

WINE AND WEEKLY: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ELEMENTS AND FREQUENCY OF HOLY COMMUNION

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Introductory Note: This paper is a slightly expanded version of the paper I presented to the elders of Redeemer Presbyterian in April of 1997. By no means do I consider this paper to be the last word on either issue it addresses. I also must beg the reader's forgiveness for errors yet to be edited, as this is not a final draft. Any feedback would be greatly appreciated, especially concerning exegetical, theological, and historical errors. Several specific changes need to be made in future drafts. In particular, the preliminary section on worship on pages 3-4 needs to be further developed and clarified. Also, the section on Romans 14 and Christian liberty needs to be rewritten. Someday, I would like to brush up the section on symbolism, indicating my more mature views in that area. I would also like to make more clear how the Lord's Supper "works," that is, its covenantal efficacy. I have littered the paper with footnotes, primarily to keep the more technical aspects of the paper out of the main body. Several footnotes address the presence of Christ in the Supper because this has been such a controversial point in church history and because I consider a proper understanding of this aspect of the Supper crucial to any sacramental debate. Ultimately, the question of Christ's presence in the sacraments (and in the worship service as a whole) is intimately bound up with the questions of frequency and the use of wine. However, a reader may skip most of the footnotes and still get the main gist of the arguments.

I am sorry this paper is so unwieldy. It was written in several phases, whenever I could find a few minutes to work on it. A lot of the paper was written as a response to specific objections I encountered as I sought to discuss this issue with others and as I presented earlier drafts of the paper. It is not as unified as I would like. Portions of it are a little repetitive. Much of it needs polishing. But I wanted to leave no stone unturned in my hope to present a compelling case for weekly communion and the use of wine instead of grape juice. I have even continued my research since I wrote the paper, and have more data to incorporate into its arguments when time permits. I have not provided a bibliography for this paper, primarily because of its informal and occasional nature. Most of my sources appear in the footnotes and those familiar with the work of Biblical Horizons writers such as James Jordan, Peter Leithart, and Jeffrey Meyers will note their influence throughout. I am also indebted to many of the church fathers, the Reformers (especially Calvin), and John Nevin (though I read his work *The Mystical Presence* after I had written most of the paper, so I was not able to incorporate all that I gleaned from him). One of the most helpful works I have read is by a little known Swiss Reformed theologian, J. J. Von Allmen. His book **Worship: Its Theology and Practice** may be considered a 300-plus page argument for the need to restore the weekly Eucharist. It was undoubtedly the single most important work I consulted.

By the way, our church did implement both of these reforms to our practice and we have been reaping tremendous blessing ever since!

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**For the elders of Redeemer Presbyterian Church
Submitted by Rich Lusk**

The issues of how often we should take communion as a church and the use of wine instead of grape juice may not seem like matters of great significance. However, there is nothing we do in all of life that supersedes the importance of gathered worship. *The essence of authentic biblical religion is the worship of the true and living God.* Worship is the center of life because God is the center of life. Worship is what we were created to do (Isa. 43:7; WSC 1) and it is what we were redeemed to do (Ex. 5:1, Rom. 12:1-2). An integral element of biblical worship is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the eating and drinking of bread and wine as appointed by Christ. It is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper that transforms everything else in life -- this meal with the Lord, along with the preaching of the Word, is the catalyst that drives our sanctification and makes us living sacrifices. In eating and drinking Christ's body and blood worthily, we receive renewed application of Christ's work to our lives (the forgiveness of sins) and the grace of the Holy Spirit (to enable us to die to sin and live more righteously). The Supper sets the pattern for Christian piety and service in the Kingdom of God, because it reinforces the corporate nature of our salvation and life together in Christ. In the Supper, the ordinary, created elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of our Lord (Mt. 26:26-28),¹ just as in our redemption God transfigures ordinary human life into "holiness to the Lord" (Zech. 14:20-21; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Tim. 4:4-5; 1 Pt. 1:14-16). As we commune with the God-man, we are driven to a deeper trust in his life and death for our justification, and we are more and more conformed to his glorious image. This feast Christ spreads before us is the centerpiece of true spirituality. Thus, anything connected with the Supper should not be treated lightly. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, obviously a very troubled church, he spent a great deal of time addressing issues contemporary Christians may consider a colossal waste of time, such as church discipline and the Lord's Supper. Even if these issues are trivial, we are not excused from dealing with them. If we cannot be trusted to deal faithfully with small matters, how can we be expected to deal faithfully with weighty matters (Lk. 16:10)? Maybe this issue is only the tip of the iceberg, but perhaps in dealing with it, the church will be prepared for confronting glaciers that she will later encounter.

Having stated that we must grapple with these communion issues, I must also state that we need to keep these issues in perspective. The Lord's Supper is designed to promote unity in the body of Christ. It is my prayer that our discussions *about* the Supper will do the same. Obviously there is much more to the

¹ This is not transubstantiation (Roman Catholic view) or consubstantiation (Lutheran view). The elements remain bread and wine (1 Cor. 10:16); however, when we eat and drink the bread and wine in faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, we do really and truly feast upon Christ's body and blood (Jn. 6:53-58; 1 Cor. 10:14-22). The sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant of grace -- they are symbols of grace rather than grace itself. At the same time, we must affirm with Calvin and historic Reformed theology, that the reality is joined to the sign in such a way that Christ is really Spiritually (or supernaturally) present in the Supper and is really given to his people by faith. He is *really* present, though not *locally* (or *physically*) present. Because Christ's presence is not merely *subjective*, but *objective*, the sacrament has intrinsic efficacy, to bless or curse, depending upon whether or not we receive it in faith. I would label this a *covenantal* efficacy.

sacrament than just how frequently we partake and whether or not we use the correct elements. Essential to the Supper is partaking in faith and unity, as the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

FREQUENCY

How often shall we partake? After studying this issue, I have come to the conclusion that Scripture mandates weekly (Lord's Day) communion. If our worship is to be Christo-centric, we must celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday. I will present the key arguments for this position exegetically, theologically, and historically, and then attempt to answer anticipated objections. We must keep in mind that Scripture, not tradition, must be our standard in answering this and any other question. But we must also remember that not only the explicit statements of Scripture are binding, but also whatever "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (WCF 1.6). Examples of such deductions would include infant baptism, the trinity, assurance of salvation, ordination services for church officers, and Lord's Day worship on the first day of the week. George Gillespie, one of the leading theologians at the Westminster Assembly, had this to say about deduction: "Necessary consequences from the written Word of God do sufficiently and strongly prove the consequent or conclusion, if theoretical, to be a certain divine truth which ought to be believed, and, if practical, to be a necessary duty which we are obliged unto, *jure divino*."

Admittedly, there is no commandment in the Bible that says "Thou shalt have communion every Sunday." But to require such an imperative is to misunderstand the multifaceted, and often quite subtle, ways that Scripture teaches us about worship. For example, Scripture nowhere commands a weekly sermon either. But from the nature of worship, as well as apostolic example, we can conclude that a sermon (or at the very least, the reading of Scripture) is not merely a good idea, to be done as often as we "feel like it," but an essential aspect of worship. Without a sermon you may have a sing-a-long or a prayer meeting, but you do not have formal gathered worship. Worship is, by biblical definition, sacrificial, and it is the Word that makes us living sacrifices (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 12:1-2). If the sacrament is missing, what separates formal worship from other Christian get-togethers, such as Bible studies? Sacramental worship is unique and should be held weekly; this is the assembly we are required to attend (Heb. 10:25).²

² This statement about church attendance may require some justification. The gist of this section of the book of Hebrews (chapters 8-10) is that the New Covenant is superior to the Old because the sacrifice of Christ is better than any animal sacrifice. Animal offerings were types and shadows of the final human offering yet to come that would put away sin rather than bringing it to God's remembrance as Old Covenant sacrifices had done (Heb. 10:1-4). But implicit in this better offering is the better sanctuary in which it was offered. Old Covenant worship took place in an earthly tabernacle (Heb. 8:5). But Christ presented himself to the Father in the true sanctuary of heaven (Heb. 9:11). Now the tabernacle in Jerusalem is obsolete, as the events of 70 A.D. attest. The writer of Hebrews is showing that Old Covenant worship has been superseded and transformed with the redemptive work of Christ. New Covenant worshippers no longer go to an earthly tabernacle to meet with God; rather they go to church (the Christian assembly), where they are in some sense transported into the heavenly throne room of God, the Holy of Holies (Heb. 4:16; 10:19ff). Old covenant worshippers drew near to God by going to Jerusalem, the earthly Mount Zion (Heb. 10:2); we draw near to God in worship by assembling together in church, the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb. 10:19ff; 12:18-29; Jn. 4:21). Biblically speaking, the church's formal gathered worship takes place in the heavens, in the very presence of God and angels. Thus to forsake the church, as 10:25 forbids, would be not only forsaking to meet with one another, but it would be forsaking to meet with God. Abandoning the church's assembly is equivalent to apostasy in 10:26ff (compare to 1 Jn. 2:19 for another passage that virtually equates leaving the church with apostasy). If we forsake the church's gathered worship, we are forsaking our weekly entrance into the Holy of Holies. A comprehensive look at this section of Hebrews makes for fascinating study and has several implications for worship that are often overlooked. But for our purposes, it will be sufficient to point out simply two considerations. First, the church, among other things, is the New Covenant temple and is therefore the meeting place of the covenant people with their God. The writer of Hebrews wants these Jewish Christians to know that God has "moved," leaving the Judaic temple desolate (Mt. 23:38); he no longer resides in the earthly temple, but now dwells in the church, His people-

It is surprising at first glance to realize that the New Testament gives very few explicit commands concerning formal worship. In light of 1 Corinthians, perhaps we could say we are told more of what *not* to do than what we actually should do. But the lack of explicit instruction in the New Testament epistles is not due to any insufficiency in Scripture; rather it is due to the nature of the church's Old Testament precursors. The church is the fulfillment of both synagogue and tabernacle/temple.³ The church grew out of the synagogue, which grew out of the "holy convocation" mandated in Lev. 23:3. Jesus attended a synagogue and read Scripture there, thus putting God's stamp of approval on the institution, though not necessarily its members. The synagogue was staffed by Levites in local communities and was primarily a place of instruction.⁴ The tabernacle, and later the temple, was the place of sacramental/sacrificial worship. The OT saints were required to go to Jerusalem regularly for feasts after settling in the Promised Land. Eventually, even the Passover was moved to Jerusalem (Dt. 16). The imagery and symbolism of the temple is repeatedly applied to the NT church (see 1 Pt. 2:4-10; Heb 10:19-25; 12:18-29; Eph 2:19-22; 2 Cor. 6:16).⁵ Thus the church's formal meetings bring together both Word (synagogue teaching) and sacrament (temple worship, primarily the Passover). We can add prayer to this list because Jesus called the temple a "house of prayer" (Mt. 21:13). Worship is thus a form of corporate covenant renewal in which God meets with his people in a unique way. God draws near to us in preaching and the sacraments, and we respond in prayer and praise. It is this theology of worship that must serve as the background for our discussion of weekly communion.⁶

We must also keep in mind that apostolic example in the early church appears to have been considered normative. The "traditions" (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6) the apostles handed down to the churches they established

temple (1 Pt. 2:4ff). The veil separating the people of God from the presence of God has been torn, and we are now free to enter in by this new and living way. Secondly, the New Covenant church, as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant temple, is now the center of what we may call sacramental/sacrificial worship. Just as feasts and sacrifices (Old Covenant sacraments) took place in the earthly temple of Jerusalem (Dt. 16), now the church is the place where we are cut open with the Word of God, in order to be transformed into living sacrifices (Heb. 4:12, 13). In New Covenant worship, we are the living sacrifices offered up to God (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15). Likewise, the church is now the place of feasting with God in his presence, just as the Old Covenant temple had been. Bringing these considerations together, we may conclude that when 10:25 requires attendance at church, it is requiring attendance at the sacramental (i.e., temple) service (Dt. 12:5-14; 14:22-29; 16:1-17). We are not required to attend church each and every time the doors open. But the church service that fulfills the temple typology and imagery, namely, the sacramental service, is mandatory for Christians. Of course, for churches that do not take weekly communion, this would seem to make church attendance optional quite a bit of the time. Obviously this is unsatisfactory; the sacramental service be held every Lord's Day and all Christians have the duty to attend unless providentially hindered.

Certainly, elders may see fit to schedule formal, sacramental, "temple" worship at various times, but we know from apostolic example that this kind of worship in the New Covenant church took place regularly on the first day of the week, the day of our Lord's resurrection. This is the pattern we should follow.

³ Of course, the New Testament presents Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the Old Testament temple (Jn. 1:14; 2:19; Col. 2:9). Similarly, Christians, because they are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ are called temples (1 Cor. 6:19). But by far the greatest number of New Testament references to the temple apply to the church corporately considered. I would contend that most references in Scripture to the church as God's people-temple focus on corporate worship.

⁴ The NT church is called "synagogue" in James 2:2. The Christian church (the synagogue of Christ) is contrasted with Judaism, which is called the "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

⁵ Wherever Christians gather to worship, there is the Temple of God, the holy mountain (Jn. 4:21). There is no longer one central sanctuary in the New Covenant; worship has been *decentralized* with the coming of Christ and the pouring out of his Holy Spirit. (Of course, in another sense, worship is still centralized because there is still one central sanctuary -- but it is in heaven, not on earth.)

⁶In my opinion, it is our failure to deeply ponder the theology of worship found in the OT that has kept so much Protestant worship barren and minimalistic. The OT is full of liturgical theology that is critical to the New Covenant church, provided we make appropriate redemptive historical adjustments. Even in Presbyterian circles that are staunchly covenantal in other respect, a kind of "liturgical dispensationalism" frequently sets in and the OT (especially Leviticus) is ignored.

are of universal and binding character, since the apostles served as the representatives of Christ and the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). There is much internal evidence in the NT to support this claim. For example, in 1 Cor. 11:2, Paul praises the Corinthians for “holding to the traditions” that he had passed on to them. However, in 1 Cor. 11:16, Paul chides the Corinthians for departing from apostolic practices followed in other churches.⁷ In 1 Cor. 14:33, 36, Paul again appeals to the practices of other churches in order to correct the deviant worship services of the Corinthians. Clearly, Paul expected uniformity in the churches of God; each church was not free to do its own thing, but was to conform to what had been universally instituted by the apostles. In the early church, it seems that liturgical unity was virtually as important as confessional unity -- hence the slogan of the church fathers, “As a man worships, so he believes.” Ultimately, apostolic tradition was rooted in the practice of Christ himself (1 Cor. 11:1, 2). The Lord Jesus is the one who has set the pattern of worship. Perhaps I could summarize this approach this way: Whenever apostolic practice or example appears to have been embedded in the Scriptures, we can assume it to be binding on the whole church throughout history. The New Testament church set the parameters of Christian worship for ages to come. This does not mean there is no room for liturgical growth, but our growth is to take place within the framework of apostolic worship. Certainly the NT envisions the church spreading into new areas geographically that will provide cultural challenges, and developing her dogma and liturgy in more complex ways, but such developments are in order to more and more approximate the apostolic ideal, not move away from it⁸ Therefore, I conclude we can legitimately deduce worship commands from apostolic example.⁹

EXEGETICAL

⁷ It may be objected that Paul has in view a *cultural* custom in this section of 1 Cor. 11. But there is no appeal to current cultural practice anywhere in the passage. In verse 16, Paul is appealing to *apostolic* tradition which was embraced uniformly by the churches the apostles founded. Verses 2 and 23 confirm this -- Paul’s teaching on headcoverings was no more derived from Greco-Roman culture than his teaching on the Lord’s Supper or the gospel itself (2 Thess. 2:13-15). Besides, Paul nowhere commands Christians to fit in with current cultural customs just for the sake of doing so; indeed, over and over again, he challenges the prevailing cultural practices of his day. Paul’s teaching in this section is based on transcendent norms. He roots his arguments concerning men and women in the church in the Trinitarian being of God (11:3ff) and the teaching of “nature”(11:14; cf. the use of “nature” in Rom. 1:26, 27 and 2:14). So what is the headcovering Paul has in view here? Verse 15 answers: “her hair is given to her as a covering.” A lot of unnecessary confusion over this text has been caused by *assuming* that Paul’s mention of headcoverings indicates that first century women wore veils in worship. But Paul does not mention veils anywhere in this passage; the idea must be imported into the text. Paul’s only mention of veils in his writings are references to Moses’ veil and the veil covering the hearts of unbelieving Jews in 2 Cor. 3. All the extra-biblical evidence we have indicates that neither Jewish nor Greek women in first century Corinth would have worn veils. For a fine treatment of head coverings in 1 Cor. 11, see Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*. Jim Hurley’s *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* is also useful.

⁸Perhaps this presupposition of the church’s development, and with it, her expansion into the world, account for the lack of an explicit command to have the Supper each Lord’s Day. In situations where the Christian church is not yet established, weekly communion may not be possible. Such frontier missions situations are inevitable given Christ’s command to the church to conquer the nations with the gospel. When the gospel is just beginning to penetrate an area, new converts may face many “irregular” situations that are only temporary. Once the church is fully established in an area, with permanent officers, weekly worship, and so forth, “normal” conditions prevail and that would seem to require communion every Lord’s Day.

⁹ When I deduce worship commands from apostolic example, I think I am in good company. This appears to have been the procedure of the Westminster divines in arriving at their doctrine of the NT Sabbath/Lord’s Day. See WLC 116-119 and WSC 59. Acts 20:7ff is a key prooftext for the divines, and as will be seen, it is for me too. I am accepting the divines basic doctrine of Lord’s Day worship, and then simply adding to their argument: When we see the apostles coming together for worship on the first day of the week, we also see them taking communion. If we are willing to accept Westminster’s view of mandatory Lord’s Day worship, why not accept mine for mandatory Lord’s Day communion, since the two seem to go together?

First, consider 1 Cor. 11:17-20. Paul speaks of “your meetings” and “when you come together as a church.” That phrase “come together” in the context of a gathering of believers is used elsewhere to describe formal gathered worship (see for example 1 Cor. 14:26). Thus it seems that whenever the Corinthians gathered together as a church, they partook of the Lord’s Supper. It is hard to make sense of this language in any other way. Paul did not say, “at *some* of your meetings...” He just says, “when you come together...” It seems a member of the Corinthian church could have said, “When we come together, we partake of the Lord’s Supper. At our meetings, we take communion.” These things could only be said by a church that practices weekly communion.

