are members of the church are entitled to receive the elements of the Lord's supper. A consideration of this doctrine is important for a number of reasons:

First, paedocommunion is a repudiation of the teachings of all the Protestant Reformers as well as all the Reformed symbols regarding the proper recipients of communion. As Reformed Presbyterians, we adhere wholeheartedly to the Westminster Standards which are explicitly anti-paedocommunion (see Confession of Faith, 29:1, 3, 7, 8; Shorter Catechism, Q 91, 96, 97; Larger Catechism Q 170, 171, 172, 174, 175, 177). The standard Reformed position (briefly stated) is that the elements of the Lord Supper are only to be received by church members who are old enough to examine themselves and receive the elements by faith.

Second, the teaching of paedocommunion has spread rapidly throughout both Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed circles in the last thirty years. If paedocommunion is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed Standards (which it clearly is), then Reformed believers need to understand the arguments for paedocommunion and refute them effectively based on proper biblical interpretation of Scripture (i.e., the historical-grammatical-theological method).

Third, the arguments for paedocommunion are often attractive to people who hold to covenant theology yet are untrained in biblical hermeneutics (i.e. the science of interpretation), theology and church history.

Fourth, the doctrine of paedocommunion often leads to or is connected with other false and dangerous teachings (e.g., sacramentalism [i.e., the sacraments operate automatically or magically, *ex opere operato*], mysticism [e.g., the "creative" hermeneutics of James Jordan and the rejection of Reformed worship in favor of Eastern Orthodox concepts of worship] and the rejection of the biblical distinction between the invisible and visible church, etc.)

### The Paedocommunionist Argument

In order to refute the paedocommunionist teaching one must first set forth the basic arguments for admitting infants and toddlers to the Lord's supper. (The presentation of their basic arguments must be fair and given without unnecessary *ad hominem* attacks or without setting up straw men that are easily destroyed.) Then, once the paedocommunionist position is articulated and understood, it will be systematically refuted while setting forth the biblical position.

The basic arguments in favor of paedocommunion are simple, straightforward and (if one accepts the paedocommunist's fallacious presuppositions) logical. It is the simplicity of the

paedocommunionist argument coupled with a woeful lack of theological knowledge in most Reformed churches today which accounts for the popularity of this doctrine.

The paedocommunionist argument is rooted in their application of covenant theology to the Lord's supper. Regarding infant baptism, all Reformed believers are in agreement that baptism corresponds to and replaces circumcision. That is why the infants of believers are obligated to receive the sign and seal of baptism. The paedocommunionists apply similar reasoning to the Lord's supper. They point out that the Lord's supper corresponds to and replaces the Old Covenant Passover. Since (we are told) whole covenant families, including infants and toddlers, participated in the Passover meal, should not infants and toddlers also be permitted to partake of the communion meal? The connection between Passover and the Lord's supper is the heart of the paedocommunionist doctrine. This argument is supported by other assertions. It is argued that 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, which discusses the need for participants to discern the Lord's body (which is a common proof text against infants and toddlers participating in communion), is directed to adults not children. While adults need to examine themselves in order to avoid the gross abuses of the Lord's table that were occurring at Corinth, infants are incapable of examining themselves and thus the apostle's admonition does not apply to them. Similarly, while a credible profession of faith is required of adults before baptism, it obviously is not required of covenant children. Further, an appeal is often made to church history. It is asserted (erroneously)<sup>1</sup> that for at least the first thousand years of its existence the new covenant church practiced paedocommunion.<sup>2</sup>

While the central arguments in favor of paedocommunion appeal to many people, a careful examination of these arguments reveals a number of serious problems that disprove the overall theory.

## The Egyptian Passover and Progressive Revelation

The main argument in favor of paedocommunion is founded upon the connection of the Lord's supper to the original Egyptian Passover. The Passover in Egypt spoke of "a lamb for a household" (Ex. 12:3), or two households if more people are needed to consume the whole lamb (Ex. 12:4). The account says, "Then they shall eat the flesh on that night" (Ex. 12:8). The "they" probably refers back to "the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel" in verse 6. That children were present is obvious from the term "household" and from verse 26 where the children (literally "sons") are to ask the heads of the household, "What do you mean by this service?" (Ex. 12:26). Is this not conclusive proof that infants and toddlers should partake of the Lord's supper since they were present at the Passover? No, it is not. We will see that it proves nothing of the sort. There are a number of reasons why we must reject paedocommunionist assertions regarding the Passover.

An examination of the Bible shows that any attempt to form a one-to-one correspondence between the original Egyptian Passover and the Lord's supper is overly simplistic and simply

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<sup>1</sup> Paedocommunion was practiced from the third to the eighth centuries. There is no evidence that it was practiced before that time. Most Eastern Orthodox churches still practice paedocommunion. Given the fact that by the third century sacramentalism was already deeply entrenched in many churches and the fact that all Reformed theologians teach that the means of grace require faith and a knowledgeable response to the signs to be efficacious, the paedocommunionist's appeal to church history is rather puzzling.

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Daddy, Why Was I Excommunicated?* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1992). See also Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1973), 44f, 752f, 794.

wrong. The Lord's supper does not merely replace the original Exodus Passover, but also *all* the Old Testament sacrificial meals. The original Passover was a continuation of a larger sacramental system that predated it. It also went through clarifications and additions as revelation progressed. In order to prove infant and toddler communion, one must examine the Exodus Passover within its overall biblical context. Consideration must also be given to the Levitical Passover (i.e. the permanent Passover) which was in effect for centuries and was the Passover practiced during the life of Jesus. Consider the following germane sections of Scripture.

(1) In Exodus 12:43-49 those who can and cannot participate in the Passover meal are identified. The passage says that no uncircumcised person, no foreigners, servants or sojourners are to participate. However, circumcised servants and strangers who dwell with the covenant people that want to keep the Passover and who submit to circumcision are permitted.

(2) In Exodus 23:14-19; 34:18-25 as well as Deuteronomy 16:1-8 we learn that a number of the elements of the original Passover were unique and applied only to the original Egyptian Passover. First of all, the Egyptian Passover was an event that took place in the home (i.e. locally). God changed the location of this feast in subsequent passages to the future temple complex (i.e. "the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide"). Craigie writes, "The original Passover in Egypt had been performed by families in their homes; the blood sprinkled on the lintel and door posts had provided protection from the destructive wrath of the Lord (see Exod. 12:21-27). The continuing celebration and commemoration of the Passover, however, was to be enacted in one place, where the sanctuary of the Lord was located; the change from the original event to the commemoration of that event may be significant. In Egypt, the Israelites had been a number of families under the suzerainty of a worldly power. After the Exodus and forming the covenant at Sinai, Israel became a single nation, the family of God; thus the Passover became the act, symbolically speaking, of the one large family of God, celebrated in one place where the sanctuary or house of God was located."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as redemptive history progressed, a number of things that fathers formerly did as part of family worship (such as offering sacrifice) were later restricted to a specialized priesthood. Therefore, those who argue that fathers should celebrate the Lord's supper in their own families or that fathers should distribute the elements to their infants and toddlers are being unscriptural.