Secondly, consider that the Lord’s Supper is intimately associated with the discipline of the church. In 1 Cor 5:6-8, Paul connects the Lord’s Supper with the primary OT feast, the Passover. Picking up on the ethical symbolism of leaven, he tells the Corinthians that they must get rid of all leaven (wickedness) when celebrating the Lord’s Supper just as the OT Jews had to get rid of all leaven in their homes when celebrating the Passover. The church is to remove the leaven of unrepentant members so it can keep the feast with purity. Theoretically, if the Corinthians were not taking the Supper weekly, they could have met for worship on several successive Lord’s Days without removing the sexual offender in their midst, i.e., without deleavening the church, since Paul says to do this explicitly in conjunction with keeping the feast. But this doesn’t seem compatible with Paul’s sense of urgency in this section of the letter. When they assembled for worship they were to expel the man (5:4) *so that* they could keep the festival without yeast. The connection of the Lord’s Supper with judgment and discipline is unmistakable. Judgment is to take place *inside* the church (5:12,13). The church is a court, and the Lord is in her midst when she assembles to render his heavenly judgment on earth (Mt 18:15-20).¹⁰ The church, as keeper of the keys of the kingdom, is to open and close the gates of heaven every time she gathers for worship. Those keys are word and discipline (HC 82-85). The church is to exercise discipline weekly, cleaning out the leaven so that she may keep the feast in purity (5:8,12,13) and enter the Most Holy Place with confidence and boldness (Heb. 10:19-25). She must deal with sin in her midst as often as she partakes of the Supper. Thus, Word, sacrament, and discipline, the three marks of the church and the essence of her ministry, are integral to worship. It seems Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians in both 1 Cor. 5 and 11 presupposes a weekly observance of the Supper.

Yet another strand of evidence is taken from Paul’s visit to Troas in Acts 20:7-11. Note that Luke can sum up their whole purpose in assembling on the first day of the week by saying, “we came together *to break bread*.” Can we say this about our worship services? If not, are we in line with the apostolic view of worship? It seems that the Supper was an integral part of worship, perhaps even the focal point in one sense, considering that Luke uses “to break bread” as a synecdoche for the whole service. Note that Luke does not say “we came together to hear a sermon” or “to pray” or “to sing.” Obviously, that doesn’t mean these things aren’t important elements of worship, but apparently the Supper holds a unique place among the elements. It is the apex of Christian experience. There can really be no dispute about what it means to “break bread.” Every commentator I have consulted insists this phrase means that they partook of the Lord’s Supper.¹¹ While this terminology can be used of an ordinary meal (see Acts 27:35), there are four reasons for taking it in the sacramental sense here. First, the early church took the sacrament in the context of a fellowship meal or agape feast, so it would be natural to call the entire event the breaking of bread. Secondly, the context in Acts 20 is that of a worship service (note it was on the Lord’s Day and combined with preaching), so it seems natural to conclude the meal was sacramental. Thirdly, Luke apparently indicates that Paul, as an apostle, led them in the breaking of bread. He administered the sacrament after

¹⁰ Most “liturgical” churches experience this every Sunday, when they corporately confess their sinfulness and then hear God (through an elder) declare forgiveness. This is the church’s primary form of weekly discipline.

¹¹ See, for example, Alexander, Calvin, Bruce, and Dennis Johnson. John Stott summarizes succinctly the scene in Acts 20: “[T]he disciples met on the Lord’s Day for the Lord’s Supper. At least verse 7 sounds like a description of the normal, regular practice of the church in Troas. And the evidence is that the Eucharist, as a thankful celebration of the now risen Savior’s death, very early became the main Sunday service...word and sacrament were combined in the ministry given to the church at Troas, and the universal church has followed suit ever since” (*The Message of Acts*, p. 321).

preaching (20:11). Fourthly, whenever Luke uses the definite article (“*the* bread”), as he does in verse 11, he seems to have the Lord’s Supper in view rather than an ordinary meal.¹²

Perhaps I can best summarize the above argument by putting it in the form of a syllogism:

We are to worship God every Sunday (as we know from the fourth commandment and dominical/apostolic example)

Worship consists (primarily and essentially) of Word and Sacrament (as we know from the theology of worship and apostolic example)

Therefore, we may reasonably conclude that we should have the sacrament every Sunday.¹³

I do not think either of these premises can be seriously questioned, and the conclusion necessarily follows. As far as I know, every apostolic worship service of which we have record included communion as far as we can tell (Acts 2:46-47; 20:7ff; 1 Cor. 10-11).¹⁴ It seems that calling weekly communion a “mandate” is grounded exegetically in the Scriptures as much as the change of day of worship from the seventh to the first day of the week. If our worship is to be centered on the Lord Jesus Christ, we must feast upon him every time we come together in an official service.¹⁵

THEOLOGICAL

A full overview of the meaning of the Lord’s Supper (which goes far beyond the scope of this paper) would provide further indirect evidence as to the propriety of weekly communion. The Supper is in many ways a summary of the entire Christian world view. It is visual sermon; it “televises” the gospel. Or better yet, it is an edible sermon, a sermon acted out by eating and drinking. The sacrament brings together many strands of biblical teaching that are appropriate in the context of a worship service. For example:

- The Supper is a remembrance of Christ and a proclamation of his death (1 Cor. 11:24-26). Is it not appropriate to remember Christ every time we gather for worship? Is it not proper to proclaim his death every time we gather until he returns?¹⁶
- The sacrament shows forth the unity of Christ’s body and we know unity is essential to worship (Mt. 5:23, 24; 1 Cor. 11:18ff). Thus the sacrament is a safeguard against ongoing divisions in the body; it requires that we reconcile before we partake, or we eat at our own risk.
- To fail to celebrate the Eucharist weekly is to virtually invalidate the other sacrament, baptism. We are treating the baptized as though they were catechumens or under severe church discipline. Only weekly communion respects the liturgical rights of the baptized.¹⁷

¹² Unfortunately our English translations leave out the definite article. See Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, p. 75, 84n12.

¹³ Again, this is not to say elders cannot schedule the Sacrament at other times if they see fit. Even daily observance would not be wrong. Also, this also does not rule out occasionally forgoing the administration of the Supper in a Lord’s Day worship service due to unusual circumstances. But the norm should be weekly communion.

¹⁴ I do not think Jn. 20:19, 26 can count as valid counter evidence because, if these were worship services at all, they were pre-Ascension, pre-Pentecost meetings and apostolic example would not yet have been fully established. At this point, the apostles themselves were still trying to figure out what was going on.

¹⁵ In *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, Von Allmen summarizes this nicely. After arguing that weekly communion is “essential to worship, quite simply, because Christ instituted it and commanded the Church to celebrate it” he concludes: “A liturgy without the Eucharist is like the ministry of Jesus without Good Friday...we have not received from God the right to make this liturgical amputation” (154-155, 156; see also 288). Von Allmen also links weekly communion with the reformation of Reformed worship and proper Lord’s day observance: “In order to revivify Reformed worship, the first step is the restoration of a weekly eucharist and communion, and the rest will follow...What makes Sunday Sunday is the celebration of the Eucharist...[Lack of weekly communion disrupts] the normal rhythm of Christian worship” (205, 287).

¹⁶ Perhaps the proclamation in 1 Cor. 11:26 is actually directed more towards God than the congregation. Just as the rainbow serves primarily as a reminder to God (Gen. 9:14-16), perhaps the elements of the Lord’s Supper are primarily being shown to God, that he might remember Christ’s death and pardon our sins.

- Weekly worship is a form of covenant renewal. God acts each Lord's Day to renew his relationship with us. An integral feature of this is the covenant meal. In the Supper, we eat of a peace offering with the Lord (Lev. 3). We hear his word declared, pledge our faithfulness to him, and seal the bond with a feast in his presence (Ex. 24). In the Supper, we show our heavenly Father the body and blood of his Son (1 Cor. 11:26), and his angel of death passes over us (Ex. 12). Because worship is a covenant renewal ceremony, and covenant renewal includes a meal in God's presence, weekly communion is an integral aspect of our Lord's Day meetings.
- Because of the corporate and covenantal nature of the sacrament, it is a protection against individualism. It should come as no surprise that churches which do not partake frequently are plagued by individualistic tendencies. Biblical piety does have an individual dimension, but this individual aspect is perverted if it is divorced from life in the Christian community, the church. The sacrament is something we do together; it is a constant reminder of our oneness in the body of Christ.¹⁸ Ignatius summarized the nature of Christian piety by saying, "Try to be together as much as possible." The Supper is perhaps the preeminent way we "come together."¹⁹
- The Supper culminates our entrance into the special presence of Christ, which is the essence of formal, corporate worship (see Jn. 20:19, 26; 1 Cor. 14:25²⁰; Rev. 3:20; Heb. 10:1,2, 19ff; 12:18ff; Ex. 24:9-11). Jesus Christ, the God-man, is really present in both his natures in a unique way in the sacrament.²¹

¹⁷See Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 156, 186, 204.

¹⁸The symbolism of the "one loaf" and "the cup" (singular) reinforce this mutual fellowship of believers (1 Cor. 10:16, 17). We need to ask ourselves if the biblical symbolism requires the use of a single loaf for the whole congregation (if possible) and a common cup. I do not pretend to have answers to these questions, but I think they are worth considering.

¹⁹Unfortunately, some in the Reformed tradition invert this by making communion an intensely "private" and "personal" time. This problem is only exacerbated when communion becomes yet another time to confess sin (which should be done, but very early in the liturgy, so it has already been dealt with before we come to the Lord's table).

²⁰1 Cor. 14:20-25 is an important but often misunderstood text. Briefly stated, Paul's point is this: Just as foreign tongues had been a sign of impending judgment on apostate Israel in Isaiah's ministry (1 Cor. 14:21 quotes Isa. 28:11-12; the reference is to the coming Assyrian invasion), so Paul understands the first century gift of tongues as serving an analogous function. Tongue-speaking in the church was intended to signify God's judgment on unbelieving Jews who had crucified their Messiah. The Jews rejected God's clear revelation in Christ so now he gave them a message they could not understand as a form of judgment. This divine judgment on the Israelites came to pass definitively in 70 A.D., with the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. With these events, the period of transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant came to an end, and with it, the gift of tongues. God removed the Old Covenant temple that the true temple of God might be revealed -- the church. Verse 25 describes the reaction of a Jew as he comes to realize that the church is indeed God's new temple, God's dwelling place. Compare to Heb. 10 and footnote 2. For a Jew to ascribe God's presence to the church's assembly was an awesome confession -- he was admitting the apostasy of his people and the authenticity of Christianity as the "true Judaism." (An interesting Old Covenant parallel to 1 Cor. 14:25 is Gen. 28:12-18, where God reveals himself to Jacob in a dream. Jacob's response is similar to the response of the Jew in the passage we have been examining: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!" [Gen. 28:16]. Note carefully Jacob's response: he *worships*. He erects a pillar and names the place Bethel, meaning "God's house" [Gen. 28:19]. Bethel, because it was a place of worship, became a kind of provisional temple, a place for men to meet with God. When Jacob met God there again in Gen. 35, he poured out a drink offering and oil on the altar, just as the Mosaic covenant would later prescribe [Num. 15:1-10; Ex. 40:9; Lev. 8:12].)

²¹The Calvinistic doctrine of Christ's presence in the sacramental feast must be carefully circumscribed to avoid the heresies of Eutychianism and Nestorianism. Eutychius had been the leader of one of the parties represented at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. He taught that Christ was neither fully human nor divine, but a mixture of both. Christ possessed only one nature, his humanity being divinized. The Lutheran view of consubstantiation appears to have a trace of Eutychianism in it, since it requires the virtual omnipresence of Christ's humanity. Rather than teaching God's people are raptured up into Christ's presence by the Holy Spirit in sacramental worship, as Calvin taught, Lutherans claimed Christ descended to dwell in the elements. Thus Christ's body must be capable of being in more than one place at a time.

The church has a monopoly on the special presence²² of Christ²³ and she should enjoy her unique privilege regularly.²⁴ The Bridegroom meets with the bride in the sacramental feast.

- In the sacrament, God's army, the church, is nourished, so that she might continue to carry on her holy war against the flesh, the devil, and the world. Without this heavenly food, we are left to fight at less than full strength. This weekly feast is a critical means of grace. If we are to wage war aggressively against sin in our own lives and in the culture, we must partake weekly.
 - In the Supper, we are reminded of the goodness of creation as God communes with his people through the physical elements of bread and wine.²⁵ Salvation does not mean escape from the physical
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But human bodies -- even glorified bodies -- face limitations of space and time that divinity does not; in other words, even though resurrected bodies have properties we cannot fathom, they remain bodies.

Calvinists have always seen this problem of the ubiquity of Christ's human body as the Achilles' heel of the Lutheran position (see Calvin's *Institutes*, 4.17.30-31). At the same time however, Calvinists must beware of the Nestorian error. Nestorius, the leader of another theological party represented at Chalcedon, was accused of separating the two natures of Christ in such a way that they were two distinct personalities. The Reformed are in danger of Nestorianism because sometimes they give the impression only the divinity of Christ is present in the sacrament, to the exclusion of his humanity. Chalcedon affirmed the orthodox position, condemning both Euthychianism and Nestorianism, by teaching that Christ is both truly God and truly man, having two natures in one person, "without mixture, without change, without separation, without division." An orthodox doctrine of Christ's presence in the Supper must be based upon an orthodox understanding of the incarnation. Eucharistology must be based on Christology. The best defense of the classical Reformed view is John Williamson Nevin's *The Mystical Presence* and his lengthy response to Charles Hodge published in the Mercersberg Review. Anyone interested in these questions *must* read and study Nevin's writings.

²² Understanding this biblical doctrine of God's special presence helps us better understand the Bible's teaching on worship and the sacrament. For example, Jesus at one point was questioned about fasting (Lk. 5:33ff). John's disciples would fast and pray, but Jesus and his disciples came eating drinking. Why the contrast? Jesus explained that the guests of the bridegroom could not fast in the presence of the bridegroom – they were to eat and drink with him. Thus, when we come into the presence of Christ, we are to eat and drink. The bride should be full of joy when she meets with her husband.

²³ Several passages speak of Christ's special presence in connection with the church. Note that the often quoted verse Mt. 18:20 follows on the heels of a passage about church discipline. In context, this verse means Christ is present with the courts of his church, enabling them do what verse 18 promises, namely, pronounce God's verdict on earth. While there are certainly other applications of 18:20 beyond church discipline, the reference is nonetheless clearly to the church's gatherings (i.e., in her capacity as an institution or organization). After discussing how Christians may meet with God in private worship, Peter Leithart writes, "Yet the people of God still meet him chiefly in the *assembly*. When the writer to the Hebrews encouraged his readers to approach the Lord with confidence, he immediately added a warning against forsaking the assembly of God's people (Heb. 10:19-25). Throughout the book of Acts, we rarely read of the early Christians in their private prayer closets (but see Acts 10:9), but frequently find them gathering to break bread (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1, 42; etc.) Certainly Christians ought not neglect private worship and prayer, but private worship should not be separated from worship of the church. Even in the new covenant, meeting God in worship is a *corporate* as well as an individual act" (*Kingdom and the Power*, p. 91). In the New Testament, as in the Old Testament, the emphasis is on the corporate side of worship.

²⁴ Proper administration of the sacrament is not only one of the marks of a true church, it also sets the church apart from her would-be imitators, i.e. so-called para-church groups.

²⁵ Weekly celebration of the sacrament reshapes our worldview. It inculcates a "sacramental worldview," which brings together the spiritual and material aspects of man's being. William Temple understood this: "It may safely be said that one ground for the hope of Christianity that it may make good its claim to be the one true faith lies in the fact that it is the most avowedly materialist of all the great religions. It affords an expectation that it may be able to control the material, precisely because it does not ignore it or deny it, but roundly asserts alike the reality of matter and its subordination. Its own most central saying is: 'The Word was made flesh,' where the last term was, no doubt chosen because of its specially materialistic associations. By the very nature of its central doctrine Christianity is committed to a belief in the ultimate

environment or the material world, but escape from *sin* and its effects. We are saved in space and history, not outside of it. Weekly observance reminds us that biblical piety and worship are not divorced from the world but embrace it. Gathered sacramental worship is not something isolated from the rest of life or tacked on to the rest of life as an added “extra,” but the very means by which the kingdom transforms life in the world. In the Supper, heaven leaves its imprint on earth. The efficacy of the sacrament extends into the whole life of the true worshipper. Frequent administration of the sacrament protects the church from Gnostic and monastic influences. It fights the prevailing pietism and escapism of our day.

- Because the Eucharistic liturgy focuses on giving thanks to God, it puts us in the proper frame of mind for going back out into the world for another week’s work.²⁶ Because we have given thanks to God while feasting at his table, we are better able to give thanks to him in the rest of life’s activities, allowing worship to flower into every facet of life.²⁷ The kingdom and its influence thus flow out into all that we do. The Supper allows cult to shape culture, as it ought. It is a weekly reminder of the “sacramental” quality of all of life, and indeed of all of creation.
- Recurrent ritual, so far from being subhuman or dehumanizing, is actually one of the most “human” things we do. The structure of the biblical liturgy,²⁸ especially the Lord’s Table, provides a regular outlet for emotion and expression in worship. Weekly communion, over time, will shape our understanding of Christian piety, worship, and community, as this pattern of feasting with Lord and each other every Lord’s Day day becomes progressively ingrained in us. It frees us from the Stoic elements of contemporary evangelical piety. There is always the danger of trivializing or formalizing ritual, but this is true of every worship element, not just the Supper. It is my conviction however, that weekly communion is one of the best ways to prevent worship from becoming stale or hollow.²⁹ In the

significance of the historical process, and in the reality of matter and its place in the divine scheme...*It is in the sacramental view of the universe, both its material and spiritual elements, that there is given hope of making human both politics and economics and of making effectual both faith and love*” (*Nature, Man and God*, p. 478, 486). History (our life in the here and now) and matter (our life on this earth, in our bodies) have genuine meaning before God. The sacrament screams this out every time we partake. For more insight into the relationship of the sacrament to worldview, see Peter Leithart’s article in *WTJ* 59:2 and *Kingdom and the Power*, chapter 7.

²⁶ Note that Jesus thanked his Father *twice* in the institution of the Supper, once for each element (Mt. 26:26, 27; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). The word “Eucharist,” a common name for the Supper in many Christian traditions, simply means “thanksgiving.” Communion prayers should not be elaborate prayers of consecration but rather simple, straight-forward prayers of thanks to God for His good gifts.