Next, the command to appear before the Lord (i.e. make a pilgrimage to the central sanctuary) applied only to male members of the nation. This command likely applied to all those 20 years of age who had been included in the census (cf. Num. 1:3) as well as boys who had been successfully catechized (Prov. 22:6) and were at least 12 to 13 years of age (Luke. 2:41). What this requirement teaches us is that either: (a) The circumstances of the original Egyptian Passover were extraordinary and did not continue in the permanent Passover, or (b) perhaps women, girls and uncatechized boys did not participate in the original Passover meal. The original Passover narrative does not explicitly specify that women, girls and young boys participated in the meal. Such a view has always been inferred from the term "household" or simply assumed. Interpreters who believe that females and young boys did not eat the bitter herbs and roasted lamb often appeal to the question—"What do you mean by this service?" (Ex.12:26)—as evidence that small children were observers, rather than direct recipients of the roasted lamb. "Exodus 12:26 does not give evidence that the child himself partook...The question, 'What mean ye by this service?' would seem to indicate that the *child* [asking this question of the manducators] was *not* one of the *partakers*....The absence of explicit command in connection with the Passover, is more likely to support the fact that the [*children*] were *not*

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<sup>3</sup> P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 242.

*included....*”<sup>4</sup> This interpretation has support from Joshua 4:6 where almost identical language is used to describe children inquiring about an act in which they did not participate. “That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What mean ye by these stones?’” The act is the carrying of stones out of the river Jordan to set up a memorial in the Promised Land. The stones were carried by a man from each tribe (Josh. 4:4-5; cf. Isa. 3:15; Ezek. 18:2; Ac. 21:13).

(3) In Numbers 9:6-12 we read how God made special provisions for men who were defiled (e.g., by touching a corpse) or away on a long journey (v. 10) during the time of Passover to keep the Passover at a separate time. Instead of celebrating the Passover at its regular time in the first month (*Abib*), these men could celebrate it in the second month (*Ziv*). What is interesting regarding this divinely inspired change is that it would have had little or no effect upon women who were ritually unclean because of menstruation. Not only does the account only mention men who were unclean, it completely ignores the fact that at any given time roughly 25% of women were unclean because of their menstrual period. “Additionally, because Israel observed a lunar month, the solution that God gave to Moses would have been absolutely no relief for menstruating women. They would have been unclean on the fourteenth of the following month as well.”<sup>5</sup> Further, it is extremely unlikely that ritually defiled women would even be allowed to prepare and serve the Passover meal to their families.

(4) Additional information is given regarding the Passover in 2 Chronicles 30. In this chapter, which describes a continuing reformation that is taking place under Hezekiah, we learn that: (a) God’s provision for delaying the Passover for a month because of special circumstances is used, in this case, to delay the Passover for the whole nation; and (b) The Passover is not a mindless ritual but is to be practiced with repentant hearts. The people are not to be like their fathers and brethren who sinned against God (v. 7), nor are they to be stiff-necked (v. 8, i.e. unrepentant), but are to yield themselves to Jehovah (v. 8, i.e. they are to submit themselves to God’s authority). Faith in God and His Word, which leads to repentance, is a prerequisite for participation in the Passover.

(5) Another passage that sheds light on the Passover is found in Luke 2: “And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast” (vs. 40-43). Here we learn that although women were not required to attend the feast, they often accompanied their husbands on the journey. Gill writes, “Joseph was obliged to go three times a year, as were all males in Israel, at the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, Deut. XVI.16. The first of these is expressed here, *at the feast of the Passover*; but the women were not obliged to go up: for so it is said by the Jews [T. Hieros. Kiddushin, fol. 61.3.]...the Passover of women is voluntary.”<sup>6</sup>

We also learn from this chapter of Scripture that Jesus attended the Feast. “And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast” (v. 42). The context indicated that our Lord had reached an age when his parents understood that he had the wisdom, grace and ability to partake of the Passover (see vs. 40, 46-47). “At the age of

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<sup>4</sup> Morton Smith, *Systematic Theology* (Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), p. 686-691, as quoted in Frances Nigel Lee, *Paedocommunionism Verses Protestantism: How Trendy Theologizers Have Retreated from the Reformation* (unpublished paper).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Bacon, “What Mean Ye?” in *The Blue Banner* (Rowlett, TX: First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, 1996), [http://www.fpcr.org/blue\\_banner\\_articles/meanye4.htm](http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/meanye4.htm), sec. 4, 3.

<sup>6</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London, 1809), 532.

twelve a young Jew became ‘a son of the Law,’ and began to keep its enactments respecting feasts, fasts, and the like. The mention of the age implies that since the Presentation Jesus had not been up to Jerusalem”<sup>7</sup> David A. Bass writes,

That this was Jesus’ first trip to Passover is manifest from the context, and in this most commentators agree. J. Jeremias, in his landmark *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, throws some valuable light on this custom. He says, “...we may conclude (from Luke 2:41) that it was custom among people from a distance to bring their children when they reached twelve years of age” (p. 76). Before twelve years of age, they remained at home. The Talmud records a priest named Joseph (not the NT Joseph of the Holy Family) as full of excessive zeal for bringing his entire *oikos* (household), children and all, to the second Passover, held one month later in provision for those who were unclean at the first or otherwise unable to attend it (he would not have dared to have brought them to the Passover in the month of Abib). The Pesshita records that he was turned back (M.Pes.IX) that he might not set a precedent for such behavior! If, indeed, the Passover was instituted for the whole family-- women and children, as the paedocommunionists maintain--how Joseph and Mary and the pious Jews were misguided! But, it seems, the paedocommunionists are now here to set the test and tradition straight.<sup>8</sup>

Hendriksen writes, “Jewish sources reveal no unanimity with respect to the exact age when a boy became a ‘bar mitzvah’ (son of the law), that is, when he attained the age of maturity and responsibility with respect to the keeping of God’s commandments. The prevailing opinion may have been that at the age of 13 a boy should fully shoulder that responsibility but that in order to become prepared to do this it would be wise for the parents to take him along to the temple even earlier. We know at least that when Jesus became 12 years of age Joseph and Mary took him along to Jerusalem in order to attend the Passover festival. Though it is not stated in so many words that this was the first time he went along, is not this a reasonable inference?”<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, the Hebrew Talmud (an ancient [c. 400 B.C. to A.D. 200] collection of rabbinical comments upon the Old Testament) says that males had their most intensive catechization at age 12 because they were soon to be regarded as men and admitted to the Passover table at thirteen years of age.