²⁷ It is often said (especially in Dutch Calvinist and Reconstructionist circles) that for the Christian, “All of life is to be worship.” This is certainly true, but while we are to worship God in every department of life, consecrating everything we do to his service (Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:23; 1 Pt. 1:15-16), we must be careful that this approach to Christianity does not have a “leveling effect” on our corporate worship. While there is no holy/common distinction for the New Covenant Christian, there is a sense in which sacramental, formal worship is elevated above the rest of life. (After all, it takes place on the holy mountain of the Lord -- see Heb. 12:18ff.) It is sacramental worship that is at the center of life and that serves as the primary transforming agent in our lives. While we are to seek to live for God’s glory in every “zone” of life, not every “zone” is equally important. In corporate worship, we ascend the hill of the Lord and enter his sanctuary (Ps. 24:3). To use Old Covenant Israel as an analogy, what we do in the “land” matters to God (work, family life, evangelism, etc.), but nothing else carries the same significance as what we do in the “temple” (especially the “Holy of Holies,” where we enter God’s throne room). Yes, all of life is to be worship, but perhaps I can make it clear this way: There’s worship, *and then there’s worship!* Obviously, frequent observance of the sacrament continually reminds us of the centrality of the church and her ordinances.

²⁸For what I mean by “structure of the biblical liturgy,” see my article “Liturgy and the Gospel.”

²⁹While many in the church today (unknowingly under the influence of Rousseau, no doubt) believe spontaneity to be the essence of sincere worship, the wisest of Christians have seen great value in recurrent, basically unchanging liturgical forms. C. S. Lewis called the urge for constant novelty in worship the “liturgical itch.” Continual change in the worship service actually becomes an obstacle to worship. Worship forms, like dance steps must be learned, and only when we have so learned them that we feel at home in

Supper, Christ meets with us personally and corporately, giving his life to us through these elements and energizing our worship service with his Spirit.³⁰

- The Supper is proof that God is redeeming his fallen and sin-cursed creation through the finished work of Christ; in this sense it is an eschatological feast³¹ foreshadowing the consummation and the renovation of all things in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:9-10, 20-23; Col. 1:15-20). God has accomplished definitively this restoration of the cosmos in Christ, and the fruits of his redemptive work progressively permeate and penetrate the culture of man as the Kingdom of God spreads (Mt. 13:31-33; Dan. 2:44-45; Isa. 11; Rev. 11:15).³² Thus the Supper, as the king's royal banquet, serves as the

them, can they become true vehicles of worship: "As long as you notice, and have to count the dance steps, you are not dancing but only learning to dance." The most helpful liturgy "would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping...There really is some excuse for the man who said, 'I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats'..." Lewis righfully desires "permanence and uniformity in worship," saying he could "make do with almost any kind of service whatever if only it would stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship. You give me no chance to acquire the trained habit." (*Letters to Malcolm*, 4-5). Should not the Lord's Supper be a constant part of our worship so that our congregations "feel at home" at the Lord's Table? Could it be that our desire for "freshness" in worship is really due to the desire to be distracted away from the God with whom we have to do?

³⁰Naturally, the sacraments do not work *ex opere operato* to bless us. Christ promises to work *through* the sacraments, and He always does because he is always present -- but this presence is a blessing to us only if we respond to Him in faith. If not, He comes to judge us. But note carefully that it the risen Christ who is does the blessing and the cursing. The blessing of the sacrament is not automatic, nor is it inherent in the sacrament considered independently of God's working, nor does it bless man apart from faith. The sacraments are one of the means God has appointed for administering his covenant grace to his people. But note that they are *means* of grace, not the grace itself; grace is an attribute of God that works through the sacraments, not some substance inherent in the sacraments. The grace of God at work in the sacraments is actually the personal presence of Christ himself through the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, we look to God, not to water, wine, or bread, for salvation. Spurgeon is helpful here: "Never mind that bread and wine, unless you can use them as folks often use spectacles. What do they use them for? To look at? No, to look *through* them. So, use the bread and wine as a pair of spectacles. Look through them, and do not be satisfied until you can say, 'Yes, yes, I can see the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'" (Mack and Swavely, *Life in the Father's House*, p. 108). If Spurgeon's illustration has a flaw, it is that the sacrament of the eucharist is primarily there to be eaten, not looked at. It is through eating and drinking that we recieve Christ.

³¹ Peter Leithart quotes Geoffrey Wainwright as saying, "The eucharistic celebration does not leave the world unchanged. The future has occupied the present for a moment at least, and that moment is henceforth an ineradicable part of the experience of those who lived it...the kingdom of God has come closer with each Eucharistic celebration." Leithart then goes on to say, "The Eucharist points toward the goal of creation and history – the eschatological wedding feast – and, if faithfully celebrated, brings that goal nearer to full realization. On the other hand, if the gift of the kingdom is offered to an unreceptive people, God intervenes to judge (1 Cor. 11:29-32). Either way, the celebration of the Eucharist leaves its inevitable mark on the world...The taste [of the Supper] makes us long all the more for the consummation of the promise, when we shall see God face to face, know even as we are known, and sit with him at his table in the eternal kingdom of heaven." (*ibid*, p. 125-6). I would add, following James Jordan, that it is not only the real presence of Christ in the Supper that makes us long for His return; it is also the real absence of Christ that gives us this longing -- meaning that while Christ is truly present, He is not present in that full and final way that He will be when He returns. Weekly feasting with Christ heightens our anticipation for his return in a very profound way.

³²I believe another illustration of the cosmic scope of Christ's redemptive work is found in the miracles of Christ, especially his miracles of physical healing. Sin has infested every area of human life and the curse has spread into every area of the creation. Christ's mission was to peel back the devastating curse of sin, restore the creation, and bring it to consummation. He is truly to be Savior of *the world* – not saving each

integration point for creation and redemption,³³ life and liturgy, work and worship. A proper understanding of the Supper annihilates the secular/sacred dichotomy that has plagued the church for much of this century.³⁴

- The ultimate blessing the Supper brings is the forgiveness of sins (Mt. 26:28). It is a renewed application of our justification. Thus it strengthens our assurance of salvation and fortifies our confidence in the grace of God. In eating and drinking the sacrament of Christ's body and blood by faith, we are made partakers of his redemptive work and sharers in his life.

We could go on with theological reasons of this sort. The Supper is so theologically rich, its connections to biblical teaching are almost limitless. This is not to say we may make the Supper mean anything we want, but it is to indicate that the Supper is more than we often suppose.³⁵ How is this theology applied to those

and every individual, but redeeming the creation considered as a whole or as a unit. *Salvation is cosmic, though not universal*. While Christ definitively accomplished this mission at the cross, obviously the effects of his saving work will not be totally realized until he returns. His miracles not only displayed his power, but also allow us to peer into the glories of the new heavens and earth yet to come. Both miracles and the sacraments show us the “stuff” of redemption (the ordinary, material creation is to be cleansed and restored by the blood of Christ) and set the pattern (or perhaps it would be better to say they follow the pattern) of our salvation (Rom. 8:19ff; Eph. 1:10). See Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 155.

³³Note that God singles out wine and bread as food he created to bring man joy and strength (Ps. 104:15). Our redemption is appropriately signified by the signs of wine and bread because our redemption is a recreation. As Peter Leithart has pointed out, the bread and wine of communion are a sort of “firstfruits” of the new creation (*ibid*, p. 124). Leithart also points out that “Jesus instituted that most common of all human activities – eating and drinking – to symbolize the kingdom and to communicate life to his people...the Eucharist teaches that it is precisely *this* world – this material, physical world of eating and drinking – that is the ‘matter’ of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is ultimately *this world* transfigured by the Spirit...the Eucharist teaches that *this* world is to be redeemed, transfigured into the kingdom of God.” The Supper is proof that man and the rest of the universe will ultimately fulfill God’s original purpose for the creation. Sin has not thwarted the plan of God but has been overruled for his ultimate glory and man’s good. Warfield echoes this: Through the redemptive work of Christ, “the human race attains the goal for which it was created and sin does not snatch it out of God’s hands: the primal purpose of God with it is fulfilled” (*The Plan of Salvation*, p. 102-103). The Supper is proof God’s goal for the creation will be accomplished – and indeed has been accomplished already in Christ’s work.

³⁴Note also the anti-Thomistic thrust of this theology of the Supper. I may be guilty of over-simplifying, but let me put it this way: Thomists see nature/creation and grace/redemption as running alongside of one another. Nature is fine as far as it goes, but it needs to be “perfected” or “supplemented” by grace. It is as if nature and grace were train tracks running parallel, but never touching; or to change the imagery, grace for Thomas is a “second story” added to nature. The Lord’s Supper seems to reveal a very different pattern of God’s redemptive work: Nature is not normal, but fallen, due to man’s sin (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:18-25). By grace, God transforms, restores, and consummates nature. Redemption is a recreation of sorts, but ultimately surpasses the original state of man. It is not an additional track to creation, but rather puts creation back on track after Adam’s rebellion and carries it to its appointed destiny. Abraham Kuyper was noted for saying “redemption is accidental.” While we would not want to push Kuyper’s remark too far, there is certainly a sense in which redemption serves only to accomplish God’s original purpose for the creation, namely transfiguring the Garden of Eden into the New Jerusalem. Through Christ’s redemptive work, God’s original purpose for man and the creation is fulfilled. The covenant of grace brings to pass all God intended in the covenant of creation and cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26-28), not only restoring man and the world to glory, but transforming it from glory to glory.

³⁵Hopefully the forgoing section will not be viewed as an unbridled display of sacramental speculation or “hermeneutical maximalism.” I am sensitive to difficulties in this area. However, if the sacrament is a sign and seal of the gospel, *it must signify all that is contained in the gospel message*. The gospel promises a comprehensive redemption; therefore it can only be symbolized by a sacrament that pictures this comprehensiveness. There is the danger of going beyond the Scripture in these matters, but I am afraid there is an equal danger of “hermeneutical minimalism” – stopping short of Scripture’s teaching and thus

present in the worship service? There are again many things that could be said here, but allow me to summarize by giving three “practical” ways the Supper impacts us:

1. The sacrament *distinguishes* the church from the world.³⁶ The Lord’s Supper is her exclusive privilege and defining badge (along with baptism). The sacrament reminds us of the antithesis between the church and the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18). But the Supper not only marks off the church from the world, it separates Lord’s Day (formal) worship from other Christian meetings. The services in which we feed on Christ are unique among gatherings of Christians. Formal worship is to be sacramental in nature. In sacramental worship, we enter God’s throne room, heaven itself, as we draw near to God in the Most Holy Place (Heb 10; 12:18-29). The sacrament is a profound reminder that God is among us (1 Cor. 14:25). God comes to renew the covenant with his people, which of course must include the administration of the covenant meal. As Jordan has pointed out, in the New Covenant there is only one food law: “Do this in remembrance of me.”
2. The sacrament *challenges* both Christian and non-Christian. The Christian is challenged to repentance and rededication, covenant renewal with his Lord, a deeper trust in Christ’s death for forgiveness, and reconciliation with offended brothers. He is also challenged in a tangible way to give thanks to God and glorify him for his gifts to his people. The non-Christian, if present, is challenged with the gospel. He is made to feel like an outsider, which of course he is.³⁷ He sees he’s missing something -- fellowship with the King of Kings, feasting with the people of God as they ascend spiritually into the Lord’s heavenly presence, and the forgiveness of sins that comes with eating and drinking Christ’s life and death. “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53).³⁸ The non-Christian is reminded that so long as he refuses to feast on Christ he is dead (Eph. 2:1-3).
3. The sacrament *seals* the Word preached. It complements and completes the Word. There can be no hint of competition between the Word and the Eucharist; they go together. First we hear the gospel, then we get to eat the gospel. The sacrament presents the Word in a tangible, sensible form. Thus God reaches the whole man with his glorious message of grace. I think this is helpful because it helps counteract an intellectualistic tendency that is common in Reformed churches, where preaching is so heavily emphasized and worshippers are often treated as minds to be filled, rather than as whole persons in need of holistic communion with the whole Christ. We make worship an experience for the whole person, including the bodily senses, when we serve the sacrament weekly. In biblical worship, we not only *hear* Christ preached, but we (sacramentally) see him with our eyes, handle him with our hands, smell him with our nostrils, and taste him with our mouths.

In summary, weekly communion is necessary if we are to seek maximum blessing in our worship. And worship is most certainly a time of God bestowing blessing on us his covenant people, being present with them in a unique way, speaking to them in the reading and preaching of his Word, and offering himself to them in the communion feast.

missing the fullness and richness of the biblical revelation. I have tried to explore the implications of the Supper in a way that remains faithful to the biblical teaching on creation, redemption, and the sacraments in general. The aforementioned works of Leithart are well worth reading in this area.

³⁶ See Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 155.

³⁷ Thus, there can be an evangelistic dimension to liturgical worship, but only in an indirect and secondary way. Worship and evangelism are basically different and need to be kept separate for the most part, but some overlap is possible (1 Cor. 14:20ff -- though remember that the unbeliever in view in 1 Cor. 14 is an unbelieving Jew, not a pagan off the street). If in sacramental worship, the church ascends into God’s heavenly sanctuary, as Calvin believed, unbelievers certainly do not make the trip with us. Worship is private time between God and His bride. But at the same time, as “earthly” observers of this “heavenly” gathering, unbelievers can, in some sense, peer over our shoulders, and come to a realization of their need for the gospel.

³⁸ John 6 is not directly about the Lord’s Supper, as it was spoken long before the Supper was instituted. However, the passage certainly has implications for our understanding of the Supper.

HISTORICAL

Finally there is the argument from church history. While church history is never ultimately authoritative (as is Scripture), the historic practice and teaching of the church can give us further insight and set a precedent for us to follow. Weekly communion, so far from being an innovation of Rome,³⁹ appears to have been the practice of the church from antiquity. For example, Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165 A.D.) and the *Didache* indicate clearly that the Supper was an ordinary part of worship every Lord's Day.⁴⁰ Further examples of ancient church practice, as well as the opinion of John Calvin, can be found in Calvin's *Institutes* 4.17.43-46.⁴¹ Calvin says, "The Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, at least once a week...no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. That this was the established order among the Corinthians, we can safely infer from Paul." Calvin called annual communion an "invention of the devil" and said the Lord's table should be spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians."⁴² Likewise, Luther, while not setting down a hard and fast rule, reports that Protestant churches in his day offered communion daily and wrote, "it is to be feared that anyone who does not desire to receive the sacrament at least three or four times a year despises the sacrament and is no Christian." What little we do know of first century worship is quite consistent on this point. It appears Christians from the apostolic church onwards partook of communion weekly. In conclusion, we can say with a great deal of confidence that if Reformed

³⁹ The Roman Catholic church has become known for weekly communion, but at the time of the Reformation the situation was quite different. One of the major controversies sparking the Reformation was the Roman practice of giving church members communion only once a year. Oddly enough, today this is one point on which the church of Rome is more "Calvinistic" than most Reformed churches.

⁴⁰ Martyr: "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read...Then we all rise and pray...when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying, Amen; and there is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given." The *Didache*: "But every Lord's Day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions." J. J. Von Allmen traces the loss of weekly communion: "Up to the fifth century, it was taken for granted that all the baptized who were not excommunicate would communicate each Sunday. But for various reasons, and in particular because of a lack of balance in the development of Eucharistic doctrine -- which, especially in the West, favoured the memorial aspect to the detriment of the aspects of communion and parousia -- the communion of the faithful became ever less frequent, until about the ninth century it was on average annual communion; and this indifference threatened to become a matter of total abstention, so much so that the Lateran Council required the faithful to communicate at least once a year at the season of Easter. The Eucharist was still celebrated each Sunday, but the celebrant was almost alone in communicating. Thus, broadly speaking, communion was divorced from the Eucharist. Such was the situation faced by the Reformers. ..At the Reformation, Luther maintained the Sunday Eucharist, and normally the Anglican Church did likewise. The Reformed Churches were alone in giving it up...But whatever the truth of the matter, it is the fact that, despite hesitations which were never lacking, the Reformed Church, alone among the great liturgical traditions, excluded from its Sunday worship the celebration of the Lord's Supper." *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 147-153.

⁴¹ It is very evident that Calvin wanted to partake of the Sacrament weekly, if not more often. Unfortunately, he was not able to implement this practice in the church of Geneva, because a stubborn city council would not allow it. So much for the idea that Calvin was a dictator!

⁴² According to Geddes MacGregor (*Corpus Christi*, 65), Calvin so earnestly wanted the Eucharist weekly, he virtually risked his ministry to attain it. Alas, he failed. For more on Calvin's desire for weekly communion, see the following: Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 204, 226, 285-6; Gregory Rickmar, *Manual For Lord's Day Worship*, A-18ff; Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament*, 252-253.

worship is to be truly *catholic* (in the best sense of the term), it must include a weekly celebration of the Eucharist.⁴³

OBJECTIONS

Why would a church *not* want to partake weekly? Taking communion is a judicial act that brings us out from under the curse of sin. Every time we partake worthily, the merits of Christ are reapplied to us. But there is no sacramental neutrality. This is why we are called upon to examine ourselves before we eat and drink (1 Cor. 11:28). The sacrament inescapably brings with it God's covenantal sanctions – either blessings or curses (1 Cor. 11:30; 10:1-12; cf. Dt. 28). Thus, while communion is intended primarily as a means of grace to God's people, it becomes a means of wrath for the unrepentant and rebellious who come to the table. Rebels in the church are scared to death of weekly communion. They are terrified (and rightfully so) at the thought of coming under sanctions so regularly. But this is simply another reason to do weekly communion: It identifies the unrepentant in the midst of the assembly and drives them out. Weekly communion will clean out the church quicker than anything else; false professors in our churches just won't be able to stand it. They will either be converted, get sick and die (1 Cor. 11:30), or go to another church where communion is not taken with such utter seriousness (and where it is therefore only taken once a quarter or so). Judgment must begin at the house of God. It is true, weekly communion is dangerous. But we must judge ourselves or face the Lord's judgment (1 Cor. 11:31); there is no other alternative.⁴⁴

But there is another reason why a church may not want to take communion weekly. Not only may a church be afraid of coming under judgment; she may also be afraid of rendering judgment. Luke 22:29, 30⁴⁵ is used far less often in our communion liturgies than 1 Cor. 11, but it is certainly a significant passage. The Supper is a means of judgment not only *on* the church, but *by* the church. Through her liturgy, the church shapes history and wages holy war on the world.⁴⁶ Luke 22 connects the Lord's Table with the authority of

⁴³Von Allmen's remarks are to the point: "We have not the right, unless we wish to injure the catholicity of our confession, to regard the Eucharist as an optional rather than essential element in the cult...We should be wasting our time on aesthetics and archaeology, and the deeper the exercise seemed to be, the more stupid it would be, if we were now to try to present a pattern of worship that lacked its peak point, viz., the Eucharist. What we must aim at in our Church is the healing of our liturgical troubles by the restoration of the primitive and normal rhythm -- namely, the Word and the Sacrament -- and all other things will follow" (288). In other words, all attempts at liturgical reform are purely academic apart from a restoration of the weekly Eucharist.

⁴⁴ Interestingly, the Lord's Day, a.k.a., the Day of the Lord, which is the first day of every week in the New Covenant calendar, is intimately associated with God's judgment (as well as his salvation). This is clearly seen in both the OT and the NT. Developing this theme, or pattern, as it is found in Scripture, goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, it should be noted that the Lord draws near to his people to judge (i.e., evaluate) them on the Lord's Day as they gather together in church (Ex. 23:17). We are like an army assembling for assessment by her Commander-in-Chief. This helps to explain the fierce judgments poured out on the Corinthians who did not pass the Lord's inspection.

⁴⁵ I take this passage to describe the *present* reign of Christ and the saints, consistent with New Testament teaching elsewhere. Christ definitively established his kingdom in his first coming (Mt. 4:17; 11:11-14; 16:28; 28:18-20; Lk. 11:20; 17:20-21; Jn. 12:12-15, 30-33; 18:36-37; Acts 1:8; 2:33, 36; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 1:19-23; 2:6; Col. 1:13; Heb. 1:13; 2:6-9; 1 Pt. 2:9; Rev. 1:5-6; 20:4-6) and bestowed his authority on his apostles. Of course, this kingdom will grow throughout history, and extend into eternity. The reference to eating and drinking in this passage must look back to the Lord's Supper, which, in Luke's account, was instituted just previously (Lk. 22:13-20). In the context, the disciples of Jesus were arguing over who would be the greatest. Jesus goes on to explain the essence of greatness in his kingdom: it comes from service to others and feasting at the King's banquet table (Lk. 22:24-30). Leithart says, "worship is a chief way we participate in Christ's rule over all things...Heaven is both the place where we meet with the triune God in intimate fellowship, and the place where we sit upon thrones ruling all things. Sitting is a posture both of kings and dinner guests; during our worship in the heavenly sanctuary, we both sit on thrones to rule and at a table for a feast" (*ibid.*, p. 98).

⁴⁶See the works of David Chilton, Leithart, and Jordan for more on this idea of liturgy and holy war.

his people. Communion furthers the dominion of God's people because in partaking they are exalted to sit with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21, 21; Eph. 2:6; see Calvin's *Institutes* 4.17.31). If we don't want to partake frequently, perhaps it is because we are afraid of the responsibility that comes with ruling and having dominion.⁴⁷ We don't take communion weekly for the same reasons we don't do church discipline or sing imprecatory psalms: We are afraid of imposing God's negative sanctions on anyone. We don't want to serve as judges. As a result, sin goes unchallenged in the church and in the culture. The church never formally and officially asks God to judge the wicked and so God does not do it; the wicked among and around us continue to prosper. The sacrament empowers God's people for subduing the earth and exercising godly authority, but with this task comes tremendous accountability. Again, while this may explain why a church would not want the sacrament every week, it is actually another reason to do it. The Supper forces us to take responsibility, to deal with sin, to further biblical dominion, and to think more militantly. The twentieth century American church is wimpy; weekly communion may be the best way to strengthen her for war.⁴⁸

Obviously fear of judgment and of judging might keep a church from partaking, even if the sense of these things is more intuitive than explicit. The church might also take the sacrament less frequently if she misunderstands what the Supper is about. Historically the church's view of the sacrament has fluctuated between seeing it as something magical (Roman Catholicism) and as a mere memorial (Anabaptism). When the memorial view prevails, as it has even in Reformed circles in recent times, the church sees far less need for the Supper. When the Supper is no longer viewed as a life-giving feast, but only a remembrance, its value decreases dramatically in the eyes of pastors and worshippers. Recovering a truly Calvinistic view of the Supper (where Christ is said to be really and truly present by faith) will once again make the sacrament a premier element in worship.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The dominion in view here is primarily spiritual/heavenly. This dominion is manifested in Christians fighting indwelling sin in their hearts (Rom. 6-7), worshipping God in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:21), doing all manner of work unto the Lord (Col. 3:23-24), enduring through suffering (Rom. 8:17-39), proclaiming the gospel to the world (Acts 26:17-18), humbly serving one another (Lk. 22:26), etc. It is only secondarily and indirectly concerned with earthly (i.e., political and cultural) rule. Godly cultural dominion in every area of life (Christendom) is an *implication* of the presence of the kingdom of God, but is not to be identified with it, at least not in this age. This is not to say the Supper is divorced from cultural transformation; rather it is to stress that the reformation of worship must take primacy over the reconstruction of culture. First we dine with Christ, then we rule with him (Rev. 3:20, 21).

⁴⁸ The insights of this paragraph are loosely based on Gary North's *Millennialism and Social Theory*, p. 210ff.

⁴⁹ Few areas of theology caused as much controversy at the time of the Protestant Reformation as that of the way in which Christ is present in the Lord's Supper. It might be helpful to *briefly* consider this debate. On one end of the spectrum, were the Anabaptists (and supposedly Zwingli shared their view). The Anabaptist conception is essentially the modern baptistic understanding: Christ is in no way present in the sacrament and therefore the Supper is a mere remembrance of Christ's suffering. In this view, the Supper is something like a memorial for a departed friend. The only presence of Christ in the Supper is *subjective* (in the mind of the worshipper). While the Supper is indeed a remembering of Christ (1 Cor. 11:24), certainly the biblical data points to something more going on when we come to the table. On the other end of the spectrum was the Roman Catholic view, known as transubstantiation. Rome had heavily imbibed an Aristotelian metaphysic, separating the accidents (or attributes) and substance of a thing. Thus, in the Supper, the elements retained the accidents of bread and wine, but the substance was transformed into the physical body and blood of our Lord. This doctrine may be rejected immediately as an abomination, since it seems to make the Lord's Supper a resacrificing of Christ (though many Romanists would deny this), contrary to Heb. 9:28, and since it is built on an attempted synthesis with pagan philosophy. Somewhere in the middle were the Lutheran and Calvinistic views, which appear to me to be more similar than may have been recognized at the time of the Reformation (and since then I might add). The Lutheran view, called consubstantiation, taught that Christ's flesh and blood are present in, with, and under the elements -- in other words, the flesh and blood of Christ somehow occupy the same space as the bread and wine. (As proof, Lutherans pointed to Jn. 20:19 where Christ apparently passed through a wall. As Christ entered the room, his body and the wall must have occupied the same space.) In the Lutheran view the elements are

Besides fear and misunderstanding, what specific objections might be raised against this position? I will raise a few objections and attempt to answer them.

1. “This practice is a departure from historic Presbyterianism.” I have two words to say in response to this: *Sola Scriptura*. Church tradition does carry great weight (indeed I have already appealed to it!), but in the final analysis what really counts is the teaching of God’s infallible Word. It is a matter of historical fact that many Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians took communion only quarterly or once a year. This practice eventually evolved into monthly communion, as practiced by a great majority of Presbyterian churches today. While our Presbyterian heritage sheds a glorious and radiant light on a great many theological issues, this, with all due respect, isn’t one of them. Quite frankly, our tradition since the Reformation has simply not done its homework when it comes to worship. The reasons for this extend beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly one cause that should not be overlooked is an overreaction to Rome’s worship. The Puritan formulation of the regulative principle of worship (WCF 21.1) is correct, but their *application* of it was flawed in a number of ways.⁵⁰ Whether we realize it or not, most Presbyterian churches (especially in the PCA) have already departed from historic Presbyterian worship (and now use creeds, hymns, the Lord’s Prayer, celebration of Christmas and Easter, etc.). Puritan “minimalism,” has fallen on hard time since most Presbyterians have abandoned many of their historic distinctives. Infrequent communion is one more distinctive that should be abandoned. There are of course exceptions, but it seems a general consensus has been reached in

bread, but also body, and wine, but also blood. Hence, Lutherans would say we really partake of Christ with our mouths. Yet Lutherans rejected the Capernaitic heresy, which taught that our teeth actually tore apart his flesh. Its hard to see how this is a consistent position: if Christ is physically present in the bread, how do we not tear his flesh with our teeth when we bite into the bread? The solution, given in the *Formula of Concord*, is that we partake of Christ *supernaturally*. Lutherans were careful to distinguish their view from the Calvinistic view, which they explicitly called a very dangerous doctrine. Calvin similarly often went to great lengths to distance himself from the Lutheran view. However, he insisted on the real, *objective* presence of Christ in the Supper and both Lutherans and Calvinists insisted on faith if one was to partake worthily. Calvin wrote, “[It] is not an empty or unmeaning sign which is held out to us, but those who receive this promise by faith are actually made partakers of his flesh and blood. For in vain would the Lord command his people to eat *bread*, declaring that *it is his body*, if the effect were not truly added to the figure. Nor must it be supposed that we dispute this point [with the Lutherans, I assume, since he had just previously referred to their doctrine], whether it is in reality, or only by signification, that Christ presents himself to be enjoyed by us in the Lord’s Supper; for, though we perceive in it nothing but bread, yet he does not disappoint or mock us, when he undertakes to nourish our souls by his flesh. The true eating of the flesh of Christ, therefore, is not only pointed out by the sign, but is likewise exhibited in reality...our souls feed on Christ’s own *flesh* in precisely the same manner as *bread* imparts vigour to our bodies. The *flesh* of Christ, therefore is spiritual nourishment, because it gives life to us. Now it gives life, because the Holy Spirit pours into us the life which dwells in it” (Comm. on Mt. 26:26). Thus, both Calvinists and Lutherans wrestled with this mystery, coming to slightly different answers. I must confess I find Calvin’s view superior and closer to the biblical truth, because it does not compromise with the Eutychian or Nestorian errors (see footnote 16) and it quite properly emphasizes the sacramental role of the Holy Spirit in the Supper. The Holy Spirit acts not as a replacement or substitute for Jesus, but to make Him present to us in his undivided deity and humanity. However, neither side can claim (or would want to claim) to have fully solved the enigmas of Christ’s presence in the Supper. The Lutherans claim we partake of Christ “supernaturally”; Calvin and the WCF used the term “spiritual” to describe our communion with Christ. (I would prefer “Spiritual” with a capital S to emphasize it is the work of the Holy Spirit.) At best, the way in which Christ is present in the sacrament has been hemmed in, not pin-pointed.

⁵⁰ The subject is too big to tackle here, but briefly consider two of the greatest difficulties with the Puritan application of the regulative principle. First, the Puritans basically looked for a list of worship elements, but nowhere does Scripture provide such a list or tell us to make such a list. Secondly, the Puritans looked really only to NT pastoral epistles for these instructions, often neglecting the teaching of the OT on worship, including its rich symbolism, inclusion of choirs and musical instruments, colors, a liturgical calendar, vestments, etc.

Reformed circles that the Puritan's approach to worship needs to be somewhat revised.⁵¹ Incidentally, we are still in good company if we advocate weekly communion. Calvin himself strongly urged the practice as a biblical requirement. Many Puritans, including Reformed Baptists and Independents of the seventeenth century, practiced weekly communion. John Owen's catechism included the following question and answer: "How often is the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper to be administered? Every first day of the week, or at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained." Westminster divines Goodwin, Nye, Simpson, Burroughes, and Bridge, all practiced weekly communion. While Presbyterians usually favored quarterly or annual communion, some Presbyterians, such as Richard Baxter, would have preferred weekly communion as the norm.⁵²

2. "The Supper will lose its meaning if taken so frequently." Our first objection was based on tradition; this one is based on feelings. My response is, "Why isn't this true of other elements such as preaching, singing, prayer, etc. as well?"⁵³ Also, where do we draw the line? If having the Supper less frequently makes it more special, why not do it once a year? Or once a decade? Or even once a lifetime? Then it would really be special! I think this "psychological" approach to worship, which bases practices on subjective experience rather than God's Word, is very dangerous. We should start by asking "What does God require of us in worship?" rather than "What will we like the most?" Someone might reply to my response by claiming that the Lord's Supper becomes monotonous more easily than other elements; for example, preaching does not lose its freshness because we hear a different sermon every week. Once again, however, this misses the point. I'm sure the Levites got tired of offering up the same old sacrifices to God day after day, year after year (Heb. 10:11). The question is not about our personal preferences, but about God's requirement. The sacrament is objectively a vehicle of God's special presence, whether we subjectively feel anything special or not. Of course, partaking carelessly can be dangerous (1 Cor. 11:29) and this makes weekly communion a challenge to us all to stay on our toes spiritually. The subjective side of the sacrament *is* crucial -- we must partake in faith. But the bottom line is that God can and will use the sacrament as a means of grace to believers even if they don't get spiritual goosebumps every time they partake; the sacrament has *objective efficacy!*⁵⁴ Worship is not

⁵¹While I do think it is safe to say that whatever present Reformed consensus on worship there is is a substantial departure from the seventeenth century Reformed consensus (whether or not everyone likes to admit this), it is by no means agreed upon in the Reformed community which direction we should take our worship. Some favor "traditionalist" worship, that simply modifies the older Puritan minimalism to make it slightly more bearable. Others are moving towards more "contemporary"/"pop"/"seeker-friendly" worship styles. Most Reformed people seem to know more what they are *not* than what they actually are. We know we do not want to be Roman, Eastern, Lutheran, Anglican, etc. But there is much we can learn about liturgy from these other branches of the church. We should not do things simply because we have always done them in the past or because everyone else around us is doing them. But neither should we not do things just because other churches do, and always have, done certain things. The great need of the hour is a renewed study of what the whole Bible says about worship and how the whole church has sought in to apply this. I think many in the Reformed camp would be a bit surprised by what they would find. Jordan's writings on worship can serve as good starting point for those who like to pursue this.

⁵² On the frequency of communion during this period, see Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, ch. 12.

⁵³Weekly ritual *may* become trite and meaningless, but it certainly does not have to. Recurrent ritual is a necessary part of life (think of how frequently you kiss your wife or shake a friend's hand -- repetition does not make these meaningless). G. K. Chesterton has a *glorious* section on how the monotony of ritual is the very essence of life in *Orthodoxy*, 60-1. I strongly recommend that you read and reread this section of Chesteron's book. If ritual becomes trite it is because *we* are lifeless, not the ritual itself!

⁵⁴ It must be pointed out, reluctantly of course, that the sacrament's objective efficacy is true not only for worthy partakers but also unworthy partakers. Believers may not feel a "spiritual high" every time they come to the table, but the sacrament is still at work blessing them. On the other hand, unrepentant partakers may not feel judgment coming upon them, but nonetheless, they are storing up wrath for themselves. There is no sacramental neutrality – *something powerful happens every time a person comes to the feast, either to drive him closer to heaven or push him closer to hell.* The sacrament will either be a feast of life or of

simply about subjective experiences, but objectives *acts*. Also this objection can be reversed into a powerful (albeit subjective) argument in favor of weekly communion. The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon confessed that he feared that taking the Supper weekly might “take away from the impressiveness of the holy feast.” Instead, he found it “to be fresher every time.” He went on to say that those who took only monthly or quarterly did not really give the Supper “a fair opportunity to edify them” because they “so grossly neglect” it. Worship for me is far more meaningful when we feast on Christ; truly the Supper becomes a window onto heaven and a foretaste of the wedding banquet of the Lamb. Whenever we partake, all the drama of Christ’s passion is relived in some sense in this edifying, electrifying, and enthralling event. There is nothing else quite like it this side of heaven. As Calvin put it, the Supper is to be experienced more than explained; it is to be delighted in rather than merely discussed.⁵⁵

3. “It is wrong to institute weekly communion simply because you are seeking God’s blessing. This is selfish. It misses the purpose of worship.” Certainly, we gather in worship to bless God -- not to give him something he lacks (because he lacks nothing), but to ascribe to him what is his already, namely, all power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, and blessing (Rev. 5:12). However, God also blesses his people when they obediently assemble before him around his throne. There is nothing wrong with seeking blessing from our Heavenly Father. Don’t we seek God’s blessing when we pray? Did not Christ motivate his disciples to be obedient with the hope of reward (Mt. 6:19-21; Lk. 12:32-34; Mk. 10:29-31; etc.)? Naturally, we come to the table seeking a blessing from the King of kings and Lord of lords. We come to the table to commemorate Christ’s death, but also to rejoice in the ongoing consequences of that death: Victory over sin and Satan, deeper fellowship with God, the nourishing and strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit, etc. Undoubtedly, the greatest blessing of the Lord’s table, towering above whatever other benefits we may receive, is the experience of having our sins forgiven (Mt. 26:28). Aren’t these blessings we all want? And don’t we want them regularly? Prosperity and joy follow obedience (Dt. 28:1-2), and so obeying the Bible’s command to partake of the Lord’s Supper when we gather will undoubtedly bring blessing from the Lord of the feast. Of course we can abuse this teaching when we start to think we can *earn* something by our obedience or *demand* a certain blessing we desire in exchange for our obedience, but the principle is Scripturally sound: Obedience brings great blessing. I will freely admit that in my push for weekly communion, not only am I motivated by a desire to do what the Bible commands, but I am also motivated by the increased blessing I expect for the congregation. C.S. Lewis has aptly commented that indifference to God’s promises of blessing is far more Kantian and Stoic than Christian. The promises we are given in the gospel are *staggering*. Echoing this, John Piper has demonstrated that Christianity may even be considered a form of hedonism!⁵⁶ What could be more hedonistic than feasting with our husband and enjoying communion with our elder brother? The Lord’s Supper is a feast of life and a feast of joy! Weekly communion maximizes the blessing we receive and therefore maximizes the joy! The command to come to the Lord’s Table is nothing less than a command to delight ourselves in the Lord (Ps. 37:4). Weekly communion is the doctor’s prescribed regimen for our sin-sick souls; it is therapy for an ailing church.
4. “Taking the Supper weekly is inconvenient. Our services are already too long -- this will only make them longer.” This objection is quite true for the most part. On the other hand, obedience is almost never convenient. The easy way is rarely God’s way. We must be careful not to let “good ol’ American pragmatism” determine how we worship God. We gather to worship the Lord, not our

death, a foretaste of eternal bliss in the presence of God or eternal damnation in utter darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The same is true of the preaching of the gospel – the Word is an “aroma of Christ” unto the elect, drawing them to the Savior, but the “smell of death” to the reprobate, hardening them in their sins (2 Cor. 2:14-17). The Word comes to save or judge, but it always accomplishes its intended effect, and it never returns void (Isa. 55:10).