States the *Talmud*: “One trains the children a year or two before [age **thirteen**], in order that they may become used to religious observances” [M. Yom 8:4]...the *Talmud* describes the first manducations at the annual Passover Feast--by the grown-up boys of pious Israelites. These manducations occurred soon after those grown-up boys had become “Sons of the Law” when turning **thirteen**. This was after they at that time made their solemn vows, and were then admitted and conferred as Communicants. According to the *Talmud* after being catechized, and on the attainment of their manhood at puberty—“one says to his sons: ‘I am ready to slaughter the Passover for you who shall [now] first go up to Jerusalem”” [Pes. 7:6 & 8:1-7].<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 75.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Bass, *Paedocommunion: A Return to or Departure from Biblical Practice* (Internet article: <http://www.newgenecaopc.org/pb.asp>), 10.

<sup>9</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 183.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Nigel Lee, *Paedocommunionism Versus Protestantism: How Trendy Theologisers Have Retreated from the Reformation*, 8, 9.

Although the Jewish Talmud is uninspired and often unreliable, with regard to the Passover its comments do in general reflect the scriptural data we have already considered (i.e. the Passover was restricted to men and mature boys).

(6) The institution of the Lord's supper, which took place at a paschal meal, is also informative. The disciples went into Jerusalem in the evening to eat the Passover (Mk. 14:17). The meal had to be eaten in Jerusalem where God's house stood. The accounts of the supper tell us that the disciples reclined at the table. This position reflected the Jewish custom at that time (M. *Pesachim* X.I). Lane notes some similarities and differences between a typical first century Passover meal and the Lord's supper:

While a normal meal began with the breaking of bread, on this occasion Jesus broke the bread during the meal and following the serving of a dish (Ch. 14:18-20, 22). The Passover meal was the one occasion when the serving of a dish preceded the breaking of bread. The use of wine was generally reserved for festive occasions and was characteristic of the Passover (M. *Pesachim* X.1). Finally, the interpretation of the elements of the meal conforms to Passover custom where the *haggadah* (or interpretation) is an integral part of the meal. The cumulative evidence supports the claim made in verses 12, 14, 16 that the disciples prepared a Passover meal and that the external forms of the Passover meal were observed at the meal itself.<sup>11</sup>

What is particularly important for this study is the fact that at this Passover only adult men were present. Although one could argue that this Passover meal was extraordinary (for in it our Lord instituted the first communion), there is nothing in any of the accounts to indicate that the disciples thought there was anything unusual about celebrating the Pascal meal apart from their families. (Remember, the disciples did not have prior knowledge that Jesus was going to institute a new sacrament. They prepared for the regular Passover meal.) The reason the disciples regarded everything as normal is simple. As we have seen from an examination of relevant Old Testament texts, only fathers and catechized sons who had reached puberty were required to attend (Ex. 23: 14-19; 34:18-25; Deut. 16:1-8; Prov. 22:6). Although wives sometimes did accompany their husbands to the three major centralized feasts (Lk. 2:41), there is no evidence that they ate the Pascal meal with their husbands.<sup>12</sup> "At this meal we see precisely what our Old

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<sup>11</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 497-498.

<sup>12</sup> Although virtually every person this author has discussed paedocommunion with immediately goes to the comparison of the Lord's supper with the first Passover as the main line of argumentation, some paedocommunionists are more sophisticated in their argumentation. For example, Peter Leithart argues from more general considerations such as the meaning of the covenant, baptism, and his assertion that Israelite children were invited to eat various sacrificial/sacramental meals. Interestingly, the passages that Leithart cites as proof that all covenant children should partake of the Lord's supper actually prove nothing of the sort. He appeals to the original Passover (Ex. 12:3-4) which is ambiguous regarding the issue and which both sides of the debate use as a proof text for their position. Scholars and commentators are not in agreement as to the original recipients of the Egyptian Passover. Then Leithart appeals to the peace offering in Leviticus 7:15-21. Leviticus 7 discusses the priest's portion of the sacrifice, but mentions nothing about infants eating the sacrificial meat. If portions of the sacrifice were taken home for the family to eat, one still needs to determine whether (a) infants partook of the meat, and (b) was the meal sacramental? The appeal to Leviticus 7 is full of assumptions that cannot be proven. Next, he cites Deuteronomy 14:22-29 which is simply a fellowship meal and thus proves nothing. Leithart also points to the Feast of Tabernacles in Deuteronomy 16:9-14, which is a time to rejoice and thank God for the harvest. This feast points to the coming of the Holy Spirit, not the Lord's supper. Finally, Leithart cites 1 Corinthians 10:1-14 which refers to the eating of manna in the wilderness by the Israelite nation. Since such eating was not sacramental and since the purpose of the passage is to teach the need for persevering in faith and obedience toward Christ, we reject this as well as Leithart's other proof texts.

Testament model led us to expect. Although Christ had shown supreme love for His female disciples and for children during His earthly ministry, at this Passover meal only adult males were invited. The meal did not take place in His hometown of Nazareth nor in His adopted hometown of Capernaum, nor even in His birthplace of Bethlehem, but in Jerusalem within sight of the temple.”<sup>13</sup>

Before considering the Lord’s supper itself as a New Covenant ordinance, a review of the Old Testament teaching on the Passover is in order. (1) The original Egyptian Passover took place in the homes of the Hebrews. The localized nature of the original Passover, however, was temporary and extraordinary. The permanent requirements for the Passover are found in God’s law and are revealed in subsequent Old Covenant historical examples. (2) While the original participants of the first Passover within the home are not specified, the immediate context restricts the meal to circumcised Jews, their circumcised servants and strangers (i.e. foreigners) who submit to circumcision (i.e. they have converted to the true religion) and want to keep the Passover (Ex. 12:42-49). Even the original Passover (which was unique in a number of ways) does not offer support to infant and toddler communion because infants would not be able to consume roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs. (3) God’s law teaches that the permanent Passover was *not* to be celebrated locally in the home, but rather in Jerusalem near God’s house (Deut. 16:2, 5-7). (4) The command to keep the Passover in Jerusalem applied only to male members of the nation (i.e. males who were successfully catechized and had reached puberty [Ex. 23:14-19; 34:18-25; Num. 1:3; 22:6; Prov. 22:6; Lk. 2:41]). (5) God made special provisions in the law for keeping the Passover at a different time (a month after the regular Passover) for men who were ritually unclean or away on a long journey (Num. 9:6-12). These provisions would be of no use to the majority of women who were unclean as a result of their menstrual cycle. (6) Faith and repentance toward God are prerequisites for participating in the Passover (2 Chron. 30:7-8). The Passover (like the Lord’s supper) is an ordinance connected with progressive sanctification and thus requires faith and understanding. The paedocommunionist understanding of the Passover presupposes a Romanist (*ex opere operato*) magical understanding of the feast. (7) Jesus likely attended his first Passover at the age of twelve (Lk. 2:41). (8) Our Lord and His apostles participated in the last Passover without their families in Jerusalem in accordance with God’s law (Mt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:17-20; Mk. 14:22-25).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Bacon, sec. 5, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> The fact that only men and older catechized sons participated in the permanent Levitical Passover, and that only men participated in the first Lord’s supper naturally raises a question regarding the participation of women in communion. If women were excluded from the Passover and the original institution of the holy supper should they not also be excluded from the ordinance of communion in the New Covenant era as well? The answer to this question is that a study of the New Testament indicates that both men and women are obligated to attend the Lord’s supper. One must keep in mind that the Lord’s supper is a new ordinance. While it has a number of things in common with the Passover, there are also important differences. Also when discerning the participants of the holy supper one must not merely examine the original institution of the Supper but also how the supper was conducted by the local New Covenant churches.

There are a number of reasons why women have always participated in communion. (1) New Testament historical examples indicate that everyone present at church meetings who could examine themselves was permitted to partake. For example we read in Acts 20:7, “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” On Sunday Christians came together to hear the Word preached and to celebrate the Lord’s supper. Virtually all commentators take the phrase “the breaking of bread” in this passage to refer to the Lord’s supper or the Lord’s supper coupled with the *agape* fellowship meal. There are two reasons the expression “to break bread” is connected

Another reason why paedocommunion is unscriptural is that the Lord's supper replaces not only the original Exodus Passover, but also replaces all the Old Testament sacrificial meals. In the Old Covenant there were different sacrifices, sacrificial meals, with different recipients. For example, the Levitical Passover included circumcised Jewish men, circumcised slaves, converted circumcised foreigners and successfully-catechized, circumcised boys or young men (Ex. 12:43-48; 23:14-19; 34:18-25; Num. 1:3, 22:6; Prov. 22:6; 2 Chron. 30:7-8; Lk. 2:41). The covenant meal on Mount Sinai admitted only the male leaders of Israel (Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel, see Exodus 24:9-11). What is particularly interesting regarding this covenant meal is its parallels with the Lord's supper. In the covenant meal of Exodus 24, the heads of the nation (the Old Covenant church) eat in the presence of Jehovah. This occurs at the beginning of the establishment of what, for them, was a new covenant. Likewise, God in the flesh (Christ) eats a covenant meal with the heads of the new nation--the New Covenant church. This occurs only hours before the sacrificial death of Jesus. The guilt offering meal was only to be eaten by the male offspring of Aaron, the priests (Lev. 6:17-18). This restriction was also true of the sin offering (see Lev. 6:25-30; 7:10), the grain offering (see Lev. 6:16-17) and the trespass offering (see Lev. 7:6-7). 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 Egyptian Passover meal as the *only* or *primary* text that sets forth the terms of communion for the Lord's supper. Simply put, the fact that there were different terms of admission to the different covenant meals, most or perhaps even all of which excluded infants and toddlers, the original Passover account does not justify overthrowing the teaching and practice of the whole Protestant Reformation.

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to communion: First, it is often mentioned in connection with public worship. It would be rather odd for Luke to make sure that his readers knew that the Christians had lunch after the service. Second, in Acts 2:42 the expression appears in a list that relates to public worship: teaching-preaching, Christian fellowship, celebration of communion, and the prayers of the saints. "In the Greek, the definite article precedes the noun *bread* and thus specifies that the Christians partook of *the* bread set aside for the sacrament of communion (compare 20:11; 1 Cor. 10:16). Also, the act of breaking bread has its sequel in the act of offering prayers (presumably in the setting of public worship). The words *breaking of the bread* appear within the sequence of teaching, fellowship, and prayers in worship services" (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 111).

(2) The context of Paul's instruction to the Corinthians regarding the Lord's supper indicates that his instructions apply to men as well as women. In chapter 11 the apostle deals with proper behavior during public worship. First, he deals with the issue of head coverings for women. Women are required to cover their heads in the worship service because of the creation ordinance of the covenant headship of the man, the observance of angels and the shamefulness of uncovered heads. Immediately after dealing with head coverings, the apostle deals with appropriate behavior at the Lord's supper (v. 17ff.). (Note the sentence, "For first of all when you come together as a church" [v. 18]). When the apostle discusses the proper participation in communion the issue is not whether one is a male or female but self-examination and discernment of the Lord's body.

(3) In the New Covenant era both males and females are to receive the sign and seal of baptism. In the Old Covenant era only men were circumcised. "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12, cf. Acts 16:15, 33; Lk. 3:21; Mt. 28:19-20). Paul explains that some of the former distinctions between people in the Old Covenant have been changed by the coming of Christ. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). While covenant headship is a creation ordinance and continues into the New Covenant era, some of the Old Covenant applications of this principle are abrogated by Christ. Females who have been baptized are communicant members of the church and partake of the holy supper. In the Old Covenant Levitical Passover the men partook of the Passover feast for themselves and their wives.



Further (as already noted), why should believers look to the Egyptian Passover yet ignore the requirements of the permanent levitical Passover which was repeatedly set forth in the law of Moses and practiced for several centuries? The paedocommunionist argument from the Egyptian Passover is arbitrary, inconsistent and ignores progressive revelation.

## The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

The strongest argument against infant and toddler communion comes from the theological meaning of the Lord's supper itself. The power or efficacy of communion does not reside within the bread and wine, but rather is dependent upon the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit opening our minds and hearts, causing us to feed upon the whole person and work of Christ by faith. As mere bread and wine, the divinely appointed symbols produce no spiritual effect upon the believer. But when the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind of the participant to perceive the gospel truth that the appointed emblems "exhibit, signify, and seal," then and only then do they become means of sanctification. If progressive sanctification from the ordinance is dependent upon understanding and faith, then infant and toddler communion are useless. Those who receive the elements but do not understand what is going on and have no faith do not receive any benefit from them whatsoever.