⁵⁵See also the description of the experience of taking communion in A.A. Hodge’s *Evangelical Theology*.

⁵⁶ See Piper’s book *Desiring God*. While Piper’s label of “Christian Hedonism” may be novel, his theology is not, at least on this point. This is historic Reformed teaching. Compare, for example, *True Bounds of Christian Liberty* by Puritan Samuel Bolton.

clocks. To let our Timexes dictate what elements we will include in our service is nothing short of idolatry. At the same time, elders and leaders in worship need to be realistic, maintain order, and not bind up the sheep with loads too heavy to carry. But remember, Presbyterian elders are not to cater to the desires of the majority or the loudest complainers. There is only room for one will in the church: Christ's will. All that ultimately matters is his Word. The length of the service and other logistical concerns are important insofar as the shepherds must care for the flock and gently lead it; but this has no bearing as to whether or not we should practice weekly communion. Again, what saith the Scriptures?

5. “Weekly communion may have been the practice of the early church. But that does not constitute a biblical mandate or requirement. Church history is only descriptive, not prescriptive. While weekly communion may be a good idea, if it is not required, we shouldn’t rock the boat unnecessarily.” This objection is a difficult one to answer. What constitutes a biblical mandate in the area of worship? Why can’t we appeal to Old Covenant types and shadows? Doesn’t the Old Covenant revelation equip us for every good work, including every good liturgical work (2 Tim. 3:16ff)? More importantly, why can’t we appeal to the New Testament narratives of apostolic practice? We do this in other areas of church life. When we see the apostles continually meeting on the first day of the week for worship, we can deduce that Sunday is the New Covenant Sabbath, and Lord’s Day worship is an authoritative pattern for the church to follow permanently. When we see the apostles call a Church-wide assembly in Acts 15, we can infer that whenever major debates crop up among Christians, a similar assembly should be called to deliberate on the matter and pronounce judgment. For our purposes, the only question is, “Did the apostles appear to lay down the practice of weekly communion in the churches they established?” If so, I believe this constitutes a mandate; apostolic example is binding on us, especially since it seems apostolic practice had its origin with Christ himself (1 Cor. 11:1, 2, 16; cf. 11:23). All the internal evidence we have in the NT seems to answer in the affirmative; the earliest known records of church practice available to us further confirm this viewpoint. Since no didactic portion of Scripture explicitly tells us how often we are to have communion, we must look to apostolic practice, but certainly this is a valid way for God to communicate his will to us concerning worship. We are to worship God only as he commands us, but there is no reason for artificially restricting the forms of instruction God could use. Also, the burden of proof can be reversed. Where is proof that the apostles ever gathered for worship *without* taking communion? Those who advocate monthly or quarterly communion will have a far more difficult time establishing their practice on Scriptural grounds. It appears to me that these are the *worst* positions to take. It is not enough to say we should partake “frequently” as PCA BCO 58-1 says unless we allow apostolic example to define “frequently.” And besides where does Scripture command us to partake “frequently”? This is where the old Puritan approach to the regulative principle breaks down. WCF 21.5 says the sacraments are to be an *ordinary* part of worship; the proof texts cited are 1 Cor. 11:23-29, which we have seen indicates weekly observance, and Acts 2:42, which refers to a church taking communion daily. By the way, daily and yearly communion can find some legitimate biblical support, though I would claim they are still inferior positions to taking the Lord’s Supper each Lord’s Day. Supporters of daily communion could cite manna given to the Israelites while wandering in the wilderness and the practice of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47). The problems with this are, first, the manna from heaven was *not* given on the Sabbath, but this appears to be the day the apostles regularly partook, and, secondly, the practice of the church in Jerusalem is unique in that the city was about to be destroyed (Mt. 24) and so it was something of a crisis and/or revival situation not faced by other churches. This would also explain the liquidating of property in Jerusalem, which was not imitated or practiced by churches in other cities. Yearly communion finds its roots in the annual Passover feast that was clearly a forerunner of the Lord’s Supper. The problem with this is that it is clear from 1 Cor. 5 and 11 that the church there partook far more frequently. Communion is to be a regular element in weekly Lord’s Day worship.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It should be added here that weekly communion finds typological support in the Old Covenant in that the showbread was eaten every Sabbath day in the temple by the priests. In the New Covenant, all God’s people are priests and get to eat “the bread of His presence” each Lord’s Day. See Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, 140ff.

6. “Such frequent observance of the sacrament will lead to superstition.” Actually, in the history of the church, the reverse has often been true. Infrequent celebration of the Supper has turned it into such a “big deal” that superstition has arisen. The end result is that the people become afraid of the table and want the Supper less and less frequently. This happened in the Middle Ages, when the doctrine of transubstantiation arose, leading to very infrequent participation and withholding one or both elements the laity.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this section I only want to point out that perhaps if the church better understood what happens in the Lord’s Supper, she’d *want* it more often. Truly it is a means of grace to believers. We *need* to partake frequently. If someone were to ask us “How can I grow as a Christian?” we would respond in unison “Take up the means of grace!” Historically, Reformed theology has defined the means of grace as Scripture and Sacrament, the audible word and the visible/edible word. But how can someone take our own advice so long as we only serve the Supper once a month? It seems we are shortchanging ourselves. I think it is fair to say that if we understand the nature of the sacrament, and if we want to grow, we will want to partake weekly. In James 4, James tells us “You have not because you ask not.” To paraphrase his teaching, if we lack desired growth in grace, *perhaps we have not because we eat not!* To go one step further, if we lack even the desire for growth, God will whet our appetites when we “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10). As the church father Ignatius put it, “To fast on the Lord’s Day is to kill Christ.” The Lord’s Day is to be a day of feasting and celebrating, in light of Christ’s victorious work; without the Supper, we are fasting, at least spiritually speaking, to our own detriment. Worship without the Supper is like a wedding without a banquet feast, covenant renewal without the sign or meal of the covenant, a victory without a celebration. Without the sacrament, something essential to our worship is missing. We are refusing to allow Christ to come into the church and sup with us (Rev. 3:20). In light of exegetical and theological considerations, church history, and the nature of worship, it seems to me weekly communion is mandated. It seems no other view can be justified. I pray the Holy Spirit would lead us into unity and maturity (Eph. 4:1-16, Jn. 17:20-23) as we grapple with this issue.

WINE

The use of wine in the Lord’s Supper is, in my opinion, both more difficult for the church today to accept and easier to see in the light of Scripture than the issue of weekly communion. After studying the Scripture’s teaching on this issue, I am convinced wine is required for the proper administration of the sacrament. There can be no doubt as to what was in the cup on the night of the Last Supper. It was the fruit of the vine, after undergoing fermentation. We know it had to be fermented because it is simply scientifically impossible that the juice, harvested several months earlier, could have remained non-alcoholic (unless Jesus somehow miraculously turned wine back into grape juice, of which there is no evidence!).⁵⁸ Really the argument for the use of wine is quite simple: Jesus took some bread and wine, thanked God for each of them, served them to his disciples, and said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” I contend that there is simply no reason for deviating from the instructions Jesus gave.⁵⁹ We are to imitate his actions in the service as closely as possible, not substituting elements or practices of our own devising.⁶⁰

⁵⁸I owe this point to Dr. Leonard Payton.

⁵⁹ WLC 168 teaches wine is to be used “according to the appointment of Jesus Christ.” The Scots Confession, chapter 21, teaches that two things are necessary to the right administration of the sacraments: they must be administered by lawful ministers and “they should be ministered in the elements and manner which God has appointed.” Thus wine is, by definition, integral to the Supper according to the Reformed confessions and catechisms.

⁶⁰ Luther said that if someone could not drink wine, he should “omit it [the sacrament] altogether, in order that no innovation may be made or introduced.”

As I see it, there are two basic issues that need to be discussed. First, since grape juice is also “the fruit of the vine” why can’t it serve as an adequate element? Does it really matter all that much? Secondly, what about those who do not want to drink wine? There are two groups of people that need to be dealt with under this heading: those who object to alcoholic beverages on moral grounds and those who are tempted to drunkenness (or think they will be) by tasting even a drop of wine.

THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP AND WINE IN THE SCRIPTURES

I think we violate the regulative principle of worship by substituting unfermented grape juice for wine in the Supper. The regulative principle of worship simply states that whatever is not commanded in worship is forbidden. In other words, worship is to conform to God’s requirements, as revealed in all of Scripture. None of us should be so arrogant as to presume that God does not care how we worship him, or that we may decide for ourselves, autonomously, what to do when we gather. To understand this better however, as Dr. Leonard Payton has pointed out, it is helpful to consider how a first century Jew would have understood Jesus’ words. Jews knew all too well from their history that “Do this” meant “Do this.” In Leviticus 10:1-3, shortly after the tabernacle is set up, Nadab and Abihu offer up “unauthorized fire” to the Lord. The Lord devoured them in his own fire. On another occasion, Uzzah usurped the priestly function, which was not his, by touching the ark; he too was struck dead. Similarly, King Uzziah entered the Holy Place to offer incense, in violation of Num 16-17. God struck him with leprosy, thus making him ceremonially unclean, and therefore excommunicating him even from the temple courtyard. To go further back in history, Cain did not offer acceptable worship and so he was rejected by God. Perhaps the most relevant text to our discussion is the instructions God gave the Jews concerning the Passover celebration in Exodus 12. These instructions are very detailed. Virtually all Christians are in agreement that the Lord’s Supper is a transformed version of the Passover. It seems to me we can no more substitute grape juice for wine in the Lord’s Supper than the Jews could have substituted some other meat, say chicken, for the lamb they were commanded to eat or some other bread for the unleavened bread God required. A pious Jew would not have even dreamed of doing such a thing. Everything connected with the Passover feast had symbolic meaning (the way the lamb was cooked, the bitter herbs that were used, the way the meal was eaten, etc.). Thus, no changes were to be made. As modern men and women, we often struggle with understanding the importance of symbols because we are so technologically and scientifically minded. But symbols are important to the biblical worldview. To tamper with the symbol is to tamper, at least in principle, with the thing symbolized. Perhaps this is why so many Americans are offended when our nation’s flag is burned. A flag is only a piece of cloth, but it represents something dear to (most of) us. The Scriptures are filled with symbolism (especially the OT and NT sacraments) that points us, in one way or another, to Christ’s person and work, something far more dear to us than a flag. This means that for God’s people to distort the symbols he prescribes is (at least symbolically) to distort the gospel.⁶¹

The symbolism of the various elements of the Passover is quite easy to understand, for the most part. The lamb and its blood, for example, pictured Christ’s sacrifice (Jn. 1:29). Does the wine in the Lord’s Supper carry any symbolic significance? It certainly seems to. Here is just a partial look at Scripture’s teaching on the symbolism of wine:

- Wine is a sign of rejoicing in Scripture. It symbolizes the joy of God’s people in his redemptive work. The OT uses wine repeatedly to portray the gladness that will accompany the coming of the Messiah and his long awaited salvation (Isa. 25:6; 55:1; Amos 9:13-15; Zech. 9:15-17). We see this anticipation fulfilled in the NT when Jesus contrasts the joyous age he ushers in with the old order, of which John the Baptist was the last representative member (Lk. 5:33-39; 7:33-34). Wine symbolizes rejoicing in a way unfermented grape juice does not. Wine is a reminder that the Supper is a joyful feast in which we give thanks and praise to God. It was not meant to be a morbid, doleful, sour event, as many Reformed Christians have come to view it. The holy feast signifies a great wedding banquet, not a funeral for a departed friend. It was said of the joyous, exuberant early Protestants that they were

⁶¹ This is not to say that elders who serve grape juice rather than wine have transgressed the regulative principle with the same intensity that Nadab and Abihu did; but certainly we can see that God takes the worship of himself by his people with great seriousness, including externals and rituals.

drunk with the wine of the forgiveness of sins; may the same be true of us as we drink the blood of our Savior who died to redeem us.

- God inspired Isaiah to prophesy of the coming days (clearly the New Covenant) when God's people would drink the wine they had worked to harvest "in the courts of my sanctuary" (Isa. 62:8-9). To not drink wine in church when we partake of the Supper is to nullify this prophecy.
- Wine was forbidden to the Levitical priests in the OT while they were "on the job." They could not drink wine in God's presence (in the tabernacle/temple; see Lev. 10:9) just as they could not sit down (Heb. 10:11). This is because their priestly work was never completed; they could not yet rejoice and rest fully before the Lord because no truly effective sacrifice had been offered. Likewise, OT worshippers had to pour out their wine offerings at the altar rather than drink them (Ex. 29:38-41, Lev. 23:13, etc.). In fulfillment of all this, Christ refused wine while performing his high priestly duties on the altar of the cross (Lk. 23:36).⁶² After his priestly work was done he did drink (Jn. 19:28-30). Now that Christ has won for us victory over sin and gained for us access into God's presence, we are to joyfully worship our Lord in the Most Holy Place, with wine as a part of that worship. Now we drink wine in the place of worship rather than pouring it out on the altar, as God transforms us into living sacrifices.
- Over and over again in Scripture, God describes his people as a vineyard (Ps. 80; Isa. 5; Mt 21). Christ calls himself the "vine" and his people the "branches" (Jn. 15). If wine is intrinsically evil, why these images?
- Just as wine was a necessary part of several OT sacrifices, so it also was required in several OT feasts, most notably Dt. 14:22-27, where the people drank in celebration of God's goodness. If anything, NT worship should be far more festive because we have so much more to celebrate. It is therefore not surprising God would command wine as a part of sacramental worship in the new age Christ inaugurated. We drink a toast to our Savior in honor of his redemptive accomplishments on our behalf. But actually, we drink much more than just a toast in remembrance of Christ: we have fellowship with him as our risen and reigning Savior, eating and drinking the forgiveness of sins, and sanctifying grace.
- Melchizedek (either a preincarnate Christophany or, more likely, a prefiguring of Christ) served Abraham wine and bread in a victory feast (after Abraham routed the four kings) that clearly foreshadowed the Lord's Supper Christ serves us (Gen. 14:18).
- The fact that we eat and drink with Christ is proof that the kingdom is here (Lk. 22:29-30). Fermenting wine symbolizes the advance and maturation of God's kingdom. With the coming of Christ, new wine has been poured into old wine skins. The boundaries of the Old Covenant have burst; the gospel is no longer "bottled up" in Palestine but has been "uncorked" and now runs over into Gentile lands. It is air from the fermentation process which causes the old skins to break as the yeast transforms the liquid from grape juice into alcohol; this is a wonderful picture both of Christ transforming the Old Covenant into the New Covenant, as well as the effects of the gospel transforming the world as it spreads.⁶³ Of course, the skins of the old covenant can't contain the wine of the new covenant so new skins (new forms of worship perhaps) are needed (Mt. 9:17; Mk. 2:18-22; Jer. 31:12; Hosea 2:22; Joel 2:19, 24; 3:18; Amos 9:13-15).
- Most importantly, Christ appointed wine to serve as the sign and seal of his blood shed for his people. The "blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11) seals the "blood of the New Covenant" (Mt. 26:28). Certainly Christ knew what he was doing when he chose an alcoholic beverage to be a part of one of the church's permanent rituals. The symbolism of wine is thus at the heart of the gospel. It represents the basis of our past hope (Christ's cross, where he shed his blood), our present hope (ongoing forgiveness and communion with the Savior), and our future hope (when we will sit down at the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb at his triumphant return). The blood of Christ is wine for the soul. May God cause our cups to run over (Ps. 23:5) as we feast in his presence at the table he has set before us!

⁶²Jesus' vow to not drink until the kingdom came was probably a Nazarite holy war vow (Num. 6). His vow was completed when his cross work was done.

⁶³ See Mt. 13:33 for another parable where yeast is also at work, illustrating the transforming effects of the kingdom.

With this teaching in view, we can see the importance of using wine in the Lord's Supper. Not only does the explicit command of Christ require it, but the symbolism of Scripture requires it as well. Jesus, as our Husband, has prepared a meal for us, he has planned the menu. Who are we to refuse the feast he spreads before us? It's an insult to our host. Or to change the imagery, coming to the Lord's Table is like eating at a restaurant that does not allow substitutions. Jesus has already placed our order for us. This is not to make the Supper sound oppressive; rather, because wine is a symbolic summary of all God's blessings, it is the best thing for us. *God wants us to rejoice in his presence! The Supper is to be a festive occasion!* It's not simply about introspection; it's about feasting and being merry before the Lord. It's an appetizer preceding the wedding feast to come. As Sproul, Jr.⁶⁴ and others have pointed out, to not use wine is to water down the gospel, it's to water down the joy.⁶⁵ Wine simply fits the occasion.⁶⁶ There is good reason why our Lord chose a drink with such properties and associations. Unfermented grape juice not only violates Christ's command, it weakens the symbolism that is at the heart of the sacrament, just as unwarranted substitutions in the Passover would have done.⁶⁷

It is sometimes claimed that the wine used in biblical times was greatly watered down and therefore virtually non-alcoholic. Thus, the argument goes, comparisons between what Jesus drank and modern day wine are invalid. There has been a lot of study done on this issue, much of which is very helpful.⁶⁸ But the bottom line is that Scripture nowhere condemns wine of any alcoholic content, strong or weak.⁶⁹ It is true

⁶⁴ "Sour Grapes," *World*, Nov. 9, 1996, p. 26.

⁶⁵ The connection between wine and joy in the Scriptures is clear by now, but it cannot be emphasized too strongly in this discussion. Wine was created by God to bring man pleasure. We should not be embarrassed by this. Pleasure -- even physical pleasure -- is not intrinsically evil. There is nothing wrong with enjoying God's creation so long as we do so lawfully and to his glory (Mk. 7:1-16; Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 10:23-26). Calvin said, "We are nowhere forbidden to laugh, or be satisfied with food, or to annex new possessions to those already enjoyed by ourselves or our ancestors, or to be delighted with music, or to drink wine" (*Institutes* 3.19.9). Commenting on Ps. 104:15, Calvin wrote "It is lawful to use wine not only in cases of necessity, but also thereby to make us merry." The Scripture clearly endorses the use of alcoholic beverages even for uses other than communion. This freedom needs to be qualified in at least two ways: It must be within the bounds of the law of God (moderation, to God's glory, showing love for others) and it must be done in the right context (Christians are forbidden from drinking with certain people -- specifically, drunkards [Prov. 23:20] and hypocrites [1 Cor. 5:11]).