The doctrine of paedocommunion *logically* rests upon a materialistic, magical, mystical, irrational, superstitious understanding of the Lord's supper. All the Reformed symbols reject the idea that the bread and wine have intrinsic power to change the soul, that people who consume the Eucharist are automatically transformed (*ex opere operato*). Such a view is usually based on the Romanist doctrine of the real presence or transubstantiation of the elements (i.e. the bread literally becomes Jesus' body; the wine literally becomes Christ's blood.) Sadly, the doctrine of paedocommunion has led many professing Christians to the apostate and heretical Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>15</sup>

There are a few paedocommunionist arguments that relate to the meaning of the Lord's supper that need to be considered. A very common argument is that the children of believers who are members of the covenant and the visible church are denied an important benefit of the covenant if they are not allowed to participate in communion. Paedocommunionist writers will often refer to the confessional understanding of communion as baptistic or individualistic and treating covenant children as if they were excommunicated. Such an argument must be rejected for a number of reasons.

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<sup>15</sup> Paedocommunionists like to point out that around the time that the church officially adopted transubstantiation (c. AD. 1100), it also abandoned infant and toddler communion. The idea, however, that Jesus is corporally present in the bread and wine goes all the way back to some of the ancient church fathers and grew in popularity throughout the middle ages. "The realistic and mystical view fell in more easily with the excessive supernaturalism and superstitious piety of the middle ages, and triumphed at last both in the Greek and Latin churches; for there is no material difference between them on this dogma" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 (1910)], 4:545). The church in the west abandoned infant and toddler communion because of their fear that Jesus' body would not be treated properly by very young children. The Eastern church did not abandon paedocommunion. (Some modern Eastern Orthodox congregations, however, do not practice it.) The fact that the western church abandoned paedocommunion because of foolish superstitious ideas does not detract one iota from the fact that paedocommunionists must logically hold to the position that the Lord's supper is an ordinance that *progressively* sanctifies apart from faith, knowledge or understanding. They need to explain how this progressive sanctifying process occurs without resorting to an *ex opere operato* conception (e.g., transubstantiation, consubstantiation) of the holy supper. What makes paedocommunionism so dangerous is its tendency to allow the leaven of Romanism into Reformed churches.

First, the paedocommunionist argument could be applied to God Himself, who did not command the participation of infants and toddlers in the permanent Levitical Passover. Children in the Old Covenant were members of the covenant and the visible church. Yet, Jehovah Himself did not see any inconsistency in restricting the Passover to adult males and their successfully catechized sons. Is God “rationalistic,” “inconsistent,” “gnostic,” “individualistic” or “baptistic” in his treatment of infants and small children under the Old Covenant order? No, of course not! Such thinking is blasphemous.

Second, the paedocommunionist argument does not take into account the differences between baptism and the Lord’s supper. Baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration. Regeneration is an act of God upon the heart in which the individual is passive. All that is required for a baby to be baptized is that at least one parent be a professing Christian and a member in good standing of a lawfully constituted church. The baby does not need to understand what is going on to receive the sign and seal of baptism (many babies even sleep through the ritual). Baptism, like circumcision, is a sign and seal of what can take place in the past (e.g., John the Baptist, adult converts), the present (e.g., some elect infants) or even the future (e.g., the children of believers whom God sovereignly chooses to regenerate at a later time).

## The Lord’s Supper and Progressive Sanctification

The Lord’s supper, however, is different in a number of ways. (1) The Lord’s supper is not a one-time, initiatory rite like baptism, but is a repeated ordinance that, along with the Word, is used for spiritual nourishment or *progressive* sanctification. Unlike regeneration or initial sanctification, progressive sanctification requires knowledge, understanding and faith. “Although Baptism and the Holy Supper have the same covenant of grace as their context, and although both give assurance of the benefit of the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Supper differs from Baptism in this regard, that it is a sign and seal not of incorporation into but of the maturation and strengthening in the fellowship of Christ and all His members.”<sup>16</sup> Calvin’s comments on this matter are excellent:

Furthermore, they object that there is no more reason to administer baptism to infants than the Lord’s supper, which is not permitted to them. As if Scripture did not mark a wide difference in every respect! This permission was indeed commonly given in the ancient church, as is clear from Cyprian and Augustine, but the custom has deservedly fallen into disuse. For if we consider the peculiar character of baptism, surely it is an entrance and a sort of initiation into the church, through which we are numbered among God’s people: a sign of our spiritual regeneration, through which we are reborn as children of God. On the other hand, the Supper is given to older persons who, having passed tender infancy, can now take solid food.

This distinction is very clearly shown in Scripture. For with respect to baptism, the Lord there sets no definite age. But he does not similarly hold forth the Supper for all to partake of, but only for those who are capable of discerning the body and blood of the Lord, of examining their own conscience, of proclaiming the Lord’s death, and of considering its power. Do we wish anything plainer than the apostle’s teaching when he exhorts each man to prove and search himself, then to eat of this bread and drink of this cup [1 Cor. 11:28]? Self-examination ought, therefore, to come first, and it is vain to expect this of infants. Again: “He who eats unworthily eats and drinks condemnation for himself, not discerning the body of the Lord” [1 Cor. 11:29]. If only those who know how to distinguish rightly the holiness of Christ’s body are able to

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<sup>16</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 542.

participate worthily, why should we offer poison instead of life-giving food to our tender children? What is that command of the Lord: “Do this in remembrance of me” [Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:25]? What is that other command which the apostle derives from it: “As often as you eat this bread, you will proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” [1 Cor. 11:26]? What remembrance of this thing, I ask, shall we require of infants when they have never grasped it? What preaching of the cross of Christ, the force and benefit of which their minds have not yet comprehended? None of these things is prescribed in baptism. Accordingly, there is a very great difference between these two signs, as we have noted in like sign also under the Old Testament. Circumcision, which is known to correspond to our baptism, had been appointed for infants [Gen. 17:12]. But the Passover, the place of which has been taken by the Supper, did not admit all guests indiscriminately, but was duly eaten only by those who were old enough to be able to inquire into its meaning [Ex. 12:26]. If these men had a particle of sound brain left, would they be blind to a thing so clear and obvious?<sup>17</sup>

Understanding the differences between regeneration and sanctification is important for understanding why there are different qualifications for baptism and the Lord’s supper. Sanctification begins in regeneration when God implants a new spiritual nature in the subject of his grace. (Early Reformed theologians often refer to this starting point as initial sanctification.) Sanctification is definitive in the sense that it was secured by our union with Christ. It is progressive in the sense that it is a lifelong process whereby the Holy Spirit subdues sin and increases a believer’s personal righteousness over time. Sanctification is a work of God *in* the believer. In sanctification the Holy Spirit works upon man in both a mediate and immediate way. For example, in regeneration (i.e. initial sanctification) the Spirit of God works immediately; that is, He works directly upon man’s soul in planting a new spiritual nature. Regeneration is not dependent on any external means. The workings of the Holy Spirit directly upon the elect person’s heart are beyond human comprehension and encompassed with mystery. In *progressive sanctification*, the Holy Spirit works medially or through means. He works upon *the conscious life of man* through the *means of grace* such as the Word of God, the preached Word (Jn. 17:17, 19; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Rom. 10:17; etc.), the sacrament of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), the communion with God in prayer (Jn. 14:13-14) and the practicing of good works (Jn. 15:2; Rom. 5:3-4; Heb. 12:5-11). The Word of God is foundational to every means of grace in *progressive sanctification* (Jn. 17:17, 19; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Ps. 119:9, 11, 15, 16, 33, 34; etc.). Once one understands that the Holy Spirit uses external means in the process of progressive sanctification, then one cannot accept the notion that babies and toddlers are progressively sanctified during communion unless one adopts the view that the bread and wine operate automatically (*ex opere operato*) and that Jesus is physically present in the bread and wine, one with the elements. Francis Nigel Lee writes, “The Paedo position would force us to embrace a Roman Catholic or Lutheran understanding of how the sacrament conveys grace...For anyone coming from the Reformed perspective, this ought to be a paramount concern. After all, people were burned at the stake during the English Reformation for the Reformed view of the Sacrament. The proponents of paedocommunion simply **must** answer the question of how grace is conferred in their new system....At best they are left with the Lutheran view; at worst, the Roman...”<sup>18</sup>

When the differences between baptism and the Lord’s supper are understood, we see that a Christian father who does not give bread and wine to a two month old baby is no more neglectful than a covenant head who starts verbally catechizing his children only when they are

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<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 2:1353; 4:16:30.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Nigel Lee, *Paedocommunionism versus Protestantism*.

able to understand the meaning of words. The only manner in which a paedocommunionist can argue against this objection to his position is either to equivocate on the meaning of the word sanctification (e.g., ignoring the distinction between initial sanctification [i.e. being regenerated and set apart by God] and progressive sanctification<sup>19</sup> or resort to an unscriptural definition of communion (i.e. an *ex opere operato* or magical formulation). It is not an accident that some of the champions of paedocommunion want people to reject the attainments of the Reformation with regard to worship and justification in favor of a more Romish, medieval conception of these doctrines.

## Participation and Proclamation

The Lord's supper is different from baptism in that it requires active participation. Believers are commanded to "take and eat" (Mt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 11:24, Majority Text). The church is to "do this act" (*Touto poiete*). This ordinance involves observing, touching, breaking, eating, tasting, drinking and so on. Dipping one's finger in the wine and placing it in a baby's mouth is not active participation on the part of a suckling. Further, even the term "remembrance" (Lk. 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24-25) refers to more than a mental activity on the part of the participants. To the Hebrew mind it involved both thinking and acting, or thinking that leads directly to appropriate actions. In the Old Testament, "often 'memory' and 'activity' go together. God 'remembers' and 'visits' or 'forgives' or 'blots out'. So also Israel is to 'remember' by erecting a 'memorial' or by reenacting a rite (cf. Exod. 13:9)."<sup>20</sup> Like the Passover which was a "remembrance" to be kept by Israel, the Lord's supper is to be remembered and celebrated by the New Covenant church. The church remembers by participating in the ordinance of communion through faith. Babies and sucklings, while in the covenant, are incapable of the appropriate mental activity and the corresponding active participation! This point does not mean that they are unholy or under discipline any more than were the Old Covenant children who did not accompany their fathers and older brothers to the Passover at Jerusalem. Although babies and toddlers are not mature enough to partake of the Lord's supper, they still are permitted to sit with their families at the table. At the original Passover meal babies and sucklings could not eat roasted lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. However, they were not regarded as excommunicated. They were part of the household. They sat around the table, protected from the angel of death by the blood on the doorposts and lintel. The repeated accusation that nonpaedocommunionists are treating their children as if they are excommunicated is *ad hominem* rhetoric.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter J. Leithart (in his book *Daddy, Why Was I Excommunicated?*) uses well-known theological terms in a unique and confusing manner. On page 23 he uses belief and regeneration as synonyms and assumes that infants have the ability to believe. Such a view is not only absurd, it also explicitly contradicts the apostle Paul's assertion that faith in Christ comes by hearing the preached gospel (Rom. 10:17). Babies can hear but they cannot understand. Paul says that edification cannot occur without understanding (1 Cor. 14:6-17). Leithart correctly points out (p. 23) that "regeneration is not separable from sanctification." But he then erroneously concludes that infants are being progressively sanctified. While it is true that sanctification is connected to regeneration, it is also true that in progressive sanctification the Holy Spirit uses external means (preaching, Bible reading, the Lord's supper, meditation on God's law, etc.) as the cause of growth. Christian adults who do not attend the means of grace can stagnate and even go backward in the process of personal holiness. This fact, however, does not mean that they were never regenerated. Among genuine believers setbacks are always temporary. Christian children are sanctified as they grow in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 553.

The teachings of the New Testament regarding the Lord's supper presuppose a level of mental maturity on the part of the participants that excludes infants and toddlers from active participation in the ordinance. The communion table involves *commemoration*, which requires the ability to meditate and reflect upon who Jesus is and what he has done on our behalf. "The believing and grateful remembrance of Jesus is most certainly the main part in this feast."<sup>21</sup> Remembrance obviously involves faith in the person and work of Christ. Hodge writes,

In remembrance of me, i.e. that I may be remembered as he who died for your sins. This is the specific, definite object of the Lord's supper, to which all other ends must be subordinate, because this alone is stated in the words of institution. It is of course involved in this, that we profess faith in him as the sacrifice for our sins; that we receive him as such; that we acknowledge the obligations which rest upon us as those who have been redeemed by his blood; and that we recognize ourselves as constituent members of his church and all believers as our brethren, We are thus, as taught in the preceding chapter, brought into a real communion with Christ and with all his people by the believing participation of this ordinance.<sup>22</sup>

Calvin concurs, "If, therefore, you would celebrate the Supper aright, you must bear in mind, that a profession of your faith is required from you."<sup>23</sup>

The Lord's supper involves *proclamation*. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). "It is a commemoration of his death, *for* it is in very nature a proclamation of that fact."<sup>24</sup> The apostle "understands by *Kataggellein*, *announce*, the individual and collective proclamation of Christ's love in His sacrifice, and of the glorious efficacy of this act. Each one confesses that he owes his salvation to this bloody death."<sup>25</sup>