⁶⁶ Calvin's *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* asks, "But why is the body of our Lord figured by bread, and his blood by wine?" In part, the answer reads, "As by wine the hearts of men are gladdened, their strength recruited, and the whole man strengthened, so by the blood of our Lord the same benefits are received by our souls." Later in the Catechism there is this instruction: "What [do we obtain] in the symbol wine? That as Christ once shed his blood for the satisfaction of our sins, and as the price of our redemption, so he now also gives it to us to drink, that we may feel the benefit which should thus accrue to us."

⁶⁷ Not surprisingly wine can also serve as a symbol of judgment on the unrepentant. The cup of salvation becomes the cup of wrath and condemnation to unworthy partakers; rather than drinking the forgiveness of sins, such hypocrites drink damnation (Job 21:20; Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17ff; Jer. 49:12; 51:7). Even believers who abuse the communion table suffer negative sanctions (1 Cor. 11:30). Wine is often used as a sign of God's wrath against his enemies (Ps. 78:65; Isa. 63:3-6; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 17:2; 19:15). God curses drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:21, 29-35 Isa. 5:11; Lk. 12:45; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Gal. 5:19-21), and drunkenness itself can be a form of God's judgment on a people (Isa. 28:7, 8; 49:26; Jer. 13:13-14; 25:16; Ezek. 23: 28, 33; Nah. 1:9-10; Hab. 2:15-16; Lam. 4:21-22; Rev. 19:6, 19). The bottom line: Drunkenness is a terrible wickedness that distorts one's view of reality, clouds one's moral judgment, destroys one's productivity and family life, and possibly leads to addiction. It is a heinous sin to be avoided and detested by God's people.

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, much of it has not been very helpful, due to a bias against alcoholic beverages. Plus, studies of this sort rely on extra-biblical data and are never finally authoritative.

⁶⁹ It is worth noting that the one time the Bible actually speaks of watered wine it is in a negative context: Isa. 1:21. The purpose of this passage is to show how all that was good in Jerusalem had become corrupted due to the wickedness of the people.

that wine was often watered down, but apparently this was not the case with Jesus' first miracle (the wine he produced is called "the best" wine, probably meaning the *least* watered down) nor was this the case with the wine served for the Lord's Supper at Corinth (it was strong enough to get them drunk, 1 Cor. 11:21).⁷⁰ The biblical warnings against drunkenness also indicate the availability of strong drink, and God even commends the use of strong drink in worship (Dt. 14:22-26). Biblically speaking, the alcoholic content seems to be irrelevant. Likewise, in the history of the church, wine of all types, both watered down and not watered down, has been used. Man was not even able to control the fermentation process until the last century, so the church usually had no choice but to use some form of wine. As far as I know, only in America, and only in the last hundred years, has any church of Christ objected to the use of wine. The rest of church history stands against us on this point. Even within our own tradition, the best theologians have advocated wine (Dabney, Hodge, Machen, Williamson, etc.) It is hard to say why the use of wine is the minority report in our own denomination today. Perhaps many pastors would like to use wine but are afraid of how their congregations would respond. However, the PCA's denominational standards (both BCO and Westminster documents) teach the use of wine and our General Assembly has rejected the position of total abstinence (GA, 1980).⁷¹

If we don't use wine, is the sacrament nullified? Yes and no. Our worship of God will always be imperfect, but in and through Christ it becomes acceptable to the Father. Thus, liturgical sins are still sins, but have been paid for at the cross. To not use wine does not automatically invalidate the sacrament any more than one false sentence in a sermon automatically invalidates the preaching of the Word. It is God's property to always have mercy, and God will use and accept our feeble attempts to worship him. At the same time, preaching that is more faithful to God's truth will be more effective, under the Lord's hand; similarly, an administration of the sacrament that is closer to the ideal of Scripture will be a greater blessing to God's people.⁷² As Williamson puts it, the use of grape juice is "technically irregular," which is probably a good term.⁷³ What reason do we have for serving the Supper irregularly? It seems we have no excuse for not following Christ's instructions on this matter.

Just as with weekly communion, by adhering to the Scriptural pattern of the sacrament (using wine), we maximize the blessings of worship. The quality of our works and worship have a direct bearing on the measure of blessing we receive from God, both temporally and eternally, though this connection is not always perceptible to the human eye (Heb. 11:6; Dt. 28; Ps. 1; Mt. 25:31-46; Gal. 6:7-10; Col. 3:23-24; Gen. 15:1; etc.). The connection is not a mechanical one-to-one ratio; rather there is an organic correspondence. There is nothing godly about being disinterested or indifferent to the reward God offers us. To pursue obedience with an eye to our reward is not legalism. Genuine faith will always bear fruit and that fruit brings blessing in this life and in the life to come. Of course, the reward is not earned because all of this can be traced back to omnipotent grace -- the faith, the fruit, and the blessing all come from God himself. Certainly the ultimate blessing is knowing God more intimately (Jn. 14:21, 23). The Supper is a gift of God for our good, intended to strengthen our faith, overwhelm our doubts, and drive us to deeper repentance. Serving/receiving the supper in a biblical manner will, under God's merciful hand, bear fruit in

⁷⁰ Note that Paul does not instruct the Corinthians to stop using wine in the Supper, but to wait for each other. Surely if there were ever a time for Paul to forbid wine, this was it! Yet he did not do so.

⁷¹ The Westminster standards are representative of the whole Reformation on this point. For example, compare the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confession.

⁷² Again, this does not mean taking the sacrament with grape juice does not bring blessing. Perhaps it would be best to put our obedience -- and the blessing of God -- on a spectrum. Using grape juice is good, but certainly using wine is better; using grape juice, however is better than using Coke or Kool-Aid. There is always a spectrum of obedience and disobedience. For example, to use a crude illustration, a person driving 56 MPH in a 55 MPH zone is speeding; but surely he is not being as disobedient as someone going 99 MPH on that same street. Our goal as Christians should be to pursue maximum obedience and faithfulness. With this in view, we must ask why someone would *not* want to use wine in the Supper. Just because the sacrament remains valid despite an aberration, it does not mean we can be indifferent to what God requires; we must strive for perfection in every facet of the Christian life, especially worship.

⁷³ *Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, p. 222.

the church. If the use of wine is indeed required, we should expect the sacrament to be a more potent means of grace when we do it more biblically.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

What about those in the body who oppose the drinking of alcoholic beverages? This has become a serious issue in America the last hundred years or so, both with prohibition and widespread alcoholism. In the wake of this cultural chaos, the church in America, in my opinion, has failed to stand for a biblical view of alcoholic beverages. This is obviously a sensitive issue that must be handled with care. But it is also a theological issue that must be evaluated in the light of Scripture. Our regulative principle in worship is the Word of God, not the word of our culture, even the evangelical subculture. The Bible supplies four presuppositions that must form the backdrop for this discussion:

1. THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION. God's creation is good (Gen. 1-2). Wine is specifically singled out as a good gift of God in Ps. 104:14-15. Note that this passage attributes the fermentation process to God. God is the Creator of wine and he gives wine to man as a blessing, for man's joy and merriment. In 1 Tim. 4:1-5, Paul uses very strong language against those who would forbid certain foods (and implicitly, drink). He says it is even demonic teaching. Why such a harsh condemnation? Because the goodness of God, as well as the responsibility of man for his sin, are at stake. If there is something wrong or inherently evil in the material creation perhaps man is not to blame for his sin. Just as Adam satanically wanted to blame the woman God gave him for the fall, these false teachers claim the problem is not with us but with our environment. Paul is attacking this false teaching that lodges responsibility for man's rebellion somewhere other than in man himself. To view wine as intrinsically evil is far more Platonic than Pauline; to refuse to enjoy wine is more Stoic than Scriptural. It is man's abuse of God's good gift that is sinful. Our rebellion turns God's blessing into a curse. But the gift itself, as well as the proper use of it, is pleasing to God. Anything in God's world is good and we are free to use it provided we do so with thanksgiving and for God's glory. If we are going to forbid alcohol simply because it can be abused why not forbid all sex and food and sleep as well since these too can be abused? The problem is not "in the stuff" as though sin were "out there" in the material world and we could avoid evil by avoiding contact with creation. No, the root of the problem is our sinful hearts. As Luther put it, "Do not suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the objects that are abused. Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we prohibit and abolish women? The sun, moon, and stars have been worshipped. Shall we pluck them out of the sky?"⁷⁴ We see Jesus affirming a positive view of creation, and specifically wine, in his first miracle (Jn. 2:1-11). Jesus created an *overabundance* of wine in that act of "transubstantiation" – about 150 gallons! The Son of God drank publicly and socially, apparently without sin and without fear of hurting his witness⁷⁵ (Lk. 7:33-35). Scripture actually commends the use wine in several instances (Dt. 14:22-27; Prov. 30:6-7; Ecc. 9:7; 1 Tim. 5:23), while strongly warning against the dangers of drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 23:20; Eph. 5:18; etc.). Clearly, we may drink wine to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Wine is even promised as a reward for those who obey God (Prov. 3:9-10). All forms of asceticism, monasticism, neo-Platonism, and Gnosticism that deprecate the material world run counter to Christianity (Col. 2:20-23). We are to rejoice in the things God has made, just as he does (Ps. 104:31). As redeemed image bearers, we have dominion over the creation because in Christ, all things are ours (Gen. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 3:21-23). The creation is under our care and there is no reason to seek to escape it or require others to

⁷⁴ Cotton Mather put the same truth this way: "Drink is in itself a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness, but the abuse of drink is from Satan. The wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the devil." This was the general Puritan attitude. The Puritans, including the first settlers in New England, paid their pastors (at least in part) in alcoholic beverages, but strongly condemned the abuse of alcohol. The early Puritans knew how to enjoy life, but they knew they had to do so within the boundaries of God's law.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, many prohibitionists/abstentionists claim Christians should not drink for fear of hurting their "witness" to the world. This seems to be an obvious example of letting the world, rather than the Word, dictate what it means to witness for Christ. Only God can determine how to best witness to his truth. Besides, the godly use of alcoholic beverages seems to be a wonderful way to witness to the goodness of God's creation.

do so.⁷⁶ As Murray has said, “It is iniquity to condemn that which God approves.” God approves of his creation. We must do the same.⁷⁷

2. THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY. Christian liberty⁷⁸ is a complex subject, closely related to the doctrine of creation. Essentially, the doctrine teaches we are free to do anything God has not forbidden in his Word.⁷⁹ Romans 14 is the key passage.⁸⁰ Who is the weaker brother? I think the weaker brother in this case is a Christian whose conscience is uninstructed and overly sensitive, probably because of a previous lifestyle or cultural background. The weaker brother has false scruples but is also tempted in a unique way to do something, which, though not wrong in and of itself, is wrong for him because his conscience will condemn him. This would include, for example, a recovering alcoholic, who is tempted to drunkenness. This person thinks drinking is wrong because of his previous abuse of alcohol; it is difficult for him to imagine how one could drink in moderation and in gratitude simply because he was never able to do so. The weaker brother should not be confused with the outright legalist. *The Fundamentalist⁸¹ who thinks all drinking is sinful is NOT the stronger*

⁷⁶ It is not unusual to find Christians who are virtually afraid of taking even a sip of alcohol because they are afraid of becoming addicted. But nothing outside of us can force us to sin (Mk. 7:17-23). We are not ruled by the creation; rather, God has given us dominion over his creation and we need not fear it.

⁷⁷ This is not to say that Christians are obligated to drink at any time other than communion. What is distressing about prohibitionism/abstentionism is *not* the fact that Christians do not drink. It is the faulty theology that underlies their abstinence that makes it troublesome. Even if wine in communion is not a very big deal (which I think it is), the flawed presuppositions that underlie the fundamentalist/evangelical prohibition/abstention *are* a big deal and need to be challenged.

⁷⁸ An excellent statement of Christian liberty is found in WCF 20. Most importantly, Christian liberty is freedom from the guilt of sin (justification) and the power of sin (sanctification), with the future hope of being freed from the presence of sin (glorification). It is not freedom *to* sin, but freedom *from* sin. This freedom means the dominion and rule of sin over us have been broken; we no longer live in the realm of sin, but have died to it, once and for all. We are now new creatures, who have been raised to newness of life and have had our old selves crucified (Rom. 6). Christian liberty, and its corollary doctrine, liberty of conscience, have been misunderstood quite often in the history of the church. Christian liberty must be offset from *lawlessness* (the freedom to do whatever I please), *pluralism* (the freedom to believe whatever I want or worship who and how I want), and *legalism* (the freedom to add to God’s law). What I am focusing on here is a particular aspect of Christian liberty and its implications for the use wine in the Lord’s Supper. Because Christ is our Lord and Master, who bought us with a price, and redeemed us with his precious blood, he alone has the right to bind our consciences. Thus we are freed from having to believe and obey the doctrines and commandments of men for the sake of conscience. We obey human authority because God established it and because he tells us to in his Word; but only God has absolute authority.

⁷⁹ Note this is basically the exact opposite of the Regulative Principle of worship.

⁸⁰ 1 Cor. 8 is a similar passage but I have chosen to work out of Rom. 14 because I think it more closely approximates the issue we are dealing with. I will not attempt a verse-by-verse exegesis of Rom. 14, as that has been done admirably elsewhere by Murray, Hodge, etc. I will pick out the most relevant points to the topic under discussion.

⁸¹ Note that I do not use the term ‘Fundamentalist’ as a derogatory term or as an ad hominem argument in any way. The Fundamentalist movement affirmed many basic tenets of Christianity that are very orthodox. Their stand against heretical modernist theology in the earlier part of this century is something for which we can be thankful. But Fundamentalism was at the same time a dangerous reduction of Christianity. It lacked the robust, full-orbed approach to Christianity that had characterized the Reformation. Fundamentalism was essentially pietistic and escapist, while Reformational thought has always been world-affirming and world-transforming. While Reformed theology and evangelical/Fundamentalist theology share many common distinctives, they have historically parted company on this issue of moderate social drinking. Machen, the leading Reformed scholar of the early 1900s, strongly opposed prohibition, which most Fundamentalists supported. While Fundamentalism as a movement has essentially died out, its influence in the broad evangelical church can still be seen very clearly. Ironically, Fundamentalists who fought so hard to uphold the inerrancy of Scripture actually undermined the sufficiency of Scripture by adding to it man-made rules. What is also of interest is that many taboos that later became common in Fundamentalism actually had their

*brother of Rom. 14.*⁸² *But neither is he identical to the weaker brother of Rom. 14.*⁸³ He is more like a Pharisee, in that he puts his own moral tradition in the place of God's law, which no where forbids drinking (Mt. 15:6). We are told in Rom. 14 to defer to the weaker brother, lest we cause him to stumble. Certainly, the strong must be loving towards the their weaker brethren (Rom. 14:1; 15:1-3), treating them as fellow servants of God and refusing to unnecessarily or deliberately cause them distress (Rom. 14:4, 10, 13, 15, 19). The strong must respect the desire of the weak to please the Lord, but should also seek to persuade the weak to come to a more biblical position (as Paul appears to be doing throughout this chapter). But while we are to forgo the exercise of our liberty in the case of a weaker brother, if it would induce him to violate his conscience, no where does Scripture tell us to defer to a legalist.⁸⁴ While both the weaker brother and the legalistic brother⁸⁵ have immature convictions that are simply wrong, there is an important distinction between offending the weaker brother and making a legalist mad. Luther, in his typically overstated way, said, "If you are around a someone⁸⁶ with a false scruple, you have the duty to violate it!" While we would not want to go as far as Luther advocated (hyperbolically, I'm sure), this way of thinking does receive support from Jesus' treatment of the Pharisees. He went head-to-head with their false scruples all the time, violating their man-made traditions (healing on the Sabbath, picking grain on the Sabbath, not washing as the rabbis did, etc.). To drink wine in front of a fundamentalist no more causes him to stumble in the sense of Rom. 14 than Jesus caused the Pharisees to stumble. The fundamentalist is not tempted to drink by seeing other Christians do it; he would not let alcohol touch his lips any more than a Pharisee would be to pick grain on the Sabbath after seeing Jesus and his disciples do it. The legalist is someone who takes offense when no offense is given, to use Calvin's language. It is important to note that both the weak brother and the legalist are in sin by holding false scruples *but they are also in sin if they violate their false scruples* (Rom. 14:23). Because of this, the strong need to be careful that they do not force anyone to violate his conscience. At the same time, when the fundamentalist mindset is allowed to hold sway over the church, a very dangerous brand of legalism can begin to take root. If you think drinking

origins in Unitarianism. My language in this section should not be taken to imply that Fundamentalists are legalists in every sense of the word, nor that their position is as distorted as the Pharisees' overall theology. They do not believe in works-righteousness as the Pharisees did. All I am pointing out is that *on this particular issue* I believe the Fundamentalist tradition has done something similar to what the Pharisees did on a number of issues, namely, add to God's law. Also, in all fairness it must be noted that not every single person who would take the name 'Fundamentalist' would say that all drinking is prohibited by Scripture. Some would recommend, but not require, abstinence. Historically, however, prohibition of alcoholic beverages has formed a prominent characteristic of the movement as a whole.

⁸² It is shocking for some Fundamentalist abstainers to find that they really do not have the moral high ground on this issue. But this just reveals a deep-seated self-righteousness that often comes with an abstentionist or prohibitionist position.

⁸³ The Fundamentalist is weak, as will be shown, but his weakness is of a somewhat different character than the weaker brother who is specifically in view in this chapter. The weaker brother in Rom. 14 is in a position where he may be tempted or lured into violating his conscience. In the case of drinking, Fundamentalists have a weakness (i.e., they have false scruples), but they are generally not tempted to violate their conscience when they see others drink.

⁸⁴ There is admittedly a fine line between refusing to submit to man-made regulations, as Paul expressly *forbids* Christians to do in Col. 2:20-23, and deferring to weaker brother for the peace and edification of the church, as Paul *requires* in Rom. 14:15, 19-21. In the former case, Christians would be sinfully allowing human authorities to rule their consciences, and thus undermine the lordship of Christ; in the latter case, the stronger brother is warned to not to do something that might lead to the "destruction" of a fellow brother for whom Christ died, and thus injure the body of Christ.