## Self-Examination

The fact that Lord's supper is a proclamation of Jesus' sacrificial death leads Paul to warn the Corinthians of the necessity of self-examination (see 1 Corinthians 11:26-29). "Let a man examine himself" (1 Cor. 11:28). The term "examine" denotes a moral exercise that presupposes a certain level of mental maturity that excludes babies and toddlers. There is to be due preparation before partaking of the elements. In the immediate context, this examination requires discernment or taking proper cognizance of the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29). The narrow and broad contexts of this passage indicate that this self-examination extends to three different interrelated areas. First, the examination extends to our treatment of Christ's body, the church. This point is plain from the immediate context, which precipitated Paul's digression upon the holy supper. Some Corinthians had been guilty of treating poor believers as second-class citizens at the *agape* feasts which at the time were still held in conjunction with Communion. (The Corinthians were probably guilty of following the ancient Greek custom of having different places to sit in the house, along with different quantities and qualities of food as a result of one's social and economic status. In other words, the rich were eating like gluttons while the poor were

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<sup>21</sup> Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977 [1889]), 581-582.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, Pa: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857]), 226.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:384.

<sup>24</sup> Hodge, 229.

<sup>25</sup> Godet, 590.

going hungry.) Scripture indicates that this ethical examination extends to other areas such as reconciliation with a brother (Mt. 5:23-24) and a refusal to repent of immorality (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13). Self-examination requires knowledge of God's ethical requirements as well as faith in God's Word, otherwise this examination would be subjective and legalistic. This examination, however, is not to be a morbid introspectionism or an expectation of sinless perfection, for every Christian knows that it is Christ alone and His merits that render him worthy to come to Communion.

Second, this examination involves "discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29) which, in context, refers to a proper consideration of the meaning and implication of the salvation purchased by Christ. This point is obvious from Paul's quotation of the original words of institution from Luke 22:19 where the Lord's broken body is set before our eyes as the atonement for our sins. Remembering Christ's passion and meditating on how Jesus delivered us from the guilt, penalty and power of sin are connected not only to the sanctifying nature of the ordinance, but also to the dire warnings connected to the abuse of the sacrament. Mistreating Christ's body, the church, by unloving behavior toward the brethren, is an implicit denial of what the supper points to. A proper discernment of Christ's body (that is, his person and work) leads to a proper discernment of his body, the church. The two are intimately connected.

Third, the context of 1 Corinthians 11:29 indicates that communion also involves a proper recognition of the elements set apart for holy use. The elements are set apart from a common to a sacred use. Therefore, it is wicked and dangerous to use them in a profane manner (e.g., getting drunk). For this reason many commentators view the conclusion of this chapter as an admonition to separate Communion from the love-feast or fellowship meal.

Once again note that the admonitions associated with Communion presuppose faith, understanding and recognition of biblical ethics. It is totally inappropriate to dismiss the implications of these admonitions by arguing that they only apply to adults because (as noted) the holy supper, unlike baptism, requires faith, knowledge and understanding for progressive sanctification. The attempt to parallel these ordinances does not work without a complete redefinition of Communion (i.e. a redefinition in an *ex opere operato* direction).

The Lord's supper also involves *communion*, which involves the ability to look to the resurrected Savior as spiritually present with his people, actively strengthening their faith and encouraging their hearts. Christ communes with and sanctifies the souls of believers by faith. All the important mental functions and activities associated with Communion, such as self-examination, remembrance and discerning the Lord's body, are of such a nature that they require faith, mature thought and understanding.

James S. Candish's comments on this topic are very helpful, especially his emphasis on the necessity of faith:

Before coming to the Lord's table, there is needed, besides that self-examination by which we judge if we can rightly partake of it, also a stirring up of those dispositions and desires that are required for doing so, especially faith, repentance, and love. For we need to have these not merely as habits, which may go dormant in the soul for a season, but as acts of the soul in lively exercise. It is by faith that we are not only prepared to feed upon Christ, but actually do feed upon Him (John vi. 35, 47). Coming to Christ, believing on Him, eating His flesh and drinking His blood, are spoken of by our Lord as one and the same thing; and all alike are connected with having eternal life, living by Him, dwelling in Him and he in us. If then we would enjoy this blessing at the Lord's supper, we must not only have had faith at some former time, or have the habitual disposition to trust in Him, but be actually trusting in Him at the time we observe it.

We must draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, *i.e.*, with undoubting reliance on Christ as our High Priest. So, too, our love must be in actual exercise. “This do in remembrance of me,” are Christ’s words, making the Supper the pledge of love between Himself and His disciples. But the very purpose of a pledge or token of love is to call forth into lively exercise the love that exists as a habitual principle in the soul. There is always filial affection in the heart of a right minded son towards his parents, though at times his thoughts and feelings may be necessarily engaged with other duties. But when he looks on a keepsake that he has received from them, the actual feelings of filial love wake up in his breast and fill him with emotion. So, while engaged in the ordinary duties of life, the child of God may not actually have present feelings of love to God and Christ, though that dwells in his heart, but when called to the Lord’s table he should have these feelings in fresh and lively exercise.<sup>26</sup>

Given the biblical understanding of the holy supper, it should not be a surprise to discover that the Reformed churches have always insisted that the partaking of communion never be separated from the preached Word. Feeding on the Word of God is a necessary prerequisite for eating the body of Christ. Thus our Lord proclaimed, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (Jn. 6:63). Not only does the preached Word define the sacraments, giving them meaning, it also strengthens our faith. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Interestingly, the symbolism of the supper itself points to the importance of faith for nourishment or progressive sanctification. The figures of eating and drinking picture a Christian receiving Christ by faith. We are not talking about a mere intellectual assent to certain propositions (thus, the frequent charge of paedocommunionist that the confessional understanding of the holy supper is gnostic is totally untrue) but a trusting in Jesus alone for salvation and spiritual nourishment. Communion vividly sets forth the vital union effected by faith between Christ and the believer. Further, self-examination in all its aspects is founded upon one’s faith, knowledge and understanding of God’s holy Word.

Once one eliminates the need for faith, he also eliminates the need for the accompaniment of the preached Word. Thus, the paedocommunionist understanding of the Lord’s supper logically should lead to the partaking of Communion apart from the Word. In other words, there would be no reason to abandon the Romanist practice of dispensing the elements to sick individuals apart from public worship. If the elements work *ex opere operato* apart from faith and understanding, then why not dispense the elements to individuals like magic pills? The paedocommunionist will simply ignore the abundant biblical evidence regarding the differences between baptism and the Lord’s supper by arguing that: (a) all the admonitions relating to the Lord’s supper are directed *only* to adults; and (b) the overall teaching of covenant theology proves that infants and small children should be included in the Lord’s supper.