⁸⁵ As I mentioned, the legalistic brother *is* weak, but his weakness is not identical to the weakness in view in most of Paul's argument. The difference is twofold: First, the legalist is not necessarily tempted to do what his conscience forbids and so he is not in danger of being destroyed. Secondly, the legalist violates Rom. 14:3 by judging the strong and imposing his false convictions on others. Because of these differences, I have separated out the two classes of weaker brothers, the truly weak and the legalistic weak. I think this distinction is important if we are to properly apply Rom. 14.

⁸⁶ Luther actually had Roman Catholics in view.

is wrong, it's easy to think you are more spiritual than a fellow Christian who doesn't share your conviction. When this happens, not only is the purity of the sacrament at stake, but the purity of the gospel is threatened as well (a much more serious matter; see Gal. 2). The teaching of Scripture is basically the reverse of this legalism: the strong brother is the one who knows his liberty in Christ, who knows what is lawful. He is actually "more spiritual" because his conscience is more in line with the Word of God and because he knows that biblical holiness is not a matter of mere externals (Rom. 14:17). Besides, it is just this kind of "tyranny by the weaker brother/legalist" that is so strongly forbidden in Rom. 14:3, 4. It is a shame when legalistic brothers are allowed to rule over the strong and diminish their freedom, especially when it is under the false pretense of being "weak."⁸⁷ While the weak brother and the legalistic brother must be distinguished, quite often the one who is weak will become legalistic or Pharisaical. New Christians, especially those from rather raunchy backgrounds, are notorious for having these kinds of weaknesses. The weak are always tempted to impose their overtight convictions on others and make them the new standard of holiness. Romans 14 seems to indicate they may keep their scruples so long as they keep them private and don't impose them on the whole church or judge others in terms of them; however, the weak should in the meantime be taught to become strong by eschewing man-made rules and educating their consciences about the true nature of

⁸⁷ The weaker brother who desires to impose his unbiblical taboos on God's people has usurped the lordship of Christ over his church. Christ retains the exclusive right to declare what is lawful for his people and he has decisively declared all foods clean (Mk. 7:19; Rom. 14:14). The weaker brother must not assume his conscience is autonomous. No man is lord even of his own conscience; the dictates of conscience are to be submitted to the Word of God. Since the fall of man, man's moral consciousness is abnormal, being twisted and distorted by sin (Tit. 1:15). Hence it needs the corrective work of the Holy Spirit and the external, objective norms of Scripture to function properly. "Natural law," mediated through conscience, is simply not a reliable standard for judging right and wrong, as Rom. 1:18-32 shows. Van Til put it this way: "The natural man cannot will to do God's will. He cannot even know what the good is...He has set all moral standards topsy-turvy...This doctrine of the *total depravity* of man makes it plain that the moral consciousness of man as he is today cannot be the source of information about what is the ideal good or about what is the standard of the good or about what is the true nature of the will which is to strive for the good...It is this point particularly that makes it necessary for the Christian to maintain without any apology and without any concession that it is *Scripture, and Scripture alone*, in the light of which all moral questions must be answered" (*Defense of the Faith*, p. 54). It may be objected that Rom. 2:14-15 give the impression that even fallen man can, by nature, derive an adequate moral standard from conscience. Van Til comments: "It is true that the non-regenerate consciousness of man cannot entirely keep under the requirements of God that speak to it through its own constitution. Thus God's will is heard through it in spite of it. Hence natural man excuses or accuses himself for his ethical action" (*ibid*, p. 55). Natural man's natural ethic has some surface level resemblance with the true ethic because the law of God continues to be objectively revealed in the created order, including his own conscience. When man renders some form of obedience to this known-but-suppressed-law, his conscience may excuse his action and he may feel "righteous." But by no means does this imply that man's "natural righteousness" actually approximates God's required standard of holiness (for no unregenerate man *really* seeks after the good he knows he ought to do – Rom. 3:10ff) nor does it imply that an unregenerate conscience can serve as a valid guide in ethical matters. *Just because a man's conscience may defend him does not mean his conscience is automatically right! Nor does it mean that he has really thanked and glorified God as ought!* Paul won't even let the regenerate man's conscience function independently of Scripture! Despite being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christians still need the specially revealed ethical norms of Scripture. It is only through a thorough knowledge of the Bible that the Christian can be equipped to do the ethically good works God calls him to do (2 Tim. 3:16-17). (Even Adam before the fall could not rely on conscience and general revelation alone; he needed special verbal revelation to know his test [Gen. 2:16] and task [Gen. 1:28; 2:15] in the Garden of Eden.) In light of Paul's discussion in Rom. 14, it is obvious the conscience of the Christian can still err, and therefore needs to be educated by the written Word of God. Some consciences are like oversensitive car alarms; others are hardened, as if seared with a hot iron. The Christian must seek to sensitize his conscience to the law of God **and the law of God only!** As our conscience is informed and guided by the Word of God, we are enabled to distinguish not only black from white, but white from off-white (Heb. 5:14).

God's kingdom (Rom. 14:17). Our goal should be to think as Paul, who was convinced no food (or drink) is unclean in itself (Rom. 14:14; see also Mk. 7:14-23; Acts 10:15, 28). It's one thing for a recovering/repenting alcoholic to say *he* should refrain from alcoholic beverages until he is no longer tempted; it's another thing for him to force the whole church to refrain.⁸⁸ I don't think the church should bow to the desires of legalistic teachers⁸⁹ for fear of offending them any more than it should bow to modernist teachers who deny the deity and resurrection of Christ, for fear of offending them. In both cases the church needs to be "lovingly offensive," speaking the truth in love and standing for the truth in love. The strong should deal with legalistic brothers in a loving manner, while still opposing their false scruples and seeking to edify and instruct them (Rom 15:1-2). As A.A. Hodge has said, the person who abstains from alcohol *on moral grounds* is guilty of trying to be holier and wiser than Christ.⁹⁰ Our Puritan forefathers may have missed the mark when they did not partake communion weekly, but on this issue of Christian liberty they could not have been more biblical. As WCF 20.2 states, "God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to his Word; or besides it in matters of faith, or worship." Let us stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Gal. 5:1) and let the strong be patient, instructive, and gentle towards their weaker brothers.⁹¹

3. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION. There is still this lingering question about what to do with the converted alcoholic in our body if we begin serving wine in communion. We must not underestimate the power of God's salvation. Christians are dead to sin; in other words, we are no longer under the power and mastery of sin, but have been set free to fight against it in the strength and weapons the Holy Spirit supplies. Alcoholism is not a new sin. Apparently the Corinthian church had former alcoholics (1 Cor. 6:9-11, note especially the past tense: "this is what some of you *were*") -- perhaps they did not always struggle so successfully against their old sinful ways (see 1 Cor. 11:21). Nonetheless, Christians are to be defined not by their sinful patterns, whether past or present, nor by some twelve step program, however helpful it may have been. We are defined in terms of our union with Christ. In

⁸⁸ Compare this to Paul's example of the recovering idolater who won't eat meat in 1 Cor. 8.

⁸⁹ Note that I have carefully put teachers in a different category than ordinary laymen. This is because the false scruples and false doctrines of teachers are more dangerous than those of a private person. Church discipline should begin at the level on which the sin presented itself. Thus an error held privately by a brother should be confronted privately, while a publicly taught error should be confronted publicly. The context of 1 Tim. 4:1-6 deals with false teachers, so Paul deals with them very sternly. Paul opposed Peter publicly in Gal. 2 because Peter, as an apostle, should have known better than to compromise the gospel by his actions. His sin was evident to all. This principle has various applications. For example, churches which require abstinence from some material thing as a condition of membership (or leadership) need to be forcefully opposed because they are binding the consciences of men. On the other hand, laymen who have false scruples need to be gently taught the truth about their liberty in Christ, as Paul does in Rom. 14. My point is that the church is not to simply cave in to the immature convictions of weak brethren. The church should side with the strong, and then help the weak become strong. It is also important to distinguish *brothers* with false scruples from non-Christians who are truly legalists. This may explain why Jesus dealt so harshly with the Pharisees, while Paul counsels the strong to deal gently with fellow church members who have legalistic tendencies. The legalism is to be opposed in all these cases – Pharisees, false teachers, weak Christians – but in quite different ways. These nuances need to be kept in mind if we are to be fully faithful to the Scriptures. Application of this truth in the church will always be quite complex; we should not seek artificially easy answers.

⁹⁰ *Evangelical Theology*, p. 348.

⁹¹ One more group of people to consider would be those who, for whatever reason, have taken a vow to not drink an alcoholic beverage. If this is the case, the person will need to be gently instructed that he should not have made such a rash and unwarranted vow. The appropriate action to take is repentance, meaning the vow should be nullified. An oath is binding only if it does not obligate one to sin. Because the Supper is mandatory, and wine is a required element, Christians are commanded to drink in at least this one case. Calvin wrote, "If you vow abstinence from wine as though something holy inhered in this act, you are superstitious; if you look to some other not perverted end, no one can disapprove" (*Institutes*, IV.4.13). See also WCF 22.4.

him, we are washed, sanctified, and justified. Somehow the Corinthian believers were able to overcome alcoholism without AA. “Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic” is simply not the biblical view. 1 Cor. 6 describes the normative Christian experience: we are not enslaved to alcoholism, or any other sin, regardless of our genetic predisposition or upbringing or environment. That being said, alcoholism is a tough sin to kill, I’m sure, and we need to be aware of struggles others in our midst may have in this area. They need encouragement, accountability, continual teaching on their new status and life in Christ, etc. They need to be taught that alcoholism is not a disease to be cured, but a sin to be repented of. They need to be reminded continually that God’s grace, not a program, is the only remedy. There are a number of potential solutions that have been offered, as to how to not cause a brother who is truly weak to stumble when the sacrament is served. We could serve some cups with grape juice or watered down wine. I am somewhat uncomfortable with serving different elements to different people unless absolutely necessary because it conveys the idea that worship is about individual preference rather than corporate obedience. It seems this could easily disrupt the very unity the Supper was instituted to promote. Alternatively, we could treat it as a church discipline issue: recovering alcoholics could be under self-imposed discipline for past sinful practices and they could eat just the bread until they are no longer tempted.⁹² Perhaps this would come sooner than we expect. The advantage to this approach is that the weaker brother sees that in the long run his weakness is not acceptable and he sees that the responsibility for coming to a more mature point of view rests on his shoulders. The disadvantage, of course, is that the weak, who truly need the sacrament, are not really allowed to partake since they cannot do so in faith (Rom. 14:23). Whatever solution is chosen, we need to be in prayer for people in this category, pleading with God to deliver them fully from a past addiction.⁹³

4. THE DOCTRINE OF THE LAW OF GOD. Christian ethics holds as its basic premise the notion that all moral questions are to be answered in the light of Scripture. In other words, our standard of right and wrong is the Bible – the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible. Nothing is to be added to or taken from the Word of God (Dt. 4:2; Rev. 22:18, 19). Jesus condemned the Pharisees for adding their traditions to God’s law (Mt. 15:6). They were putting their words on the same level as God’s. When Christians make up their own rules of “holiness,” they not only infringe upon the liberty of conscience we have in Christ, they also attack the sufficiency and finality of Scripture. Scripture simply does not forbid the moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages to the glory of God. If drinking alcohol is wrong, what prooftext teaches this?⁹⁴ If we lay down a law of abstinence we are going beyond what is written and undermining *Sola Scriptura*. The answer to the destructive abuse of alcohol in our culture is *not* making legalistic rules, but teaching and modeling the lawful use of God’s good gift.

⁹² I realize that the Reformers were quite opposed to the partaking of only one of the communion elements. However, they were facing a Roman Catholic church that for superstitious reasons had withheld the cup from the laity. The issue we face is quite different.

⁹³ I will propose my own recommendation for a solution below. However, each session that faces this issue will need to think through the best way to apply this truth to their congregation, and some may come to different conclusions. Elders need to seek maximum faithfulness to Scripture and maximum edification for their congregations.

⁹⁴ Of course Christian prohibitionists/abstentionists *try* to build a case from Scripture but it is never convincing. All their supposed prooftexts only forbid the abuse of alcohol, not its use. Plus there is overwhelming Scriptural support for Christian liberty in this area. The OT prohibits alcohol *only* in the following texts: Lev 10:8-11 (Aaronic priests were forbidden drink in the sanctuary for symbolic and practical reasons -- but New Covenant Christians are not Aaronic priests; they are Melchizedekal priests and therefore this prohibition does not apply); Num. 6:2-6 (Nazirite vows were only temporary and forbade not only wine but *all* grape products, including grape juice; plus the Nazirite could not cut his hair or touch a dead body); Prov. 31:4, 5 (Kings were forbidden drink that would impair their judgment and handling of the law of God); Jer. 35:1-19 (Jonadab gave a command to his sons to not drink -- but Jonadab’s “house rules” should not be confused with “God’s rules,” especially since Jonadab also forbade his sons from owning a house and sowing seed!). The NT *nowhere* forbids the drinking of alcohol. The closest the NT comes is in its qualifications for church officers (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1) -- but even then it is only the *excessive* use of wine that bars a man from office.

OBJECTIONS

A great number of objections can be raised against the position outlined above. Since the great majority of evangelical churches in America do not use wine in communion, I am aware this is a sensitive issue and fellow believers will have various questions. I will raise what I consider to be the most pertinent counterpoints to my arguments. However, I would also urge objectors to remember that the burden of proof can (and should) be reversed: Why would a church *not* want to take wine, especially since Christ undoubtedly served wine at the Last Supper? Why would a Christian *want* to take grape juice rather than wine, in light of the deep Biblical symbolism associated with fermented beverages? What justification can be given for departing from the Scriptural pattern? With these things in mind, consider the following objections and responses:

1. Perhaps the most potent objection that can be raised to what has been said above concerns my distinction between the “weaker brother” and the “Christian legalist.” Is this a valid distinction? Rom. 14 certainly does not make this distinction explicit. If this distinction does not hold, someone might want to claim that the strong should forgo drinking wine in front of the weak, so as to not distress them. Some claim this would forbid the use of wine in the Lord’s Supper as well, if weaker members object. It is this view that seems to have prevailed in twentieth century evangelicalism. What can be said in response to this? Should the Fundamentalist who prohibits alcohol be included in Paul’s “weaker brother” category after all? And if so, does this mean the strong must bow to their false scruples? And does the truly weaker brother have a right to demand that no fellow Christian drink in his presence? First of all, whether the legalistic or ascetic brother is included in Rom. 14 or not, it is simply wrong to conclude that this would require the strong to abstain. The distress of the weaker brother is not caused by seeing someone else do something that his conscience forbids him to do; the distress Paul has in view is the vexation of conscience that results from having actually done something one believes to be wrong.⁹⁵ *Nobody’s conscience is violated by watching another do something he feels he cannot do in faith. The “stumbling” of the weaker brother is not the result of the strong violating the false scruple of the weak in his presence. Rather, the strong brother becomes a source of stumbling only when he causes the weaker brother to violate his own false scruple, and thus be “destroyed.”* Therefore, whoever the weaker brother is, he cannot forbid the strong from drinking wine in the Lord’s Supper (or even socially for that matter). How do we know this? Paul tells the weak they must not judge the strong for exercising their liberty.⁹⁶ Surely he would not turn around and tell the strong to cater to this rebellious judgment by the weak. The weak must not be allowed to lord it over the strong and the strong must not try to induce or “force” the weak to sin against conscience. That being said, it is not an absolute necessity to the thesis of this paper to prove that the weaker brother in view in Rom. 14 does not directly include the legalist. Whoever the weaker brother may be, he cannot impose his practices on the whole congregation and the strong are free to exercise their liberty in the presence of

⁹⁵ So, for example, if you are at a restaurant drinking a glass of wine with dinner, and a member of your church comes up to you and says, “I am offended by seeing you drink that. Will you please stop?” it is important to understand what he means when he says he is offended. A proper response on the part of the strong will include many things, but it will certainly involve finding out why the “weaker brother” feels that he is in danger of stumbling. If he simply means that he thinks drinking is wrong in and of itself, I see no reason for the stronger brother to stop drinking. He may want to do this out of consideration and love, but I do not think he is automatically obligated to do this since in this case the “weaker brother” is really a legalist and violating Rom. 14:3. (Col. 2:20-22 forbids God’s people to submit to legalistic rules and the strong must be sure that he does not allow another man to become lord of his conscience.) On the other hand if the offended brother says, “I am a recovering alcoholic and watching you drink tempts me to sin,” I think the stronger brother needs to stop drinking for his brother’s sake. The point is that the stronger brother is to respect the false scruple of the weaker brother, being careful not to (intentionally or unintentionally) coax him into violating his convictions.

⁹⁶ Remember, when the weaker brother makes his tradition the standard for all other Christians, he becomes a legalist and must be gently opposed. Paul says he should keep his conviction about ‘adiaphora’ (things indifferent) between himself and the Lord (Rom. 14:22).

the weak, so long as they do not tempt the weak to do what would be wrong *for them*.⁹⁷ It is still worth noting, however, that when Paul deals with asceticism and the false philosophy of legalists, he is quite harsh (1 Tim. 4:1-4, Col. 2:20-23). As we have already seen, Paul perceived such attitudes to be an assault on the integrity of the Creator and a dangerous threat to the gospel. On the other hand, he deals very gently with the weaker brother in Rom. 14 and counsels others who are strong to do the same. Certainly he does not accuse the weaker brother in this context of holding to the doctrine of demons. The weaker brother may share with the legalist immature and immoral convictions, but they are grounded in quite different attitudes and backgrounds. They also have a quite different bearing on the life of the church: The legalist imposes his scruples on others and holds them up as the pattern for true righteousness, while the weaker brother keeps his scruples to himself and, presumably, realizes that they are an aberration and not normative (Rom. 14:3).

2. It might be suggested by some that because Jesus used the phrase “fruit of the vine” (Mt. 26:29), grape juice can serve as an adequate substitute for wine, and still stay within the bounds of the regulative principle. But to Jewish ears this phrase would have meant wine and nothing but wine.⁹⁸ This terminology was used to describe wine used on sacred occasions, including Passover. Besides, both Greek and Hebrew have distinct words for grape juice that Jesus could have used, had he intended to communicate this.
3. Someone might object to my whole approach by claiming I sound like a legalist, with my petty concern for detail. New Testament worship is free from such things, is it not? Isn’t this being a bit picky? Isn’t it an “unspiritual” concern for externals in worship? I would like to make a few preliminary remarks before dealing with the specifics of this objection. It assumes a certain view of biblical obedience and/or the relationship of the OT to the NT that I find untenable. It contrasts internal and external conformity to the law of God, telling us to encourage the former and not mandate the latter. The implication is that biblical spirituality has to do with internals and not externals. Along with this is the tendency to imply that OT believers had to be concerned with trivial details in the law whereas now we are free from such things. This view simply does not comport with what the whole counsel of God says about holiness. Biblically, I think spiritual maturity is a matter of externals as well as internals, general precepts as well as details. This is true in both the OT and the NT. Biblical piety must be rooted in the heart, but it always works itself out in external actions (Gal. 5:6, Jas. 2:14-26). The OT does not teach a religion of externals. Being a true Jew has always been a matter of the heart (Rom. 2:25-29) and physical circumcision was never enough (Dt. 30:6). When Jesus summarized the whole law with the two love commandments, he was simply quoting the OT. The OT law is spiritual (Rom. 7:12,14); it is

⁹⁷ This is not a form of relativism. The issue of drinking alcoholic beverages may be a “disputable matter” (Rom. 14:1) in the church, but that does not mean there is not a biblical view. Lots of things have been debated in the church down through the centuries (the trinity, the deity of Christ, vegetarianism, predestination, the lawfulness of owning material luxuries, eschatology, etc.) but in every case there is a true perspective and many competing false perspectives. On the issue of drinking, God has clearly revealed in his Word that it is acceptable, provided it is not done in excess and it is done to his glory. This is an “absolute,” not subject to change. When Paul stresses that it would be wrong for a weaker brother to drink *for him*, he is emphasizing that it is always harmful to go against conscience. Violating a scruple desensitizes one’s conscience, making one vulnerable to other greater forms of rebellion. Scripture clearly commends alcohol to us as a gift of God, but those who think it is wrong are forbidden to partake *because it is always wrong to do what you are convinced is wrong*. *How can a man please God when he is doing something he thinks is displeasing to God?* It is not the drinking of wine per se that is unlawful for the weaker brother; it is the violation of a firmly held conviction that makes it wrong. Drinking unto the glory of God is never sin, but acting against conscience always is. Whether we drink or not, we are to do so to the Lord (Rom. 14:6).

⁹⁸ The Jewish *Mishna* clearly defines “fruit of the vine” as *yayin*, which was the standard Hebrew word for wine. There can be no doubt what Jesus meant in context. See Alfred Edersheim’s *The Temple*, ch. 12, for a detailed description of OT Passover ritual.

the unconverted man (not the OT saint) who treats the law as a dead letter (Rom. 7:6).⁹⁹ Both OT and NT are concerned that man obey God from the heart (Prov. 4:23; Ps. 51:10; Ps. 139:23-24), in all that he does (Mt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 10:5). Obedience is required in soul (1 Thess. 5:23), but also in body (Rom. 6:12-13). To be “spiritual” is not a matter of escaping the body or the physical; it is a matter of bringing all we think, say, desire, and do under the reign of the Holy Spirit. Note also that the “works of the flesh” include both internal and external sins (Gal. 5:16-25), while Jesus requires visible fruit as proof of an inner love for God (Mt. 7:20; Jn. 14:15). The extent of obedience that God requires is absolute: inward and outward, broad principle and tiny detail, in every area of life. This is true especially in worship. We should exhort our congregation to this kind of holistic obedience because the Bible mandates it.¹⁰⁰ The fact that fewer details are given concerning New Testament worship does not mean that we can disregard the details that are given – instead it serves to magnify their importance and makes us that much more culpable for deviating from the simpler instructions we have been given. With this background in mind, we can answer the charge of legalism. The term “legalism” can be used in different ways, but it essentially comes in two forms (though these two are often intertwined): It is either redefining the law of God¹⁰¹ or making law-keeping the ground of one’s justification. Certainly this paper advocates nothing like the latter form of legalism -- we are saved by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. As for the former brand of legalism, the objector must demonstrate precisely what has been added to the law by my position. Jesus used wine in the Lord’s Supper and told us to “Do *this*” just as he did it. What command has been added to the law of God by insisting on wine? Is not wine what Jesus and his disciples drank, and is it not therefore required? I conclude the charge of legalism is without foundation.¹⁰²

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

It seems then that the use of wine in the Lord’s Supper is not an option, nor is it a matter of personal preference. Wine is the prescribed and required element. However, in view of other biblical considerations, I think there may be circumstances in which elders would also want to make a substitute available (i.e., grape juice) for some members of their congregations. Obviously, this must be considered a departure from the regulative principle, as argued above. However, Rom. 14 brings in additional factors that merit our attention. Grape juice can and should be available provided two conditions can be met. First

⁹⁹ Compare Ps. 19 and 119 where the psalmist hides God’s Word in his heart and meditates on it in his mind.

¹⁰⁰ Note that when Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their hypocritical obedience (Mt. 23:27-28), he actually commended their external conformity to the minutiae of the law (Mt. 23:23). The Pharisees are not condemned for paying attention to the details of the law (“these you ought to have done”); they are condemned for not obeying God out of a heart of faith and love (“leaving the weightier matters of the law undone”). John Murray, commenting on Mt. 5:17ff, had this to say about legalism: “Too often the person imbued with meticulous concern for the ordinances of God and conscientious regard for the minutiae of God’s commandments is judged as a legalist, while the person who is not bothered by details is judged to be the practical person who exemplifies the liberty of the gospel...[But] the criterion of our standing in the kingdom of God and of reward in the age to come is nothing else than meticulous observance of the commandments of God in the minutiae details of their prescription and the earnest inculcation of observance on the part of others” (*Principles of Conduct*, p.154). The Puritans are a wonderful example of this kind of precise, heartfelt obedience to God’s law. In fact, the Puritans were originally labeled Precisans. One Puritan, when asked why he was so meticulous about keeping biblical requirements, responded, “I do it because I serve a *precise God!*”

¹⁰¹ That is, adding to the law of God or externalizing it (e.g. claiming the seventh commandment forbids only the act of adultery, not lust). Again, the law of God *does* concern itself with externals. But obedience starts in the heart and then works itself out in actions. Lawful obedience cannot be limited to merely externals or merely internals -- it envelopes both.

¹⁰² There is irony in this objection when it is made by a prohibitionist. The prohibitionist forbids the drinking of alcohol on moral grounds. But this is truly a case of the former type of legalism -- adding to the law of God. Thus the one making the charge of legalism is quite often the real legalist!

it must be proven that this deviation from the biblical norm of the Supper is rooted in Scripture, not in a concession to cultural tastes. In other words, we must ask ourselves how the teaching of Rom. 14 should be applied to weaker brothers in the assembly. Also, while not addressing the legalistic brother directly, Rom. 14 still carries implications for how the church deals with him, since he has false scruples. I think Rom. 14 says many important things about violating one's conscience that would have implications for dealing with the weaker brother as well as the legalistic brother. ***Both types of situations must be kept distinct, but both types must be addressed.*** Certainly we want both types of brothers to come to maturity, but we do not want to destroy them along the way. The strong must not force *anyone* to sin against their conscience. Therefore, it seems we have the same two options in dealing with the legalistic brother as we have in dealing with the recovering alcoholic: We can treat it as a church discipline issue, and serve only wine, forcing them to abstain (at least in part) from the Supper until their convictions mature and their consciences allow them to partake. Or we can serve them grape juice. This brings me to my second consideration. If we do serve anyone anything other than wine, either because of a sinful past addiction or a sinful commitment to abstinence, it must be with the explanation and understanding that this a departure from what strictest compliance to biblical worship would require, and that the false scruples of the persons taking something other than wine are clearly sub-Christian. If these two conditions can be met, perhaps serving wine, with a few cups of grape juice for those who cannot drink alcohol without violating conscience, is a valid solution. Therefore I propose the church do something like the following:

- serve some cups with grape juice and the rest with wine
- instruct the congregation that taking grape juice is a departure from the biblical norm, but the elders are making a concession so that no one will be forced to violate his or her conscience (based on Rom. 14)¹⁰³
- patiently educate the congregation on the biblical view of alcohol¹⁰⁴
- over time, hope that more of our brothers are able to exercise their liberty properly
- insist that the strong continue to accept and bear with the weak patiently (Rom. 14:1; 15:1), seeking their edification and growth, without pridefully despising them (1 Cor. 8:1, 2)¹⁰⁵
- move towards serving only wine.¹⁰⁶

It is hoped that this solution provides a means of harmonizing Scripture's clear teaching on worship, as well its teaching on the relationship of the weak and the strong within the body of Christ.

¹⁰³ Again, I believe this to be the best solution because I do really think we would be tempting the brother with false scruples to violate his conscience if we serve only wine. He knows he should partake of the Supper and wants to partake of the Supper, so we should make it possible for him to do so. Obviously this is not a long term solution, nor is it ultimately satisfactory. The weak must outgrow their weakness. But I do think it is a viable option in light of Rom. 14. We must not pressure anyone into violating his conviction for "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). To do so would be breaking the law of love Paul commands the strong to keep. The result, ultimately, could be the "destruction" of the weak (Rom. 14:15).

¹⁰⁴ This education includes clearly differentiating the truly weak from the legalistic weak. Or to put it another way, it requires teaching the weak to not violate Rom. 14:3. Obviously, there seems to be more biblical sympathy extended to those who are truly weak. Thus the grape juice is intended primarily for these members. The weak who try to bring everyone else down to their level of weakness need to be edified and taught about both Christian liberty and the kingdom of God, which is not about rules concerning food and drink (Rom. 14:17).

¹⁰⁵ While the weak need to learn the "Law of Liberty," the strong must not forget the "Law of Love." The weak are not to judge the strong for exercising their liberties in Christ; but neither are the strong allowed to despise the weak for their weaknesses in Christ (Rom. 14:9, 10).

¹⁰⁶ Obviously if we ever were able to move to using wine exclusively (which we should strive for), we would need to raise this issue with prospective members before they join so they can be properly instructed in the biblical view of alcoholic beverages and so they won't be caught off guard the first time they partake. Because the use of grape juice is so widespread, it is commonly assumed that the element will be grape juice. This just shows us how deep the inroads of modern culture are into the church. Rather than exerting cultural leadership, the church has followed the world and adopted a pagan notion of holiness that is metaphysical rather than ethical.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the four theological presuppositions stated above (creation, liberty, salvation, and biblical law), as well as what we have seen about the nature of the regulative principle of worship and the biblical teaching on wine, I am compelled to conclude we ought to be using wine in the Lord's Supper. Wine serves to remind us of the goodness of creation and the blessings of redemption. Those who are offended by the use of wine in the Supper are actually offended by Christ's command and example. Their false scruples need to be handled in accordance with Rom. 14, but that does not mean the weak may infringe upon the liberty of the strong. Serving wine in the Supper seems to be a simple issue of obedience. Will we conform to the biblical pattern of worship or will we insist on doing things our own way? Will cultural tastes override biblical norms or will we submit our practices to the rule of Christ, even on controversial issues? How to practically implement this on an unsuspecting congregation is another matter, and one that needs to be discussed at length by elders before any action is taken. Let us pray God would give us wisdom and patience and allow us to come to one mind on this issue as the church of Christ! May we eat and drink the feast of life and victory with joy!

EPILOGUE

Obviously any discussion of the Supper cannot be isolated from other strands of biblical teaching, such as worship, covenant theology, symbolism, creation, redemption, ethics, and so on. Really, the whole Christian world view is involved in such a discussion; as Peter Leithart has said, "Our views of the Supper crystallize and summarize our entire world view" (*ibid*, p. 123). A misunderstanding of other areas of biblical teaching will show itself in a misunderstanding of the Supper. Because this paper has attempted to cover so much ground, I thought it might be helpful to state as succinctly as possible the arguments presented. First, frequency:

- Communion is an essential and defining element of Lord's Day "official" worship. The New Covenant church is the coalescence of Old Covenant synagogue and temple; thus worship integrates both Word and Sacrament.
- Weekly communion was the practice of the apostolic church, as careful study of 1 Cor. 5, 11 and Acts 20 show. While these texts may only imply weekly communion indirectly, it is difficult to account for their language from any other perspective.
- Apostolic traditions, as recorded in Scripture, are norms binding the church for all of time. The apostles established standards for doctrine and worship we are bound to uphold, including weekly communion.
- We must reckon with the beneficial fruits of partaking of the Supper every week. Because the Supper is so powerful in shaping and molding our theology and piety, weekly communion is foundational to Christian growth and maturity. As a means of grace, we *need* the Supper as often as we gather, and if we understand all that the Supper portrays and accomplishes we will *want* it that often.
- Historically, weekly communion finds strong support among the church fathers and Calvin.

The use of wine is equally mandated, though with important qualifications:

- On the night when Jesus transformed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper, he served wine to disciples, saying, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). Under the regulative principle of worship, we are to bound to follow Jesus' instructions and actions, including the use of wine.
- The doctrine of creation teaches wine is a good gift of God that we may freely enjoy in accordance with his law.
- The doctrine of redemption singles out wine as a fitting symbol of Messiah's blessings. Wine is a powerful, sensual sign of the joy of the gospel. Because symbols are crucial to the biblical world view, they should not be needlessly altered.
- Christian consciences are free from legalistic rules. We may not forbid what God allows. However, Rom. 14 commands strong brothers (those who understand their freedom in Christ) to show love

- towards weaker brothers (those who have false scruples about wine or would be tempted to drunkenness if required to drink). Therefore, elders should make grape juice available, if needed.
- Historically, the universal practice of the Christian church (until recently) has been the use of wine in the Lord's Supper. The past two millennia of church history (and possibly even several more centuries, going back to the Passover feast) stand against the use of grape juice.

It is hoped this paper will encourage God's people to more biblical worship as they press forward in the work of reforming the church. The sacrament is a stepping stone on our journey into the life to come. The Lord's Supper is a means of grace to believers: at the table we enjoy both forgiveness (Mt. 26:28) and fellowship (1 Cor. 10:16-22). The Supper is essential to living the Christian life in a fallen world, but it also points us to the world to come. The Communion feast is at the heart of biblical worship and distills the whole Christian world view. May God see fit to graciously use the eating and drinking of bread and wine to grant us the ongoing forgiveness of sins and to transform us into the image of his beloved Son.

Therefore blessed Moses of old time ordained the great feast of the Passover, and our celebration of it, because, namely, Pharaoh was killed, and the people were delivered from bondage. For in those times it was especially, when those who tyrannized over the people had been slain, that temporal feasts and holidays were observed in Judea.

Now however, that the devil, that tyrant against the whole world, is slain, we do not approach a temporal feast, my beloved, but an eternal and heavenly. Not in shadows do we show it forth, but we come to it in truth. For they being filled with the flesh of a dumb lamb, accomplished the feast, having anointed their door-posts with the blood, implored aid against the destroyer. But now we, eating of the Word of the Father, and having the lintels of our hearts sealed with the blood of the New Testament, acknowledge the grace given us from the Savior, Who said, "Behold, I have given unto you to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all power of the enemy" [Lk. 10:19]. For no more does death reign; but instead of death henceforth is life, since our Lord said, "I am the life" [Jn. 14:6]; so that everything is filled with joy and gladness; as it is written, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice" [Ps. 97:1].

St. Athanasius

At the Lamb's high feast we sing praise to our victorious King, who has washed us in the tide flowing from his pierced side. Alleluia!

Praise we him, whose love divine gives his sacred blood for wine, gives his body for the feast, Christ the Victim, Christ the Priest. Alleluia!

Where the paschal blood is poured, Death's dread angel sheathes the sword; Israel's host triumphant go through the wave that drowns the foe. Alleluia!

Mighty Victim from the sky, Hell's fierce powers beneath you lie; you have conquered in the fight; you have brought us life and light. Alleluia!

Father, who the crown shall give, Savior, by whose death we live, Spirit, guide through all our days: Three in One, your name we praise. Alleluia!

"At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing"
Ancient Latin Hymn

Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit

towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.

Now, that sacred partaking of his flesh and blood, by which Christ pours his life into us, as if it penetrated into our bones and marrow, he also testifies and seals in the Supper -- not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfill what he promises. And he truly offers and shows the reality there signified to all who sit at the spiritual banquet, although it is received with benefit by believers alone, who accept such great generosity with true faith and gratefulness of heart.

*John Calvin
Institutes of the Christian Religion
IV.17.4*

We cannot do everything at once [in the reformation of corporate worship] and the important thing is to know where to begin. The answer to this is clear: we must begin where it is most faulty, and where the fault has the gravest implications. We must begin by emphasizing the sacraments. For four hundred years the best minds among us have been demanding a weekly communion service and protesting against the amputation of our worship. For four hundred years, or nearly, it has become more and more glaringly obvious how greatly this deprivation of sacramental life not only impairs our cult, but falsifies our Church. Hence it is there that we must begin: we must restore to our cult what will fully justify it, namely the Lord's Supper.

Let all those who do not wish our Church, reformed according to God's word to die (unless it were to be reborn along with other Christian churches in a new-found unity), let all such passionately demand as starving men clamor for relief, the restoration of the Eucharist. Let them apply to the authorities of the Church, demanding the re-introduction of the weekly communion service, by a measure that will be concerted and deliberate...In doing this, they would only be reminding the authorities of the duty of obedience to Jesus Christ. It is not easy, because obedience at this point will show clearly how divided and confused is our obedience at so many other points, and hence it will provoke strong opposition from church members. But this is no reason to grow disheartened, and a good educator does not easily submit to the limits and progress imposed by those whom he wishes to educate.

Here then is where we must begin...If we do so, the other factors, a fuller participation of the laity and the introduction of a paschal character to the services, cannot fail to follow, probably more quickly than we think. In fact, if the Church has resisted attempts that have been made in these latter points by various liturgical movements, the reason is that we have not decisively begun with the sacraments. If we begin there, it will not seem like a demand of the laity (or like a desire on the part of the clergy to involve the laity, who are quite happy to see the clergy alone assume responsibilities for which they are paid), nor will it look like a pursuit of aesthetic-catholic aims. It will be manifest as a matter of simple obedience to Jesus Christ from which the rest will follow. But these other factors, as much as a new emphasis on the sacraments, will give our church a new look: it will again become, not Roman, certainly, but catholic. This we must know; and it is perhaps because we know it, or at least because we have a presentiment of it, that we are content to listen to our great doctors, from Calvin to Barth, demanding the weekly Eucharist, without giving into their demands.

But if, in order not to become once more catholic (in the fullest sense), we are unwilling to obey Jesus Christ through the restoration of the weekly Eucharist (with all its consequences, liturgically and ecclesiologically), then the day will soon come when even what we have will be taken from us (cf. Mk. 4:25 par.).

J. J. Von Allmen