We have proved that these arguments are fallacious by noting the following: (1) Infants and toddlers did not participate in the permanent Passover feast. Thus the charge that paedocommunionists level against Christians who are faithful to the Reformed symbols could be leveled against God himself. If God did not command that infants and toddlers who were circumcised should partake of the Levitical Passover, then God would be just as guilty of violating the paedocommunionist’s interpretation of covenant theology as confessional Reformed believers. (2) Baptism and the Lord’s supper are different sacraments with different requirements. The Lord’s supper is not an initiatory sacrament in which a person is passive but an ordinance of *progressive* sanctification. Paedocommunionists need to explain how babies and

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<sup>26</sup> James S. Candish, *The Christian Sacraments*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 121-122.

sucklings are *progressively* sanctified apart from knowledge, understanding and faith. Paedocommunionists must either redefine the biblical doctrine of sanctification or they must pervert the meaning of communion by adopting an *ex opere operato* formulation.

One paedocommunionist author attempts to circumvent the progressive sanctification argument by arguing that the Lord's supper does work *ex opere operato* (i.e. automatically) in the sense that the recipients do invariably receive blessings or cursing during the communion meal. Paul says that judgment comes upon those recipients who receive the body and blood of our Lord in an unworthy manner. This argument raises the question: How could infants and toddlers receive communion in an unworthy manner if they do not know their right hand from their left, if they have no ability to communicate, mistreat people or discern the body? A study of Paul's warning in context makes it abundantly clear that this caution applies to professing Christians who are capable of acting in an unloving manner toward the brethren. The modified *ex opere operato* argument still presupposes a magical, mechanical understanding of the supper.

Another common argument of paedocommunionists is based on the fact that the Lord's supper is a covenant renewal meal. The argument is as follows: If baptized children are included in the covenant and are members of the visible church, then obviously they have a right and obligation to participate in the covenant renewal meal that Jesus has instituted. Is it not sinful and wrong to keep the eucharist from Christ's little lambs? Although this argument is common and has sentimental appeal, it is easily refuted by Scripture. Were the children of believers part of the covenant and members of the visible church in the Old Testament economy? Yes, they certainly were. Did they then have the right to participate in every covenant meal that Jehovah had instituted? No. They did not participate in the covenant meal on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:9-11), nor did they participate in the permanent Levitical Passover (Ex. 23:14-19, 34:18-25; Num. 1:3; 22:6; Prov. 22:6; 2 Chron. 30:7-8; Lk. 2:41). Does this exclusion mean that they were excommunicated or regarded as outside the covenant by God? No, absolutely not. It was God Himself who instituted the various covenant meals and determined the appropriate recipients. If, under the old economy, God can say that infants and children are in the covenant yet cannot participate in certain sacred activities until they are able to understand what is going on, then He obviously can do the same in the New Testament. We may not like it. It may not seem logical to us. However, we must submit to God's teaching, which is reflected in our Reformed symbols.

Another very common argument used by paedocommunionists against the historic Reformed position is that the restriction of communion to adult church members and successfully catechized children who have made a credible profession of faith is that the confessional understanding came about because of the influence of Greek philosophy and rationalism on Calvin and the early Reformers.<sup>27</sup> This argument is refuted in two ways. First, it needs to be pointed out that this accusation is never supported by any actual evidence. If the Calvinistic Reformers and theologians were influenced by Aristotilianism, neo-Platonism or Thomism (regarding Communion), then one should easily be able to demonstrate that fact by showing quotations, similarities of thought and philosophical connections. Until this work is done, the idea that the Westminster divines were influenced by Greek thought in their

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<sup>27</sup> When one understands Calvin's view of the Lord's supper as well as that of the other early Reformers (e.g., Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Theodore Beza) one will see that the charge that these men were rationalistic in their views of communion is baseless. They taught that "by faith and the power of the Holy Spirit our minds, for which principally this is food, are lifted even to heaven to obtain the body and the blood present there" (Beza, at the Colloquy of Poissy). Whatever one may think of Calvin's view of the Lord's supper it is certainly not based on rationalism.



understanding of the Lord's supper needs to be regarded as an *empty* accusation. Second, anyone that is familiar with the Reformed confessions and theologians of the past knows that their arguments were based on the exegesis of Scripture and not on esoteric philosophical considerations. Even this brief study has shown that the new covenant Lord's supper as understood by the Reformed symbols is thoroughly rooted in Scripture, not heathen philosophy. Perhaps the reason this accusation (that the historic Reformed view is Greek or rationalistic) is so frequently made by paedocommunionists is that their position is inherently irrational. The Bible teaches that progressive sanctification comes by God's truth (Jn. 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Ps. 19:9 ff., etc.). To argue that infants and sucklings are progressively sanctified by crumbs of bread apart from any understanding is irrational. Although God is almighty and can do whatsoever He desires, He cannot contradict His own nature or Word.

## Conclusion

Our study has revealed that the doctrine of infant Communion is faced with a number of insurmountable exegetical and theological difficulties. An examination of the Old Testament shows that "the strong support for paedocommunion" that allegedly is to be found there is lacking. Not only is there nothing tangible in the Old Testament to cling to for divine warrant, the relevant material *contradicts* paedocommunion. Sacramental ordinances designed for progressive sanctification required faith, knowledge and understanding in the Old Covenant just as the Lord's supper does in the New Covenant.

A brief examination of passages dealing with the Lord's supper in the New Testament demonstrates that the holy supper is a sacrament for progressive sanctification (i.e. spiritual nourishment and growth) and thus requires discerning the Lord's body, self-examination, faith, repentance and active participation. There is simply no way a Reformed Protestant can adopt paedocommunion without redefining the doctrine of sanctification. (Many, of course, adopt infant communion out of an ignorance of both doctrines. If a popular theologian or conference speaker promotes it, then it must be right.)

While the issue of paedocommunion may seem to be a minor doctrinal matter that is not worth arguing over, the adoption of infant Communion by Reformed churches has great potential for leading people to superstitious, sacramentalist views of Communion. It can be and, sadly, already has been a conduit to mysticism, Romanism and Eastern Orthodoxy for a number of poor deluded souls. Thus, let us hold fast to the doctrinal attainments of our covenanted reformation not because we have a love of tradition, but because the Reformed symbols are excellent expressions of scriptural teaching.

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